

PERU & CHILE

Machu Picchu, Cuzco, Atacama, Patagonia & Easter Island

21 days

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Day 1 Arrive in Lima

Today we arrive in Lima, Peru.

In recent years, this city has undergone some wonderful restorations of the plazas, ornate facades, and wooden balconies for which it is famous. Named the 'City of Kings' by the Spanish Conquistadors, Lima is the capital of Peru. Founded in 1535 by Francisco Pizarro, where the River Rimac meets the Pacific Ocean, this was the most important Spanish city during the colonial era with a population of about 100,000 inhabitants. Today the city is home to more than 7 million people.

Overnight in Lima (Miraflores).

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Lima: City Tour

This morning we start our tour with a visit to San Francisco's Church to visit the extensive catacombs that lie underneath. We then continue to the Plaza de Armas, the most important plaza in Lima. The oldest surviving part of the plaza is the impressive bronze fountain, erected in 1650. Surrounding the plaza is the exquisite Archbishop's Palace, the cathedral, and the Government Palace where handsomely uniformed presidential guards are on duty all day. We visit the cathedral where the great conquistador Francisco Pizarro's tomb lies.

We then proceed to the Larco Museum, which showcases remarkable chronological galleries and an excellent overview on 3,000 years of development of Peruvian pre-Columbian history. Located in a unique vice-royal mansion of the 18th century built over a 7th century pre-Columbian pyramid, is surrounded by beautiful gardens. Features the finest gold and silver collection from ancient Peru and the famous erotic archaeological collection, one of the most visited Peruvian tourist attractions. For an unforgettable experience, Larco is one of the few museums in the world where visitors can also choose to enter the storage area with its 45,000 classified archaeological objects.

Later we head to the trendy area of Miraflores where people stroll along the cliff tops and watch the sun setting on the Pacific Ocean. The best location is the new "Love Park," with its magnificent monument to lovers at its centre. We continue to the Hacienda Mamacona for an exhibition of beautiful Peruvian Paso horses, accompanied by a delicious dinner of Criollo food and a folkloric show.

Overnight in Lima (Miraflores).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Lima - Fly to Cuzco - Urubamba Valley - Ollantaytambo - Yucay

Early this morning we fly to Cuzco, located in a fertile valley at 3354 m (11,004 feet). This is the archaeological capital of the Americas and the ancient capital of the Inca Empire that, at its height, stretched from Colombia in the north, through Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, and down to central Chile in the south. Although the empire already existed in the 12th century, it remained small until the mid-15th century. Over the next 100 years, it expanded massively but declined due to the civil war and the conquest by the Spanish conquistadors under Francisco Pizarro in 1533.

On arrival we will travel by road into the Urubamba Valley, or "Sacred Valley of the Incas," along one of the most scenic drives on our trip, to the Inca ruins of Ollantaytambo located on a spectacular ridge with deep valleys on either side. We can admire the carefully constructed and maintained farming terraces on the surrounding hillsides.

We continue to the town of Yucay on the bank of the Urubamba River (2300m / 7,590 ft). This is an attractive little town of particularly fertile lands whose name translated into Spanish means "deceit" or "bewitchment". According to legend, in the middle of the 15th century, the Inca Huayna Capac was captivated by the incomparable magnificence of Yucay's setting and decided to settle here.

Overnight in Yucay.

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Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Yucay - Machu Picchu Area

Today we take the early morning train* from Urubamba to Aguas Calientes and Machu Picchu. The train journey to Machu Picchu is a highlight of any trip to the Andes; the scenery is simply spectacular, and the train allows you to enjoy it in comfort. The +/- 3 hour trip takes us through a changing landscape with wonderful vistas of the mountains and, deep in its dramatic canyon, the beautiful Urubamba River. Our early arrival from Urubamba ensures that we are at the site before the tourist throngs arrive on the train from Cuzco later in the morning.

Upon arrival at the Aguas Calientes train station, a bus will take us on the 6 km (4 mile) twisting journey up the mountainside to the site of Machu Picchu. Having already dropped our baggage at our hotel, we proceed immediately for a guided 3-hour walking tour of the ruins (please be prepared with all that you need for our tour). We will enter the site through the House of the Terrace Caretakers, which flank the agricultural sector. Once on the site, we will see, among other features: the Temple of the Sun, the Fountain Caretaker's House, the Royal Sector, and the puzzling Temple of the Three Windows. We will also see the Common District, the Sacred Rock, and the prison-like Temple of the Condor.

Machu Picchu, popularly known as the 'Lost City of the Incas,' is an ancient city of stone palaces, towers, temples and staircases. It is a very mysterious place, and to this day our knowledge of it remains sketchy. There are no records or artifacts on the site to indicate what any of the buildings were used for. Archaeologists have ascertained that the site was most likely a ceremonial centre and possibly used for administrative purposes for the populous region.

After our tour, you may choose to proceed to the hotel or remain on the site for some independent exploration (your ticket is included and good for the day), and return to the hotel on your own using the return portion of your bus ticket.

* PLEASE bring an overnight bag for this one night at Aguas Calientes as the train enforces strict luggage limits. Our larger bags will be transported back to Cuzco for us. Please also note that, due to group size limits, groups exceeding 15 participants will be split between two guides for today's site tour.

Overnight at Agua Calientes (near Machu Picchu).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Machu Picchu Area - Cuzco

A large part of the beauty of Machu Picchu is created by its setting on a mountain top surrounded by deep valleys. By staying for a second day to visit Machu Picchu, rather than visiting as a day trip from Cuzco, we are able to savour the atmosphere of this very special place.

In the early morning of our second day at Machu Picchu,* most group members choose to take the bus back up to the site with the weather-dependent hope of seeing the mist-clad mountains greet the morning sun. Weather notwithstanding, the best thing about going up the second day is being there early when there are fewer people, allowing time to "soak it in," as well as the opportunity to climb Huayna Picchu and/or to the Sun Gate.

During our time at Machu Picchu, we will also include a visit to the Manuel Chavez Ballon Site Museum, which focuses on the "discovery", excavation, and history of Macchu Picchu. On display are historical photos, including photos of Hiram Bingham at Machu Picchu shortly after he came across the ruins, informative write-ups on the construction of Machu Picchu and the life of the Incas, and artifacts found at the site. Outside the museum is a very lush botanical garden running along the river; some plants are labelled and there are a few short trails. This is a nice shady area to rest on a hot day and is an easy 25 minute walk from Aguas Calientes down the road leading to Machu Picchu.

Later in the afternoon we board the VISTADOME train from Aguas Calientes to Ollantaytambo Station (1.5 hours) from where we bus back to Cuzco.

* DUE TO strict limits on the number of visitors daily, if you elect to visit again today (optional - at your expense), you will need to book well advance online via www.ticketmachupicchu.com. You will need to choose the EARLIEST options for Machu Picchu only OR Machu Picchu & Huayna Picchu if you want to hike Huayna Picchu.

Overnight in Cuzco.

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Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Cuzco Area

This morning we visit some of the most important Inca sites in the Cuzco area.

Sacsayhuaman is an impressive complex which, like so many others of that time, had both a religious and military purpose. The fortress known as the 'storehouse of the sun' incorporates some of the largest stones ever used in a building. The zig-zag walls represent the teeth of the sacred puma and provide an excellent defensive structure. The stones fit so perfectly together without mortar that not even moss can grow in the cracks!

In the afternoon we return to Cuzco and enjoy a tour of the town. We visit Coricancha, the temple of the sun which was the most important location in the Inca empire. Entombed in the closed cloister of the Sto Domingo Church, these sacred walls were hidden from modern civilization until the colonial walls were brought down in 1950 by a powerful earthquake. We also visit the church of San Blas with its fabulously carved pulpit. Wandering the narrow streets of the San Blas artisan region we make our way to the cathedral which towers impressively over the Plaza Mayor. Inside we find precious paintings from the Cuzco School of Art, one of the most prolific of its era.

This Inca city was laid out around a great central square in the shape of a puma, the god of lightning. Today, stone walls built by the Incas line most of Cuzco's central streets and form the foundations of colonial and modern buildings. The Inca buildings were so well built that the Spaniards simply knocked down the upper parts of the Inca temples and palaces and built their churches and mansions on top of the Inca walls. Shortly after the Spanish conquest, the capital was moved to Lima on the coast. Thus Cuzco has retained a wonderful, untouched colonial atmosphere. The culture is also very much alive here, and is evident in the music, clothing and handicrafts of the people.

We have dinner at a local restaurant where we can try some typical Peruvian dishes. One may wish to try the "Pisco sour", a powerful drink made with a Peruvian liquor distilled from white grapes.

Overnight in Cuzco.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Cuzco - Lima, Peru - Santiago, Chile

Today we fly from Cuzco to Lima and connect with our flight to Santiago, Chile

NOTE: This itinerary is based on air schedules that can change without notice. Though this program should provide a very good sense of how this tour will be accomplished, some adjustment/s may be required up to the time of departure. A schedule change may require that we fly to Santiago tomorrow morning.

Overnight in Santiago.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Santiago: City Tour & Maipo Valley

This morning we will explore the city of Santiago! Situated in the country's central valley, and home to 7 million people, Santiago's rapid economic growth has made it one of South America's most developed cities. Its unique urban environment artfully unites classic and modern.

Our city tour takes you to the main attractions of the city including Cerro Santa Lucia, the 'Classic Quarter', La Moneda (Government Palace), the Municipality of Santiago, the National Historical Museum & the Santiago Metropolitan Cathedral (Catedral de Santiago).

We will visit Santiago's Plaza de Armas, a typical meeting point for Chilean people. As the midpoint of the Spanish settlement of 1541, the square was once a military training ground, hence its name, but with time it became the focus of Santiago's social and commercial life with some of the nation's most accomplished architecture.

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This afternoon we will travel south of Santiago in order to visit the scenic Maipo Valley, one of Chile's most important wine-producing regions. Maipo is at the very northern end of Chile's extensive Central Valley, and is home to some of the country's most prestigious wines. This region is often described as the 'Bordeaux of South America'.

During our time here we will visit one of the area's most important wineries, Concha y Toro. In Don Melchor Square our local guide will invite us to enjoy a panoramic view of the Pirque vineyard, while tasting a glass of its world class wine. We will stroll through the winery's century old vineyards and visit the Pirque's House, the residence of the Concha y Toro family. This is where Chile's largest winery was founded a century ago.

Overnight in Santiago.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Santiago - Punta Arenas

Today we fly from Santiago to Punta Arenas in Patagonia.

Punta Arenas is located at the foot of the Andes on the western side of the Strait of Magellan, facing the island of Tierra del Fuego. This port city attracts commerce and shipping from all over the South Atlantic. Founded in 1848, the city was originally a military garrison and a penal settlement. Port facilities soon became established as a stopover for shipping en route to California during the Gold Rush. The population increased and the town developed as a result of the wool boom of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During the last quarter of the 19th century, 300 purebred sheep were imported from the Falkland Islands. Such was the success of subsequent breeding that by the turn of the century there were almost two million sheep in the territory. Immigrants from all over western Europe were attracted to the area, bringing with them major developments to fishing and farming.

Overnight in Punta Arenas.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Punta Arenas - Torres del Paine

Today we travel by road from Punta Arenas to Torres del Paine National Park. The start of our journey takes us across the flat rolling pampas, or 'plains'. The Patagonian steppe is one of the last strongholds of the guanaco and Darwin's rheas, both of which we hope to see along the way. Patagonia is a sparsely populated region located at the southern end of South America, shared by Argentina and Chile. The region comprises the southern section of the Andes Mountains as well as the deserts, steppes and grasslands east of this southern portion of the Andes.

We will stop for lunch in the small town of Puerto Natales, which sits alongside Ultima Esperanza Sound. Not far from Puerto Natales is the Mylodon Cave. This area became known to the world a little over 120 years ago when in 1895 the settler Eberhard Hermann visited the cave and found inside it the fur of a Mylodon, a large extinct sloth. We will make a stop here to walk the scenic path that brings us to the mouth of the cave.

From here we continue to the southern tip of the Andes in Chile, and Torres del Paine National Park, one of the most impressive sights in the Southern Hemisphere. The park encompasses ancient forests, glaciers, lakes, rivers and fjords, and fauna including guanacos, foxes, pumas and a diverse array of birds. The Torres del Paine (Towers of Paine) are spectacular granite pillars that soar almost vertically more than 2000m (6,000 feet) above the Patagonian landscape. The park in which the high peaks sit may be considered the finest national park in all of South America. With turquoise lakes, roaring waterfalls, rivers and creeks, dense forests and sprawling glaciers this is an unequalled destination.

Overnight in Torres del Paine National Park.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Torres del Paine National Park: Full Day of Exploration

Today we spend the entire day exploring Torres del Paine National Park.

We will travel by coach bus throughout all accessible regions of the park, stopping at various places of interest and scenic viewpoints. The photogenic panoramas are endless and, when the weather is clear, panoramas are everywhere. We will also have the opportunity to walk along some of the easy-going trails that afford expansive views of the mountains, waterfalls and glaciers for which Patagonia is famous. At Grey Glacier we will walk to the glacier viewpoint. A short walk in the heart of the park will bring us to Salto Grande, a spectacular waterfall on the Paine River. During our day we will also see the Cascada del Rio Paine (waterfalls), and Lago Pehoe (Lake Pehoe) in the heart of the park.

Some say Paine was the name of an early settler. Others say the name comes from an ancient Indian word meaning blue -- hearkening to the intense blue of the area's lakes. Wherever the name comes from or means, this is a spectacular park, comparable to Yellowstone or Yosemite in the US. Founded in 1959, Torres del Paine takes in 180,000 ha (450,000 acres). In 1978 UNESCO gave the park World Heritage status, recognizing it as a biosphere especially worthy of international recognition.

The park is part of the Paine Massif, which lies inside the continent from, or east of, the high central Andean spine. The massif are medium high mountains emerging suddenly from the plains of the Patagonian steppes. The mountains are granite, capped by crumbly sedimentary rock that used to lie on the valley floor. Before the Chilean government acquired the park, it belonged to ranchers who overgrazed and also burned down forests to increase pasture area. The glaciers of the park are in quick retreat--up to 17 m (56 ft) a year for the last 100 years, creating a fascinating study of plant succession and soil build-up from bare rock to forest. The flora of the park ranges from grassland to southern beech forests. Many parts of the park were too remote for the cattle ranchers, and exist today in a pristine state. The animal stars of the park are the Guanacos -- wild South American cameloids, related to the domesticated llama and alpaca -- and the Rheas, an ostrich-like bird. Native peoples hunted both across the plains, using every part for food and shelter. When the Europeans came, the Guanaco were slaughtered to make way for cattle and almost became extinct.

Overnight in Torres del Paine National Park.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Torres del Paine National Park - Punta Arenas

This morning we depart Torres del Paine and travel back to Punta Arenas.

Upon arrival in Punta Arenas we will make a short visit to the Municipal Cemetery, a fascinating place to stroll around due to its immaculately trimmed cypress trees and tree-lined pathways. The cemetery is resting place of pioneers, immigrants and families of diverse nationalities that left their mark in the colonization and development of this isolated part of the world.

Overnight in Punta Arenas.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Punta Arenas - Santiago - San Pedro de Atacama

This morning we fly to Santiago and connect with our flight to Calama in the high Atacama Desert, the driest place on earth.

On arrival we transfer to San Pedro de Atacama, elevation 2300 m (7,600 ft). Northern Chile is home to the world's most arid desert and its salt flats, hot springs and geysers as well as large deposits of copper and other minerals, Calama and other parts of the altiplano. This region also boasts fertile ravines and oases, inhabited by some of the country's native peoples. Both Incan and Spanish influences can be seen in its villages, and evidence of human existence in this area dates back over 10,000 years. No significant precipitation has been reported here since the Spanish colonial period.

(Depending on flight schedules we may either connect to Calama or overnight in Santiago and then fly tomorrow morning).

Overnight in San Pedro de Atacama.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Atacama Area: Salar de Atacama / Lago Chaxa / Toconao / Tulo & Quitor

We start our touring today with a visit to the Salar de Atacama, the world's largest salt lake. Rich in minerals, including borax and lithium, this salt lake is home to flamingos and many other bird species. Salar de Atacama is formed by waters flowing down from the Andes that, unable to escape from the basin, are forced to evaporate, leaving salt deposits on the earth. In some areas, lagoons peek out from under the crust, such as at Laguna Chaxa. At Lago Chaxa, part of the Reserva Nacional de los Flamings, one often can get quite close to flamingos in their natural habitat.

From here we travel to the small colonial town of Toconao. The material of choice here is volcanic rock for both local crafts and the town church (1744) and San Lucas bell tower (1750). The church and houses in this picturesque village are built of bricks of the local white volcanic stone. You will have some free time here to wander the small streets and explore this quiet location.

We later return back to San Pedro for lunch and some free time before heading out again in the afternoon. This afternoon we will visit Tulo, a 2,800-year-old site where evidence of the earliest habitation in the region was found. Located in an ancient oasis once supported by the San Pedro River, Tulo Village is one of the most important ancient villages in the Atacama Desert. We will also visit the fort of Quitor (Pukara de Quitor). The Atacameño people built this Pukará in order to defend themselves from Pedro de Valdivia and the Spanish in northern Chile. This pre-Columbian archaeological site overlooks the valley of the river San Pedro and was designated a national monument in 1982.

Overnight in San Pedro de Atacama.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Atacama Area: El Tatio Geysers / Valley of the Moon

We leave the hotel early this morning before sunrise and travel northeast to see the spectacular geysers of El Tatio (elevation 4400m / 14,500 ft) located within the Andes mountains. We arrive at the site in time to watch the sunrise over the mountain. Here the super-heated water gurgles in the frozen ground and emerges violently as steam in over 100 geysers, boiling pools, and fumaroles. El Tatio is the largest geyser field in the southern hemisphere and the third largest in the world.

From here we continue to explore the beauty of this region of the Andes. If lucky we will have some great photo ops of vicuna along our route. We will also stop in the tiny village of Machuca. The small lakes and lagoons in the area are home to a number of indigenous bird species including the Andean Goose and Giant Coot.

We will return back to San Pedro for lunch before heading off again in the early evening to the Valley of the Moon. You will be wowed by the lunar-like landscape of the valley, which lies in the Salt Mountain Range. We will explore its many geological formations, from canyons to caves to depressions, and learn about the physical history of the area. From atop a sand dune you will be provided with some unique panoramas. Just prior to dusk we drive to the upper ridge of the Valley of the Moon to see the sunset in this bizarre lunar landscape formed by erosion of the salt mountains. Light reflecting off the salt crystals is an eerie sight.

We then return back to San Pedro after sunset.

Overnight in San Pedro de Atacama

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Atacama - Fly to Santiago

Today we drive to Calama for our flight back to Santiago. Depending on today's flight schedule, there may be some free time in San Pedro de Atacama in the morning, or in Santiago in the afternoon.

Overnight in Santiago.

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Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Santiago - Fly to Easter Island

Today we fly from Santiago to Easter Island.

Upon arrival at Mataverí Airport we see the first of Easter Island's famous Moai, or stone statues. Hanga Roa, the capital, is where most of the island's population of about 5,500 lives. Typically South Pacific in appearance, the pace in the village is typically slow.

Easter Island is over 3200 km from the nearest population center (Tahiti and Chile), making it one of the most isolated places on Earth. This triangle of volcanic rock in the South Pacific is best known for the giant stone monoliths, known as Moai, that dot the coastline. Almost 900 giant stone figures dating back many centuries reveal their creators to be master craftsmen and engineers. These stone figures are distinctive among other stone sculptures found in Polynesian cultures. There has been much speculation about the exact purpose of the statues, the role they played in the ancient civilization of Easter Island and the way they may have been constructed and transported.

The early settlers called the island "Te Pito O Te Henua" (Navel of The World). Admiral Roggeveen, who came upon the island on Easter Day in 1722, named it Easter Island. Today the land, people, and language are all referred to locally as Rapa Nui.

Overnight on Easter Island.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Easter Island: Full Day of Exploration / Rano Kau & Orongo Village

Today we will start our touring with a visit to Ahu Akivi. Restored in the 1960's, Ahu Akivi has seven standing moai, and is the only ahu with moais that appear to be looking out towards the ocean. All other moai on the island face inland. We then make a stop at Puna Pau. Puna Pau is a small extinct volcano whose name means 'dry spring'. What is most important today is that Puna Pau volcano's crater was the quarry from where the stone needed to build pukaos, or moai headdresses, was taken. The red volcanic rock found here is soft and easy to carve, and it has a high iron content, which gives it its characteristic reddish color.

At Ahu Vinapu we see the incredible stone walls similar to those built by the ancient Incas; the architecture of these walls is sometimes used as an argument to support the theory that the early islanders came from South America.

We will take a break for lunch in the center of Hanga Roa before heading to the southernmost volcano of the island, Rano Kau. From here we will have an opportunity to see most of the island as well as its reed-covered lake. On the west side of the slopes you have an impressive view of the islets Motu Nui, Motu Iti and Motu Kao-Kao. The main feature on Rano Kau is its rebuilt ancient ceremonial village of Orongo. In primitive times it was used for the traditional egg-ceremony, taking place year after year to choose the religious head of the island. The site is full of petroglyphs representing Tangata Manu (birdman) and the god Make-Make.

Overnight on Easter Island.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 19 Easter Island: Full Day of Exploration / Rano Raraku

Today we start our full day of touring with a visit to the spectacular Rano Raraku quarry, a highlight of any visit to Rapa Nui. This location is a classic symbol of the island and the original factory of the moais. Here we will see the dozens of gigantic statues that cover the inner and outer slopes of the volcano. We so many statues in situ, we are able to admire them in different stages of production, from carving in the rock to upright position and lying face down on their intended road to their platforms.

From Rano Raraku we proceed to Ahu Tongariki, the largest Moai site of Easter Island. Here we see 15 moai lined up, including the largest moai ever erected on the island. The Moai (with their pukao) were toppled in the 17th century during a tribal war. Fortunately none of them were broken, and they remained on the ground until the great earthquake of 1960. At that time a large tsunami took the fallen statues and

the pukao and scattered them further inland leaving them a couple of hundred meters from their original location.

We continue along the south coast, stopping at Ahu Akahanga, a large ahu (platform) with four big fallen statues. According to legends, the tomb of the first king of the island is in this area. We then visit Vaihu, another ancient site in ruins.

This afternoon after lunch we head across the heart of the island to Papa Vaka, located on the north coast. Papa Vaka is an archaeological site located on the island's north road, and is characterized by its numerous petroglyphs (designs carved into rock) with motifs related to the sea and fishing.

Our last stop today will be at the beautiful archaeological zone of Anakena where we see the standing moai. Here we will spend some time at the beautiful white sandy, coconut-palm lined beach. This setting is decidedly Polynesian, and a great place to end our day.

Overnight on Easter Island.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 20 Easter Island - Fly to Santiago

Today we travel back to Santiago. Depending on the time of our flight, you may have some free time today in either Easter Island or Santiago.

Overnight in Santiago.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 21 Departure

Today is free to explore and enjoy Santiago.

Departure from Santiago (most flights depart Santiago in the evening).

BUEN VIAJE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast