

*This information should answer some of your questions about the trip and give you a better idea of what we do day-to-day. It doesn't hope to answer everything. If you have any questions please get in touch.*



*Trail below Ausangate*

- **An energetic and fulfilling trip to the Cusco/Machu Picchu area**
- **Excellent acclimatisation balance**
- **Relaxed start with enough time to absorb the Inca atmosphere**
- **Walk the famous Inca Trail**
- **Follow it with a challenging high-level trek around Nevado Ausangate**

## **Peru**

Peru is South America's third largest country, and with 25 million people, its fourth most populous. It is a country of extremes – desert and rainforest, snow peaks and sand dunes, excessive wealth and tortuous poverty. The coastal plain is hemmed in between the sea and the giant Andean chain, the spine of the country, while to the east is the Amazon jungle.

Peru has never seemed more attractive! At present its future with overseas visitors looks bright. It can boast mountain scenery and trekking to rival even the mighty Himalayas, rainforest reserves full of animals and birds, the incredible architecture of the Incas and arguably the best museums in South America. The country does not have traditional resorts or famous beaches, it

is a place for activity and is attracting travellers, historians, linguists, climbers and trekkers in growing numbers each year. Add the special vibrancy, colour and cacophony of its Andean and colonial culture and a visit to Peru is an experience seldom matched anywhere in the world.

### **High Places in Peru**

High Places have operated in Peru for many years. We were one of the first companies to return after the civil unrest and 'Shining Path' activities of the early 90's and we have a long established and successful relationship with our colleagues both in Cusco and Huaraz.

### **The trip**

This trip combines the famous Inca Trail with a more vigorous high level trek around the mountain Ausangate (6372m), in the remote Cordillera Vilcanota range.

The Inca Trail leaves the main Urubamba Valley and over 3/4 days climbs from lush sub-tropical vegetation through cloud forests and over three passes at around 4000m. There are Inca paving stones, Inca stairways, an Inca tunnel and of course the ruins: Runkurakay, Sayacmarca, Phuyupatamarca, Wiñay Wayna and Machu Picchu itself. While the walking is not difficult the altitude will make extra demands on you and even if it is the most popular trail in Latin America it still requires good fitness and walking ability. (see **Altitude** paragraph on next page).

After the trail we stay overnight in Aguas Calientes, the small town beneath Machu Picchu. Time to recover from the trek before a pre-dawn start next morning to catch Machu Picchu at sunrise – simply breathtaking. And then almost a full day to explore and marvel. Some of you may take the challenge of climbing the very steep Inca steps to the summit of Huayna Picchu - there is a limited quota nowadays and only the early birds will get tickets!

**Note:** The entrance charge to Machu Picchu is **not** included to allow you flexibility as to when you visit. Allow approx US\$45.

### **Cordillera Vilcanota trek**

This trek is in the more remote Cordillera Vilcanota range, which lies south-east of Cusco nearer to the Bolivian border and Lake Titicaca. Ausangate (6384m) is the principal mountain in the range. The circuit is a sustained 6-7 day trek crossing three high passes, the highest being an energetic 5050m. The scenery is outstanding, passing through a landscape of glaciers, turquoise lakes and alpine peaks. We should see herds of llamas, alpacas and numerous birds as we pass through remote settlements where traditionally dressed Indians many of Inca descent, still live a life little changed over the centuries.

### **Cusco**

Cusco is one of the worlds really exciting places an amazing place and you will feel a thrill at your first sight of the terracotta roofs and churches as you fly in. It was the capital of the Inca empire, which at its peak, stretched from southern Chile to Ecuador. Even today it remains the most important cultural centre in Peru and both within the city and close by are astounding examples of Inca stonework. The Incas laid out the city in the plan of a puma - their most sacred animal. The head was the great fortress of Sacsayhuaman on a hill above the city, the spine was the stream of Tulumayo, and the body was the great plaza of Huacaypata.

Your first reaction arriving in Cusco is one of breathlessness in more ways than one, because at 3350m above sea level time is needed to get used to the altitude. Make the most of it though, there is something for everyone: excellent shopping for handicrafts, the best Andean music, a range of quality and fun places to eat, fine buildings and museums and of course the awe-inspiring Inca stonework at every corner. The crisp air, hot sun and clear blue sky of the winter dry season provide a perfect backdrop for exploration.

### **The trekking day**

During both treks we are supported by a local guide, cook team and support crew. On the Vilcanota trek we use horses or donkeys to carry bags and gear. Our group here will be exclusive and we can get to know the team and the arrieros (donkey drivers) more easily. On the Inca Trail no horses are allowed and porters are used so there will be a weight limit of 10kg on the personal gear we can give the porters – we can leave some things at the hotel. Our group of up to 15 will include a complete mix of people.- we are in the 'Inca Trail' system but it all works well. We camp in roomy two person tents. A typical day would be to wake at 6am with a cup of tea in the tent, breakfast in the mess tent and away before 8am. Trekking is best before the heat of the afternoon. A lunch stop is usually around 12 noon with perhaps the chance for a brief siesta. Arrival in camp is close to 3 -3.30pm in time for afternoon tea. After sorting camp out, we are relaxed and ready for the main meal of the day at about 6pm or soon after.

### **Climate**

Our trek takes place in Peru's dry season and although this does not mean that it won't rain, the weather is generally dry and stable. The most common daily pattern is a clear, bright morning with a bit of cumulus cloud in the afternoon. It is usually clear again by evening. Daily temperatures vary greatly. During the hottest part of the day and in the sun, the temperature can exceed 25°C, but is usually tempered by the altitude and ideal for walking. Passes can be much cooler and at night it can drop to below freezing especially at the higher camps.



*Inti Raymi Festival, Cusco*

### **Accommodation**

In Lima we stay in a pleasant hotel close to the centre of the city. In Cusco and Agua Calientes we stay in small and comfortable hotels with en-suite facilities. All accommodation is on a twin share basis. On trek we camp in roomy 2-person tents and there is a communal dining tent for eating and socialising in the evenings.

### **Transport**

Flights between Lima and Cusco are on standard shorthaul jets eg. 737's. Once in the Cusco area we travel in our own private bus or minibus. The train journey along the Urubamba valley on our return from Machu Picchu will always be a highlight.

### **Food**

While on trek we provide all meals and will take as much fresh meat and vegetables as we can. We are more than happy to cater for vegetarians if notified beforehand. In main towns we provide breakfast only. Cusco is a fun place to eat out and there are a variety of local restaurants to try. In practice, we will often eat together and advise on the best places. A meal in a cheapish restaurant costs about 20 soles (US\$7-8 approx) and a good restaurant in Cusco may charge closer to 50 soles. (US\$16 approx).

### **Health and hygiene**

Being ill in Peru can be avoided. Initial contact with salads and street vended food should be resisted. Water should always be regarded with caution and treated if considered necessary. While bottled water appears to be taking over the world, in the 'world' that 'High Places' frequents it is often sold at inflated prices, creates big disposal problems, often distorts the local economy and frankly is not necessary. With a little discipline, local water can be treated with a

personal supply of purification tablets and drunk freely. We recommend using Chlorine Dioxide which comes in tablets or tincture, is tasteless and is usually available from good outdoor shops. Micropur is one brand name and these can be bought in Cusco. Our tip is to carry a few limes, bought locally, to freshen up the water.

On trek we boil all drinking water and provide facilities for hand washing before all meals. With increased numbers on popular treks, camp hygiene and good judgement is vital. In camp we use a toilet tent.

### **Altitude**

Above 3000m, the air is thinner, the pressure is lower and there is less oxygen available in the atmosphere. Acclimatisation is the process by which the body adapts to these conditions. The key to acclimatisation is a good itinerary with a gradual initial height gain, walking at a slow and steady pace, and increasing fluid intake – drinking at least 4 litres a day is advisable above 3000m.

Many people have minor side effects from altitude, such as headache, nausea or general lassitude. The optional use of 'Diamox' has proved useful for some people, as this drug can reduce these symptoms. You will be given more information on 'Diamox' with your Final Information, between 8 and 10 weeks before departure.

### **Baggage**

While trekking, you will only need to carry what you might use that day: i.e. rain gear, spare sweater, camera, water etc. The rest of your kit will be carried by the burros (donkeys) on the Vilcanota trek and by porters on the Inca Trail (10 kg max). You can leave some items in the hotel prior to the treks, a lockable bag is recommended if you are leaving valuable items.

### **Safety**

Care must be taken in the streets and shops of Lima. Joe Simpson who has led several trips to Peru for us in the past, recounts in one of his books how someone removed his watch within minutes of leaving a hotel. Beware also of pickpockets in Cusco. Away from cities things are more relaxed, but be careful. It is always a good idea to be discrete carrying valuable items and in how you use your camera. Think how you can look less like a tourist.

### **Language and people**

A few words of Spanish, enough to say hello, count and tell the time, will make your visit more rewarding. People are usually pleased that you are making an effort to speak the language - even if it doesn't always come out right! There are few English speakers in Peru.



*Machu Picchu at sunrise*

## DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

*This itinerary is flexible and should be seen as a guide only. Local conditions, weather or fitness could lead to changes in our daily plans. All times and distances are approximate. 'B,L,D' refers to meals included in the trip cost, i.e. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner.*

**This trip is 18 days ex CUSCO. The first and last days refer to the days of arrival in and departure from CUSCO, and may not be the days you leave or return home.**

- DAY 1 Arrive Cusco (3050m). At this altitude the least exertion will need more breath than usual and care needs to be taken right from the start to get used to the altitude. A 'drink plenty of water' day and easy walks around the main square (Plaza de Armas) with the rest of the day to settle in and relax. It will be enough just to be here. Hotel. (B)
- DAY 2 A full day to begin to absorb the sights and sounds of Cusco in your own time and at your own pace – also a valuable acclimatisation day. Aim for a walking circuit of some of the main Inca sites above the town – your guide will advise. The massive Inca temple-fortress, Sacsayhuaman, is a breathless half hour walk from the Plaza de Armas but such good exercise. It is one of the wonders of Peru and the most accessible example of massive Inca stonework. From Sacsayhuaman we hike up the hill to the statue of Jesus and a perfect view over Cusco. That may be enough for the day but now or at a later date you can follow the path along to the ruins of Qenco, Cusillyuioc (Temple of Monkeys), Salumpunku (Temple of the Moon), Puca Pucara and Tambomachay. The walking though easy is at altitude so ensure you drink plenty of water today. You can catch a taxi back to Cusco from anywhere en-route.(B)
- DAY 3 **Ollantaytambo.** We will have more time for Cusco later in the trip but for now it's time to head towards the Sacred Valley. For Inca admirers, the fortress of Ollantaytambo is one of the most exciting places in the whole of Peru. Its Inca temple, terraces and aqueducts are breathtaking. Also at 2790m we can have a slight respite from the altitude before the Inca Trail beckons. Hotel. (B)
- DAY 4 **Ollantaytambo.** A steady walk out of town (5 hours round trip) and up to Pumamarca, a well preserved Inca fortress overlooking the main valley. Today will also be a good measure of how well we are acclimatising. Hotel (B,L)
- DAY 5 **Inca Trail 1.** Our vehicle takes us to the roadhead a few kms up the main valley – Kilometre 82 where our porters are waiting. We cross the river and a pleasant rising trail passes through small rural settlements. A short hike off the trail leads to some Inca ruins and terracing at Llactapata before continuing up to a saddle with good views down and across the main Urubamba valley. A descent leads to our first camp at the village of Huayllabamba. 3 hours. 3000m. (B,L,D)
- DAY 6 **Inca Trail 2.** The hard work begins as we climb up to Dead Woman's Pass (4198m), a tough day and the highest point of the Inca Trail. Take plenty of time to admire the view and as we meet our first Inca steps below the pass, maybe consider how the Incas built it all. We descend the far side of the pass and camp at 3000m. 6 hours. (B,L,D)
- DAY 7 **Inca Trail 3.** The trail climbs slowly to another pass where we have excellent views. Then we follow the winding trail down into cloud forest and the ruins of Sayacmarca and Wiñay Wayna. Camp at 2650m. 6 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 8 **Inca Trail 4.** The path contours a final hillside and enters a cloud forest full of begonias, bromeliads and tree ferns. A steep flight of stairs leads to the first Inca gate and shortly afterwards to the Sun Gate from where suddenly we can see Machu Picchu spread out below us. A dramatic moment impossible to describe. But the crowds have already arrived on the first trains and we wait until tomorrow for the close encounter with the 'Lost City.' We drop down into the Urubamba valley to our hotel in nearby Aguas Calientes. Strongly recommended – the thermal pools (and a beer) – only a short walk.(15mins). 3 hours. (B,L)

DAY 9 Up early and we have Machu Picchu almost to ourselves – well almost. The amazing Inca stonework and architecture combined with the location and the remoteness simply defies belief. Almost as incredible is the stone-stepped trail up the pinnacle of Huayna Picchu, a great climax to the visit if you are good with steepness and height. Finally an afternoon train back to Cusco (4-5 hours) a marvellous experience in itself. What a day! Hotel. (B)

DAY 10 Rest day. Sightseeing in and around Cusco. (B)

DAY 11 **Vilcanota Trek:** Our bus picks us up at the hotel and we drive (approx 5hr) to the village of Tinquí (3800m). This unspoiled town is located right in the foothills of the Cordillera Vilcanota. It is only a short walk to camp. (B,L,D)

DAY 12 Now more acclimatised, we head up the Mapocho River valley. The walk today takes us close to Mt Ausangate. This great massif of ice and rocks has enormous walls and hanging glaciers all around. The trail climbs steadily to our first pass at 4450m, a tremendous place with Ausangate so near. We drop down to our Camp at 4300m. 6 hours. (B,L,D)



*Loading horses high on the Vilcanota.*  
Photo Frank Milner

DAY 13 Today we cross Arapa Pass (4750m) and hike into a valley of lakes and waterfalls with great views of mountains. We camp by Laguna Jatun Pucacocha (Great Red Lake), 4600m, looking towards the southern glaciated face of Ausangate. 5 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 14 A tough day. Crossing the Apacheta Pass (4855m), we descend to a frozen lake and then climb glacial moraine to the Alto Palomani, at 5050m the highest point of our trek. We camp in the remote village of Pampacancha, 4550m. 6-7 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 15 Our path runs through the wildlife-filled Jampamayo river gorge with excellent views of Mt. Jatunpampa and a chance to visit the quiet village of Jampa in the afternoon. Tonight we stay at our highest campsite (4750m) with plenty of time to photograph and explore the mountain slopes. 5 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 16 We circle north-west by Lake Ticllacocha and over the last pass, Jampa, (5000m) surrounded by glaciers. With huge mountains, turquoise and green glacial lakes all around us, you can't help but be impressed. We then drop down toward the village of Pacchanta (4250m) where there are thermal baths, and a good campsite. 5 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 17 A short (3 hour) hike this morning descends through villages to bring us to the roadhead, with views of the peaks of Cayangate, Chimbaya and of course Ausangate, towering above them. Here we say goodbye to our arrieros (mule and cook team). Our bus meets us for the return to Cusco to our hotel for welcome hot showers and a celebratory meal. (B,L,)

DAY 18 Depart Cusco. (B)



*Train to Machu Picchu*

BL/9/10