



Six things you need to know before visiting Peru

Cash is king



It's a 'cash only' world in Peru which can take some getting used to if you're coming from the UK where people use plastic to pay for absolutely everything from tube fares to food shopping.

Conversely in Peru, it's almost impossible to use credit cards in small towns and villages while, even in big cities like Lima and Cuzco, a staggering amount of restaurants sport signs in their window saying 'cash only'.

Don't be snap happy



Always ask permission before taking a picture of a Peruvian – this is especially important if children are involved. We have no right to take photos of people without first asking their consent.

Coca leaves can help cure altitude sickness

Head spinning? Having trouble sleeping? Or perhaps the hotel stairs are making you breathless? If you answered yes to any of the aforementioned questions, chances are you're suffering from altitude sickness which isn't surprising given that most visitors spend a substantial amount of time in Cusco, the cosmopolitan Inca capital that has an elevation



of about 11,152 feet (Altitude sickness generally starts affecting people at 8,000 feet).

Symptoms typically dissipate within a day or two but you can help minimise them by avoiding alcohol and caffeine and drinking plenty of water and tea de coca (coca leaf tea). After a couple of sips of the latter, you'll notice that the throbbing in your head has begun to subside and you can breathe again.

Just don't even think about bringing a stash of coc a-the plant that is used in the manufacture of cocaine- leaves back to the UK, where they are banned.

Lima is more than a layover

Most travellers tend to check out Cuzco and Arequipa and, if not overlook Lima, then at least minimise the time spent in this bustling metropolis. Big mistake.



Peru's capital is the second driest in the world, rising above a long coastline of crumbling cliffs. Lima also boasts one of the most fabulous sunsets in the world (the city faces due west across the Pacific, so the setting sun can flood into the beaches), world-class cuisine and museums that are the envy of Latin America (here's looking at the spectacular Museo Larco, with its galleries of gold and silver Chimú jewellery lighting up as the visitor approaches).

Factor in buzzing barrios like Barranco, a charming area of artists and restaurants leading down to the sea, and hip hotels – take a bow Belmont Miraflores Park – and you have a city worth stopping in rather than just using as a transit hub.

There are many ways to visit Machu Picchu



You don't have to hike the Inca Trail, a genuinely challenging physical experience, in order to visit Machu Picchu for there are other ways to see the famous ruins.

If you have an aversion to strenuous exercise or are tight on time, take train up to Aguas Calientes (also known as Machu Picchu Pueblo), and visit for the day from there.

However if you are intent on hiking to Machu Picchu via the scenic Inca Trail, as its ancient ancestors once did, forget about it in February (when the trail is closed) and think carefully about it between June and August (the busiest months).