

# *All about the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu & Itinerary*

**December 2011 - January 2013**

## **Very Important Remark**

**Note that this is a typical trekking itinerary and may be subject to change depending on speed of the group, group size and availability of camping space allocated by the UGM. Alternative campsites may be used and will be used.**

The Inca Trail is Peru's best known hike. This 43km trek combines visits to archaeological sites, amazing mountain scenery and lush cloud forest rich in native plants such as orchids with many different species of hummingbird.

### Day 1

Between 5:00-05:30 am we will pick you up from your hotel and travel by private bus to Piskacuchu (2700m) which is a small community located 82 along the railroad from Cuzco to Machu Picchu (also known simply as km82). Buses normally stop at the town of Urubamba in the Sacred Valley for about an hour or so to give people the opportunity to have breakfast.

Hikers cross the Vilcanota River and follow the trail to the right as it climbs steeply up from the river. After passing through the small village of Miskay, the ruins of the Inca hill fort of Huillca Raccay come into view high above the mouth of the river Cusichaca ('happy bridge'). It is a simple descent down to the Cusichaca River. From parts of this trail there are great views of the Cordillera Urubamba and the snow capped peak of Veronica 5860m.

You'll also get a great view over the extensive Inca ruins of Llactapata (also known as Patallacta on some maps). Llactapata 2750m means 'upper town' in Quechua and was first discovered by Hiram Bingham in 1911 and was primarily an agricultural station used to supply Machu Picchu with maize, the staple crop of the Incas. The settlement comprised over one hundred buildings, houses for the workers and soldiers, including five baths.

For a further 7 km the path follows the left bank of the river up to the small village of Wayllabamba (3,000m). The name in Quechua means 'grassy plain'. This is the last place along the trek that you can buy snacks and drinks.

## Day 2

We will wake up at about 6:00 am and after breakfast we will leave Wayllabamba behind and begin the most difficult part of the trek. Following the left bank of the Lulluchayoc River for about 1 hour brings you to 'Tres Piedras' (three stones) and a small bridge over the Huayruro River. The stream is named after the Huayruro which is an ornamental tree. Its seeds are red and black. Many of the porters from the Ollantaytambo district are also known as Huayruro because of their traditional red and black ponchos! A little further on you'll enter a beautiful cloud forest passing a waterfall.

A further three hours trek through steepening woods and increasingly spectacular terrain brings you to the tree line and a meadow known as Lulluchapampa (3,680m). It is another 1½ hours climb to the first and highest pass of the trail (Abra de Huarmihuañusca or 'Dead Woman's Pass) at 4,200m. Once at the top hikers can celebrate having completed the most difficult section of the trail.

The descent from the pass is steep although not difficult, following the trail on the left side of the valley to the valley floor and to the 2nd night's campsite at Pacamayo (3,600m). There are toilet facilities here.

## Day 3

This day is the longest but also the most impressive and most interesting due to the many Inca ruins that we will visit along the way.

From the campsite at Pacamayo it takes about an hour to climb up to the ruins of Runkuracay (3800m). These small circular ruins occupy a commanding position overlooking the Pacamayo valley below.

Another 45 minute hike will bring you to the top of the second pass: Abra de Runkuracay (4,000m). At last you'll feel that you are walking along the trail of the Incas with paving, for the most part, being original. The descent down the steps from the pass is steep so take care. This section of the trail, up till the 3rd pass, is particularly beautiful as the path crosses high stone embankments and skirts deep precipices. After about 1 hour from the 2nd pass you'll arrive at Sayacmarca (3624m) by way of a superbly designed stone staircase. The name Sayacmarca means 'Inaccessible Town' and describes the position of the ruins perfectly, protected on three sides by sheer cliffs. No one knows the exact purpose of these ruins.

From then on the path descends into magnificent cloudforest full of orchids, hanging mosses, tree ferns and flowers, passing through an impressive Inca tunnel, carved into the rock, on the way.

The trail then climbs up to the 3rd pass (3,700m). The view from the pass offers excellent views of several snow-capped peaks including Salkantay (6,180m) and Veronica (5,750m). A few minutes after the pass is Phuyupatamarca, the most impressive Inca ruin so far. The name means 'Town in the Clouds'. Access to the ruins is down a steep flight of stairs passing six 'Inca Baths' probably used for the ritual worship of water.

Leaving the site via an impressive Inca staircase you descend a thousand or so steps. Be careful with your knees which will feel the strain by the end of the day.

After about an hour of walking through cloudforest you may just be able to see the tin roof of the Trekkers Hostel at Wiñay Wayna, although it probably won't be for another 2 hours until you arrive.

Wiñay Wayna is the last official campsite before Machu Picchu. There is a restaurant where you can purchase drinks and even a well deserved beer, as well as hot showers (\$1.5) and toilet facilities.

A short trail leaves from the southern end of the hostel to the ruins of Wiñay Wayna. The name in Quechua means 'forever young' and is named after a variety of pink orchid which grows here. The ruins comprise magnificent agricultural terraces set in an impressive location. There are also many buildings of good quality stonework and a sequence of 10 baths, suggesting that the site was probably a religious center associated with the worship of water. Ritual cleansing may have taken place here for pilgrims on the final leg of the trail to Machu Picchu.

#### Day 4

We'll wake early at 4.15am, have breakfast and set off on the trail again by 5.15am to get to Machu Picchu before sunrise. The sky starts getting light by 5:30am and the first rays of the sun reach Machu Picchu at about 7:00am. The trail contours a mountainside and drops into cloud forest before coming to an almost vertical flight of 50 steps leading up to the final pass at Inti Punku (Sun Gate). From this point you will be able to see sunrise over Machu Picchu which is spread out before, an unforgettable experience.

From Inti Punku we will descend for about 40 minutes to Machu Picchu. When you arrive at the ruins you'll have plenty of time to take photos of Machu Picchu from the classic view point. Most groups wait at this point for a while so most of your photos should be 'tourist free'. When the group is back together again we descend to the main entrance where we will have to register and where you can safely leave your large backpacks. You can also go to the toilet and have a quick coffee in the restaurant just outside the entrance. With just your daypack on the group will re-enter the ruins with the same guide for a complete tour of the major sectors. The tour takes about 2 hours so by about 10:30 you'll have free time to explore the ruins alone.

The train back to Cusco departs from Aguas Calientes which is the nearest village to the ruins of Machu Picchu. The train departs at approximately 16:30 (time can vary) and you'll arrive back in Cusco for about 21:00. Included in our standard service are the tourist bus

from Machu Picchu down to Aguas Calientes, the train back to Cusco and a transfer from the station to your hotel. Sometimes, however, we buy train tickets just back as far as Ollantaytambo and then bring you back to your hotel in Cusco by private bus. The later method usually works out about 30 minutes quicker.

We suggest that after visiting Machu Picchu that you take the bus down to Aguas Calientes by 15:30 at the latest (assuming train departs at 16:30). Buses depart every 15 minutes. Check with the guide for actual times. This leaves you plenty of time at the ruins to climb Wayna Picchu (the mountain that you see in the background). It takes about 1 hour to climb and 40 minutes to descend. Most people, however, leave the ruins at about 13:30 and return to Aguas Calientes for lunch (at the ruins there is only one restaurant and it's very expensive). There are several small restaurants in Aguas Calientes to satisfy all budgets.

## Frequently Asked Questions - Inca Trail

If you're unable to find the answer to your question in our F.A.Q please do not hesitate to [Contact Us](#).

### How long the Inca trail is and how many hours do we hike per day?

The Inca Trail is 43 kms (27 miles) long and depending on which campsites are used the approximate hours hiked per day are:

Day 1: 5 hours

Day 2: 8 hours

Day 3: 7 hours

Day 4: 4 hours

### How difficult is the Inca Trail?

The Inca Trail is considered a moderate hike. It's not a technical hike but there are a lot of Inca staircases to walk up and down, and the altitude may affect some individuals. We recommend purchasing a wooden walking stick while in Peru as it will help with your balance and reduce the load on your knees. We ask that you not use a metal tipped walking stick as it can harm the fragile environment along the trail.

## **Is altitude sickness common? And how high is the Inca Trail?**

It's impossible to predict who will be affected by altitude. Your ability to adapt to high altitude is determined by your genetic makeup and has little to do with fitness or health. Most people will have no problems as long as they take the time to acclimatize properly. A full day spent in Cuzco (3249m), taking it easy and drinking plenty of water, is usually enough for most people.

The highest point you will reach while hiking the Inca Trail is 4200 meters. You will sleep at 3600 meters for one or two nights.

## **Is it possible to skip the Inca Trail even if the tour includes it?**

Yes! If you do not wish to hike the Inca Trail please advise us at the time of booking (it is very difficult to make these arrangements once you have already confirmed). If you choose not to hike the trail you will spend two nights in Cuzco and then take the train to the town of Aguas Calientes for the third night. At sunrise you will rejoin your group at Machu Picchu. You may also choose to book a trip that includes the slightly higher and scenic Salcantay-Lares Trail; this popular trek ends in Aguas Calientes, where you will spend the night and catch the early buss to Machu Picchu.

## **When do we reach Machu Picchu and how much time do we spend there?**

You will reach Machu Picchu at sunrise on Day 4 (the hike begins at approx. 3am). After viewing the sunrise you will be met by a local guide who will take you on an informative 3-hour tour of the ruins. After the tour you will have a few hours of free time to explore the area on your own before the group travels by bus to Aguas Calientes where we catch the train back to Cuzco.

## **Do porters carry our personal stuff while on the Inca Trail?**

No! Items not required while on the trail can be stored safely at your hotel in Cuzco. All you will be required to carry is a light backpack containing your personal cloths and items that you will need during the day, do not overcharge your life! If, by any circumstances you may require a larger stuff, you may share a porter for US 35.00 with other hiker. Please make reservations for the porter along with the Inca Trail booking.

## **How cold does it get on the Inca Trail (will I need to bring hats and mitts)?**

The altitude means it can get quite chilly, especially during the Andean winter (May - September) when the temperature can drop to below zero degrees (Celsius) at night. It can still be cool at other times of the year and so we recommend bringing thermal underwear and a warm sleeping bag. You can purchase warm, inexpensive and locally made hand-woven mitts and gloves in Cuzco.

## **What type of accommodation is used on the Inca Trail?**

Three-person tents are used to accommodate two same-sex travelers. There are a few places where permanent but very basic toilet facilities exist and when they are not available our team will set up portable toilet tents. Trekkers are provided with a bowl of hot water (and a hot drink) every morning in their tent.

## **Is a sleeping bag and mat included?**

Sleeping bags are not included and so we recommend bringing a compact three-season sleeping bag. A popular alternative is to rent a sleeping bag in Cuzco. They are clean, warm and cost approximately USD\$10 (for all three nights). Some renters may choose to bring a sleeping bag liner or sheet. Foam mats are provided however some travelers also bring their own self-inflating mat (ie. a Thermarest).

## **Is purified water available on the trail?**

Bottled water can be purchased on day 1 and on the evening of day 3 of the Inca Trail however we discourage trekkers from purchasing bottles as it increases the amount of garbage that must be packed out. Boiled water will be provided every evening after dinner so that you can refill your water bottle(s). If you wish to add water purification tablets you should bring these with you.

## **What type of food will we get on the Inca Trail?**

Our cooks prepare excellent high-energy meals appropriate for a trek of this nature. The menu usually includes pasta, rice, chicken, fresh fruit and vegetables and a variety of oatmeal, eggs and other breakfast foods. Vegetarian alternatives are available upon request at the time of booking.

## **How much should I tip the guides and porters?**

Tipping is at your discretion but always appreciated. A good rule of thumb is anywhere from \$2-10 dollars per day for the porters.

## **What are the requirements to hike the Inca Trail?**

To hike the Inca Trail with Inca Xpress Adventure you must be over 12 years of age, with moderate level of fitness, and hold a passport that is valid for up to 6 months after you return to your home country. We will require your passport at the time of booking, as this is essential to purchase the Inca Trail permits. Bookings should be made 3-4 months in advance to ensure a permit could be obtained. A limited amount of permits are available each day for hikers, in an effort to preserve the trail.

## **Departures**

Everyday throughout the year (except Sundays and the month of February when the trail is closed). Recommended months to do the hike: From March to December.

## **Inclusions:**

Collection from your hotel in the morning

Private bus to the start of the trail

Inca Trail & Machu Picchu entrance fees

English speaking professional guide (two guides for groups over 9 persons)

Igloo tents - 2 persons in each 4-person capacity tent with plenty of space for your backpacks

Double thickness foam mattress

Cook and Cooking equipment

Meals (03B,03L,03D) - food includes pancakes, omelets, soups, fresh fruit, avocado, pasta, chicken, fish, meat, rice, all rich in carbohydrates and suitable for trekking, hot drinks including coca leaf tea which is excellent for the altitude.

Teatime everyday (tea, coffee, biscuits, popcorn)

Porters (to carry the tents, food, and cooking equipment)

Dining tent with camp tables and chairs

Kitchen tent

Accommodation for our porters and cooks

First aid kit including emergency oxygen bottle

Train ticket (Backpackers service) from Aguas Calientes to Cusco or Aguas Calientes to Ollantaytambo, then bus to Cusco and transfer to your hotel.

### **Not included:**

Breakfast on the first morning. Some hotels offer an early morning breakfast service. If not, we stop at the town of Urubamba on the way to the start on the trek where you'll have the opportunity to have breakfast,

Meal in restaurant in Aguas Calientes on day 4 of the trek.

Entrance to the thermal springs in Aguas Calientes US\$1.5.

Sleeping bags can be hired in our office for US\$8 for the 4 day trek.

Tips for the guide, cook and porters

Bus fee to return to Aguas Calientes.

Personal Insurance of any kind.

### **What you need to bring/carry:**

Backpack,

Sleeping bag (can be hired from our office for US\$2 per day)

Sleeping mattress (we will provide you with this)

Rain jacket or poncho (plastic ponchos can be purchased in Cuzco for a few dollars)

Strong, comfortable footwear

One complete change of clothing (you can afford to carry more changes of clothing if you hire a personal porters, see options below)

Sweater and jacket (something warm)

Water bottle and purification tablets (Micropur are recommended and can be bought in local pharmacies in Cusco)

Flashlight and batteries

Hat or cap to protect you from the sun

Sun block (sun protection cream)

insects repellent

Toiletries, towel and toilet paper

Selection of small snacks, chocolate, dried fruit, biscuits etc,

Camera, plenty of film and spare batteries

Swimsuit (if you plan on visiting the hot springs at Aguas Calientes after the trek)  
You also need to bring your original passport on the trail.

## Options:

(1) **Personal porters** can be hired to help carry your personal items such as clothes, sleeping bag etc. They can be hired for \$70 for all 4 days and will carry up to a maximum of 18kg (usually 1 porter between 2 persons is more than sufficient). You can hire the services of a half a porter to carry up to 9kg for US\$45. However, even with a personal porter, you will still need to bring a day pack for essential items. About 30% of the group usually has personal porters to help them. If you hire a porter we will provide you with a sack to put your items in to give to the porter. This extra porter will help you carry: duffle bag or sack (we will provide you with this), sleeping bag, mattress (we will provide you with this), clothing, sweater, jacket, wooly hat, scarf, gloves (something warm for at night), flashlight and batteries, toiletries. Your personal porter, however, will not walk at your side so you will still need to bring a day pack for essential items. You will meet up with your porter at lunch time and at the campsite late in the afternoon. Equipment to be carried by yourselves: small day pack, water bottle and sterilizing tablets, warm sweater, broad-brim or peaked cap, sun protection cream, insect repellent, toilet paper, selection of small snacks for the day etc, camera, lightweight plastic poncho just in case of rain (can be bought in Cusco for US\$1)

**Very Important Remark: You must decide if you want to hire the services of a personal porter in advance when making your trek reservation since we need to purchase the porter's trekking permit. You cannot decide to hire an additional porter once you arrive in Cuzco.**

## Vegetarian Food

We can provide vegetarian meals or cater for special diets with no extra cost. Just let us know at least 2 days prior to trek departure.

**Sleeping bag hire.** If you haven't got a sleeping bag or you don't want the hassle of bringing one with you then we have sleeping bags in our office for rent. The price is US\$2 per person per day.

## Other information:

(1) **Luggage storage.** When you go on the trek it is best to leave any luggage that you are not going to need behind in Cuzco. Nearly all the hotels in Cuzco provide a secure luggage deposit. Put any valuables in their safe. Very rarely do hotels charge for this service especially if you are returning to the same hotel after the trek. If there are any problems with your hotel we can arrange to store your luggage at our office.

(2) **Time of arrival in Cuzco.** Unless you plan to stay an extra night in Aguas Calientes, you will return to your hotel in Cuzco for approximately 9pm on the 4th day of the trek.

## Inca Trail Park Regulations

The Inca Trail is part of the Machu Picchu Sanctuary, a protected area managed by the Peru National Institute of Natural Resources, INRENA. All visitors must obey park regulations prohibiting littering, cutting or damaging trees, removing or damaging stones of ruins and the Trail, removing plants, killing animals, lighting open fires or camping in the archeological sites (only authorized campsites can be used).

The following procedures must be followed:

### 1. Payment of entrance fees:

a. The only valid document granting the right to walk the Inca Trails Network - the Machu Picchu Historical Sanctuary Network RED or SHM - is the ticket issued by the Instituto Nacional de la Cultura (INC). This ticket is personal, non-transferable and includes the entrance fee to Machu Picchu.

b. Payment for the right to use the RED can only be made in the city of Cusco, and has a cost of US\$62, usually included in the quote an authorized agency provides. From August 2008 onwards, this cost will increase 50%

c. Under no circumstances, payment for the use of the RED will be accepted at its registry and entry control points.

d. Payment for the right to use the RED must be made a minimum of thirty (30) days before beginning the trip and the acquisition must be made under your name.

**e. The reimbursement of payment for the right to use the RED is not possible under any circumstance.**

## 2. Reservations

a. Reservations will be made in the offices of the Departmental Headquarters of the Instituto Nacional de Cultura in Cusco, receiving confirmation with corresponding reservation code.

**Note: Reservations will be subject to the daily capacity emitted by the UGM (500 people, including guides, porters, helpers and visitors), therefore we recommend you to reserve your place far in advance.**

b. The entrance permits can be bought even 360 days before the trip begins.

c. To buy the entrance permits, the Tour Operator must pay 100% and provide full names, passport numbers, ages, nationalities and passport photocopies of all those going on the trip, to the relevant authorities. The traveler must send this information and documents to us from his or her home country.

d. Wrong information on travelers will result in the non-acceptance of their entrance permits, and no reimbursement of fees will be made in this case.

e. Only people under 28 years old with valid International Student Identification will be considered as a student, entitling them to a discount on the RED entrance fee.

### Summary:

We recommend you to make the Inca Trail reservation (which means paying for the program) far in advance. In the low season (Oct-Mar), we advise you to make a reservation at least 5 weeks in advance. In May and September, we recommend you to

make a reservation 6 weeks in advance and for the peak months of June, July and August we highly recommend a minimum of 6-8 weeks to make a booking. If the entrance permit has been bought, and then you want to change the date, the only means for making such change is to buy the permit again.

If you turn up in Cusco in the low season (November to March), you may still find space available with some agencies 5-7 days prior to the trek departure date. However, during May 2004 there were many people who were disappointed not to find spaces available even arriving in Cusco 3 weeks in advance. Things were even more difficult for people arriving in June, July & August with it being impossible for visitors to purchase last minute spaces on the Inca Trail upon arrival.

### Useful Information

#### Weather in Cusco

Cusco has a temperate climate with year round temperatures fluctuating between 14° - 16°C, with warm days and cold nights. The rainy season in Cusco is from December to March. Machu Picchu has a semi-tropical climate, with warm and humid days and cold nights. The rainy season in Machu Picchu is from November to March, so be prepared. The wet months are January to April, when roads are often closed by landslides or flooding. The best months for visiting Machu Picchu are from April to October.

We recommend you to:

- Use waterproof boots during treks and sneakers during long walks.
- Drinking lots of liquids on long excursions, especially during the Inca Trail
- Always take rainwear.

#### What to Bring

- Waterproof Hiking boots or/and sneakers.
- Long pants or slacks
- Long-sleeved shirts.
- Several T-shirts
- Sweaters and a jacket.
- Rain wear (you never know when will rain even if it's the dry season).
- Camera.
- Insect Repellent and sun block (sun is always stronger in such altitude).
- Personal toilet items.
- Personal first Aid kit.
- Flashlight.
- Wash kit, water bottle and water purifying tablets.
- A light backpack.
- Change of underwear.
- Gloves, scarf, wool socks and a hat or cap.

- A towel and toilet paper.

## Water

The tap water in most of Peru is potable, but the chemical content varies from place to place. To avoid problems, we recommend that you always drink bottled water.

## Health

Because you are visiting Andean areas, don't forget to take precautions to avoid altitude sickness if you are prone to it. Be sure to try a hot tea or an infusion of coca leaves on arrival at altitude. During your first day move slowly and eat lightly, resting the first couple of hours.

## Heights

Cusco City: 3,360 m.a.s.l.

Machu Picchu: 2,400 m.a.s.l.

Urubamba Valley: 2,850 m.a.s.l.

Inca Trail highest point: 4,200 m.a.s.l.

## Park Regulations

The Inca Trail is part of the Machu Picchu Sanctuary, a protected area of 32,592 hectares, managed by the National Institute of Natural Resources, INRENA. Every visitor must obey park regulations prohibiting littering, cutting or damaging trees, removing or damaging stones of ruins and the Trail, removing plants, killing animals, lighting open fires or camping in the archeological sites (Only authorized campsites can be used).