

PERUVIAN TREASURES

Incan icon Machu Picchu may be Peru's tourism star but other attractions in the country are now emerging from its shadow, says **Shaney Hudson**



IMAGE: GETTY

PERU REMAINS ONE of South America's most appealing destinations. Traditionally, visitors have been lured by its mysterious archaeological ruins, vibrant indigenous culture and incredibly diverse geography, comprising the Andean mountains, the subtropical Peruvian Amazon and the Pacific coast.

UNESCO World Heritage Site Machu Picchu remains the country's star attraction, with the archaeological site acting as an anchor for most itineraries. However, in the past few years Peru has firmly established its credibility as a top-tier destination, with more to offer than just the famous ruins.

"We've found it's not just Machu Picchu people wish to visit, although that's still an important element in many of our tailor-made trips to Peru," says senior travel consultant Nicola Le Rougetel, from Enchanting South America.

"The world-class cuisine is attracting foodies and we're consistently seeking out authentic food experiences for them. We've also noticed an increase in a desire for more people to head to the Peruvian Amazon, instead of the Brazilian side of the Amazon, in a desire to head off the beaten path."

And this desire has been reflected in visitor numbers. In 2013, the country saw sustained growth, with 318,364 US visitors arriving between January and September — a 9.2% increase on the same period in 2012.

According to Naureen Kazi, US travel trade manager for PromPeru, this growth is driven by the distinct experiences Peru offers. "Looking at trends and what segments are becoming popular, there's a clear rise in culinary travel, multi-generational travel, adventure travel, river cruising and voluntourism."

Operators are also feeding demand with improved connections and infrastructure. American Airlines established a direct daily service to Lima from Dallas Fort Worth in April last year, while JetBlue began its daily service to Lima from Fort Lauderdale in December.

Last year also saw the opening of the 134-room Four Points by Sheraton Miraflores and the 17-room boutique Hotel B, joining the Hilton Lima Miraflores and the Westin Hotel & Convention Center in the growing number of high-end options in the Peruvian Capital.

But one of the biggest factors driving visitor numbers is word of mouth. "We're experiencing a lot of enquiries from friends of guests," says Le Rougetel, "It seems the word is out on the diversity Peru offers."

Here we offer a rundown of some of Peru's top trails and tours... ►

Machu Picchu

FROM THE ANDES TO THE AMAZON

■ WHERE: Lima, the Andean region, Iquitos and Amazon rainforest.

■ HOW LONG: 12 days, 11 nights.

■ THE DETAILS: Enchanting South America's from the Andes to the Amazon tour covers the country's big attractions, including Cusco, the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu, but also heads to the jungle region for a luxury Amazon cruise.

Setting off from Lima, the tour spends five nights in the Andean region, exploring Cusco and the Sacred Valley, with a night at the spectacular Sanctuary Lodge, next to Machu Picchu. Flying to Iquitos in Northern Peru, guests then begin a four-night Amazon cruise, exploring remote wilderness and jungle only accessible by boat.

While this itinerary emphasizes luxury, its standout feature is giving guests the privilege of time to properly explore a destination.

■ BEST FOR: Luxury lovers and river cruisers.

■ SAMPLE: Enchanting South America's Peru from the Andes to the Amazon costs from \$9,470 per person, double, including all accommodation, internal economy-class flights, all airport and hotel transfers, full board on the Iquitos cruise, all entrance fees and guides. T: 1888 263 2574. enchanting-southamerica.com



A TASTE OF PERU

■ WHERE: Lima, Cusco, the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu.

■ HOW LONG: Eight days/seven nights.

■ THE DETAILS: Designed for gourmands, this food tour gives national traditions a historical context and showcases regional specialties that have helped make Peru a gastronomic hotspot.

Visiting both Lima and Cusco, the tour features cooking classes, market trips, farm visits and fine dining. What sets the tour apart are the meals at top Peruvian restaurants, giving a taste of the innovative fusion foods of cosmopolitan Lima.

Along with tours of Cusco and Machu Picchu, visitors explore the Sacred Valley, sampling Andean markets and regional staples, along with learning to prepare ceviche and pisco sour.

■ BEST FOR: Gourmands and foodies.

■ SAMPLE: Active Gourmet Holiday's A taste of Peru for Foodies tour costs from \$3,400 per person, double, including airport transfers, all accommodation, five lunches or dinners, six culinary demos, five cultural tours, train tickets and entrance fees. Excludes flights. T: 1 203 732 0771. activegourmetdays.com

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF PRE-INCA CIVILIZATIONS

■ WHERE: Trujillo, Chiclayo and Cajamarca.

■ HOW LONG: Eight days/seven nights.

■ THE DETAILS: Taking in the Trujillo, Chiclayo and Cajamarca archaeological sites, this week-long tour looks at the pre-Inca civilizations of the Sican, Chimú and Moche people that settled in this area.

From Lima, the tour visits Trujillo and the 140ft-high Temple of the Sun, the tallest pyramid in the Americas, then heads to the UNESCO-listed adobe capital of the Chimú kingdom, Chan Chan. Staying in a rural area famed for its hot springs, visitors can visit the necropolis of Otuzco and a pre-Inca aqueduct near Cumbemayo, before finishing the trip in Cajamarca, home of Peru's famous 'Ransom Room' of the last Inca Emperor.

■ BEST FOR: History buffs and return visitors.

■ SAMPLE: South America Travel's Trujillo, Chiclayo and Cajamarca Peru archaeology tour departs from Lima and costs from \$2,184 per person, including B&B hotels, transfers, entry fees, and guides. Excludes flights. T: 800 747 4540. southamerica.travel ►

CELEBRATING THE WINTER SOLSTICE

■ WHERE: Cusco and the Sacred Valley.

■ HOW LONG: Six days/five nights.

■ THE DETAILS: Held in Cusco every year to mark the winter solstice, Inti Raymi remains the most important celebration on the Inca calendar; city streets swell with people, music, markets, ceremonial processions and performances.

The festival is popular with locals and tourists alike and it's common for most hotels to sell out. This specialist tour from Totally Latin America not only covers accommodation but also secures pre-reserved seats for the festival's main event at Saqsayhuman on June 24.

Also included is a day in the Sacred Valley exploring the indigenous market of Pisac, a tour of Ollantaytambo, return train tickets to Machu Picchu and a guided tour of Cusco.

■ BEST FOR: Culture vultures and festival-goers.

■ SAMPLE: Totally Latin America's Inti Raymi 2014 festival package departs Lima and costs from \$1,250 per person. This includes all accommodation and breakfasts, airport transfers, entrance, train tickets and shuttle to Machu Picchu, Sacred Valley and Cusco tours, plus pre-reserved seats for Inti Raymi Saqsayhuman. Excludes flights. T: 1 855 217 9045. totallylatinamerica.com



HIKING THE INCA TRAIL

■ WHERE: Cusco and Machu Picchu.

■ HOW LONG: Three days camping together with four days hiking.

■ THE DETAILS: For most visitors, Machu Picchu is the highlight of a visit to Peru. But why take the train when you can walk there in the footsteps of the Incas? The classic four-day trek along the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu begins at kilometer 82 and consists of a series of steep ascents and descents through dense cloud forest. While the trail is well marked and supported by porters, the altitude and mud can challenge even the most experienced hiker. Accommodation is at campsites along the trail, and the climax is the final morning's climb before dawn to reach the Sun Gate as the sun rises over Machu Picchu.

Departing from Cusco, the four-day trip also allows a full day to explore Machu Picchu before returning to Cusco by train in the evening. Only a limited number of permits to hike the trail are released each day, so it's important to book early.

■ BEST FOR: Active and adventurous travelers.

■ SAMPLE: Inca Trail Reservations' four-day hike is priced from \$539 per person and is available March to January; the trail closes during February. The price includes trail permit, transfers to and from Cusco, porters and food. T: 1800 930 4319. incatrailreservations.com

FAST FACTS

■ CLIMATE: Peru has a varied climate. The wet season is during summer (December-March), with peak season during the drier, winter months (May-September). For Machu Picchu, May-June is the best time to visit as it's dry and warm without the crowds of July and August.

■ CURRENCY: Peruvian Nuevo Sol (PEN).

\$1 = \$2.8 PEN.

■ TIME: GMT -5.

■ DIAL CODE: +51.

■ GETTING THERE: International flights from the US land in Lima. JetBlue flies from Fort Lauderdale; United from Newark, Houston and Miami; American Airlines from Dallas Fort Worth, while Delta flies from Atlanta.

■ GETTING AROUND: In Peru's cities and main tourist centers, taxis are affordable and reliable but most travel within the country is done by bus or air. For Machu Picchu, special minibuses depart every few minutes to/from Aguas Calientes (round trip US\$14). Travel to Aguas Calientes (Machu Picchu) is via a private rail service. There's also a thrice-weekly rail service between Cusco and Puno and thrice-monthly Tren Sierra service between Lima and Huancayo.

■ HEALTH: Peru doesn't require any immunizations for entry but recommends against yellow fever and antimalarials are advised for trips into the Amazon.

■ GEOGRAPHY: Peru is in the west of South America, by the Pacific Ocean between Chile and Ecuador, and comprises tropical jungle, arid desert and mountains.

■ VISITOR NUMBERS: 387,606 US visitors in 2012; 318,364 from January-September 2013.

■ TOURIST BOARD CONTACT: Prom Peru.

T: 511 574 8000. peru.travel

