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The Mountains of Peru

Peru is synonymous with mountains. Seen from above, Peru's territory resembles a colossal sheet of wrinkled paper. The reason is the presence of the magnificent Andes that, like a giant backbone of rock and snow, cut across Peru from north to south and mold its geography and with it, the landscape and the people.

The Andes spread across Peru, forming the largest concentration of snow peaks of the Americas. They are an intricate system of large and small mountain ranges –approximately 20 of them– crowned by a thousand summits that tower over 5.000 masl and more than thirty that rise above 6.000 masl.

The best-known are the Cordillera Blanca and Huayhuash ranges in the department of Ancash; Vilcanota and Vilcabamba in Cusco; Carabaya in Puno; Chila in Arequipa; La Viuda in Lima, and Pariacaca in Junín.

Mountains in Peru are so pervasive that it is almost impossible to imagine a landscape without soaring peaks looming in the horizon. Only in the Amazon plain and some areas in the arid coastal desert does the land flatten out.

Besides splitting Peru's territory into two clearly defined regions, the Andes are the country's continental water- divide. This means that the summits of the Andes channel the water from rain and thawed glaciers in two diametrically opposite directions: to the West into the Pacific Ocean, and to the East into the large Amazon basin.

The Andes are mostly located slightly south of the Equator and this location has a decisive influence on the characteristics of Andean massifs. Therefore, although its summits remain perpetually snow-capped, Peru's Andes are, to a great extent, a tropical range.

The Andean climate is affected by two factors: the warm and humid winds that blow in from the Amazon jungle and the cold fronts originating in the Pacific Ocean region. These two factors combine to determine a rainy season from November to April with abundant rainfall and afternoon snowstorms, and a dry season from May to October when sunny days are followed by extremely dry and cold nights with temperatures often below -5° C.

Except for a handful of mountains in Argentina and Chile, the highest peaks in the Americas are to be found in the Peruvian Andes. These include Mount Huascarán (6.678 meters), Peru's highest mountain; Yerupajá (6.634 meters), the highest mountain in the Amazon basin; and Alpamayo (5.947 meters), ranked as the most beautiful mountain in the world in a competition held in Germany in 1960.

Untainted mountain chains can still be found in Peru. They are attractions of great interest for lovers of outdoors and mountain sports.

Such unique areas are home to an impressive succession of landscapes and exceptional animal and plant wildlife, that include: the Puya Raimondi, a plant with the largest number of flowers in the world (more than 10.000) which blooms only once every 80-100 years; queñual forests that grow almost on the edge of the snow line; century-old yaretas, that grow scarcely one millimeter a year; small herds of graceful vicuña whose wool is considered the world's finest; majestic Andean condors that dominate the skies, and dozens of tiny hummingbirds that feature all the colors of the rainbow.

Several high-Andean civilizations of farmers and livestock herders –who follow millenary mountain traditions of paying homage to the sacred Apus or sacred mountain guardians– add to the attractiveness of the area. So come and see for yourself.

Mountain Trekking

Peru is a true hikers' paradise. Practically all of the sierra, including valleys, plateaus and mountain ranges include trekking circuits of various degrees of difficulty. However, only a few have been "discovered" as commercial trekking routes.

The rest are still unexplored and await those who wish to walk the magical trails of the Peruvian Andes and their extraordinary web of pre-Columbian roads. More than 12.000 lakes, the deepest canyons on Earth, glaciers and snow-capped mountains, forests and waterfalls, picturesque towns and the most hospitable people one could imagine welcome travelers.

Some roads are so steep they get lost in dizzying abysses, or they zigzag like huge snakes between the mountains, like flat and long ribbons lost in the immensity of the desert, or hidden and imperceptible in the thickness of the Amazon forest.

The roads of Peru offer endless possibilities and the ideal combination for trekkers of all levels of experience and requirements.

The Inca Trail to Machu Picchu

Part of the 23.000 km (approximately 14.000 miles) of roads built by the Incas in South America, this is Peru's most famous trekking route and possibly one of the most spectacular in the Americas. Every year, some 25.000 hikers from around the world walk along the extraordinary 43 km of this stone-paved road built by the Incas leading to the unassailable citadel of Machu Picchu located in the depth of the Cusco jungle.



Inca trail, Cuzco
Alejandro Balaguer / PromPerú



Trekking, the Inca trail, Cuzco
Alejandro Balaguer / PromPerú

The journey starts in the village of Qorihuayrachina, at kilometer 88 of the Cusco-Quillabamba railway and takes three or four days of strenuous walking. The route includes an impressive variety of altitudes, climates and ecosystems that range from the high Andean plain to the cloud forest. Travelers will cross two high altitude passes (the highest being Warmiwañuska at 4.200 masl) to culminate the hike with a magical entrance to Machu Picchu through the Inti Punko or Gateway of the Sun. One of the main attractions along the route is the web of ancient settlements built in granite rock by the Incas like Wiñay Wayna and Phuyupatamarca immersed in an overpowering natural scenery. Hundreds of species of orchids, multicolored birds and dreamlike landscapes provide the ideal backstage for a route that every hiker should walk at least once.

Many travel agencies sell complete packages to trek the Inca Trail that include meals, camping

gear and porter services. Travelers who wish to organize themselves independently can find porters in the communities of Chillca and Wayllabamba who will charge a modest fee to help carry your gear. Drinking water and food supplies, as well as full camping gear are needed.

The Machu Picchu administration charges a US\$ 50 per person fee to provide road maintenance. Admission to the sanctuary is included in the ticket. In Wiñay Wayna –site of some of the most impressive agricultural terraces found in Peru– travelers will find toilets and a visitor's shelter.

The Cordillera Blanca Mountain Range

“A great sea of mountains,” “Peru's Chamonix” are some of the remarks made by mountaineers who visit the site. Located 410 km northeast of Lima (5-6 hours by car and 7-8 hours by bus), the Cordillera Blanca is the world's highest tropical mountain chain. It stretches for 180 km from north to south and splits the eastern and western headwaters of the Andes in this region. Easily reachable by a paved road off Pativilca (210 km north of Lima) that leads to the Callejón de Huaylas, every year the Cordillera Blanca welcomes thousands of mountaineers eager to conquer its summits or walk through its beautiful landscapes. Practically the entire range is a protected area within the Huascarán National Park, a paradise of snow-capped mountains, 663 glaciers, 269 emerald-green lakes and 41 rivers, plus 33 archaeological sites. Its flora and fauna are an additional attraction featuring almost 800 varieties of blossoming flowers including the Puya Raimondi and ancient queñual and cacti forests unique to these mountain scenarios, as well as Andean condors, vicuña, puma, taruca or Andean deer and well over a hundred species of birds.

Only a handful of the area's innumerable trekking circuits have gained international fame. The route across the Santa Cruz gorge is perhaps the most popular of all. From the village of Cashapampa where it starts, all the way to the Llanganuco ravine, it is dotted with beautiful emerald-green lakes. A walking tour of the gully usually takes four to six days. Other highly popular circuits include a tour of Alpamayo, a spectacular trek among snow-capped summits that takes about 12 days; the Cedros gorge tour where trekkers take four days to hike the mountains in the northern sector of the Huascarán Park; the less demanding and faster (one and a half days) trek through Llanganuco and Portachuelo, and the excursion

through the Quilcayhuanca ravine, a gently sloping route that can be traveled in a couple of days.

Llama-trek Expedition in Olleros-Chavín

A new and interesting way to trek, llama-packing is part of Llama 2000, an initiative undertaken by a group of peasant farmers from the Callejón de Huaylas and the Mountain Association of the Olleros-Chavín area. The initiative is designed to promote ecotourism in the Ancash department by rescuing its traditions. Llama and alpaca – the traditional Andean beasts of burden– captivate the walkers' attention during their trip along some of the most spectacular trails in the Cordillera Blanca and Huascarán National Park.

The route starts in the charming town of Olleros (30 km south of Huaraz) where llamas are loaded with the necessary travel gear. During four days of walking and enjoying the scenic beauty of the area and the views of snow-capped peaks like Shaqsha (5.703 meters), Cashan (5.686 meters) and Tuctupunta (5.343 meters), travelers have the opportunity of sharing the customs and traditions of local peasant communities at Shongo (a site dotted with imposing sacred monoliths or huacas) and Nunupata.

The route ends at the splendid archaeological site of Chavín de Huántar, built to serve as the administrative and ceremonial center of the first pre-Columbian civilization that spread over most of what is now Peru. UNESCO declared the site part of Mankind's Cultural Heritage in 1985. Dozens of structures in polished rock, underground plazas and galleries, and peculiar gargoyle heads and carved stone slabs make Chavín an indispensable stop for visitors to the area.



*Llama trek, Ancash
Aníbal Solimano / PromPerú*

Cordillera Huayhuash

Located about 50 km south of the Cordillera Blanca, and 250 km northeast of Lima, Huayhuash is one of the least known mountain ranges in the world and at the same time one of the most beautiful. It stretches along 30 km from north to south and includes a string of gorgeous snow-capped mountains, most notably the Yerupajá, and dozens of glaciated lakes of unparalleled beauty like Carhuacocha, Jahuacocha, Mitucocha, among others. The full trekking circuit that, according to experts, is one of the world's most spectacular routes in the world, stretches along some 165 km (100 miles) and can be walked in about 12 days.

Only one route goes full circle around the range. Two days after leaving Chiquián (3.400 masl), travelers will reach the heart of the range. The route climbs over five mountain passes and crosses charming peasant farming and herders' communities like Llamac, Pocpa, Huayllapa and Pacllón, to complete the northern section of the loop. The route then continues along the eastern side and finishes on the western face of the mountains.

A shorter circuit (45 km) links Chiquián to lake Jahuacocha. The trek sets off from the villages of Llamac and Pocpa and finishes at Pacllón. Extraordinary glaciers, crystal-clear lakes, herds of llama and alpaca, hospitable residents and, most of all, pristine landscapes are the rewards awaiting those willing to venture in the discovery of this unique trekking circuit.

The Colca Valley

Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa once called the Colca "The Valley of Marvels." In the Colca, travelers will find a series of circuits of breathtaking beauty that have only recently been included as part of adventure expeditions. Located 150 km north of Arequipa at the end of a gravel road, it's made up of an almost endless web of horse trails that crisscross the valley's ridges to link colonial towns of unusual splendor. A touch of interest is added by the beautiful lakes, unique formations carved by erosion into the rock, and plentiful, rare animal and plant wildlife including the Andean condor and vicuña, queñual forests and fields with century-old yaretas. Major attractions include the area's imposing snow-capped volcanoes some of which are active, like Hualca Hualca (6.025 meters), Sabancaya (5.976

meters) and Ampato (6.288 meters) among others.

Since the dawn of time, the Colca has been home to the Collagua and Cabana ethnic groups, two peoples whose origins can be traced back to the High Plateau Pucara and Quechua ethnic groups from Cusco. Their mastery of hydraulic engineering can be seen in the sophisticated system of agricultural terraces that decorates the steep flanks of the valley.

One of the most popular trekking routes in the Colca links Cabanaconde and Tapay. The expedition lasts from three to four days during which travelers will enjoy some impressive scenery, Cabana villages like Cosnihua and Malata, and numerous pre-Hispanic ruins. Tour operators in Arequipa and Colca (towns of Chivay and Yanque) offer trekking and horseback riding packages. Lodging and restaurants catering to all tastes and budgets are also available.

Mount Ausangate

The heart of the eastern Andes, south of the ancient and magical city of Cusco, is dominated by Mount Ausangate (6.333 meters), the main Apu or mountain spirit of Peru's southern Andes. Access to the massif is made possible by a paved road that sets off from Ocongate. The 8-to-12 day walk is physically demanding, as it requires climbing through high mountain passes and being exposed to changing weather conditions.

Trekking and adventure travel agents offer circuit packages from Cusco. Hiring an experienced agency and local guides is advisable. In addition to the spectacular Andean backdrop, the route is dotted with numerous Quechua communities that continue to make a living from traditional communal farming and llama and alpaca herding.

Mount Salkantay

A stately 6.271 meter mountain, Mount Salkantay rises over Machu Picchu, in the breathtaking Vilcanota Range. There, at the end of a trekking route that combines the rarely surpassed magnificence of its natural backdrop and the attraction of the world's best known pre-Hispanic legacy, stand the Machu Picchu citadel and the Inca Trail.

The expedition starts by taking the old Inca stone-road that leads to the lost city of Machu Picchu and crosses a mountain pass between Mount Salkantay and Mount Humantay (5.917 meters). The excursion then proceeds down the Aobamba river gorge up to the archaeological site. From the path it is possible to get a unique view of the most beautiful mountains in Cusco: Wayanay (5.464 meters), Palcay (5.229 meters), and Wakay Willka or Veronica (5.750 meters), located on the opposite bank of the Urubamba river valley. Several Cusco trekking and adventure travel operators offer this circuit. It is also highly recommended to hire an experienced local guide.

Coast and Cloud Forest Trekking

Trekking does not necessarily demand mountain ranges or steep slopes. Some sites along the Peruvian Pacific seaboard combine the immensity and deceiving emptiness of the desert with a ragged coastline to create scenery of unsurpassed beauty and attractiveness.

One such site is undoubtedly the Paracas desert, located some 250 km south of Lima, where yellowish saltpeter plains, fine sand dunes, wind-eroded cliffs, and an extraordinarily rich sea provide fishing grounds for huge colonies of sea birds and seals in a unique environment on Peru's coast. Many roads, some of which double as top-notch trekking circuits, can be found in the Paracas Bay and Peninsula.

On Peru's northern tip, Bayóvar and its virgin beaches are a natural jewel in the Piura department. Deep gorges carved by now-dry rivers that flow only once every 50 years, have molded a fierce landscape. Forests of twisted carob trees, flocks of migratory birds, and a wind-

swept desert are some of its most singular attractions.

On the other side of the Andes mountains, down the abrupt slopes that overlook the east of Peru and drenched by rain originating in the steamy Amazon plain, lies the high jungle. A land of impenetrable forests, it is considered the last haven of a unique plant wildlife (including orchids, bromeliae and ferns) and rare endangered animals like the spectacled bear, the dwarf deer and the yellow-tailed woolly monkey.

One route in this area leads to the wondrous Kuelap fortress, the Amazon jungle enclave of the Sachapuya people, renowned for the spectacular clay rock fortified walls they built around this citadel, built at 3.000 masl on top of an imposing rocky ridge. Kuelap is the most important archaeological attraction in Peru's northeast and consists of a beautifully-engineered citadel sitting on top of two huge superimposed platforms. For its sheer size (584 by 110 meters) and characteristics, the site is comparable to Cusco's Sacsayhuaman.

To reach Kuelap, travelers must head for Chachapoyas, after a 50-minute flight from Lima (it is necessary to charter a special flight because there are no regular routes) or a full day's car drive from Chiclayo on the coast (750 km north of Lima). From Chachapoyas, they head by road to Tinco, in the Utcubamba valley and then up a 7-kilometer gravel road to the fortress.

Other interesting routes in the Eastern Andes include the splendid eastbound roads from Cusco and Puno which are still largely unknown to trekking aficionados.

Mountaineering in Peru

The Peruvian Andes provide an incomparable spot for mountaineering and make Peru a magnet for lovers of South American mountains. There are many reasons: a unique concentration of mountains and relatively few mountain climbers; mild weather almost all year-long, and relatively easy access to sites that are nevertheless cut off from hectic city life. It is an ideal combination that makes Peru one of the most attractive destinations for mountaineers worldwide.

Although the lowest summit of the Huascarán massif, the world's highest tropical mountain, was first climbed in 1908 by US climbers Annie Peck and two Swiss guides, mountain climbing in the Andes only took off in Peru in the early 1930s thanks to the pioneering European expeditions that launched the great Andean travel adventure in search of new climbing challenges.

Since the 1932 expedition led by Austrian climbers Borchers, Schneider and Kinzl reached the southern summit of Mount Huascarán (6.768 masl) –Peru's highest–, Peru's peaks have been the scene of many more spectacular ascents.

The Cordillera Blanca Mountain Range

Peru's mountain climbing mecca, the Cordillera Blanca runs along the eastern flank of the Santa river, in the Callejón de Huaylas. It embraces both the largest and most beautiful snow-capped peaks in the country. Among the best known are Mount Huascarán (6.768 masl); the Huandoy massif's three summits, all over 6.000 meters high; Chopicalqui (6.354 meters), Chacaraju (6.112 meters), Alpamayo (5.947 meters) and Copa (6.118 meters).

The range's advantages include its ideal climate for climbing between May and October, and its easy access that allows climbers to finish the ascent in a short time. Additionally, the cities and towns located at the foot of the mountains provide travelers with a full variety of services including porters, guides, rescue teams and climbing gear. Huaraz, the capital of the Ancash Department, features several hotels and restau-



*Snow biking, Mount Pastoruri, Ancash
Anibal Solimano / PromPerú*

rants, while a dozen reliable travel agencies organize climbing expeditions. Chartered flights arrive at the small local airport. However, Huaraz can be easily reached in five to six hours by taking the road from Lima to Pativilca (210 km to the north along the North Pan-American Highway) and then climbing another 200 km towards the Sierra.

Other towns at the foot of the mountains like Carhuaz, a hook-up point with the towns in the Callejón de Conchucos; Yungay, the starting point for expeditions to the scenic Llanganuco lagoon in the Huascarán National Park, and Caraz, a flower-growing community known for its pleasant climate, also offer travelers a full range of services including guides, porters, rescue teams and climbing gear rental.

The Cordillera Huayhuash Mountain Range

"The most splendid of Peru's mountain ranges" is a common remark made by climbers about this site. The first summit in the range is Mt. Siulá Grande, first climbed by an Austrian expedition in 1936. Its highest mountain, Yerupajá, was first climbed in 1950 by a team from Harvard University. Huayhuash includes a dozen peaks which are particularly difficult to climb due to frequent snow and ice avalanches. Some of the best-known glaciers include Yerupajá (6.634 meters), Yerupajá Chico (6.121 meters), Jirishanca (6.094 meters), Siulá Grande (6.344

meters), Rondoy (5.879 meters), Ninashanca (5.807 meters), and Rasac (6.017 meters).

The mountains are usually approached from the town of Chiquián (360 km northeast of Lima), which is also an ideal place for getting supplies. Porters and guides can be hired in the nearby towns of Llamac, Pocpa and Pacllón. Expeditions are also organized in nearby Huaraz.

Peru's 25 highest mountains

Mountain	masl	Department
Huascarán	6.768	Ancash
Huascarán (North)	6.655	Ancash
Yerupajá	6.634	Lima
Coropuna	6.425	Arequipa
Huandoy Centro	6.395	Ancash
Chopicalqui	6.354	Ancash
Siulá Grande	6.344	Ancash
Ausangate	6.333	Cusco
Ampato	6.288	Arequipa
Salkantay	6.271	Cusco
Sarapo	6.127	Ancash
Hualcán	6.122	Ancash
Chacaraju	6.112	Ancash
Jirishanca	6.094	Ancash
Chachani	6.075	Arequipa
Pucahirca	6.046	Ancash
Hualca Hualca	6.025	Arequipa
Rasac	6.017	Ancash
Sabancaya	5.976	Arequipa
Carnicero	5.960	Ancash
Alpamayo	5.947	Ancash
Rondoy	5.879	Ancash
Misti	5.825	Arequipa
Huagurunchu	5.785	Pasco
Pariacaca	5.750	Junín/Pasco

Summits of Arequipa

Arequipa is synonymous with volcanoes, blue skies and endless plains. Known as the White City for the white volcanic ashlar stone used in its buildings, Arequipa sits at the foot of the western Andes. The city is the starting point for a number of ascents of variable difficulty, all characterized by a rare combination of breathtaking landscapes, easy access, and a significant cultural element. Ancient Peruvians chose Arequipa's volcano summits for ritual human

sacrifices to honor their gods, as shown by the recent discovery of Juanita or Little Jane, the mummified Inca maiden found in an exceptionally good state of preservation on the summit of Mount Ampato.

Misti volcano (5.825 meters) is the main symbol of Arequipa. More than a climb, going up Misti implies a two-day walk on often-loose ground up steep slopes. The most popular ascent starts from the city of Arequipa itself and goes on to Tambo Inca and the base camp at Nido de Aguilas (Eagle's Nest) to reach the summit on the second day of ascent. Chachani (6.075 meters), the city's other volcano, can be approached along a spectacular gravel road that climbs toward the Pampa de Arrieros.

Four hours from Arequipa, the Colca Valley features stunning mountains that have also become popular among mountain climbers. They include volcanoes like Ampato (6.288 meters) and Sabancaya (5.976 meters), as well as the glacier at Hualca Hualca (6.025 meters), among the most important. Lastly, the Coropuna (6.425 meters), probably the most beautiful mountain in the Cotahuasi Valley, offers travelers an impressive view of the area. It can be reached from lake Pallarcocha, a little more than two days away from Arequipa by road.

Information about access to these and other mountains can be obtained from adventure travel operators in Arequipa who will also provide all the logistic services and make arrangements with local porters and guides.

The Vilcanota Mountain Range

The Sacred Valley of the Incas, about 60 km north of Cusco city, is home to a string of picturesque towns, and numerous archaeological sites, well-kept farms where giant maize is grown, and an exceptional climate. The surrounding mountains, perfect for trekking and mountaineering, stand out among the many local attractions. Chicón, Wekay Willka (also known as Pumasillo or Verónica), Pitusiray, Sawasiray, Terijway and Sunchubamba –all above 5.000 meters– are some of the main summits in the Vilcanota Range.

Yucay, Urubamba, Ollantaytambo, the towns that dot the valley offer lodging and food, as well as local porter and guide services. Most of the

travel agencies that organize climbing expeditions are based in Cusco.

The Central Andes Mountain Range

The Central Andes, and in particular the western slopes, feature peaks that stand out from their respective ranges because of their height and beauty, like Rajuntay (5.247 masl) and Pariacaca (5.750 masl) in the mountains near Lima; and Huagurunchu (5.785 meters), which overlooks

the mining city of Cerro de Pasco, in the department of Pasco. All are easy to reach by roads.

However, lack of infrastructure and experienced guides and porters may pose some difficulties in this region. The climate varies from a rainy season between November and May, to a dry season from June to September, which is the perfect time for climbing.

Rock climbing

Originating in Scotland, rock climbing soon became one of the most popular adventure sports at the end of the past century. The climber's ultimate goal is not simply to reach the top but to do so in a particular way. Following the right route, rather than a means to achieve a final destination, has always been the ultimate goal of the climber's endeavors. Time and technology have drastically improved the equipment and safety devices needed for this sport and made possible more and better ascents.

Rock climbing started its swift rise in popularity in the 1960s when the polished granite mountains of California became a sort of Mecca for extreme sports lovers. A decade later, the sport arrived in Peru, a land filled with ideal sites for the sport, in particular in the mountains of Lima, Cajamarca and Pasco.

Given the many factors that determine the complexity of a route like soil type, slope and length, it is hard to put together a classification for all the possible destinations. However, the Yosemite Decimal System is widely recognized as a classification that takes into account various levels of difficulty ranked from 5,0 to 5,14. As the level of difficulty rises above 5,10, the ranking adds letters from A to D to the decimal score. Thus, the most difficult ascent in the world – a cliff in southern Germany – is rated 5,14D, while Peru's most difficult climb, the Canchacalla route, is rated 5,12D.

Additionally, the routes are classified by risk. GP paths are open to all climbers; R paths are restricted and involve the risk of serious injury; climbs given an X rating imply a death risk while a double X ascent carries a death risk for climbers and their teams. Many walls in the narrow Rímac canyon in Lima or the polished rock walls in Tinajani in Puno are typical R- and X-rated climbs.

Points of Interest

Other than man-made climbing walls built in concrete that have become increasingly popular attractions in bars and adventure sports festivals, there are some particularly apt places throughout Peru to practice outdoors rockwall climbing. The

outskirts of Lima for one are full of ideal spots for rock climbing. For instance, the walls of Camacho are in the outskirts of Lima, in the neighborhood of La Molina. Further east lies Vichuya in the Lurín Valley. The Rímac river valley has its own spots like Canchacalla, 46 km east of Lima along the Central Highway, where rock climbing courses have been taught for several years. Also in Lima, Infiernillo –literally Little Hell– at kilometer 67 along the same road, lies within easy reach and is one of the most demanding walls for rock climbers.

Down the coast, along the South Pan-American Highway, are the sedimentary rock cliffs at Biki (45 km south of Lima), La Tiza (60 km), and Paracas (250 km to the south). All overlook the Pacific Ocean, where waves crash against the cliffs, adding a touch of danger to an already risky sport.

In the Andes, Cumbemayo in the outskirts of Cajamarca, the Tinajani rock forest in Ayaviri, Puno; the Llanganuco glacier walls in Ancash, and the stone formations in the Huayllay sanctuary in Pasco are all ideal spots for rockwall climbing.

Recommendations

Perú: Location and Climate

Peru is located on the central part of western South America and is hemmed in by the Pacific Ocean. Home to more than 24 million inhabitants, the country covers a surface of 1.285.215 km² (about the combined size of Spain, France and Italy) making it one of the 20 largest countries on Earth. Also because of their geographical location, Peru's coasts have traditionally served as a vital point in maritime and trade routes on the subcontinent. Moreover, Peru has sovereign rights over 200 miles off its coasts, and territorial rights over 60 million hectares in Antarctica.

The Coastline

Due to the presence of the cold Humboldt Current and the fact the coast is limited to the east by the Andes, the Coastline is a long barren desert

where there is almost no rain. Winter runs from April to October in the central and south coastal regions while summer lasts from November to March. In winter, skies are heavily overcast and a light drizzle, called garúa, is frequent. Despite an intense chill factor caused by high humidity, temperatures rarely fall below 12° C.

In Summer, however, the sun shines brightly, making temperatures frequently rise to 30° C. The north coast is not affected by cold water currents, which is why the area is blessed with almost 300 warm, sunny days a year with temperatures that can reach 35° C in summer. Rainy season in this region is from November to March which are considerably increased due to The El Niño weather phenomenon.

The Andes

Two distinct seasons can be found in the Andes. One is a rainless winter that runs from April to October when days are sunny and nights cold with frequent frosts, thus making it the perfect time for a visit. Heavy rains (generally more than 1.000 mm or about 40 inches), fall in the rainy season –erroneously known as “winter”– that lasts from November to March. The Andean climate features radical temperature changes over the same 24-hour period from 24° C in the day to as low as 3° C at night. The mountain climate is dry and favors a wide variety of crops.

The Jungle

Split into the high jungle (above 700 masl) and low jungle (below 700 masl). The subtropical, mild climate of the high jungle features rainfall (approximately 3.000 mm or 120 inches a year) from November to March and sunny days from April to October. Nights are always cool. In the lower jungle or Amazon plain, two well-marked seasons are directly related to distance to the Equator. In the dry, travel season running from April to October, days are often sunny and temperatures climb above 35° C. River flow drops and roads are usually open to traffic. From November to March, showers are frequent –at least once a day– and road travel difficult. Humidity is extremely high throughout the year. From May to August, an occasional frost originating in cold fronts, called friajes or surazos, blowing north from the southern tip of the subcontinent may hit the southern jungle and make temperatures fall to between 8 and 12° C.

Mountain Climate

It is often said that in tropical mountain ranges, rather than four seasons in the year, there are four seasons in a day. Mornings in the Peruvian Andes are bright but cool like in springtime. The day heats up through noon when, like in summer, many head for the shade. In the afternoon, cumulus clouds that appeared in the sky during the morning hours reach their climax, and the oblique rays of the sun make it feel like autumn. After the usually short sunset, a winter cold sets in.

Such varied weather patterns result from the location of the Andes, which run from north to south and separate the warm and humid Amazon basin winds from the masses of cold wind blowing from the Pacific Ocean. Due to their tropical location, the Peruvian Andes feature well-defined rainy and dry seasons with an almost imperceptible transition period between the two. Also, due to Peru's location in the Southern Hemisphere, seasons are reversed compared to Europe and the United States.

May to September

Winter or the dry season is the only season open to high mountain climbing. Proximity to the Equator means shorter days by 30 to 50 minutes as the season moves on. Frosts occur above 4.500 masl. July offers the best weather, before the cold northern winds start blowing in August.

September to December

A season suitable for climbing lower glaciers and trekking, it is similar to spring in the Northern Hemisphere. Afternoon showers and an occasional electric storm become more frequent as cumulus clouds dump off their morning humidity in a matter of minutes. Skies are then clear before night falls and the skies become studded with stars.

December to May

A season of torrential afternoon storms, and occasional light, persistent drizzle, this is not an appropriate time for mountaineering expeditions in the Andes. On a rainless day, a walking tour may be possible along a gully, although streams, almost dry in winter, can become impossible to cross during this time of the year.

Distances

Always check with the local residents about the state of repair and condition of roads. However, they should not be relied upon to provide accurate information on time and distance since their replies are based on subjective impressions. The usual "just over the hill" answer usually implies long hours of strenuous uphill climbing at great altitude.

The Environment

"Leave nothing but foot prints, take nothing but pictures." Plants must not be uprooted or cut. Do not start fires in high altitude forests. Do not deface road signs. Fishing and hunting are forbidden in the dry season (when trout fishing is strictly banned). Always tell local authorities or the mountaineers' association when you are entering a mountain area. Never trek or climb by yourself. Do not litter. Bring back all disposable materials and wastes. Leaving them on the mountain trail causes pollution.

Snow Conditions

Andean mountains are also subject to global warming and glacial retrenchment which translates into the loss of about two meters (6 ft.) of snow every year with the ensuing ongoing changes of aspect and feasible approaches to the mountains. Large masses of serac or compacted snow blocks break off. Above 4.500 masl, rain falls as snow. Generally, snow in the Andes sticks firmly to steep slopes and may even form shelves near the leeward side of the summit. Exceptionally, shelves may appear on both sides of a ridge. Another peculiarity of mountains in this region is the appearance of stepped or grooved snow walls.

Mountain faces in the Southern Hemisphere have a number of features that make them different from those in the Northern Hemisphere.

North faces are sunnier. The sun and cold modify snow and ice. The best climbing snow can be found here.

South faces are more stable. Snow remains unchanged due to scarce sunlight and temperatures usually drop below 0° C. Plenty of soft snow is found at the beginning of the dry season from May to September.

East and West faces show mixed features. Quite often, a hike along a west- or east-oriented shelf will reveal substantial changes in snow conditions.

Shelters

There are practically no high mountain shelters in Peru except in the Cordillera Blanca which features a single, well-prepared shelter at the end of the approach to the Pisco glacier. There are also shelters near the Parón lagoon in Ancash owned by a hydro-electric power station and another on the ascent route to the Misti (Eagle's Nest) volcano in Arequipa.

Rescue Teams

These must be trusted to highly trained guides. In the Cordillera Blanca and Huayhuash areas, rescue efforts are coordinated by the Guides' Association (Casa de Guías), which should be contacted to carry out search and rescue missions. The victims or their relatives must pay the corresponding expenses. When helicopter support is needed, the respective consular authorities will negotiate rental fees with the Peruvian Navy or Air Force. Total rescue expenses usually fluctuate between US\$3.000 and 5.000.

Scale of Difficulty

Generally the UIAA scale is used to rate the ascent's degree of steepness and difficulty whether on rock, snow or ice.

Easy (E): snow slopes up to 40°.

Slightly difficult (SD): snow slopes up to 45° with an occasional harder short segment. Mixed or rock to degree II.

Moderately difficult (MD): snow slopes up to 45° with an occasional harder, somewhat longer segment. Mixed or rock to degree III.

Difficult (D): slopes up to 55° on snow with one or two long ice segments between 60° and 70°, or shorter but harder segments. Mixed or rock up to degree IV.

Very difficult (VD): numerous long, sustained segments at 60° on ice and one or two long ice passages between 70° and 85° or shorter

somewhat harder passages. Mixed or rock to degree V.

Extremely difficult (ED): long vertical passages on ice. Mixed or rock to degree VI and occasional artificial surface.

Exceptionally difficult (XD): long haul itinerary of degree VII mountaineering difficulty, involving long, sustained and exposed passages.

Guides, Porters and Mountain Personnel

All mountain work, whether permanent or temporary is subject to an official and professional classification. All mountain personnel must coordinate an authorization issued by the National Board of Tourism (Dirección Nacional de Turismo).

Mountain guides: either working in teams or freelancing, all mountain guides have received certified training. Experienced and trained to climb the main snow-capped mountains, they charge approximately US\$60 a day, food and transport not included.

Trekking Guides: Not necessarily trained as mountain climbers, they are nevertheless familiar with the walking routes and circuits. They usually travel with large expeditions organized by tour operators. They charge approximately US\$30 a day, food and transport not included.

Mountain Guide Trainees: After completing their training, mountain guides go through a year's trial period during which they are officially not allowed to guide certain difficult ascents. They

charge approximately US\$40 a day, food and transportation not included.

First class porters: They assist mountain climbers wherever beasts of burden cannot reach. Not allowed to climb above 6.000 meters. Usually they are fully equipped, and are capable of overcoming extremely adverse obstacles and conditions. However, climbers must provide them with the required high mountain gear. Fees are usually in the neighborhood of US\$20 a day, food and transport not included.

Second class porters: They assist mountain climbers and trekkers in areas not accessible to pack animals but will not go into snow areas. Fees are around US\$15 a day plus meals.

Mule drivers: In heavy demand among climbers, they own the beasts and usually live near the most popular mountains or routes. Fees are settled on the spot although in parks like Huascarán rates are fixed (approximately US\$5-8 a day plus US\$4 for each beast). Mule drivers must be licensed. A community-enforced rule allows them to work only near their towns. Drivers must be paid for the time spent returning to their towns and for their food.

Cooks: Certified cooks are valuable members of any expedition. Cooking is no simple task above 4.000 meters of altitude. Generally they assist in buying groceries and many also have the necessary cooking ware and utensils. Cooks are also responsible for guarding the camp while travelers are away. They charge between US\$5-8 plus food.

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