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## **A FRESH LOOK**

*From Papua New Guinea to Fiji the islands of the South Pacific offer something for all travellers*

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# Peru

ON CLOUD NINE

*Machu Picchu might  
steal the show but  
there's far more to Peru  
than its Inca heritage,  
says Andy Hoskins*

Hiking the sought-after Machu Picchu Inca Trail is increasingly more difficult with a reduced number of permits available – but operators can suggest other spectacular trails



**W**ith such an iconic and spellbinding sight as Machu Picchu – that imposing Inca citadel high up in the Andes – it's all too easy to overlook the many charms that make Peru such a rewarding country to visit.

Summing up Peru's multifaceted appeal across its Amazonian, Andean and coastal environments is difficult, but Daniel Benians of Distinctive Americas nevertheless tries.

"Peru is the ultimate destination for first time visitors to South America," he says. "With

awe-inspiring Inca sites, exotic wildlife, spectacular landscapes and increasingly fabulous food, it never fails to deliver."

The country has long been a favourite with backpackers and the adventurous, but the rapid development of high-quality tourism infrastructure in the last decade has opened Peru up to the luxury visitor too.

Today it vies with Brazil as the best-selling Latin American country for most UK tour operators, drawing a wide range of visitors. "Peru is as popular as ever with clients, appealing to backpackers, honeymooners and empty-nesters alike," says Travel 2 Product and Purchasing Manager, Justine Egan.

Sunvil Traveller names the 50-75 year-old age group among its top clients, while Tucan Travel welcomes plenty of adrenaline junkies, "whether they are on their gap year or blowing their retirement fund", says Product Manager Rolf Stanley.

Although the client base is diverse, the first-time visitor's itinerary is not so varied. Peru's key destinations are clustered in the south of the country, so a typical tour will touchdown in the capital Lima, moving on to the picturesque and bustling colonial city of Cusco, high in the Andes, followed by the rural Sacred Valley, Machu Picchu and Lake Titicaca.

The variation comes with the addition of a trip to the tropical Amazon rainforest for the wildlife enthusiast, a visit to 'La Ciudad Blanca' – the White City – of Arequipa and the staggering Colca Canyon, or perhaps a flight over the mysterious Nazca lines and a few days relaxing on the coast.

The long-overlooked north of Peru is beginning to attract a good number of visitors too.

Rainbow Tours now offers the trendy DCO suites in the far north town of Mancora, for example, while Distinctive Americas cites the pre-Inca sites of Trujillo, Chiclayo and Chachapoyas as key stops in the region. "Casa Andina already has a property in Chachapoyas and other hotel groups are sure to follow," says Daniel Benians.

Those who find the abundance of archaeological sites or the cobbled streets and baroque churches of Cusco just a little too sedate can head off into Peru's rugged landscapes to let off some steam.

Rainbow Tours Programme Manager Amanda Sweeney suggests white-water rafting, horse-riding and mountain biking for starters, and then of course there's the trekking.

Arriving at Machu Picchu after hiking the famous Inca Trail is high on the bucket list for many visitors, but with only a limited number of permits available to do so – which are difficult to obtain at peak times – operators are increasingly offering different trekking routes in the region.

The Salkantay and Lares treks are two such alternatives, both of which "are equally spectacular and much quieter, and explore less-visited landscapes and villages", says Benians. It can even be done in comfort, he explains, sleeping not under canvas every night but in quality lodges complete with outdoor Jacuzzis and massage services.

If comfort is the order of the day, hotel groups such as Belmond (formerly Orient Express) and Inkaterra operate a host of luxury and boutique hotels and lodges, or consider an Amazon river cruise with the likes of Aqua Expeditions.

The standard of vessels and hospitality is proving a match for the luxury ships of Ecuador's Galapagos Islands – a popular add-on to any Peru itinerary.

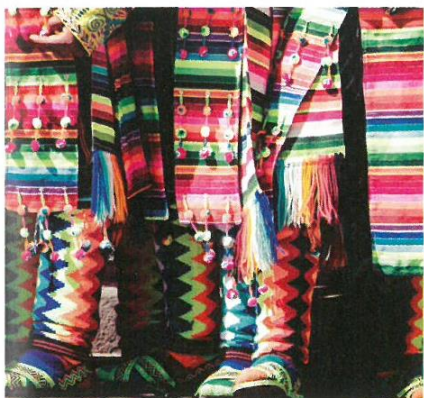
So is there anything holding Peru back right now? There are still no direct flights from London (Madrid is the usual transit) and several operators report steadily increasing prices compared to other Latin American destinations. Others are commonly taking bookings 12 to 18 months in advance of travel and as one product manager says, "if you want the best properties, it's best to book early".

## What's new

**Hotels:** The luxury Hotel Sumaq Machu Picchu ([machupicchuhotels-sumaq.com](http://machupicchuhotels-sumaq.com)) is refurbishing its guestrooms, lobby, restaurants and bar over the







► next 18 months. The \$1million project is due for completion by May 2015.

The Belmond Miraflores Park hotel ([belmond.com](http://belmond.com)) in Lima reopened earlier this year after a four-month refurbishment. It includes a fresh new look for guest rooms and a stylish new restaurant and bar.

Inkaterra ([inkaterra.com](http://inkaterra.com)), a small group of boutique and ecotourism-focused hotels, has upgraded its restaurant at its mid-range El Mapi property in Aguas Calientes (Machu Picchu Pueblo).

**Transport:** Inca Rail launched the Machu Picchu Train this summer offering a 'clean, reliable and value for money service' between Ollantaytambo and Aguas Calientes. The company also operates the regular Inca Train, with executive and first class options, and the exclusive Inca Princess carriage.

**Operators:** From March 2015 Sunvil Traveller ([sunvil.co.uk](http://sunvil.co.uk)) will offer new four- and six-night lodge-to-lodge treks in the Sacred Valley in conjunction with Mountain Lodges of Peru ([mountainlodgesofperu.com](http://mountainlodgesofperu.com)).

Journey Latin America ([journeylatinamerica.co.uk](http://journeylatinamerica.co.uk)) has launched a new website featuring profiles of over 150 destinations across the region and details of

25 group tours and independent trips in Peru.

New from Tucan Travel ([tucantravel.com](http://tucantravel.com)) this year is the 18-day Amazon & Andes tour, a whirlwind adventure across the country.

Both Rainbow Tours ([rainbowtours.co.uk](http://rainbowtours.co.uk)) and Abercrombie & Kent ([abercrombiekent.co.uk](http://abercrombiekent.co.uk)) highlight Hotel B in Lima's bohemian Barranco district as becoming a firm favourite since opening, while El Mercado Tunqui in Cusco is proving popular too.

### Tourism talk



*"As well as the architectural and artistic remains of fascinating cultures for which Peru is perhaps best known, the country also offers amazing wildlife experiences, unique national parks and reserves in coastal, desert and*

*"Recommend that clients take advantage of their overnight stay near Machu Picchu and make a second visit to the citadel. It gives them the chance to beat the crowds the next morning and watch the sun rise or walk a stretch of the Inca Trail"*

JUSTINE EGAN, PRODUCT & PURCHASING  
MANAGER, TRAVEL 2

*Amazonian environments, adrenaline-fuelled activities, modern and cosmopolitan culture, and cuisine among the richest in the world. And whether your clients are backpacking or travelling in luxury, Peru has the facilities to cater for all.*

*My personal highlights? There are too many! The Amazon, Trujillo, Miraflores and Barranco in Lima, the Nazca lines, the Colca Canyon, Lake Titicaca... and I haven't even mentioned you know where!"*

Byron Shirto, Chairman

Latin American Travel Association (LATA)

### Where to book it

**SUNVIL TRAVELLER** - 020 3740 9055

Highlights of Peru is Sunvil's most popular trip for first-time visitors (from £2,698pp including flights). Its Comprehensive Peru tour is great for those returning to see more of the country (19 nights, from £5,172pp including flights). [sunvil.co.uk](http://sunvil.co.uk)

**TUCAN TRAVEL** - 0800 804 8435

Peru Completed is a 21-day all-encompassing adventure incorporating the Andes, Amazon and coastal desert and highlights such as the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu. It costs from £2,179pp excluding international flights. [tucantravel.com](http://tucantravel.com)

**RAINBOW TOURS** - 020 7666 1260

The operator's 11-day Northern Routes of Peru & Beach Holiday visits this lesser-travelled region of the country, including Trujillo, Chiclayo and Mancora. It's priced from £2,495pp including flights.

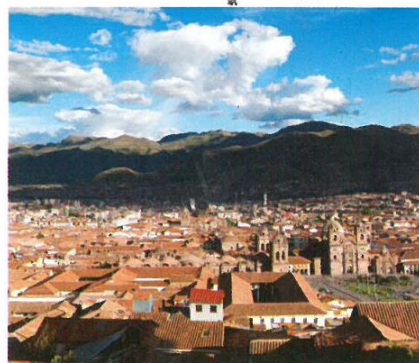
[rainbowtours.co.uk](http://rainbowtours.co.uk)

**DISTINCTIVE AMERICAS** - 01242 890555

A 16-day Classic Peru itinerary visits Lima, Arequipa, the Colca Canyon, Lake Titicaca, Cusco, the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu. It costs from £3,595pp including flights. [distinctiveamericas.com](http://distinctiveamericas.com)

#### WHO FLIES THERE

[aa.com](http://aa.com); [aireuropa.com](http://aireuropa.com); [delta.com](http://delta.com);  
[iberia.com](http://iberia.com); [klm.com](http://klm.com)



Above: colourful textiles typical of Peru; Right: the tiled rooftops and colonial churches of Cusco



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