



Cuzco, the Navel of the World

A brief preview, before your departure...

Indian vendors speak Spanish to tourists and Quechua to each other. Catholic nuns live in buildings once inhabited by Inca “chosen women”. The Marcos Zapata painting of the Last Supper in the cathedral shows Christ and his apostles dining on Andean cheese, hot peppers and roast guinea pig. Cuzco is a city where past and present collides in an uneasy but intriguing mix. When Francisco Pizarro and his soldiers arrived nearly five centuries ago, Cuzco the capital of the Inca Empire, served as borne to an estimated 15000 nobles, priests and servants. Where now daily rail, plane and bus services connect this city to the rest of the country, long-distance Indian runners called *chasquis* once linked the rest of Tahuantinsuyo, as the empire was called. Today, local residents have attempted to recall those glory days, relabeling streets with their original Quechua names and even calling the city Qosqo, a pronunciation closer to its original Inca name.

Center of the world

For the Incas, Qosqo meant “navel of the world,” and they believed their splendid city was the source of life. Legend has it Cuzco was founded by Manco Capac and his sister-consort Mama Occllo, sent by the sun god Inty with the divine task of finding a spot where the gold staff they carried would sink easily into the ground. That place was Cuzco, and there Manco Capac taught the men to farm and Mama Occllo taught the women to weave.

The Inca Empire came into being during the reign of Inca Pachacutec Yupanqui, who began a great expansion, imposing Quechua as the common language, conquering other Indian nations, creating a state religion and turning Cuzco into a glittering capital as large as any European city. It was Pachacutec who transformed Cuzco from a City of clay and straw into a thriving metropolis with grand stone buildings in the second half of the 12th century; a modern stone statue of Pachacutec on the south side of Cuzco pays tribute to the king who ruled for 40 years and was one of the empire's greatest warriors, innovators, and unifiers of Andean civilizations. His son, Tupac Inca Yupanqui, continued his work, expanding even further the empire's boundaries.

Some of the best-loved Inca legends have been transferred to the Peruvian theater. Among them is *Ollantay* — the story of Pachacutec's most famous general. Under Ollantay's military leadership, the empire was extended into what is now Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile and portions of Argentina. A grateful Pachacutec promised to grant him any wish. Ollantay boldly asked for the hand of Kusi Kuyur, the monarch's daughter. But the Inca, the son of the Sun, could not allow a member of the monarchy to marry a commoner even though the daughter professed her love for the military leader. Ollantay rebelled against Pachacutec and was eventually ordered to be imprisoned for the remainder of his life. Kusi Kuyur refused to marry anyone else and was sent to be a chosen woman, dedicating her life to serving the sun god. The story does not end here, however, because years later an unforeseen occurrence brought the couple together again for a happy ending. The play is staged frequently in Cuzco and Lima, and is worth seeing by those who understand some Spanish.

A brief moment of glory

Peruvian Tour Operator

At its peak, Cuzco, built in the shape of a puma, was a city with sophisticated water systems, paved streets and no poverty. But it had been an imposing urban center for only about 70 years before the Spanish arrived. Of course, since the Incas left no written records, and the Spanish explanations of what they found are contradictory, theories about Cuzco's design are numerous. One specialist in archeology and astronomy even speculates that one city boundary was warped to make it coincide with the mid-point in the Milky Way, reflecting the Indian sensitivity to astronomy and the movements of the heavenly bodies. The Spaniards were certainly impressed by the order and magnificence of Cuzco, and wrote back to Spain that it was the most marvelous city of the New World. But the Incas' cultural achievements were merely a minor distraction in comparison with the lure of their treasures: conquistadors greedily pushed their way into ancient temples and seized their gold and silver art works, which they promptly melted into portable bars. In addition to palaces and gold-filled temples, indestructible buildings, and advanced medical techniques, the Spanish soldiers found the Inca society full of skilled artisans. A storehouse of delicate, brightly-colored feathers from tropical birds was used solely for the weaving of fine capes for the Inca and his priests. Rescued examples of the capes or *mantas*, which may reflect the most extreme test of patience and handiwork, are found in museums in Lima. These survived because the Spanish thirst for gold was so great that they overlooked many of the empire's other treasures. Cuzco retained a level of importance for the first few decades after the Spanish Conquest. It was here that Diego de Almagro's faction of Spanish soldiers attempted to wrest control from Pizarro, and for his treachery the leader was executed on the city's main plaza. It was also here that the Spanish struggled against Manco Inca as the Indians made a fated attempt to stop the European conquest; but by 1535 the capital of this new Spanish colony had been set up in Lima. Cuzco's wealth had been stripped, and silver from Bolivia had turned attention away from this valley. After centuries of provincial oblivion, Hiram Bingham's discovery of Machu Picchu and the subsequent construction of a roadway to that mountain-top citadel in 1948 transformed Cuzco into the jumping-off point for visits to one of South America's best-known tourist attractions.

Bringing back the Sun

Many travelers come to Cuzco for *Inty Raymi* (the Festival of the Sun) in June 24. If you are planning a visit, be sure to make hotel reservations and arrive by June 20 because the City is mobbed. *Inty Raymi* was the Inca winter-solstice celebration, held in June 21 or 22, which the Spanish moved to June 24, the Catholic feast of Saint John the Baptist — the Catholic Church has always been good at incorporating pagan festivities. But the fireworks that burn throughout the night of June 23 don't have much to do with Juan the Baptist. They're lit to bring back the Sun during the longest nights and shortest days of the year. In the 1940s residents of Cuzco revived *Inty Raymi*, basing their fiesta in colonial accounts of the Inca festival. On June 24, *campesinos*, town's people and travelers follow the Inca's procession from Qoricancha, via the Plaza de Armas, to the fortress of Sacsayhuaman for a pageant that is no less impressive because it has an eye on tourism revenue. The regal Inca-for-a day is borne in a litter, dressed to tinfoil and glittering gold, his guard consisting of costumed Peruvian army troops. The fires of the empire are ceremonially relit, a llama is "sacrificed" to the Sun, and music and dance groups perform, wearing hand-woven clothes that would have made Pachacutec proud. The pageant lasts for about three hours, but the city becomes a giant fair for a couple of days.

Walking into the past

The most startling and curious characteristic of Cuzco at first glance is its architecture. Huge walls of intricately laid stone pay testimony to the civilization that 500 years ago controlled much of this continent. The Spaniards' attempts to eradicate every trace of the "pagan" Inca civilization proved too ambitious a task; the Europeans ended up putting their own buildings on the mammoth foundations of the Inca ones, often using the same stones that had been finely cut and rounded by the Indian masons. When earthquakes shook the city the colonial walls came crashing down but the Inca foundations remained intact. Before you start to explore this intriguing city, remember that it is nearly 3,330 meters (10,900 ft) above sea level, so take it easy until you get acclimatized. Also, don't forget to buy a Cuzco Visitor Ticket, which gives you entrance to numerous sites far more cheaply than if you bought individual tickets at each. Bearing these two things in mind, the **Plaza de Armas** is a perfect

Peruvian Tour Operator

place to start. In Inca times it was not only the exact center of the empire known as Tahuantinsuyo — or The Four Quarters of the Earth — but was also twice as large as it is now. Samples of soil from each of the conquered areas of the empire were joined at this spot and the plaza itself, flanked by Inca palaces, was surfaced with white sand mixed with tiny shells, bits of gold, silver and coral.

This was the spot where important Inca religious and military ceremonies were staged. Some claim the section that remains today was a portion of Aucaypata, the Square of War, featuring a stone covered in sheets of gold where offerings were made before military actions. However, other experts disagree and suggest it was called Huacaypata — or Weeping Square — because it was here that deceased Incas were mourned. During the early days of Spanish control the plaza was the scene of much violence and blood-letting, such as the execution of the rebel leader Tupac Amaru II. Captured while trying to flee with his pregnant wife, Tupac Amaru — a *mestizo* whose real name was José Gabriel Condorcanqui — was ordered to be executed in the square.

Today, things are quieter on the plaza, which is one of the most superb colonial squares in Latin America. Tourists study the handicrafts for sale as insistent local women sitting under blankets beneath the colonial arcades chant *comprame*, or “buy from me.” Quality varies, but good bargains can be found. However, don’t believe it when vendors claim their rugs and weavings are antique wool does not endure indefinitely in the damp highlands. The centuries old textiles displayed in Peru’s museums were rescued from the arid coast. And if they were antique, these items should not be bought or taken out of the country.

Cuzco’s cathedral

The most spectacular view of the plaza comes after nightfall when dramatic lighting transforms the square. But while the night is best for outside photos, the interior of Cuzco’s magnificent Cathedral can only be seen during the day — and it shouldn’t be missed (open Mon—Sat 10—11.30 am and 2—5.30pm, closed Thu pm; open for worship only on Sunday, but you can go in if you are discreet). The Cathedral is flanked by the church of Jesus Maria, to the right —also known as the Iglesia de la Santísima Trinidad — and El Triunfo to the left. Jesus Maria was built in the mid- 18th century, which makes it one of the “newer” structures.

Rather confusingly, visitors are normally channeled through the main doors of El Triunfo, then turn left to the cathedral itself. Built on what once was the palace of Inca Wiracocha, and made in part from stones hauled from the fortress of Sacsayhuaman outside the city, the cathedral mixes Spanish renaissance architecture with the stone working skills of the Indians. Begun in 1559, it took a century to build and an awesome investment of money. The altar is of solid silver. The cathedral also contains magnificent examples of Escuela Cuzqueña (School of Cuzco) paintings, including some by Diego Quispe Tito, the 17th-century Indian painter widely regarded as the master of the school. In the corner next to the sacristy is a painting by Marcos Zapata of the Last Supper, with Christ and his apostles dining on roast guinea pig (*cuy*), hut peppers and Andean cheese. A painting of Christ’s Crucifixion is the subject of many theories: some believe it is a 17th-century work by a member of the Cuzco School; others hold that it is the work of Flemish painter Sir Anthony van Dyck; still others believe it was by a Spanish artist, Alonzo Ocano: while a final theory proposes that it is the work of various artists, because the head is out of proportion with the body.

The cathedral’s Maria Angola bell in the north tower can be heard up to 40km (25 miles) away. Made of a ton of gold, silver and bronze, the bell, which is more than 300 years old, is reportedly the continent’s largest, but when it was cast it had a partner — the Magdalena, which was dropped by workers during a storm at the edge of Lake Titicaca, where the bells were made.

Twelve Angled Stone

Called Hatunrumiyoc by the Indians, this masonry masterpiece was left by Inca architects who proved that no piece of granite was too irregular to be fitted without mortar; the museum houses an impressive collection of religious paintings of the Cuzco School, including some by Diego Quispe Tito. Head straight up Calle Hatunrumiyoc, and on your right you will find the Iglesia de San Blas. Apart from its ornate altar San Blas is a simple church by Latin-American standards, and has a beautifully carved pulpit, said to be one of the world’s finest pieces of woodwork. There is some dispute about

Peruvian Tour Operator

who produced it; some say it was an Indian leper who initiated the work after he was miraculously cured. The streets around San Blas form Cuzco's artists' quarter with galleries, studios and small shops, including the workshops of the prolific Mendivil family.

Temple of the Sun

Take any of the streets leading south from the Plaza de Armas and you will find your way to the most important place of worship in the Inca Empire. Now a church, the Iglesia Santo Domingo (open daily 9.30am—6pm; entrance charge), this was El Templo del Qoricancha (or Qoricancha) — the Temple of the Sun, and the most magnificent complex in Cuzco. Walls there were covered in 700 sheets of gold studded with emeralds and turquoise, and windows were constructed so the sun would enter and cast a nearly blinding reflection off the precious metals inside. The mummified bodies of deceased Inca leaders, dressed in fine clothing and adornments, were kept thrones of gold, tended by women selected for that honor. In the same room, a huge gold disk representing the Sun covered one full wall while a sister disk of silver, to reflect the moonlight, was positioned on another wall. Spanish chronicles recall the Europeans' astonishment when they saw Qoricancha's patio filled with life-sized gold and silver statues of llamas, trees, fruits, flowers and even delicately handcrafted butterflies. Legend has it that Atahualpa's ransom included 20 of Qoricancha's life-sized golden statues of beautiful women. The Spanish historian Pedro de Cieza de León wrote a description of the patio "in which the earth was lumps of fine gold ... with stalks of corn that were of gold-stalks, leaves and ears... so well planted that no matter how hard the wind blew it could not uproot them. Aside from this there were more than 20 sheep of gold with their lambs and the shepherds who guarded them, all of this metal."

Chosen women

Retrace your steps towards the Plaza de Armas, and in Calle Arequipa you will find another Christian enclave which was formerly an Inca holy place. This is the Convento y Museo de Santa Catalina (open Mon—Thurs and Sat 9am—5.30pm; Fri 9am—3pm; entrance charge) which centuries ago housed a different group of cloistered females, some 3,000 Chosen Women who dedicated their lives to the Sun God. Foremost among these were the *mamaconas*, consecrated women who taught religion to selected virgins — called *acllas*. The *acllas* were taught to prepare *chicha* for use in religious ceremonies, to weave and to pray. They made the fine robes that the Inca wore — only once — out of vicuña, alpaca and even a silky fabric that was made from bat skins.

The most beautiful church

In a city with so many churches, it is an honor to be dubbed the "most beautiful." That distinction belongs to La Compañía de Jesus (open daily 9—11am and 3—6pm; admission free), sitting on the southeast corner of the Plaza de Armas where once stood Inca Huayna Capac's palace. The Jesuit church, with its baroque facade, intricate interior, finely carved balconies, and altars covered in gold leaf, were started in 1571 and took nearly 100 years to complete, in part because of damage in the 1650 earthquake.

There is a wide selection of restaurants in Cuzco, serving both Peruvian and international food, including a number of very pleasant Italian restaurants. If you are looking for night-time entertainment as well as food, it can be found at the restaurants from which lively Andean music emanates. One of the finest floor shows takes place nightly at El Truco, where the *pisco sours* pack a hefty punch and the musicians and dancers are first-rate. Eating a plate of *anticuchos*, a delicious shish-kebab of beef heart, while watching the traditionally-garbed performers singing in Quechua and playing reed flutes will make visitors temporarily forget that the Incas lost their showdown with the Spanish.

But eventually the foot-stomping dance songs will be replaced by much quieter mountain music. Locals will tell you that it was when the Spanish killed the last Inca and the sun god turned his back on his children that Andean songs became melancholy. If you are looking for something a bit more contemporary after so much history and tradition, there are several video bars in Cuzco where weary

Peruvian Tour Operator

tourists can select a video, order drinks from the adjoining bar, and settle down in comfort to enjoy American or other foreign movies.

Cuzco's fiestas

Cuzco holds a number of very colorful festivals the best-known of them are in June, but there are several exceptions. One is the Christmas Eve festival called *Santo Rantikuy* (which means the buying of saints) when crafts and nativity sets are sold in the Plaza de Armas. Another is the celebration in Holy Week when Our Lord of the Earthquakes, the image of Christ in the cross which is credited with saving the city from destruction during the earthquake of 1650, and which stands in the cathedral, is paraded through the streets on a silver litter. Red flower petals are thrown in its wake, symbolizing the blood of Christ and thousands of Cuzqueños turn out along with the civic, religious and military hierarchies of the city. A third exception is International Workers' Day (May 1), when a parade of workers through the square continues for hours, with each group lined up behind its respective banners — from the organization of transportation workers to the union of informal street vendors (*ambulantes*), which is made up mostly of women with their babies strapped to their backs. This, like many others ceremonies in Cuzco opens with the raising of the red-and-white Peruvian flag and the rainbow-colored standard of the Inca Empire.

Corpus Christi (in honor of the Eucharist) is a moveable feast, held on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday — usually in early to mid-June. Effigies of Saint Sebastian and San Geronimo race into Cuzco from the little towns of those names, borne in enormous litters by their devotees and led by a brass band and people carrying banners and candles. Accompanied by other statues of saints and the Virgin, brought from Cuzco's *barrios* and suburbs, they are taken to the church of Santa Clara. The Plaza de Armas comes alive: large altars decorate with flowers, tin, mirrors, crosses and images of the Sun are erected and vendors set up booths with food prepared especially for Corpus Christi.

After High Mass, the statues are paraded around the plaza, stopping to bow at each altar — no mean feat when some of the gilded and silver-covered figures weigh up to a ton. Each parish has its own brass band, costumed dance groups and devotees, and the plaza is a *mélange* of color and sound. At the end of the procession comes the priest bearing the Eucharist, almost forgotten to the crush. Slip inside the cathedral if you can, because some of the old women remain there to sing Quechua hymns in the high, bird-like voices typical of traditional music. The day gets more lively as it goes on: generous quantities of alcohol are consumed, and masked devil-dancers frolic among the shrubberies.

Sacsayhuaman

The overwhelming fortress of Sacsayhuaman is a bold demonstration of ancient construction skills. Made of massive stones weighing up to 17,000kg (125 tons), this military complex overlooking Cuzco has a double wall in a zigzag shape — some say to imitate the teeth of the puma figure whose head the fort may have formed. The fort also once had at least three fabulous huge towers and a labyrinth of rooms large enough for a garrison of 5,000 Inca soldiers. It marks the birth place of the river that runs under Cuzco; channeled through stone conduits cut to give the city an invisible water supply.

Sacsayhuaman was the focus of the Great Rebellion led by Manco Inca against the Spanish in 1536. From here, the Incas besieged Cuzco for 10 months. Historians say that if Manco Inca had defeated the Spanish in Cuzco, he might have saved the empire. But, no matter how valiantly his troops fought and died, the Spanish eventually wrested back control of the fort, of the old Inca capital of Cuzco, and ultimately of all Peru. Archeologists estimate that tens of thousands of workers labored in this massive structure for up to seven decades, hauling the immense stone blocks that make up its double outside walls, and erecting the nearly indestructible buildings that transformed the complex into one of the most wondrous in all the Empire. Although the outer walls remain intact, the buildings to the complex have been destroyed — in part to provide building stones for many of the structures in Cuzco. Even so, visitors to the fortress can still see the so-called Inca's Throne from which parading troops were reviewed. This is one of the area's most spectacular spots at which to take dawn photos, and, hike much of Cuzco; it provides a startling contrast of Indian and Christian cultures. Beside this complex, built during the reign of Inca Pachacutec, is a giant white statue of Christ, his arms outstretched over Cuzco to the valley below. It's a good place for a picnic lunch, too: perched in almost any stone you'll

Peruvian Tour Operator

have an amazing view of the red-tiled roofs of Cuzco and the lush fields of tire surrounding valley. The gaily-decorated llamas wandering through the ruins are smelly but harmless, and the giggling children tending them will almost certainly ask you to take a photograph — be sure to give them a tip. Peruvian archeologists and Inca scholars say that Sacsayhuaman is in danger, although it lies in ruins. They claim that the 100,000 tourists and Peruvians who annually attend the colorful *Inty Raymi* festival to celebrate the winter solstice damage the font, not only with their litter but also by moving and defacing stones. Efforts to move the festival from Sacsayhuaman have met with resistance, both from those who insist that Cuzco's largest celebration each year must be held in the Inca stronghold and from those who worry about the loss to the area of much-needed tourism revenue.

Some 7 km (4 miles) from Sacsayhuaman is Kenko, an Inca shrine with a circular amphitheater a 5-meter (18-ft) stone block which is said to represent a puma. Its name means "labyrinth," and this ceremonial center — dedicated to the worship of mother earth (Pacha Mama) — includes water canals cut into solid rock, and a subterranean room. Unlike Sacsayhuaman, which is a

Complex made of huge stone blocks transported to the spot and assembled there, Kenko was honed from a huge limestone formation found at the site. Into its walls were carved typical Inca-style niches and alcoves used to display gold and holy items in pre-Hispanic times. The shrine also contains drawings etched laboriously into its stone, among them a puma, a condor and a llama.

Farther along the road to Písaq is a smaller fortress, Puca Pucara believed to have guarded the road to the Sacred Valley of the Incas. Like Machu Picchu, this pink stone complex has hillside terraces, stairways, tunnels and towers. And to the north is Tambo Machay, the sacred bathing place for the Inca rulers and the royal women. A hydraulic engineering marvel, its aqueduct system still feeds crystalline water into a series of showers where once water rituals were held by worshippers of the Sun. The ruins now consist of three massive walls of Inca stonework tucked into a hillside. There are Peruvian historians who say that this was used by Tupac Inca Yupanqui as a hunting lodge, in addition to being a shrine. Some claim that it was where Pachacutec received a prophetic vision of the Incas as conquerors. Others say that the water running through the aqueduct came from a holy spring, and this may have become of the rare spots where sacrifices of children were made.

An attractive village with Inca ruins, which can be visited by bus from Cuzco, is Chincheros. It has a lively market on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday — the latter being the best day to go. It is said that Chincheros was one of the favorite spots of the Tupac Inca Yupanqui, who built a palace and had agricultural terraces cultivated here at the mouth of the Vilcanota River. Other historians say it was an important population center in Inca times and that Tupac Inca, the son of Pachacutec, had an estate here. If the Inca royalty were lured to Chincheros, it might have been by the commanding view of snow-capped mountains and the river below. If you are here for the Sunday market, held

a plaza banked by a massive Inca wall, you will notice that the Indians use it as an opportunity to socialize as much as to buy and barter for goods. This "town of the rainbow" as it was known in Pre-Hispanic days, has kept many of his ancient customs and its inhabitants live in centuries-old houses and still wear traditional clothing.

The Sacred Valley of the Incas

Písaq makes a good base for exploring the Sacred Valley. The valley is a delightful place: the climate is peasant, the people are agreeable, the agricultural terracing is a marvel, and there is a number of welcoming little *hostels* in which to spend the night. Písaq is a friendly village known for its good fishing busy Sunday market and tire ruins above the town, and it lies about 32 km (20 miles) from Cuzco in a curving but decent road. There is a road up to the ruins and you can sometimes get a ride in a truck, but otherwise they can be reached by climbing past the mountain side terraces (Indian children will cheerfully serve as guides for a small fee). At this high altitude, even the fittest travelers find themselves winded and their hearts pounding, so they are grateful when they round the bend on an isolated trail to find themselves face to face with one of the many eager Inca Kola vendors who are scattered throughout the site. Steep farming terraces and dramatic architecture mark this one-time Fortress City whose many features includes ritual baths fed by aqueducts and one of the largest known Inca cemeteries. The stones making up Písaq's buildings are smaller than those at Sacsayhuaman, but the precision with which they are cut and fit is amazing, as is the lovely view.

Peruvian Tour Operator

In fact, in some respects the stonemasonry is more awesome than that of the more famous ruins at Machu Picchu. There are residential buildings and towers that some scientists say may have been astronomical observation spots. Higher up, there is a second set of ruins. Owing to the style — smaller stones more haphazardly arranged — a number of theories have arisen to explain the origin of this section. Some say that it was used by servants or other community members with low social standing; another theory says it pre-dates the main part of the complex. You can use the Cuzco Visitor Ticket to see the Pisac ruins. Pisac's Sunday market is a riotous affair in a town where the people work hard and — apparently — play hard. The beer tent is the favorite haunt of the motley brass band that adds an increasingly out-of-tune touch to the town's festivities. Sometimes it seems that the beer tent is the favorite stop for most of the other villagers, too. For that reason, the later in the day visitors arrive, the better their chances for some congenial bargaining for the fine alpaca blankets and sweaters available; although, of course, the biggest selection is to be found earlier in the morning. There is a smaller, less touristy market held on Tuesday and Thursday, which is also well-worth visiting.

Urubamba

From Pisac, follow the road and the river about 40 km (25 miles) through the village of Yucay to Urubamba, which lies at the center of the valley; in recent years this has become a popular place to stay. The weather is milder than in Cuzco, its closer to Machu Picchu, and it makes a good center for visiting other places of interest. There are a number of hotels, cheap and not so cheap, in Urubamba itself and scattered along the valley. Urubamba is a peaceful village of flowering trees and has a strong Indian flavor. The coat of arms in the City hall is sufficient evidence of this; no Spanish symbols are found in the emblem, which bears pumas, snakes and trees. It was the beauty and calm of this village that prompted the 18th-century naturalist Antonio de Leon Pinelo to expound on his theory that Urubamba was the biblical Eden. From here you can make trips to the salt pans at Salinas and the Inca agricultural terracing at Moray. You can get a bus for the first part of the way, but after that it's a hike.

Ollantaytambo

Continuing along the valley, you come to the great fortress of Ollantaytambo, a place of great sacred and military importance to the Incas. (The fortress can be visited using the Cuzco Visitor Ticket. For details about the story of Ollantay, Pachacutec's most famous general, *see above*.) Here, travelers find themselves facing an elegant and intricate walled complex containing seven rose-colored granite monoliths which puzzle scientists, who say that the stone is not mined in the valley. A steep stairway enters the group of buildings, among which the best known is the Temple of the Sun — an unfinished construction in front of a wall of enormous boulders. Portions of the original carvings on these huge worn stones can still be seen, although it is unclear if they really are pumas, as some claim. Specialists say that the unfinished condition of the temple has less to do with the Spanish destruction of Ollantaytambo than with the fact that it was simply never completed. It is astonishing that it was ever started, when one thinks of the work involved in manipulating these huge stones.

Ollantaytambo, strategically placed at the northern end of the Sacred Valley, also has plazas with sacred niches, shrines, an area of stone stocks where prisoners were tied by their hands, and ritual shower areas, including the Princess's Bath, or Baño de la Ñusta.

The village's military fortification was so well planned that it took the Spanish by surprise when they arrived in search of Manco Inca during the 1536 uprising. Hernando Pizarro (a brother of Francisco) led a contingent of about 100 Spaniards and a number of Indians to the fort with the intention of capturing and executing the rebel leader. Chronicles say that as the Spaniards sneaked up to the fort just before dawn, they looked up to see the silhouettes of multitudes of Indian warriors ready to take them in. It is even said they saw Manco Inca himself, directing troops from inside the Ollantaytambo complex, mounted in a captured horse. In fact, Manco Inca's men had diverted the Patacaucha river through some canals, and now they opened barriers that allowed the water to rush out and flood the plain that the Europeans were crossing. However, the Spaniards managed to escape to Cuzco, where they recruited a force of 300 soldiers' to return and confront Manco Inca. Outnumbered, he abandoned the walled city and fled to Vilcabamba, where he was eventually killed.

Peruvian Tour Operator

Ollantaytambo is perhaps the best preserved of all the Inca settlements. The old walls of the houses are still standing, and water still runs through original channels in narrow streets which are believed to date from the 15th century. In the nearby river stand the remains of an Inca bridge and *campesinos* around the settlement live in houses that have changed very little since Pizarro's arrival.

After exploring the Sacred Valley, the destination of most visitors is the Inca Trail and Machu Picchu. You can get a train from Ollantaytambo or take a train from Cuzco and get off at Km 88.

MACHU PICCHU

Hidden from the world until 1911 this Inca refuge in the mountains is breath-taking in every sense. Trekkers can choose the hard way up, via the Inca Trail; others may opt for the Train, of all the popular treks in South America, the three to five-day Inca Trail is the one that most travelers want to do. The adventure begins with a four hour train ride along the Urubamba River, a region known to the Incas as the Sacred Valley. Legions of early-rising *campesinos*, loading and unloading their marketable goods at every station along the way, crowd together in what begins to look more like a cattle car than a passenger train. At Qorihuayrachina, Kilometer 88, the train pauses briefly, allowing hikers to disembark. Here at the trailhead, a footbridge temporarily separates the trekker from a rich history dating back more than 400 years. (If you want to avoid several days of arduous trekking, the train leaving from Cuzco also stops at Chalcabamba, Kilometer 104, 8 km (5 miles) from the Lost City, and you can get off there, but you will miss out on some stunning scenery.)

The first 11 km (7 miles) meander through easy terrain of dusty scrub bushes, low-lying hills, and few rustic huts. Conserve your strength in this stretch, because it will soon get tougher. The first barrier is the Warmiwañusqu Pass. Beyond lies a wealth of Inca ruins, but struggling to the top of this 4,000-meter (13,000-ft) pass is no small challenge. Laboring up the seemingly endless trail, the hiker soon identifies with its name. In English it translates literally as "Dead Woman's" pass.

From here, Inca history begins to unfold. The small guard-post of Runkuraqay, overlooking the valley and often shrouded in mist in the morning, is the first reward offered by the Inca Trail. Farther along, the more elaborately-constructed site of Sayajmarka (Dominant Town) perches atop a narrow cliff. The fine stonework for which the Incas were justly famous is apparent here. Snaking along the valley below is an incredible "paved highway" made of neatly-fitted stone, masterfully constructed by a culture the Spanish conquistadors considered uncivilized.

Stunning ruins

As the trek progresses, the archeological sites become more complex. Puyapatamarca (Cloud-Level Town) is fascinating for its circular walls and the finely engineered aqueduct system which still provides spring water to the ancient ceremonial baths. Below, the trail offers another yet delights to the trekker. High steps, a virtual stone stairway almost a half mile in length, lead down into high jungle vegetation where wild orchids and other exotic flowers bloom. Curiously, this section of the trail lay undiscovered until 1984. Until then, a modern footpath connected this interrupted section of the Inca highway. Tenaciously clinging to the side of a steep ravine is the last set of ruins, and the most stunning. Huiñay Huayna presents an unbelievable picture when first seen in the distance. The ability of the Incas to construct something so complex in an area so vertical defies comprehension, yet the series of ritual baths, long stretches of terracing and intricate stone work certainly prove what would appear to be impossible. About two hours away lies the jewel in the crown — Machu Picchu. From the high pass of Intipunku, the Sun Gate, you get the first glimpse of the fabled city. This is the culmination of days of walking; the immersion into an ancient culture is complete. Arriving as the Incas did centuries ago, the trekker begins the final descent into Machu Picchu, sharing a path with history.

Discovering the ruins

When Hiram Bingham and his party discovered Machu Picchu in July 1911, Bingham was actually searching for the ruins of Vilcabamba, the remote stronghold of the last Incas. Today we know that he had almost certainly found Vilcabamba, without realizing it, when he stumbled across the jungle-

Peruvian Tour Operator

covered ruins of Espiritu Pampa, some 100 km (60 miles) west of Machu Picchu, two months before making his spectacular find on the Urubamba gorge. But Bingham saw only a small section of Espiritu Pampa, and dismissed it as insignificant. It was left to Gene Savoy, another American explorer, to investigate Espiritu Pampa when he came looking for the lost city of the Incas more than 50 years later. Bingham was a Yale graduate, later a US Senator, who became fascinated with Inca archeology in 1909, while in Peru studying Simon de Bolivar's independence struggle. He returned with the Yale Peruvian expedition in 1911, and took the narrow mule trail down the Urubamba gorge in July of that year. Melchor Arteaga, a local *campesino* whom he met by chance while camping on the river banks, led him to the jungle-covered ruins. Machu Picchu — Ancient Peak — was what the local people called the mountain above the saddle-ridge where the ruins were located, and its sister mountain was Huayna Picchu — Young Peak. Not only did Bingham want to call these ruins Vilcabamba, because he believed he had discovered Manco Capac's gilded city but he also speculated that the mountain refuge was Tampu Tocco the mythical birthplace of the Ayar brothers, the first of the Incas.

Bingham's mistake in thinking that he had found the location of Vilcabamba is understandable. Who would have imagined that there were not one, but two, lost cities in the jungle north of Cuzco? But overwhelming evidence against the Machu-Picchu-as-Vilcabamba hypothesis emerged, and Bingham was presented with an enigma: if Machu Picchu was not the last refuge of the Incas then what on earth was it?

Outpost in a lost province

Bingham carried out further explorations between 1911 and 1915, discovering a string of other ruins and a major Inca highway (now known as the Inca Trail) to the south of Machu Picchu. Later still, in 1941, the Viking Fund expedition led by Paul Fejos discovered the important ruins of Huiñay Huayna above the Urubamba gorge, about 4.5 km (3 miles) due south of Machu Picchu. This proved that Machu Picchu was not merely a lost city, but part of an entire lost region — a fact generally ignored by popular histories. The usual account portrays Machu Picchu as a secret refuge known only to a select few, and concealed from the Spaniards. But this would have been impossible; the location of an entire active and populated region could not have been concealed from the Spaniards, who had many allies among the Indians. And yet the Spaniards did *not* know of Machu Picchu's existence. The only possible conclusion is that the Incas and Indians at the time of the Conquest did not know of it either. Somehow the city and its region were abandoned and depopulated before the conquistadors arrived, and the memory was lost even to the Incas themselves. Perhaps the area was devastated by plague, or overrun by the Antis, the hostile jungle tribesmen. But why would there be total amnesia about its location? This cannot have been accidental. The Incas had a caste of *quipucamayocs* — oral history recorders — who kept detailed accounts of the Inca past, but this was *official* history, and the Incas were notorious for wiping inconvenient details off the record. Perhaps this was Machu Picchu's fate a province that rebelled and was dealt with so ruthlessly that its existence was erased from official memory. Well, that is simply one theory that fits the known facts. Here is another according to new evidence unearthed from Spanish colonial archives and recently presented by the archeologist J. H. Rowe, there was a "royal estate (a rather Western concept, but the most intelligible way to put it) of the Inca Pachacutec at a place called "Picchu," north of Cuzco. This leads to an interpretation that Machu Picchu was built and populated by the *panaca* (royal house) of Pachacutec, and that the eventual disappearance of the *panaca* a generation or so after the ninth Inca's death, led to the depopulation and abandonment of the whole region. Signs of a pre-Inca occupation at Machu Picchu, going back 2,000 years, have recently been discovered, but there was certainly no pro-Inca city of any consequence here. If we accept that Machu Picchu was built for Pachacutec, we can speak of the construction dates of Machu Picchu with reasonable confidence. According to a widely accepted chronology the Inca expansion began in the year 1438 after Pachacutec had defeated the Chanca invasion from the north. Various chronicles tell us that for strategic reasons (to keep the retreating Chancas out) this mountainous area was the first to be settled in the headlong rush toward empire.

The building style of Machu Picchu is "late imperial Inca," which supports this thesis, and there are no signs of post-Conquest occupation. So the whole settlement was built, occupied and abandoned in the space of less than 100 years. The rest is speculation. And who can resist speculating when faced with something as affecting and impenetrable as the mystery of these silent stones?

Piecing together the past

What kind of settlement was Machu Picchu? John Hemming, author of *The Conquest of the Incas* probably the best book on the subject — states that the site has only 200 habitation structures, leading him to estimate a permanent population of about 1,000 people. It is interesting that the agricultural output of the area would have greatly exceeded the needs of the natural terracing at Machu Picchu itself, there were also much larger terraced areas at Inty Pata (just behind Machu Picchu peak to the southwest), and Huiñay Huayna, along the Inca Trail. More than one archeologist has proposed recently that the principal material function of the Machu Picchu region was to create a reliable supply of coca leaves for the priests and royals of Cuzco.

Hiram Bingham called the ruin a “citadel,” existing for strategic and defensive purposes. But beside its outer walls and moat, Machu Picchu contains an unusually high proportion and quality of religious architecture. Modern opinion leans more to the view that Machu Picchu was essentially a site of spiritual and ceremonial significance, with important agricultural functions. Its strategic purposes, if any, were secondary.

Bingham’s fortress idea did not prevent him from speculating that the city was a refuge of Cuzco’s Virgins of the Sun, an idea inspired by the revelation that more than 75 percent of the skeletal remains found there were female. This exciting piece of news has boon on the lips of tour guides ever since. Yet there is one difficulty with this hypothesis: the Yale expedition found only skulls, the other bones having disintegrated in the humid climate. It is extremely hard to pronounce in the gender of a skull, particularly if, like the expedition’s medical authority Dr Eaton, you are not very familiar with bones of the racial subgroup it comes from. Dr Eaton pronounced most of the skulls “gracile,” and therefore, he assumed, female. But they could as easily have been young men, or men of small stature. The skulls still exist, and could be studied again by modern experts, but so far no-one has done it. It is alleged that the terms of Bingham’s permission to excavate at the site of Machu Picchu were unclear. This led to vague accusations of smuggling after he shipped all his relics back to Yale University, where most of them remain to this day. There were no precious metals, however, and it is not a visually spectacular collection, so the dispute is mainly one which concerns scholars.

Breakthroughs in archeology

Since 1985 an astonishing number of new discoveries have been made around Machu Picchu. Taken as a whole they support and expand the emerging view of Machu Picchu as the ceremonial and possibly administrative center of a huge and quite populous region. The alluring myth of Machu Picchu as some kind of Andean Shangri-La perched alone in its remote crag must now be laid to rest.

The most extensive finds have been made across the river to the northeast, in a sloping plateau known as Mandorpampa about 100 meters (330 ft) above the railroad. Its outstanding feature is an enormous wall about 3.5 meters high by 2.5 meters wide, and more than a kilometer long, which runs straight up the mountainside toward a pointed peak known as Yanantin. It was apparently built to protect the adjacent agricultural terraces from erosion, and may also have served to demarcate two areas with separate functions. A road running along its top heads off northeast into densely forested mountains towards Amaybamba, or perhaps some other Inca settlement as yet undiscovered. Other finds on the *Pampa* include quarries, circular buildings, a large number of stone mortars, and a big observation platform.

Closer to Machu Picchu itself, the sector on the North Slope of Huayna Picchu which is known as the “Temple of the Moon” has been cleared to reveal a subterranean temple, a fine wall with an imposing gateway, and an observatory directed toward the Yanantin peak.

Farther upriver, two important burial sites known as Killipata and Ch’askapata have been discovered, and the ruins of Choquesuysuy, just upstream from where the hydro-electric power station used to stand, now appear to be much larger than had been previously believed. Of all these sites only the Temple of the Moon has been opened to the public so far.

In the years following Bingham’s discovery the ruins were cleared of vegetation, excavations were made, and later a railroad was blasted out of the sheer granite cliffs of the imposing canyon. Visitors began to arrive. Pablo Neruda came in 1942, and was inspired to write his most famous poem. In

Peruvian Tour Operator

1948 a sinuous 12-km (7-mile) road from the river banks to the ruins was inaugurated by Hiram Bingham himself.

A walking tour of the ruins

Bingham classified the ruins into sectors, naming some of the buildings. But some of his conclusions appear wide of the mark to modern archeologists; others seem too arbitrary, resting on minimal evidence. However, for the sake of clear directions we need to name different sectors, and, since nobody has come up with a better system than Bingham's, here we go: You enter the ruins through the **House of the Terrace Caretakers** which flanks the Agricultural Sector. This great area of terracing was undoubtedly for agricultural purposes and made the city self-sufficient in crops. The terraces end in a Dry Moat beyond which lies the City itself.

If you continue straight ahead you come to the fountains, which are actually small waterfalls, in a chain of 16 little "baths," varying in the quality of their construction. These were probably for ritual, religious purposes relating to the worship of water. Bingham speculated that Machu Picchu might have been abandoned because this water supply dried up, or became inadequate to irrigate the terraces. The hotel consumes most of this spring water today. The Main Fountain is so called because it has the finest stonework and the most important location; it is just above you to the left as you arrive from the terraces, here too, is the **Temple of the Sun**. This round, tapering tower features the most perfect stonework to be found in Machu Picchu. It contains sacred niches for holding idols or offerings, and the centerpiece is a great rock part of the actual outcrop in which the temple is built. The base of this rock forms a grotto which is casually referred to as the Royal Tomb, although no bones were found there. Recent archeo-astronomical studies have shown how this temple served as an astronomical observatory. The rock in the center of the tower has a straight edge cut into it. This is precisely aligned through the adjacent window to the rising — point of the Sun on the morning of the June solstice. The pegs on the outside of the window may have been used to support a shadow-casting device, which would have made observation simpler.

The temple's entrance doorway has holes drilled about the jamb, less complex than those in a similar doorway at the Qoricancha in Cuzco. The adjacent building has two stories and was obviously the house of someone important. Bingham named it the **Palace of the Princess**.

Next to the Sun Temple, just above the main fountain, is a three-walled house, which has been restored and had its roof thatched as an example of how these structures looked in Inca times. It is usually called the **Fountain Caretaker's House** — but it's unlikely to have been a house at all, since it is open to the elements in one side. The thick stone pegs fixed high up in the wall are thought to have served as hangers for heavy objects.

Students of the more esoteric aspects of the Inca culture have suggested that this complex of adjacent structures forms a temple to the four elements: the Temple of the Sun (Fire); the "Royal Tomb" (Earth); the open-fronted Fountain Caretaker's House (Air); the Principal Fountain (Water).

The structures directly opposite the Sun Temple, across the staircase, have been classified as the **Royal Sector** because of the roominess of the buildings, and also for the huge rock lintels (weighing up to 3 tons) which in Inca architecture generally characterized the homes of the mighty.

At the top of the agricultural terraces, standing high above the city is a lone hut which is a great place for an overall view of the ruins. It backs onto a gently-sloping area known as the cemetery, because Bingham discovered numerous bones and mummies at this spot. Just a few meters from the hut lies a curiously-shaped carved rock, called the Funeral Rock.

Bingham speculated that this had been used as a place of lying-in-state for the dead, or as a kind of mortician's slab, which bodies were eviscerated and then left to be dried by the sun for mummification.

Mysterious stone

At the top of the staircase leading up from the fountains you come to a great jumble of rocks that served as a quarry for the Inca masons. There is a fascinating discovery in this sector — a partially-split rock that seems to show precisely how the builders cut stone from the quarry. The rock bears a line of wedge-shaped cuts where tools were hammered in to form a crack. The problem with this rock,

Peruvian Tour Operator

though, is that it was reportedly cut by a 20th-century archeologist, Dr Manuel Chávez Ballón.

Follow the ridge away from the quarry with your back to the staircase and you come to one of the most interesting areas of the city. Here is the **Temple of the Three Windows**. Its east wall is built in a single huge rock; the trapezoidal windows are partly cut into it. On the empty side of this three-walled building stands a stone pillar which once supported the roof. On the ground by this pillar is a rock bearing the sacred step-motif cornrow to many other Inca and pre-Inca temples. Next to this site stands the Principal Temple, another three-walled building with immense foundation rocks and artfully-cut masonry. It is named for its size and quality, and also because it is the only temple with a kind of sub-temple attached to it. This is generally called the Sacristy, because it seems a suitable place for the priests to have prepared themselves before sacred rites. The stone, which forms part of the left-hand door-jamb, has no fewer than 32 corners in its separate faces.

Ascending the mound beyond this temple leads you to what was probably the most important of all the many shrines at Machu Picchu, the Intihuatana, the so-called "Hitching Post of the Sun." The American traveler Squier popularized this term in the 19th century, but nobody has ever unraveled the mystery of how this stone and others like it were used. Every major Inca center had one. It seems likely that the stones somehow served for making astronomical observations and calculating the passing seasons. There was at least one other Intihuatana in the vicinity, located near the site of the old hydroelectric power station in the valley below, to the west. The second stone was probably situated to make a specific astronomical alignment with the main one. The main Intihuatana is a sculpture of surpassing beauty. It is the only one in all Peru to have escaped the diligent attention of the Spanish "extirpators of idolatry," and luckily has survived in its original condition. The group of buildings across the large grassy plaza below forms another, more utilitarian sector of the city. At the north end, farthest from the entrance to the ruins you find two three-sided buildings opening onto a small plaza, which is backed by a huge rock generally called the Sacred Rock. An intriguing aspect of this plaza is that the outline of the great flat rock erected at the northeast edge is shaped to form a visual tracing of the mountain skyline behind it. Then, if you step behind the *masma* (three-sided hut) on the southeast edge and look northwest, you find another rock that echoes in the same way the skyline of the small outcrop named Uña Huayna Picchu.

Walking back toward the main entrance along the east flank of the ridge, you pass through a large district of cruder constructions that has been labeled as the Common District. At the end of this sector, you reach a building with two curious disk-shapes cut into the stone of the floor. Each is about 30cm in diameter, flat, with a low rim carved around the edge. Bingham thought these were mortars for grinding corn, but this is doubtful. True, he did find some pestle stones in the same building, but the normal mortar used by the Quechua Indians today is much deeper and more rounded within; also, it is portable, not fixed in one spot. These "mortars" would not have served well for that function. However, nobody has suggested a more plausible explanation for these enigmatic carvings.

Just across the next staircase, you come to a deep hollow, surrounded by walls and niches, which is known as the Temple of the Condor. Bingham called this the Prison Group, because there are vaults below ground, and large niches with holes that might have been used for binding wrists. However, the concept of "prison" probably did not exist in Inca society; punishments tended to involve loss of privileges, in physical suffering, in death. Some early Spaniards reported pits full of snakes or pumas into which offenders were dropped to see if they would survive, but that is hardly a prison. The complex was probably a temple. A rock at the bottom of this hollow bears a stylized carving, apparently a condor, with the shape of the head and the ruff at the neck clearly discernible.

There is a small cave known as Inti Machay above and to the east of the Condor Temple, which has been identified as a solar observatory for marking the December solstice. The cave is faced with coursed masonry and features a window carved out of a boulder that forms part of the front wall. This window is precisely aligned with the winter solstice sunrise, so that morning light falls in the back wall of the cave for ten days before and after that date.

Further explorations

If you arrived at Machu Picchu via Aguas Calientes rather than by the Inca Trail, there are three walks, which are worth attempting. First, above the ruins to the southeast you can see a pass scooped out of the ridge, with a small ruin at the center. This is Intipunku, the Sun Gate. You can actually see the

Peruvian Tour Operator

sunrise in this gateway from the western heights of the ruins at certain times of year. The trail traversing the mountainside from this point was the main Inca highway from Huiñay Huayna and other sites farther south. It is well preserved, and makes for an easy climb, taking about an hour and a half there and back. The view of Machu Picchu from Intipunku is magnificent.

The second walk is to the Inca Drawbridge. A trail winds back from the heights of the ruins, by the cemetery, leading along the west flank of the mountain behind Machu Picchu, this trail grows narrower until it is cut into the side of a sheer precipice, and you find yourself taking each step with care. Follow it until you come to a spot so abrupt that the ancients had to build a huge stone buttress to create a ledge for the path to cross. They left a strategic gap to the middle of the buttress, bridged by logs, which could be withdrawn. Beyond this point, the trail quickly peters out, becoming unstable and extremely dangerous. The path has been fenced off shortly before the bridge, ever since one walker tried to hike beyond it and fell to his death. To the bridge and back is an exciting one-hour walk demanding a cool head for heights. Hardy visitors also hike to climb Huayna Picchu, the towering granite peak that overlooks Machu Picchu from the north. The trail was destroyed by freak weather conditions in 1998 and remained closed for some time. It is the original Inca path, very steep, and stepped in places. Approach it with caution — but don't be put off by the peak's fearsome appearance. You do not have to be a mountaineer. If you are reasonably active and healthy, you will get to the top — and back. Everyone planning to climb Huayna Picchu must sign in at the control point along the trail leaving the principal ruins. You must set out before 1pm, as visitors are barred from starting the climb after that.

As you near the top of Huayna Picchu, you pass through ancient terraces so inaccessible and so narrow that their value for agricultural purposes would have been negligible. It is thought that they were probably ornamental gardens, to be admired from the City below. About an hour and a half gets the average person sun to the peak for a stupendous view.

The Temple of the Moon stands inside a cavern halfway down the north face of Huayna Picchu. It was discovered as recently as 1936, and contains some of the finest stonework of the entire Machu Picchu complex; the Inca pathway which leads to the temple forks off the major trail to the left about one third of the way up to the peak of Huayna Picchu.

Huiñay Huayna

Physically active people staying overnight of Machu Picchu can also consider taking the Inca Trail to Huiñay Huayna. *The* round trip takes about four hours, including some time to look at the ruins. Note that the Inca Trail fee, minus entrance fee to Machu Picchu, is charged for this hike. The journey itself is rewarding, since the trail passes through exotic tropical forest, and is well worth the effort.

It is also possible to spend the night at the basic hostel at Huiñay Huayna, and return to Machu Picchu in the following morning. LI