

Cusco & The Sacred Valley Travel & Accommodation Guide

A historical refuge where beauty, style and night-life intertwine.



A 16th century Spanish colonial city built on the foundations of the raised Incan capital, travellers bound for Machu Picchu are regularly surprised by the beauty, style, nightlife, food and rich cultural offerings of Cusco.



Blending Spanish, Incan and global tourist culture, Cusco's historic centre is replete with a bevy of baroque and renaissance churches, monasteries, museums and galleries filled with Incan treasures, alluring examples of colonial and contemporary art, and priceless religious artefacts. All of which are accessible via narrow stone streets and stairs flanked by exquisite colonial buildings with visible Incan foundations, arched stone doorways, and extraordinary ornate carved timber balconies.

In Cusco, all roads lead to Plaza de Armas, its stately Renaissance centre, with its lush green lawns, gardens of white and yellow pansies, central fountain, surrounding arched porticos and impressive cathedral. Fanning out from here, clubs, bars and restaurants dazzle the senses with indigenous, Spanish and global offerings: restaurant menus combining local speciality 'cuy' (roasted guinea pig) with Italian pastas or clubs busting out rock, pop, salsa and reggae music to the early hours.

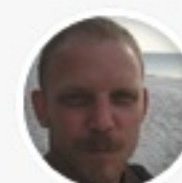
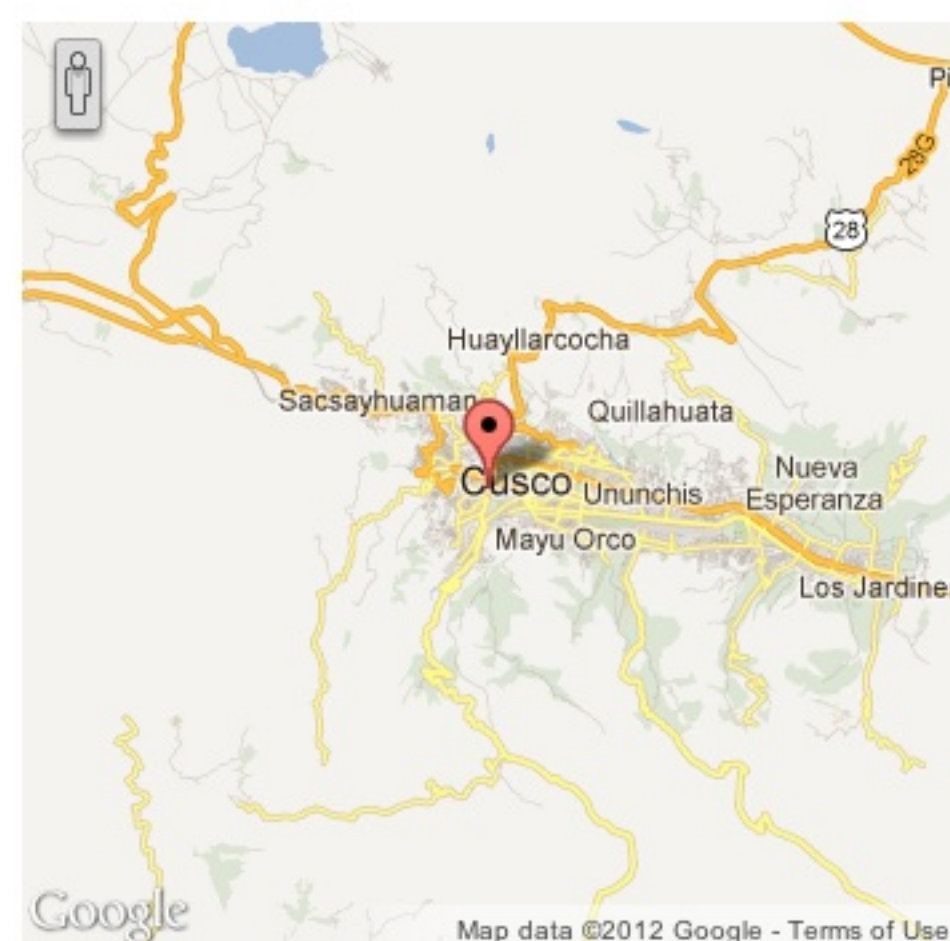
And visibly perched in the hills above, the fortress ruins of Sacsayhuaman are accessible via a steep 40-minute climb. This glorious feat of engineering consists of 20 metre high walls of massive stone blocks (weighing in at approximately 300 tons) that have been fit together perfectly without mortar. Further on, past bubbling brooks and wild flowers, the ruins of the ceremonial site of Q'enqo, with its carved channels that once flowed with sacrificial llama blood; Tama Machay, with its impressive Incan baths; and Puca Pucara, thought to be the out of town lodge for Emperor Pachacútec (the Alexander Great of the Andes), make for an invigorating day of exploration.

From Cusco, the Sacred Valley of the Incas, which according to researchers, was the heartland of the Inca Empire, is only a short bus or train ride away. Quaintly nestled in the snow-capped Andes, the villages and ruins here, most notably Pisac and Ollantaytambo are a delectable combination of natural beauty, exquisite crafts, intriguing ruins and existing Incan structures. Pisac's Sunday craft markets are considered by many to be the best in South America, and the ruins above the town, while not as geographically blessed as Machu Picchu, are for many as equally impressive. And the gorgeous village of Ollantaytambo, with ruins in the hills above, is a living archeological site, with a grid of cobbled streets, carved canals, stone fences topped with cactus, drying corn on corrugated iron roofs and residents still residing in Incan homes from the 15th century.

A visit to Cusco and the Sacred Valley is a journey through history and beauty.

Note: With average altitudes of 3500 meters, mountain sickness is a serious problem in this area.

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Ben has travelled extensively through the Americas, Europe, Asia and Australia. His features and reviews have appeared in publications and websites in the UK and Australia, including Rough Guides (Penguin Group, London, UK), The List (Edinburgh, Scotland), Tiger Beer's UK website, Australian Traveller, OUTthere and Cruise Passenger.

