

Machu Picchu Travel & Accommodation Guide

Incan ruins and geographical grandeur combine.



Perched on a jungle ridge, surrounded by sharp Andean peaks and plummeting valleys, the ruins of Machu Picchu have captivated the world for a century.



The technical genius of the Incas displayed in the site's complex system of aqueducts, graceful terraces, sophisticated astronomical observatories and exceptional stonework certainly has had some role in this, along with sheer number of well-preserved residential, religious and military structures. But it is the geographical grandeur of its setting that truly sets Machu Picchu apart, making it the most loved and well-visited archaeological site in South America, possibly the world.

There are very few experiences akin to sunrise at Machu Picchu. Not that the sun is often visible. At Funerary Rock Hut, elevated above the ruins, a magical mist commonly shrouds the site in Spielberg-like mystery. But, as you sit in the company of adorable alpacas, the mist slowly lifts, providing glimpses of its majesty: an undulating patchwork of vibrant green lawns and terraces subdivided by stonewalls, ancient buildings and stairs climbing the escarpments. And all while the surrounding mist-clad peaks emerge like Japanese landscape paintings.

Then it clears and Machu Picchu, in all its glory, glistens in the morning sunlight.

Arriving for such an experience requires staying in Machu Picchu Pueblo, the ugly tourist village in the valley below and rising early for a bus ride or steep hour and a half climb; or, by arriving on the famous Inca trail (with four-, five- and two-day trekking options available).

Machu Picchu, it is reckoned, served mainly military and religious functions and was probably built around the 15th century. One of a number of military fortresses thought to have defended the Incans from the inhabitants of surrounding jungle, it also shows signs of significant religious importance and enough terraced agriculture to allow subsistence for its estimated 1,000 inhabitants. Theories vary widely, however, and the truth is that very little is known of its origin or purpose. The site was 'discovered' by American archaeologist Hiram Bingham in 1911, and the absence of precious artefacts he found suggests the site was abandoned in an orderly fashion. The Spanish never knew of it, so perhaps their arrival caused its inhabitants to move elsewhere.

There are many sites to explore, but particularly noteworthy, for aesthetic reasons, is the Temple of the Condor, a fabulous example of Incan Stonemasonry for which a natural rock has been shaped into the impressive wings of a condor, and the Royal Tomb, where 100 skeletal remains were discovered. But, it is the little details and grand views afforded by a myriad of locations that make exploring Machu Picchu such a pleasure.

Despite thousands of tourist flocking to the site each day, Machu Picchu continues to provide an experience unlike any other.

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