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Peru: a vast scenario

Peru is a vast region where the traveler will always find sunshine, the landscape he always dreamed of, or the ideal spot to practice a wide variety of adventure sports: rafting down raging rivers, mountain biking through breath-taking landscapes, fishing in emerald-green lakes or gliding amongst the condors.

Whether swimming in crystal-clear seas, trekking through glaciers along ancient roads or through steamy jungle, no matter what the season, the visitor will always find some ideal spot to enjoy a unique and unforgettable stay.

Because Peru lies near the Equator and is split in two from North to South by the Andes, creating two major watersheds, the Pacific and the Amazon, the country is able to boast the greatest biodiversity on the planet. Peru is also home to a wide range of climates and micro-climates as well as to diverse geographic scenarios.

Winter drapes the central and southern coast in a thick layer of clouds, the northern coastline is drenched in brilliant sunshine, inviting visitors to flock to the region's fabulous beaches and taste the superb local cooking.

Travelers avid to explore mountains, peaks or thick rainforest, will always find that either the highlands or the Peruvian Amazon are ideal to enjoy a visit, since the summer rainy season in one region will always coincide with the dry, sunny season in the other. The great thing about Peru, is that one can enter a thousand countries without crossing a single border.

What is more, this scenario of pure nature and unique landscapes blends together customs from a number of different linguistic groups and cultures, whose past steeped in history astounds locals and visitors alike. This diversity has given life to one of the world's richest gastronomies, and to a land of contrasts that invites visitors to discover its essence. Peru awaits you.

Aong the peruvian coastline

With the exception of the 52 rivers that split the narrow sandy coastal strip on their way down to the Pacific Ocean, the Peruvian coastline is an

arid desert that fringes the sea with sweeping beaches, hidden coves, rocky cliffs and towering rock formations carved out by the wind and waves. In some areas, armies of sand dunes march down to the sea; in others, meanwhile, the sun glitters on the saltflats in a world by the sea that appears to be uninhabited. However, the landscape gives way drastically and definitely to one of the richest oceans to be found on Earth, a world teeming with life.

The Peruvian coastline offers lovers of the sea many advantages: a stable climate that seldom sees rain, no hurricanes and slight variations in temperature during the daytime and throughout the year; beaches bathed by cold waters and others that feature warm waters; solitary beaches where dolphins and sea lions are the lone companions of the visitor; waves so long-running and perfectly shaped that they never seem to come to an end; and, by combining the right time and place, there's the chance to acquire that perfect tan or practice water sports practically 365 days a year.

The Peruvian coastline offers water sports fans a wide range of possibilities, or perhaps just go fishing, try the local cuisine or take in the surroundings, ruffled by a gentle sea breeze. We invite you to discover Peru's beaches for yourself.

Beaches

Peru has been doted by Nature with more than 3.000 km of coastline. Peru's beaches link up, one after another, in an endless chain of natural scenarios and physical characteristics that will delight travelers from all walks of life: some are dusted with pure white sand, blown in from distant sand dunes; others are filled with thick grains of sand which do not stick to the skin; some are made of dark sand, pebbles, covered in mangroves or studded with prickly cacti; some are lapped by tranquil seas, while others are pounded by huge waves of staggering beauty.

Some beaches have been turned into modern ports or picturesque, sleepy fishing villages. Others, meanwhile, have kept their pristine beauty and the enchanted air with which Nature endowed them thousands of years ago.



*Pizarro Port, Tumbes
PromPerú*

So come and explore the beaches of Peru. The Pan-American Highway runs parallel to the coast, providing access to all beaches. The northern stretch sets off from Lima and runs up to Tumbes, on the Ecuadorian border, while southwards the highway runs from Lima down to Tacna on the Chilean frontier. The road is in excellent condition from Trujillo to Tacna (some 1.900 km) and fairly good from Trujillo to Tumbes (some 700 km).

Peru's Top 10 Beaches

Punta Sal

Possibly the most heavenly beach on Peru's north coast. The beach resort of Punta Sal or Punta Sal Grande, as it is known locally, is one of the most spell-binding beaches on the Peruvian coast, and enjoys peace and sunshine all year round. There is excellent fishing and diving to be found in its warm and clear waters. Seafood lovers will appreciate the local shrimp, lobsters and the finest fresh fish to be found up north.

Access and services: the beach is reached via a 2 km detour off the North Pan-American Highway at kilometer 1.187. The area teems with hotels and restaurants that throb with activity during the summer season. Apt for all vehicles.

Máncora and Las Pocitas

Wedged into the Piura coastline, Máncora has become the main hotspot for surfers each summer. From December to March, the quiet streets of the village burst into a non-stop party. Nearby, further south, the area of Las Pocitas features a rocky beach where low tide forms a series of natural rock pools which are a favorite for swimmers. The fine sandy beaches are lapped by clear, warm seas.

Access and services: Located at kilometer 1.164 of the North Pan-American Highway, the area features several hotels and restaurants. Apt for all vehicles.

Colán

The traditional summer resort for Piura residents. Built in the 1950s in the style of the old coastal residences, the village is known for its typical mansions with terraces raised on wooden beams, shaded by decades-old palm trees. The sea is clear and warm, while every evening provides a fabulous sunset. Stingrays are common here, which is why visitors are advised to enter the water dragging their feet (a practical local solution).

Access and services: the beach is reached via a paved detour off the Pan-American Highway north of Piura at kilometer 989 headed for Paita. What better than to try a ceviche (raw fish marinated in lemon juice) by the sea together with traditional tamales (cornmash pastries). Apt for all vehicles.

Bahía de Nonura

The beaches of Bayóvar are Peru's last virgin beaches, and without a doubt, the most beautiful. Made up of sweeping, open bays or white granite rocky outcrops that spring out of the sand dunes, the beaches boast an extraordinarily clear blue sea teeming with dolphins, turtles and flocks of seagulls. Fishing here is superb, and sundown will enchant even the most seasoned traveler.

Access and services: To enter the area, travelers will have to drive down a detour off Kilometer 886 of the North Pan-American Highway. The detour leads down to Bayóvar and then along the coast. A special permit, which is easy to get, must

be obtained from state oil firm Petroperu S.A. at company headquarters in Lima or Piura. The wind picks up somewhat in the afternoons, so travelers are advised to pick a sheltered area to camp in. Apt only for 4WD vehicles.

Casma: Culebras, Corralones, Tuquillo and La Gramita

Easy to reach, this part of the coast is split into dozens of sheltered striking beaches, rocky cliffs and islands. Some areas are sheltered from the wind, with calm seas, good fishing and bright sunlight all year round. In summer, campers flock to this area in search of peace and quiet. Further north, lies the lagoon of Playa Chica, a haven for a vast variety of wildlife. The area can be windy in the afternoons.

Access and services: Wedged between the Las Salinas saltflats of Huacho and the town of Huacho itself, the area is reached by a detour from kilometer 135 of the North Pan-American Highway. Apt for all vehicles.

El Paraíso

The peninsula and beaches of El Paraíso (El Palmero, Tilca, Tocay and others) meet every requisite to honor their Spanish name of Paradise: numerous beaches where no human being treads, a calm and always clean sea, good fishing and bright skies in summer. Campers and holiday makers flock to Paraíso beaches in summer looking for calm and a natural scenery of great beauty. Nearby to the north the lagoon at Playa Chica provides shelter to varied animal wildlife. Windy in the afternoon.

Access and services: Located between Las Salinas and Huacho, El Paraíso beaches can be reached off a detour at kilometer 135 of the North Pan-American Highway. Apt for all vehicles.

Chepeconde

Formerly called La Barca, the beach was discovered by campers two decades ago. Since then, its popularity has increased to the point where it has become one of the most heavily visited campsites during the summer. The fine sandy beach runs down to a superb, clear sea. A series of natural rock towers split the beach into three well-defined areas, of which the northernmost one draws the biggest attention.

Access and services: The area can be reached via a detour at kilometer 120 of South Pan-American Highway. Apt for all vehicles.

Paracas: La Mina, La Catedral and Mendieta

Without a doubt, Paracas is blessed with the most spectacular stretch of coast along the Peruvian shoreline. The unique landscape features a salt-laden desert that runs down to a deep blue sea through horseshoe-shaped beaches, gigantic cliffs and rocky bluffs carved out by the wind and waves. The National Reserve, which stretches across 335.000 hectares, is one of the country's best beach destinations, and ideal for activities such as diving, fishing, windsurfing, surfing and photography. Worth a visit are the Ballestas islands, a 1-3 hour boatride depending on the craft. The area is also home to huge flocks of guano birds and sea lion colonies, and is a refuge for migratory birds and rare species such as the Humboldt penguin and the marine wildcat.

Access and services: A paved road leads down to the reserve and its beaches from the town of Pisco at kilometer 234 of the South Pan-American Highway. Once past the guardpost, the road turns into a packed dirt track. In the nearby resort of Paracas and El Chaco beach, one can find hotels, restaurants and boats for hire. Apt for all vehicles.

Jiway and Champeque

Jiway is a nice bay bereft of houses, ideal for swimmers and fishermen. It boasts deep blue seas, white sand and good fishing. Just like nearby beaches, the area is riddled with pre-Hispanic archaeological remains of great value. Visitors are recommended to enter the unique Ayparipa citadel. To the north lies the picture-pretty beach of Champeque.

Access and services: Located at kilometer 594 of the North Pan-American Highway (La Libertad), the beach can be reached via a dirt road which can at times be somewhat covered in sand. Apt mainly for 4WD vehicles.

Puerto Inca

For many, Puerto Inca is the finest beach on the south coast. Formed by two perfect bays, the area looks down onto a clear, calm sea which is ideal

for children. There is excellent fishing and diving to be found. The area known as Quebrada de la Huaca was one of the sites that provided fresh fish for the Inca ruler in Cusco. Nearby, one can still find remains of the Inca road system that linked the coast to the highlands, as well as dozens of ancient storerooms and other pre-Columbian stone constructions.

Access and services: The area can be reached via a 3 km dirt road that detours from the South Pan-American Highway at kilometer 603 and runs down a narrow gully. The beach features a small shelter for visitors. Apt for all vehicles.

Other Eye-catching Beaches

In addition to the above, the coast features thousands of beautiful beaches and special attractions, whether for water sports lovers, fishermen or simply visitors looking for somewhere to get some rest and fresh air. The map in this section includes a selection of around 30 of the country's best beaches, with information on services, possibilities for the visitor and characteristics of the sea.

We recommend using the map, especially when hunting for beaches close to city areas or when looking to tour groups of beaches near a certain area.

Recommendations

Accessibility

Several of the beaches along the Peruvian coast lack services for visitors, which for many is part of their charm. So when visitors travel to unfamiliar beaches, they should always bring enough food and water. Don't forget sunblock and a light windbreaker for the afternoon winds, as well as plastic bags for garbage.

Driving

Do not venture onto dirt or sand roads unless accompanied or experienced in rough terrain driving. When driving on sand, let out some air from the car tires to avoid getting stuck in a rut.

Services

For those who are fond of their creature comforts, many beaches, especially those located near the big cities, feature restaurants and lodgings that

are generally open from December to March. Visitors should bear in mind that these spots are packed with visitors during national holidays, so make your bookings with anticipation.

Stingrays

On some beaches, such as Paracas bay and some further north, swimmers risk being stung by stingrays, known locally as pastelillo. In these spots, the best thing to do is to enter the water dragging one's feet, which frightens them away, or to use closed rubber sneakers. If despite taking precautions you get stung, the best thing is to wash the wound with plenty of soap and water, and then bandage the spot. While the effect of the sting varies according to the person and the size of the ray, the local solution is usually the most effective: to bury one's foot immediately in hot sand or suck the poison from the wound.

Camping

Campers have a wide range of beaches to choose from. Excursionists are recommended to always camp in groups, especially when visiting remote or isolated beaches. The hundreds of fishing villages are good spots to rent boats and buy fresh fish and supplies, as well as for repairing outboard motors.

Surfing

Although few people are aware of this fact, it was in ancient Peru, and not in Polynesia or the South Sea Islands that the first evidence was found of men riding the waves with the help of external aids, as found on textiles and pottery dating back to pre-Hispanic civilizations. This art, believed to date back at least 2 000 years in Peru, is still practiced by fishermen in northern fishing villages such as Huanchaco, Santa Rosa and Pimentel, where fishermen venture out onto the waves on totora reed rafts during their daily fishing trips.

The Maui surfboard made its debut on the Peruvian coast in 1942. Since then, surfing has gathered enough fans as to become one of the most widely practiced sports around. The waves off the Peruvian coast are well-known all over the world and some of the best breakers -such as Punta Rocas south of Lima or Cabo Blanco to the north- are part of the surfing world championship circuit.



*Surfing in the south beaches, Lima
PromPerú*

Peru has ideal beaches that will satisfy the most demanding surfer all year round: the central coast features constant waves during winter (April to September), while the north coast sees heavy seas (or “crecidas”) between October and March. At the same time, as there are only 12.000 surfers in Peru, compared to 700.000 in Brazil for example, one can always find empty beaches and perfect waves in Peru. All surfers have to do, is choose their favorite point.

Seven Top Spots*

* Depending on their shape and breaking direction, waves are divided into normal or tubes, and left and right, respectively.

Cabo Blanco

For many, this beach boasts Peru's best left-breaking wave. It is a fast-moving, short wave (which makes a quick take-off mandatory) that carries one of the country's best tubes. It can rise to a four-meter-high wave, although normally it ranges from three to four meters. It is ideal between November and December. It can also be a fairly dangerous wave as it breaks near a reef, a risk which is accentuated by the sand dredging that occurs when the tide rises. The frequency of the breakers is directly linked to the swell that comes from the north (sparked by the North Pole and which runs through Hawaii).

Access: To reach Cabo Blanco, surfers have to take a winding paved road that runs down from the town of El Alto, located at kilometer 1.137 of the North Pan-American Highway. Apt for all vehicles.

Bayóvar-Nonura

A showcase wave. Long, left-running and

stretching to a good height (up to 3 meters), surfers compare it to a train for its size and force. The entry to the point needs a tough paddle out, with strong currents. The waves generally reach their peak during the summer.

Access: The area can be reached via a detour off kilometer 886 of the North Pan-American Highway, a side road which leads to the Bayóvar terminal and then heads along the coast. Apt only for 4WD drive vehicles.

Chicama

The world's longest wave. It breaks down into four sections known as the point, the cape, the man and the pier. Each section is a wave in itself, with its own character and speed. Surfers say that to surf Chicama, one has to bring along a spare pair of legs. A classic left-running Peruvian breaker, it swells with the currents that run from the south and west and reaches ideally some two meters in height.

Access: The cove -also known by the local name of Malabrigo- is reached by a detour that runs down from kilometer 614 of the North Pan-American Highway. Apt for all vehicles.

La Herradura

The classic point for Lima surfers. On its best days, the left-breaking waves can reach five meters in height. It breaks down into three sections, with the closest to the beach being a tough tube. It is a popular beach, where one can count up to a hundred surfers on a good day (an important additional difficulty if one considers that each series consists of just five waves). Reserved for experienced surfers.

Access: Located just a few minutes from downtown in the district of Chorrillos, on the southern outskirts of Lima.

Pico Alto

The largest and most spectacular wave to be found in Peru. It is a point break (with left- and right-running sections, although surfers tend to go more for the latter). Its perfect, long-running waves can stretch to 10 meters in height. Not for beginners. Surfers in the know compare the wave to Waimea (Hawaii) and Todos los Santos (Baja California). A long paddle out, as the wave breaks 1 km out to sea. The beach draws a lot of visitors

in the summer, when dozens of hostels and restaurants are open.

Access: Only 43 km south of Lima down the South Pan-American Highway. Apt for all vehicles.

Punta Rocas

The most famous surf point in Peru and home to international surfing championships (February). A big wave, which can run to five meters high. Surfers call this beach a "wave machine"; right- and left-running waves, not necessarily perfect, but constant.

Access: Located at Kilometer 45 of the South Pan-American Highway. Apt for all vehicles.

Isla San Gallán

Peru's best right-breaking wave. Thanks to its shape, the island features the only beach in Peru where one can surf right-running tubes that break to the West. A fairly long wave that breaks down into four sections. The sea is very cold and winds gust in the afternoon. San Gallán is a unique landscape, where surfers take to the waves amidst hundreds of sea lions. The island, located off the Paracas peninsula, was recently included in the national reserve.

Access: One can only reach this spot by sea (one-and-a-half hours). Surfers tend to rent motorboats on El Chaco beach.

Other Spots to Check Out

Máncora

The point at Máncora is located to the far south of the town with the same name, at kilometer 1.164 of the North Pan-American Highway.

Organos-El Ñuro

The beach at Organos nestles to one side of the North Pan-American Highway, at kilometer 1.152. El Ñuro is to be found 9 km south of Organos and is only accessible using 4WD vehicles.

Huanchaco

The most famous of Trujillo's beaches, because fishermen still ride totora reed rafts over the waves as the locals have done for thousands of years. The village is located just 4.5 km from the city of Trujillo, next to the pre-Hispanic mud-

brick citadel of Chan Chan.

Costa Verde

Located at the foot of the cliffs that plunge down from the city of Lima, the Costa Verde is made up of a chain of beaches mainly located in the district of Miraflores (such as La Pampilla, Makaha, Waikiki and Redondo). Great for surfers of all levels, with good waves year-round.

Señoritas

Between Punta Hermosa and Caballeros, just 44 km south of Lima down the South Pan-American Highway, this beach has become a popular spot for all kinds of surfers. This beach draws the biggest crowds in the summer, when the area's many seaside restaurants offer beach-goers a varied menu of marine dishes.

Puerto Viejo

Located 70 km south of Lima down the South Pan-American Highway, on the edge of the Cañete Valley. In the summer, the beach bustles with seafood restaurants catering to weekend campers and holiday-makers.

Cerro Azul

Just 131 km south of Lima down the South Pan-American Highway. A superb, fairly long wave. The beach offers dozens of restaurants and hostels.

Recommendations

Never surf alone. Keep beaches clean by taking your refuse with you, and do not disturb the marine wildlife that shares the sea with the visitors (dolphins, sea lions and seagulls). Check for the presence of undertowns as well as reefs and rocks on the sea bottom. In addition, remember that, depending on the area, in March or April (around Easter Week), tides tend to rise and the waves swell, increasing the risk.

Sports Fishing

Tuna fish, drums, flounder, Pacific croaker, grunts, groupers and even the world's largest black marlin, a 1.560 pound specimen caught off Cabo Blanco by Alfredo Glossel, Jr., are just some of the many fish species to be found in Peruvian waters. Peru's fishing coves used to draw such

personalities as Bob Hope, Marilyn Monroe, John Wayne, Prince Philip of Edinburgh, Nelson Rockefeller and bullfighter Dominguin, all of them out to cast their line and experience the excitement of deep sea fishing. The great writer Ernest Hemingway was a regular visitor to Peruvian waters. The large fish specimens to be found there inspired his famous book *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Like Hemingway, fishermen know that Peru is synonymous of adventure, and above all, great fishing. It is hardly a coincidence that Peru has always enjoyed the reputation of being one of the world's leading fishing nations. Here, fishermen will always find an ideal beach for any kind of fishing: rocky beaches and cliffs, wide open sandy beaches, cold waters rich in plankton and clear warm currents. Happy fishing.

Deep-Sea Fishing

Fishermen cast their lines into the sea all along the vast Peruvian coastline, a sport that is split into two categories: fishing from dry land, whether from the beaches or the cliffs, and fishing from boats. Fishing from the shore is most common in Peru. Species like flounder, Pacific Croaker and grunts are popular amongst fishermen along the sandy beaches of the central and southern coast. To the North, shore-based fishermen tend to haul in drums and pámpanos. Fishing from the bluffs, meanwhile, goes on all down the coast, needing just craggy shores and rocky coves to go fishing. The most common fish species caught here include grunts, Peruvian rock bass and local species such as cherlo, tramboyo and pintadilla. Both types of fishermen use live bait, generally small shellfish to be found in the sand, known locally as muymuy, or wedge clams and seasnails.

Deep sea fishing also breaks down into two types: casting from an anchored boat or trawling from a moving boat. Fish species caught from an anchored boat - along the central and southern

coast - tend to be the same as those fished from clifftops, adding to the list of northern species the cuskeel, grouper and smoothhound. Trawling, meanwhile, is generally done off the north coast with the aid of artificial bait, pulling in species such as tuna, chermelas, agujillas, sierras, plumas, pericos and marlins.

Lake and River Fishing

Freshwater fishing is split into river and lake fishing in the highlands, generally above 2.500 masl, and fishing in the Amazon jungle. Highland fishing is limited to basically two species: trout and silverside, both introduced in Peru in the nineteenth century. These fish are common in clean and well-oxygenated rivers. At altitudes above 3.000 meters one tends to find trout (white and pink or rainbow).

Sports fishing in the jungle, less developed than along the coast, is concentrated in a handful of rivers and lakes in the northern Amazon (Iquitos and environs), where native species such as the tucunare, gamitana and araguana are popular, and also in some parts of the southern jungle (Madre de Dios), where one can find zúngaros, chambiras, pacos and doncellas.

Recommendations

Every time fishermen head out to open sea, whether in their own boat or a rented one, they should inform the harbor captain of the respective fishing cove. This can prove to be a big help and avoid accidents. Also check the list of tides and find about the weather forecast. Although special permits are not required for sports fishing, the Fisheries Ministry bans trout and silverside fishing in the highlands during the summer season in the Andes. Respect fishing restrictions and throw back small specimens or those carrying roe. Those fishing from bluffs or beaches should take care with the cliffs and sandy areas alike. Never go fishing alone.

Adventure sports

If one had to come up with a technical definition for adventure sports, one could state that they encompass certain kinds of outdoor activities where physical effort, fresh air and risk -often extreme- come together to produce a sensation of pleasure hand-in-hand with a powerful dose of adrenaline. Since adventure sports first took off in Peru in the early 1980s, the so-called fin de siècle sports are gathering more and more fans who seek to escape the daily routine of life in the cities and experience some of that numbed sensation of direct contact with nature.

Peru, a land where Nature appears to have crafted the geography to create challenges for all those venture into the wilds, could be catalogued without fear of exaggeration as the New World's adventure sports paradise. And there are plenty of reasons: Peru is a land where snow, steep mountainsides, raging rivers and breath-taking landscapes alternate with deep green lakes and dizzying canyons. All one needs here is a little imagination and some courage -or folly- to become, almost without realizing it, an adventurer.

A world of surprises, incomparable beauty and a hefty injection of adrenaline await those prepared to leave any major city and take to the zigzagging roads that climb up to the highlands or into the desert. Many roads that penetrate the country's rugged geography follow routes opened up thousands of years ago and preserved until today by mule drivers involved in trading products between the three great natural regions in Peru: coast, highlands and jungle. To plunge into the outback is to discover a terrain forged for adventure. The only limits here are your own.

Whitewater rafting

Rafting was made popular in Peru thanks to Polish adventurer Yurek Majcherzyck and his traveling companions who, after several attempts, managed to paddle down the torrential Colca River and cross its 300 rapids that run through the heart of the department of Arequipa.

Since then, a group of Peruvian enthusiasts has dedicated a lot of hard work and energy to open



*Rafting in Lunahuana, Lima
Aníbal Solimano / PromPerú*

up new rafting routes all across the country. It is a tough task, considering that Peru is criss-crossed by more than a dozen rivers that flow for more than 600 km, while just the five longest rivers alone run across 7.000 km of territory.

Whitewater rafting requires inflatable rubber rafts, which are, pushed on by paddles and a helmsman generally at the stern, who guides his crew through the wild river rapids.

Internationally, rapids are classified on a scale of Class I to VI according to their difficulty (VI usually being impossible to tackle, requiring portering the raft along the river bank). There are no age limits for rafters. The only requisite is a taste for adventure.

Places of Interest

The Coast

The Cañete River is, without a doubt, the favorite rafting spot for Lima dwellers. The stretch generally rafted, located near the pleasant fruit-growing area of Lunahuana, 160 km southeast of Lima, includes rapids rating Class II and IV. The season starts up in October and runs until April.

The Tumbes River is the most torrential river found along the Peruvian coast. The stretch which is generally rafted, between the communities of Figueroa and Rica Playa, includes rapids rating Class II and IV, and involves a 2-3 day trip through the spectacular dry forests of the Northwest Biosphere Reserve. The area teems with crocodiles, giant otters and colonies of iguana lizards. The river is generally rafted between May and October.

The Highlands

The Santa River, located in the stunning Callejón de Huaylas valley, 400 km northwest of Lima, flows down to the coast between the Cordillera Blanca and Cordillera Negra massifs. The stretch that is rafted runs from the town of Caraz to Yungay, and features Class II and III rapids. The Santa is generally rafted from May to October, making it an ideal additional reason for visiting the region.

The Colca River is Peru's premier rafting river, and its rapids are ranked the world over as amongst the toughest. The river tumbles down the Colca Valley itself, 300 km north of Arequipa, but can be rafted with little danger along a 40 km-stretch between Cabanaconde and Tapay. It can be rafted from May to October and features Class II to IV rapids. Tours set off from the town of Chivay. The Colca Canyon, through which the river flows, is after the Cotahuasi canyon (also in Arequipa), the second deepest on Earth, and is twice as deep as the Colorado Canyon.

The Vilcanota, or Urubamba River, which runs through the heart of the Sacred Valley in Cusco, features some areas that are highly popular amongst rafters: one stretch between Calca and Urubamba, and another between Huambutio and Pisac, both featuring rapids rating Class II and III. A third stretch, downstream from Ollantaytambo, features Class III and IV rapids.

The river is rafted from May to October.

The Apurimac River, which has only recently been added to the rafting circuit, is a unique experience for its landscapes and difficulty. The river features Class III and IV rapids, while the trip takes 3-4 days. Expeditions set off from the city of Cusco. Recommended for experts.

The Jungle

The Mayo and Huallaga Rivers in the department of San Martín, are extraordinarily beautiful rivers which have only recently been added to the commercial circuit. These rivers feature Class II and III rapids which can be rafted from May to October. Tours set off from the city of Tarapoto.

There is little doubt that the Tambopata River, wild and torrential, is the most spectacular rafting route in Peru. The tour starts in Puno, setting off from the community of Putina Puku (1,900 masl), and tumbles along through one of the richest and most exuberant tropical jungles to be found in Peru, winding its way into the Madre de Dios department (at an altitude of 200 masl on the Amazonian plain). The trip, which runs through the largest strip of uninhabited countryside remaining, takes 7-12 days and requires some complex logistics. The river features Class III and IV rapids.

Peru's 20 Longest Rivers

River	Length (km)
Ucayali	1,771
Marañón	1,414
Putumayo	1,380
Yavarí	1,184
Huallaga	1,138
Urubamba	862
Mantaro	724
Amazon	713
Apurímac	690
Napo	667
Madre de Dios	655
Tacuatimanu	621
Tigre	598
Purús	483
Corrientes	448
Tapiche	448
Inambari	437
Curaray	414
Morona	402
Tambopata	402
Total	15,451

Recommendations

Always hire the services of companies with experience in rafting. Follow exactly the instructions of the guides and raft captains and always demand safety gear (helmets and life jackets). Do not insist on going to rafting areas that are excessively difficult or unknown, as this can lead to serious accidents.

Mountain Biking

This is the fastest-growing sport in the country. Thousands of bikers today take their light-frame bikes into every gully and trail they can find all along the country's rugged geography. Biking took off in Peru in the mid-1980s, and since then has never looked back. The number of bikers and the quality of circuits have both grown by leaps and bounds.

Actually, any part of the country, with the exception of the coastal desert and the jungle plains, is apt for mountain biking, an exciting sport that requires minimum gear and can be undertaken by either the novice or the experienced sports lover. Based on the degree of difficulty and logistical needs, however, biking circuits can be broken down into three major categories: (A) considered apt for beginners, involving routes with gentle slopes and hard, compact terrain; (B) for bikers with a degree of experience, including circuits that run along steeper slopes and imply a certain degree of risk for cyclists; and (C) reserved for experts because of steep slopes and extremely loose terrain (involving a great degree of risk and often at high altitude). So get your bike, and explore Peru.

Places of Interest

Pachacámac

Located 31 km from Lima down the former South Pan-American Highway, this valley has become the most popular spot for Lima bikers. From the former San Fernando plantation, located east of the town of Pachacámac, one can reach a series of circuits that vary according to the degree of difficulty and types of terrain: La Chacra (A), on the route to Cieneguilla, El Manzano (B), El Cardal (B), El Chirimoyo (C), El Lúcumo (C), Las Lomas (B), amongst others. The area is open for biking between April and December.

Olleros-San Bartolo

Located in the upper reaches of the Lurín Valley, this circuit starts out by climbing up the desert gully of Tinajas up to the spot called Repartición (3.000 masl), from where one abruptly descends to the area of El Huayco, to end up crossing 30 km of practically flat land into the beach resorts of San Bartolo or Chilca, according to choice. The route is reserved for experts (C). Bikers would do well to take along plenty of water as well as a guide or an expert on the route. The trail is biked between May and October.

Los Platanales de Totoritas

For several years now, this has been the most popular biking route along the coast. Totoritas is a beach resort located near the town of Mala, 81 km south of Lima. The routes, which gather increasingly larger crowds of bikers every year, wind their way through fields of crops and form part of the international mountain bike rally circuits. Like in Pachacámac, there are several types of routes to be found: Los Platanales (A), El Mirador de Azpitia (A), La Antena (B) and El Canal Madre (B), amongst others. The area is cycled in the summer season (December-March).

Other Circuits in Lima

Other interesting areas near the capital include routes through the Upper Cañete Valley, especially those that run through the communities of Vilca and Alis; the area of Huarochirí, and the upper reaches of the Lima highlands, between the lake and town of Marcapomacocha, and the Santa Eulalia Valley.

Paracas

The Paracas Reserve, especially the peninsula and southern coast, is a vast playground for biking enthusiasts. The area features short and simple routes, like those that run along the beaches, or ones that are extremely difficult, weaving between sand dunes and climbing steep hillsides. As a rule, it is advisable to take along plenty of water and a map of the area. Preferably, bikers should tackle these routes accompanied by an expert.

The Cordillera Blanca

One of the most spectacular routes to be found in Peru. Amongst the gullies and mountains of

the Callejón de Huaylas valley lie dozens of beautiful and at the same time tough biking routes. Most circuits climb to a great height (above 3.500 masl), before dropping down steep slopes. One of the most popular routes is the one that runs from Lake Llanganuco (3.800 masl) to the town of Yungay. Another route links up the 4.800 meter pass of Punta Olímpica with the city of Carhuaz. Both are Class A and B routes, recommended between May and October. Warm clothing and spare parts are indispensable, as are precautions to ward off high altitude sickness, known locally as soroche.

Canchaque-Huancabamba

A little-known route, but very beautiful. The route sets off from the city of Piura and climbs east up to the small town of Canchaque. From there, the route starts a dramatic climb up to the 3.000 meter Cruz Blanca pass before zigzagging down to the village of Huancabamba, in the heart of the Piura highlands. Recommended for experienced bikers (B), and preferably from May to October. Bring warm clothing and water. Huancabamba has some restaurants and rustic lodgings.

The Colca Valley

Located three hours north of Arequipa, the Colca Valley is definitely a paradise for eco-tourism and outdoors fans. The valley opens up at Chivay and is slashed by two roads that run from east to west. Both are ideal for mountain biking. However, the more demanding cycle routes (B or C) are to be found along the dozens of dirt tracks that run down to villages and farmlands in never-ending zig-zags that run down the valley. The most popular route is the one that links up Chivay with Cabanaconde and runs past the lookout point at Mirador de Condore. Best biked from May to October. Take warm clothing and spare parts.

The Sacred Valley

At just an hour by road from the city of Cusco, the Vilcanota River Valley offers a wide range of routes for bikers. Located at an altitude of 2.500 masl, the area is riddled with picturesque villages and natural landscapes that, together with a taste for adventure, make for unparalleled circuits of stunning beauty plus major cultural attractions. The valley also features some of Peru's most spectacular pre-Hispanic ruins: Ollantaytambo,

the Inca fortress and town; Pisac, the extraordinary complex of terracing; the pre-Columbian agricultural experimentation center of Moray, and many others. The dry season (May to October) is the best time to visit. Cusco features companies that run tours and rent the necessary equipment.

Cusco-Paucartambo-Cosñipata Valley

A route with a medium degree of difficulty (B or C), depending on the trails the biker wishes to cover. The circuit sets out from Cusco and crosses one of the most spectacular high-altitude areas on Earth: Andean intervalleys filled with colonial villages, a tundra-like, high Andean plain featuring traditional communities, and the exuberant cloud forest of the Manu National Park, which teems with a variety of flora and fauna. The route takes 3-4 days and requires some complex logistics.

Best visited from May to October. It is advisable to bring warm clothing and camping gear, and take precautions against high altitude sickness.

Recommendations

Always wear a helmet, goggles, gloves and elbow and knee pads. Tours should be done in groups of at least three members, all of whom should take along water or rehydrating liquids. A couple of spare inner tubes are necessary, as are some basic tools for changing flat tires. To choose the route, bear in mind your physical condition and do not demand more from yourself than realistically possible. Remember that biking, like any sport, should provide relaxation, and not massive injuries.

Paragliding and Hang Gliding

There are two main types of apparatus used by those fond of flying: flying mechanisms that use the aerodynamics of wings in order to fly; and the classic parachute, which simply drops. Paragliding and hang gliding share a structure made of a cloth or synthetic fiber which moves with the winds. The difference stems from the fact the paraglider is not rigid, while the hang glider is.

Hang gliding was born from an unsuccessful model developed by NASA to improve aerospace rescue parachutes, something which caught on



Hang-gliding in the Sacred Valley, Cuzco
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amongst those with a penchant for flying. The first hang glider was brought to Peru in the 1970s. Paragliding, meanwhile, did not take off in Peru until the early 1990s. Its origins date back to Savoie in France, where persevering sportsmen modified the classic parachute until they came up with others split up into cells, allowing for a longer flight with more room for maneuver. The concept has since improved, to the stage that today flyers can glide for 10 km for each 1.000 meters they drop.

Once up in the air, sportsmen tackle two kinds of currents: ascending, which are divided up into thermal (columns of warm air generated by the heating up of refractory surfaces) and orographic (which are created when air rebounds off a cliff or similar obstacle); and descending, similar to pockets of air that produce turbulence for jet airplanes. Choose your best option... and head for the vertigo.

Places of Interest

Cusco

The Sacred Valley guarantees some first-rate flights: the Mirador de Chinchero, a lookout point over the town with the same name, provides a dynamic flight on the strength of the wind that buffets the hillside and then climbs in updrafts; and the Cerro Sacro hill, located on the Pampa de Maras plain, where there are good thermal currents. Fliers take to the air at altitudes of between 3.000 and 4.000 masl. Take-offs are best very early in the morning or in the late afternoon. Ideal between May and October.

Moyobamba

The famous Morro Calzada rears over this jungle city, a hill that is a haven for plants and animals and is popular for Sunday excursions. Flights here are simple, featuring good thermal currents. Ideal between May and October.

Callejón de Huaylas

A paradise nestling amongst soaring mountains and deep gorges. The area that sees most visitors lies between the towns of Caraz and Yungay, especially the Pan de Azúcar hilltop. This was the launching point for Swiss parapente enthusiast Franz Schilter, who made an 80 km flight up the valley to the city of Huaraz. Best between May and October.

Lima

The Costa Verde Seaboard has become the scenario of choice for lovers of air sports. The Parque Ghandi, a park wedged between the districts of San Isidro and Miraflores, is the main meeting place for enthusiasts. It is an ideal area when the winds gust from the west. Also, just 30 km south of Lima lies the valley of Pachacámac, one of the most popular flying areas for Lima residents. Paul Poblete Park and the area of El Manzano (which also attracts mountain bikers) are two other popular spots. North of Lima, some 60 km, lies Pasamayo, a vast sand dune which can be reached from the Pan-American Highway, the best spot is the summit of the Serpentin pass (serpentine), so-dubbed because of the winding road that hangs on the cliff over the Pacific Ocean.

Ica

The desert also has spots that are ideal for flying: the hillside of Jahuay along the South Pan-American Highway (still within the confines of Lima), and the La Catedral beach in the heart of the Paracas reserve (along kilometer 250 in Ica) provide excellent areas for flying.

Recommendations

Never fly alone. Amateurs are strongly advised to hire the services of companies or experts who can provide them with equipment and information on the best spots for flying. Always use safety gear. In Peru, no license for this type of gliding is needed, although there is an association that regulates and monitors the sport. Avoid areas near airports, airstrips or high voltage power cables.

Other Adventure Sports

Windsurfing and Sandboarding

Despite the fact these sports are newcomers to Peru, open air sports like windsurfing and sandboarding have been gaining increasing numbers of followers in recent years. Windsurfers flock to the breezy bays of Paracas (Atenas, Mendieta and Yumaque) as well as certain areas along the north coast such as Pasamayo, El Paraíso and Medio Mundo, the most popular spot.

Sandboarding has become popular on the sand dunes near Ocucaje, Villacuri and Ica, an ideal area to take to the steep sandy slopes of the desert.

Hot Air Ballooning

Since 1988, a company based in Cusco, Globos de los Andes, has been running tourist hot air balloon flights over the Sacred Valley of the Incas. The one-hour flights cost US\$300 per person. Setting off in the morning from the community of Maras, 55 km from the city of Cusco, balloonists take to the air and enjoy an unusual view of the Cusco countryside, its snow-capped peaks, several archaeological sites and main towns. The company also runs flights dedicated to bungee jumping over the Cusco area, including the Inca fortress of Sacsayhuaman.

Underwater Fishing and Scuba Diving

Underwater fishing has been popular in Peru for decades. The Peruvian sea provides excellent fishing, with a large variety of scenarios to practice water sports, which has made underwater fishing one of the most popular sports in coastal cities and ports. The coasts of Pucusana, Paracas and Ilo to the south, and Tumbes and Piura to the north, are the most popular spots among fishermen. Scuba diving, meanwhile, is not widely practiced in Peru. The coasts do, however, offer ideal conditions, with unexplored beaches, huge schools of Coastal sea fish and colonies of playful sea lions. Although in few spots along the Peruvian coastline are waters as clear as in the Caribbean or the Atlantic, they are home to a greater diversity of species, making Peru an exceptional place for those looking for a unique and different experience.

Peru: Location and Climate

Peru is located on the central section of South America, and its coasts are lapped by the Pacific Ocean. The country has a population of 24 million and a territory of 1.285.215 square kilometers (the size of Spain, France and Italy combined), making it one of the 20 largest countries on Earth. Due to its location, the Peruvian coast has always been a vital link for maritime routes and trade with the subcontinent. Peru also lays claim to 200 nautical miles of ocean off its coasts and has rights over a 60 million hectare stake in the Antarctic.

The Coast

Due to the effect of the cold Humboldt current and the presence of the Andes to the East, the coast is a vast and arid desert, a land where it never rains. The central and southern coast of Peru has two well-defined seasons: winter from April to October, and summer from November to March. During the winter, a thick layer of cloud blankets the skies, and it frequently drizzles. Despite the sensation of low temperatures sparked by the high humidity, it is rarely colder than 12 °C. During the summer, on the other hand, the sun shines brightly and temperatures often top 30 °C.

The northern section of the coast, meanwhile, is not affected by the cold current, meaning that part

of the country sees sunshine and warm temperatures (up to 35 °C in the summer) 300 days a year. Rainy season in this region is from November to March which are considerably increased due to The El Niño weather phenomenon.

The Highlands

The highlands, or sierra, lives through two seasons: the dry season from April to October, where the sun shines during the day and nights are cold (often bringing frost), and it rarely rains (the ideal time to visit); and the wet season (oddly enough called winter) from November to March, when rainfall is heavy (often over 1 000 mm). The region stands out for the range in temperatures throughout the day. One commonly comes across temperatures plunging from 24 °C at midday to -3 °C around dawn. The highlands are also endowed with a pleasant, dry climate, which spurs the planting of a vast variety of crops.

The Jungle

The jungle can be divided into the highland jungle or cloud forest (above 700 masl) and lowland jungle (below 700 masl). High jungle country

features a subtropical, balmy climate, with heavy rainfall (some 3.000 mm a year) between November and March, and bright sunshine from April to October. It is always cool at night.

The lowland jungle regions, meanwhile, experience two extremely different seasons, which accentuate depending on the proximity to the Equator. The dry season from April to October (the ideal time of year for tourism) is marked by sunshine-filled days and high temperatures, often over 35 °C. During these months, the flow rate of the rivers drops and the roads are easy to drive along. The rainy season, however, which runs from November to March, features frequent downpours (at least once a day), and muddy roads which make traveling difficult. The humidity is high in the jungle all year round. In the south of the country, the jungle region is sometimes hit by cold winds, known locally as a "friaie", a front that moves north from the far south of the continent between May and August, when temperatures can plunge to 8-12 °C.

Note: To calculate Fahrenheit temperatures: 9/5 (°C) + 32

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