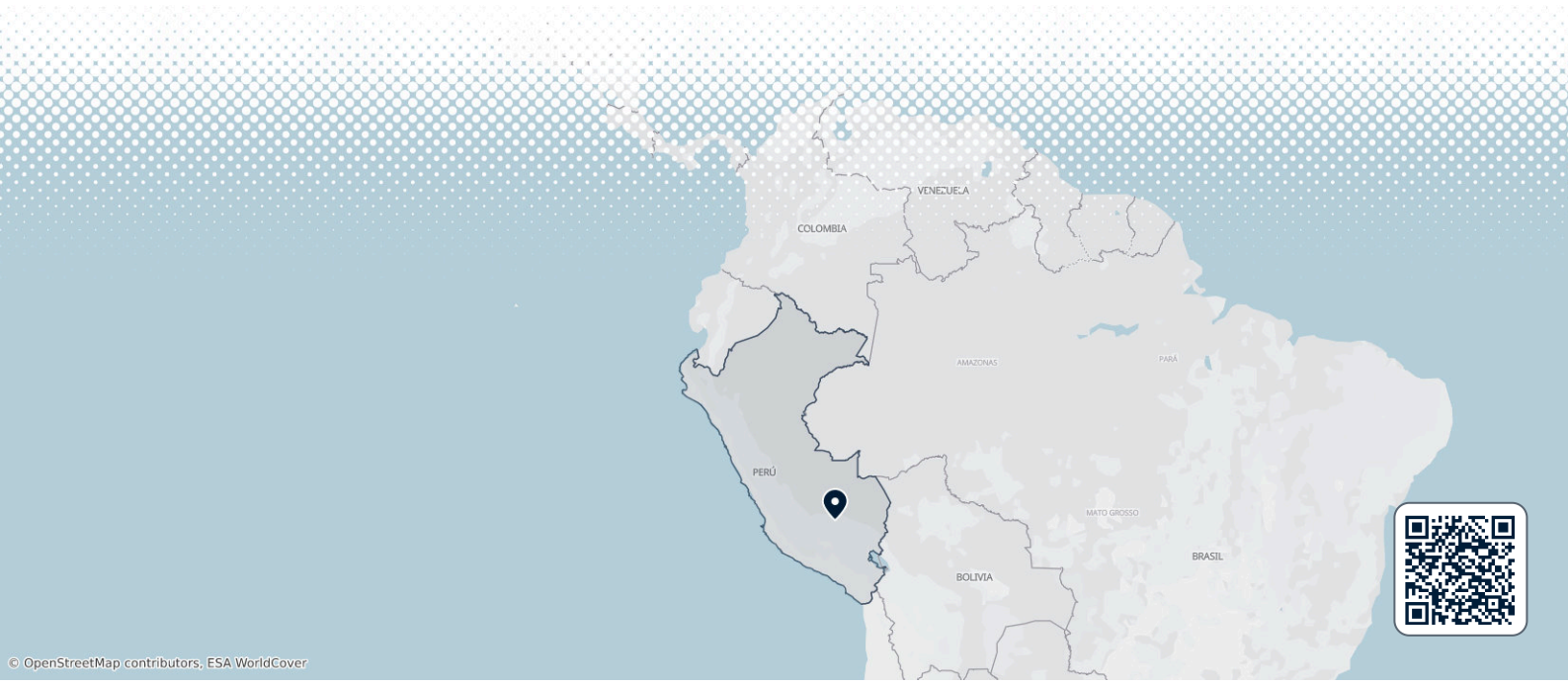
Cusco

Peru

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Cusco was the capital of the Inca empire, and the Spanish who took it in 1533 did not clear the site. They built their churches and mansions directly onto the Inca walls. Both are still standing, often in the same building. That layering is what makes the centre unusual.

The city sits at about 3,400 m, so the altitude shapes the first day or two of any visit. Most people come for the Inca and colonial centre and use the city as the base for Machu Picchu and the valley beyond. Three or four nights suits it well. The chronicler *Inca Garcilaso de la Vega*, son of a conquistador and an Inca noblewoman, was born here in 1539.

When to visit

The dry season runs from May to September and is the best time to come. Days are clear, nights are cold, and the trekking routes are open. The wet season from November to April brings rain most afternoons, and the Inca Trail closes every February for maintenance.

The event to plan around is **Inti Raymi**, the Inca festival of the sun, held on 24 June. It is staged as a large costumed reenactment and fills the city for the surrounding week. Book beds and tickets months ahead if you want to be here for it.

MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Fair Fair for hiking	16° / 19°	6° / 4°	21 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds · UV 11 (Extreme)
February	Fair Fair for hiking	16° / 19°	6° / 4°	21 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds · UV 11 (Extreme)
March	Fair Fair for hiking	16° / 19°	6° / 4°	19 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds · UV 10 (Very high)
April	Great Great for hiking	16° / 19°	6° / 4°	Dry air · Calm winds · UV 10 (Very high)
May	Great Great for hiking	16° / 19°	6° / 3°	Dry air · Calm winds · UV 9 (Very high)
June	Great Great for hiking	17° / 19°	5° / 2°	Dry air · Calm winds · UV 8 (Very high)
July	Great Great for hiking	17° / 20°	4° / 1°	20 sunny days · Dry air · Calm winds · UV 9 (Very high)
August	Great Great for hiking	18° / 21° Feels like 15°	5° / 2°	Dry air · Calm winds · UV 9 (Very high)
September	Great Great for hiking	18° / 21°	6° / 4°	Dry air · Calm winds · UV 10 (Very high)
October	Good Good for hiking	18° / 22°	6° / 4°	Dry air · Calm winds · UV 11 (Extreme)
November	Good Good for hiking	18° / 22°	6° / 4°	12 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds · UV 11 (Extreme)
December	Fair Fair for hiking	17° / 20°	6° / 4°	20 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds · UV 10 (Very high)

Best months: May, June, July, August, September

Climate data: NASA POWER (MERRA-2) · 1996–2025

Top sights



A Qurikancha was the richest temple in the empire, and its inner walls were once sheathed in gold. The Spanish raised the Santo Domingo convent straight on top of it, so you see Inca masonry and colonial cloister in one building.

B Sacsayhuamán stands on the ridge above town. Its zigzag ramparts are built from blocks weighing more than 100 tonnes, fitted so tightly that no mortar was used.

C Plaza de Armas is the centre of daily life, framed by stone arcades. It was the Inca ceremonial square before the Spanish rebuilt around its edges.

D La Basílica Catedral del Cusco took nearly a century to finish. Inside is a large collection of Cusco School paintings, the colonial style that mixed European religious subjects with Andean detail.

E Iglesia de la Compañía de Jesús sits on the same square and has the more elaborate baroque front of the two churches. It was rebuilt after the 1650 earthquake.

F Twelve-angled-stone is set into a wall on Hatunrumiyoc street. Each of its twelve corners locks into the neighbouring blocks without mortar. It is the most photographed piece of Inca stonework in the city.

G San Blas District climbs the slope above the centre. It is the artisan quarter, full of workshops, small galleries and steep narrow lanes.

H San Pedro Market is the main produce market and still serves locals more than visitors. Come for fruit, juice counters and cheap set lunches.

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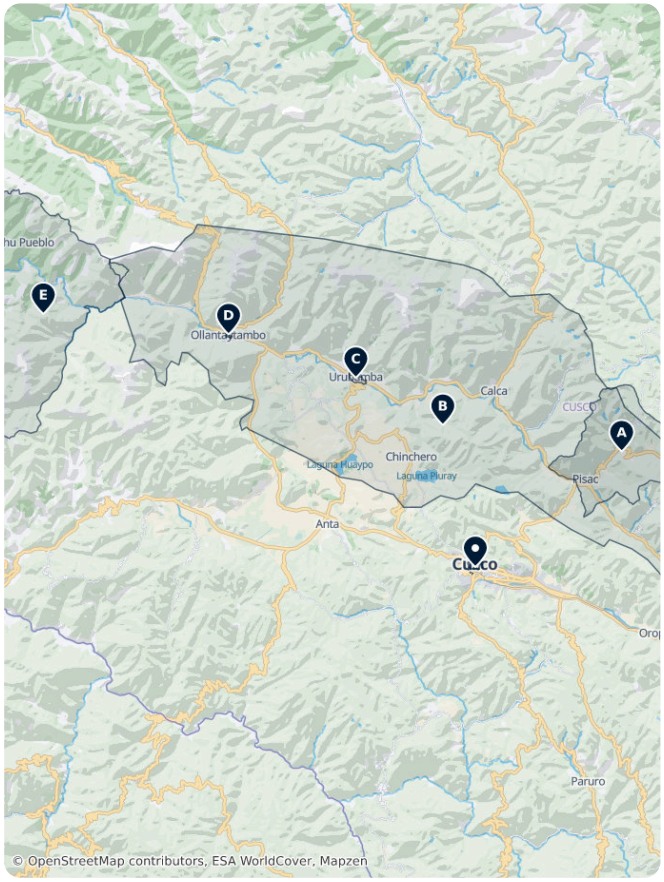
What to experience

Things to do and time your visit around, rather than more places to photograph.

- Climb to Cristo Blanco for sunset. It is about 30 minutes uphill from San Blas, and the whole basin opens up below you.
- Watch the Inti Raymi reenactment on 24 June at Sacsayhuamán, with hundreds of costumed performers filling the terraces.
- Drink mate de coca or chew coca leaves on your arrival day, as locals do. It is ordinary and legal here, and it is the standard local answer to altitude.
- Watch a weaving demonstration and learn to read the patterns. The Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco runs them with highland weaving communities.
- Join the Señor de los Temblores procession on the Monday of Holy Week, when the city's patron crucifix is carried around the square.

Day trips

Cusco is the base for the whole region. These are ordered from closest to farthest.



- A Pisac — about 45 min by colectivo. A large craft market in the village, and a ridge of Inca terraces and tombs above it.
- B Sacred Valley — 1 to 2 h depending on the stop. The valley holds the Maras salt pans, the circular agricultural terraces at Moray, and C Urubamba as a lunch stop.
- D Ollantaytambo — about 1 h 45 min by bus. A working town still on its Inca street grid, with a steep terraced fortress above it. It is also the main railhead for Machu Picchu.
- E Machupicchu Historical Sanctuary — 1 h 45 min to Ollantaytambo, then about 1 h 30 min by train, plus the shuttle up. Possible in one very long day, but far better with a night in Aguas Calientes.
- Rainbow Mountain — about 3 h each way by road, then a hike topping out above 5,000 m. Worth it only once you are properly acclimatised.

Getting there

- **By air**: Alejandro Velasco Astete International Airport lies about 5 km southeast of the centre, with a 15 to 20 minute taxi ride into town. Almost all international travellers connect through Lima.
- **By train**: There is no rail line from Lima or the coast. Trains from the Cusco area run only towards Machu Picchu, leaving from Poroy outside the city or from Ollantaytambo.
- **By bus**: Long-distance coaches use the Terminal Terrestre south of the centre. Lima takes 21 to 24 h, Arequipa around 10 h, and Puno around 7 h.

Official tourism information for the country is at PROMPERÚ.

Getting around

- **On foot**: The historic centre is compact and walking is the way to see it. Expect steep cobbled streets, and expect short climbs to feel harder than usual at this altitude.
- **Public transit**: City buses and shared vans, called combis, serve the outer districts. Pay the fare in cash to the conductor on board. Visitors staying near the centre rarely need them.
- **Taxi**: Taxis are cheap and everywhere. Agree the fare before getting in, as meters are not used.
- **Tourist ticket**: The **Boleto Turístico del Cusco** is a single combined ticket covering Sacsayhuamán, several nearby ruins and a group of city museums. Those sites cannot be entered on a separate ticket, so buy it if you plan to visit more than one.

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

High

The historic centre is small and easily walked, but the streets are steep and cobbled and the altitude makes short climbs tiring.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Low

Steep gradients, heavy central traffic and the altitude make cycling impractical for most visitors.

Driving

- **Is a car worth it?**: Not for the city. The centre is tight, partly pedestrian and hard to park in, and colectivos or buses reach every major site in the valley.
- **Parking**: Use the guarded lots, signed as playas de estacionamiento, around Avenida El Sol. Street space in the old centre is very limited.
- **Restrictions**: Several streets around the main square are closed to private traffic. Roads up to the high-altitude sites are narrow, winding and often unpaved.

Food & drink

Food here is Andean rather than coastal. Look for cuy, roast guinea pig served on festival days. Alpaca steak is lean and appears on most menus. Chiriuchu is a cold plate of many meats, eaten at Corpus Christi. Soups are thickened with quinoa and other highland grains.

Aim for areas rather than chasing individual restaurants. The lanes around San Blas District hold most of the small, interesting kitchens. San Pedro Market is the place for a cheap set lunch and fresh juice. On the main square itself, prices climb and quality tends to drop.

What to eat & drink

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Anticuchos · anticuchos
Grilled skewers of marinated beef heart, a common street-food snack.

SWEETS & DESSERTS

Picarones · picarones
Deep-fried rings of sweet potato and squash dough, served with syrup.

DRINKS

Pisco Sour · pisco sour
Peru's national cocktail, made with pisco brandy, lime juice, and egg white.

Chicha Morada · chicha morada
Sweet, non-alcoholic drink made from purple corn, spices, and fruit.

Mate de Coca · mate de coca
Coca-leaf tea commonly drunk in the highlands to ease altitude discomfort.

SIGNATURE DISHES

Ceviche · ceviche
Raw fish marinated in lime juice with chili, onion, and cilantro. Peru's signature national dish.

Lomo Saltado · lomo saltado
Stir-fried beef strips with onion, tomato, soy sauce, French fries, and rice.

Causa Limeña · causa limeña
Layered cold dish of mashed yellow potato with chicken, tuna, or avocado filling.

Papa a la Huancaína · papa a la huancaína
Boiled potato slices covered in a spicy, creamy cheese sauce.

Cuy · cuy
Roasted or fried guinea pig, a traditional Andean specialty.

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Safety & health

Cusco is generally safe for visitors, and most trouble is opportunistic rather than violent. Petty theft is the main risk: watch bags in crowded markets, on night buses and around the main square after dark. Use a booked or registered taxi late at night rather than flagging one down.

Altitude is the more serious issue. At about 3,400 m, many arrivals get soroche, or altitude sickness, with headache, breathlessness and broken sleep. Take the first day slowly, drink plenty of water, eat lightly and skip alcohol. Do not fly in and start a high trek the next morning.

History

Cusco was the political and religious centre of Tawantinsuyu, the Inca empire, and roads ran from here to all four of its quarters. Qurikancha was the heart of the state religion. Its gold was stripped and melted down as part of the ransom for the captured emperor *Atahualpa*.

Francisco Pizarro entered the city in 1533. The Spanish did not level the Inca stonework. They built on top of it, so colonial walls across the centre still stand on Inca foundations.

In 1536 *Manco Inca* laid siege to the city from the heights at Sacsayhuamán and came close to retaking it. Much of the colonial city then fell in the 1650 earthquake. The Inca walls underneath largely held, and most of the churches you see today date from the rebuilding that followed.

Country facts

Quick practical facts for Peru at a glance:

CURRENCY
PEN

EMERGENCY
911

ELECTRICITY



Type A / Type B / Type C
220 V · 60 Hz

LANGUAGES
Aymara, Spanish, Quechua

TAP WATER
Not safe to drink

Cusco Essentials

Cusco serves as a living museum where Inca masonry forms the foundation for Spanish colonial architecture. This collection highlights the city's dual heritage, from the precisely carved Twelve-angled stone and the golden foundations of Qorikancha to the Plateresque facade of the Cusco Cathedral. The selection includes the artistic workshops of San Blas, the indigenous produce of San Pedro Market, and museums housing Pre-Columbian artifacts within historic mansions. High-altitude viewpoints provide a comprehensive look at the Andean capital's urban evolution.





A Plaza de Armas

Historic central square and UNESCO World Heritage Site that served as the administrative and religious heart of the Inca Empire. It remains the primary public space and a central hub for exploring colonial monuments and archaeological sites.

Calle Plateros, Cusco, Peru (-13.51677, -71.97878)



B Qoricancha Site Museum

Coricancha, Curicancha, Koricancha, Qoricancha or Qorikancha was the most important temple in the Inca Empire, and was described by early...

Santo Domingo, 08000 (-13.52026, -71.97514)

Mo–Sa	08:00–17:00
Su	14:00–16:00

+51 84 249176



C Twelve-angled-stone

The twelve-angled stone is an archeological artifact in Cuzco, Peru. It was part of a stone wall of an Inca palace, and is considered to be...

Pasaje Haturumiyoc, Cusco, Peru (-13.51601, -71.97625)

Mo–Su Open 24/7

lageoguia.org/la-piedra-de-los-doce-angulos-cusco-peru/



D Cusco Cathedral

The Cathedral of Cusco or Cathedral Basilica of the Virgin of the Assumption is the main temple of the city of Cusco, in Peru and houses...

Triunfo, Cusco, Peru (-13.51626, -71.97785)

Mo–Su 10:00–18:00



E San Blas District

A former colonial parish is now a popular area full of artistic influences and hip bars and shops to stop by.

Calle Cuesta San Blas, Cusco, Peru (-13.51485, -71.97438)



F Inca Museum

In this museum, you can see artefacts from Peruvian history, mainly from a period of Incas. There are also their mummies!

Córdoba del Tucumán, Cusco (-13.51563, -71.97815)

Mo–Fr 09:15–16:00

museoinka.unsaac.edu.pe, +51 084-237380



G San Pedro Market

A local market that offers a variety of fresh fruits, vegetables and more.

Calle Túpac Amaru 477, 08002 Cusco (-13.52096, -71.98263)

Mo–Su 06:00–18:00



H Church of the Society of Jesus

The Iglesia de la Compañía de Jesús is a historic Jesuit church in Cusco, the ancient capital of the Inca Empire, in Cusco Region, Peru.

Portal Belen, Cuzco, Peru (-13.51758, -71.97798)

Mo–Su 09:00–17:00



I Museum of Precolumbian Art

The Pre-Columbian Art Museum is an art museum in Cusco, Peru, dedicated to the display of archaeological artifacts and examples of pre...

Plaza de las Nazarenas 231, Cusco (-13.51491, -71.97735)

Mo–Su 08:00–22:00

mapcusco.pe

J San Cristobal

High-altitude viewpoint located next to the 17th-century San Cristóbal Church. It offers panoramic vistas over the historic center, the Plaza de Armas, and the surrounding Andean peaks.

(Unnamed Road), Cusco, Peru (-13.51348, -71.97978)

Mo–Su Open 24/7

Editor's Choice

Cusco’s historic center showcases a unique blend of Inca engineering and Spanish colonial architecture. This selection covers the city's core, from the expansive Plaza de Armas and the art-filled Cusco Cathedral to the precise masonry of the Twelve-angled-stone. Beyond the stone walls, the Inca Museum displays pre-Columbian artifacts and mummies, while the San Blas District offers a look at traditional Andean craftsmanship and contemporary galleries. For a taste of daily life, the San Pedro Market serves as a primary hub for local produce and regional textiles.





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Calle Cuesta San Blas, Cusco, Peru (-13.51485, -71.97438)



F San Pedro Market

A local market that offers a variety of fresh fruits, vegetables and more.

Calle Túpac Amaru 477, 08002 Cusco (-13.52096, -71.98263)

Mo–Su 06:00–18:00

Museums & Art Galleries

Inca heritage, pre-Columbian art, colonial religious art and Andean traditions, all within walking distance of the Plaza de Armas.





A Qoricancha Site Museum

Built on the site of the most important sun temple in the Inca Empire, this museum and archaeological complex preserves significant ancient Inca sanctuary ruins.

Santo Domingo, 08000 (-13.52026, -71.97514)

Mo–Sa	08:00–17:00
Su	14:00–16:00

+51 84 249176



B Inca Museum

Discover Peruvian history focused primarily on the Inca period, featuring a rich collection of archaeological artifacts and mummies.

Córdoba del Tucumán, Cusco (-13.51563, -71.97815)

Mo–Fr	09:15–16:00

museoinka.unsaac.edu.pe, +51 084-237380



C Museum of Precolumbian Art

Located on Plaza de las Nazarenas, this art museum displays an extensive collection of archaeological artifacts and pre-Columbian artworks.

Plaza de las Nazarenas 231, Cusco (-13.51491, -71.97735)

Mo–Su 08:00–22:00

mapcusco.pe

D Santa Catalina Convent and Art Museum

Founded in 1610, this historic monastery showcases beautiful colonial architecture alongside painted arches, wall paintings, and religious art.

Plazoleta Santa Catalina, Cusco (-13.51758, -71.97734)

Mo–Fr 09:00–17:30

+51 84 221386

E Museum of Religious Art

Hatunrumiyoc, Cuzco, Peru (-13.51620, -71.97614)

Mo–Su 10:00–18:00

+51 84 225 211

F ChocoMuseum

Learn about the history of chocolate and its production process, with opportunities to taste the chocolate during your visit.

Calle Garcilaso 210, Cusco, Peru (-13.51748, -71.98050)

Mo–Su 08:00–20:30

chocomuseo.com/cusco/, +51 84 244765



G Museo de la Coca

Cuesta de San Blas (-13.51524, -71.97413)

Mo–Su 08:00–20:00

H Hilario Mendivil Museum

Located on Plaza San Blas, this small museum showcases religious sculptures created by renowned Peruvian artisan Hilario Mendivil Velasco.

Plaza San Blas, Cuzco, Peru (-13.51517, -71.97409)

+51 84 226 506



Museo Maximo Laura

Carmen Alto 225, Cusco
(-13.51496, -71.97478)

Mo–Sa	09:30–20:00
Su	17:00–20:00

museomaximolaura.com

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