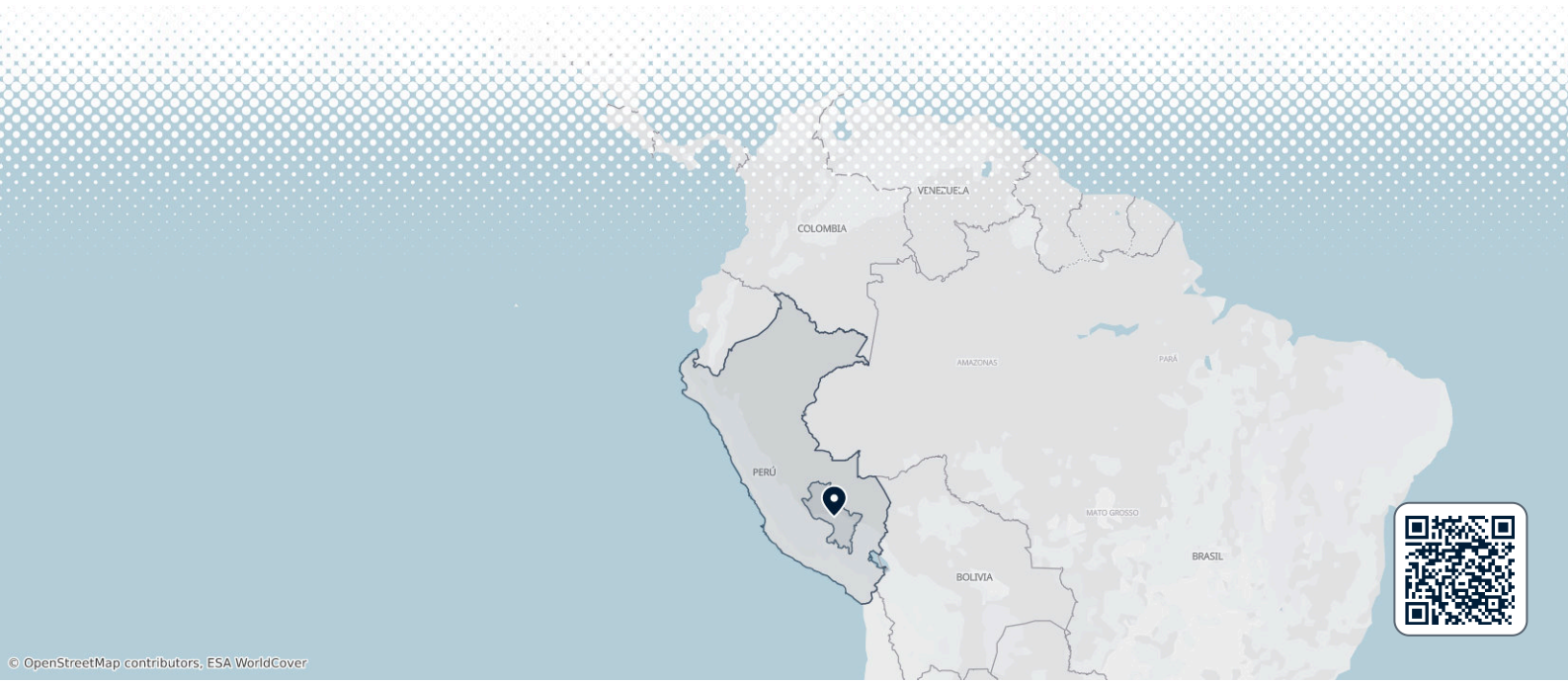


# Cusco Department

Peru

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic

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## Overview

The Cusco department covers the old heartland of the Inca empire. It runs from high puna in the south to cloud forest in the north, on the edge of the Amazon. Most of what draws visitors sits in a band around the regional capital. That band holds the Sacred Valley, a dense group of Inca sites, and Machu Picchu at the end of the rail line.

Most visitors base themselves in Cusco city and travel out each day. Staying a night or two down in the valley makes the region easier to cover. Altitudes range from roughly 2,000 m on the valley floor to passes above 4,800 m. Plan for the height as much as the distance. Two weeks lets you add a trek or the remoter ruins; one week covers the main circuit.

## When to visit

May to September is the dry season and the practical window for trekking and for the high passes. Expect bright days, hard frost at night above 4,000 m, and busy sites in July and August. From November to April it rains most afternoons, roads to remote sites wash out, and the Inca Trail closes for all of February.

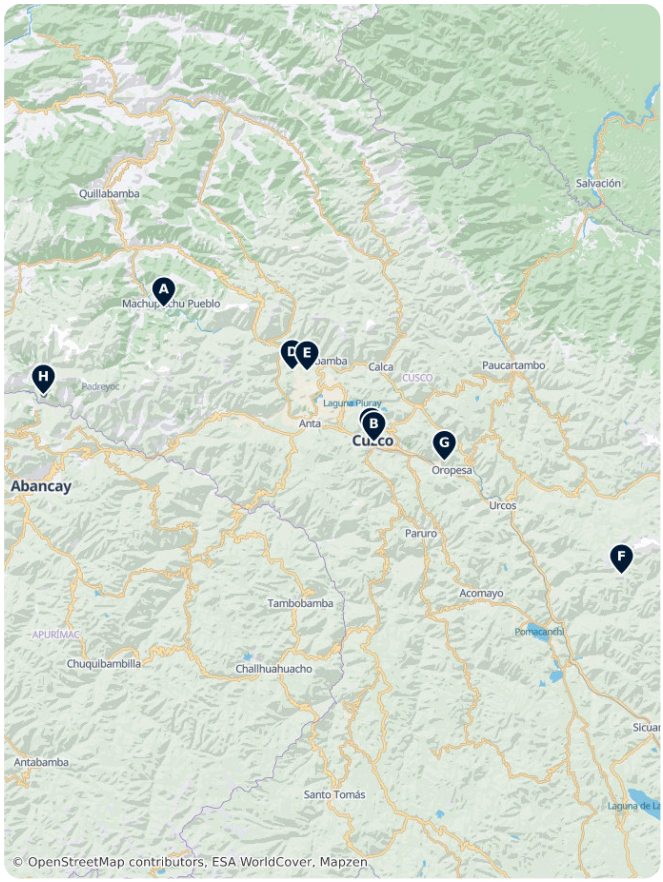
The date to plan around is **Inti Raymi** on 24 June in Cusco city, the largest festival in the Andes. The same month brings the Q'eswachaka bridge renewal in the south of the region. Four communities reweave a grass suspension bridge over the Apurímac gorge in three days.

| MONTH | CONDITIONS | DAY °C avg / max | NIGHT °C avg / min | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| January | Fair<br>Fair for sightseeing | 19° / 22°<br>15–20° | 9° / 7° | 22 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds · UV 11 (Extreme) |
| February | Fair<br>Fair for sightseeing | 18° / 21°<br>14–20° | 9° / 7° | 22 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds · UV 11 (Extreme) |
| March | Fair<br>Fair for sightseeing | 18° / 21°<br>14–20° | 9° / 7° | 20 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds · UV 10 (Very high) |
| April | Great<br>Great for sightseeing | 19° / 21°<br>14–21° | 9° / 7° | Dry air · Calm winds · UV 10 (Very high) |
| May | Great<br>Great for sightseeing | 19° / 22°<br>14–21° | 9° / 6° | Dry air · Calm winds · UV 9 (Very high) |
| June | Great<br>Great for hiking | 19° / 22°<br>15–21° | 8° / 5° | Dry air · Calm winds · UV 8 (Very high) |
| July | Great<br>Great for sightseeing | 20° / 23°<br>15–21° | 8° / 5° | 20 sunny days · Dry air · Calm winds · UV 9 (Very high) |
| August | Great<br>Great for sightseeing | 21° / 24°<br>16–22° | 8° / 5° | Dry air · Calm winds · UV 9 (Very high) |
| September | Great<br>Great for sightseeing | 21° / 24°<br>16–23° | 9° / 7° | Dry air · Calm winds · UV 10 (Very high) |
| October | Good<br>Good for sightseeing | 21° / 25°<br>17–23° | 9° / 7° | 12 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds · UV 11 (Extreme) |
| November | Good<br>Good for sightseeing | 21° / 25°<br>17–22° | 10° / 7° | 12 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds · UV 11 (Extreme) |
| December | Fair<br>Fair for sightseeing | 19° / 23°<br>15–21° | 9° / 7° | 21 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds · UV 11 (Extreme) |

Varies by region: the smaller figure under each day temperature is the range from the cooler to the warmer parts.

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

## Top sights




**A** Machu Picchu is the reason most people come. The 15th-century citadel sits on a ridge above the Urubamba gorge. Entry is by timed ticket on a fixed route, so book well ahead.

**B** Qurikancha in the regional capital was the empire's central temple, later built over by a Spanish convent. It is the clearest single illustration of what happened to Inca Cusco.

**C** Sacsayhuamán overlooks the capital from a ridge, its zigzag walls made of blocks weighing more than 100 tonnes.

**D** Moray is a set of deep circular terraces cut into a plateau near Maras. The temperature drops noticeably from the top ring to the bottom, and the site is widely read as an agricultural experiment.

**E** Salinas of Maras are thousands of small salt pans stepped down a ravine. They have been worked by local families since before the Spanish arrived, and still are.

**F** Rainbow Mountain draws long day trips south of the capital for its banded mineral colours. The walk tops out above 5,000 m and is genuinely demanding.

**G** Tipón is a terraced site southeast of the capital built around a working Inca water system, with channels and fountains still running.

**H** Choquequirao is a large Inca complex reached only by a two-day walk in and out. It sees a tiny fraction of Machu Picchu's visitors.

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## What to experience

Things the region is actually known for doing, spread across the year.

- Walk the Inca Trail or the Salkantay route to Machu Picchu. The classic trail is permit-controlled and sells out months ahead; Salkantay needs no permit.
- Watch the Q'eswachaka rope bridge being rebuilt each June. Local communities cut, twist and re-lay a grass suspension bridge across the Apurímac gorge in three days.
- Go to the Virgen del Carmen festival in Paucartambo in mid-July. It is three days of masked dancing, and far less staged than the events in the capital.
- Buy directly from weavers in the highland villages above the valley, where communities work with natural dyes and sell without a middleman.
- Ride the southern rail line towards Puno for the scenery, crossing the La Raya pass at over 4,300 m.

## Where to explore

The region's destinations sit mostly along one corridor northwest of the capital.

- City of Cuzco is the historic core of the regional capital and the base almost everyone uses.
- Sacred Valley is the string of towns and ruins along the Urubamba river, lower and warmer than the capital.
- Pisac sits at the valley's southern end, known for its craft market and the terraced ruins above it.
- Urubamba is the valley's market town and a convenient midpoint.
- Ollantaytambo keeps its Inca street plan and is the railhead for the train onward.
- Machupicchu Historical Sanctuary is the protected area around the citadel, covering cloud forest and several other Inca sites.

## Getting there

- **By air**: Alejandro Velasco Astete International Airport in the regional capital is the only airport with scheduled passenger service. Nearly everyone connects through Lima; the flight takes about 1 h 20 min.
- **By train**: There is no rail link to the coast. Rail in the region runs from Poroy and Ollantaytambo to Machu Picchu, and on a separate scenic line south to Puno.
- **By bus**: Long-distance coaches reach the capital from Lima in 21 to 24 h, Arequipa in about 10 h and Puno in about 7 h. Puno is the usual overland link from Lake Titicaca and Bolivia.

Official country tourism information is at PROMPERÚ.

## Getting around

- **Colectivos and minibuses**: Shared vans link the capital with the valley towns constantly through the day. Pay the fare in cash on board. They are the cheapest way to move between towns and need no booking.
- **Train**: The usual way to reach Machu Picchu is the train to Aguas Calientes, then a shuttle bus up to the entrance. Book seats well ahead in high season. The budget alternative is a bus to Hidroeléctrica followed by a flat two to three hour walk along the railway.
- **Organised transport**: Many outlying sites, such as the salt pans and the southern colour mountains, are far easier on a day tour than by public transport.
- **Car**: Useful for reaching sites on your own schedule, though see the driving notes below.

## Driving

- **Is a car worth it?**: Reasonable for the valley and the sites around the capital, where it saves waiting for colectivos. Not worth it for Machu Picchu, which no road reaches.
- **Conditions**: Main valley roads are paved and in fair shape. Routes to remote sites are narrow, unpaved and steep, with weather closures in the wet season. Distances take far longer than a map suggests.
- **Restrictions**: The historic centre of the capital has streets closed to private traffic, and parking there is scarce. Fuel stations are sparse outside the main corridor, so fill up before long stretches.

# Food & drink

This is highland cooking, not the coastal seafood Peru is better known for. Cuy is roast guinea pig, served whole on festival days. Alpaca is lean and now common on menus. Chiriuchu is a cold assembly of many meats, eaten at Corpus Christi. Maras salt and native potato varieties turn up across the region. Chicha de jora, a fermented maize drink, is still made in valley villages.

For eating, the capital has the range and the valley towns have the atmosphere. Mercado de Pisac is worth timing a visit around for its food stalls as much as its crafts. In smaller villages, look for a picantería, the traditional lunch house, rather than anything aimed at visitors.

## 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

The region is generally safe, and the main risks are environmental rather than criminal. Petty theft happens in crowded markets and on night buses; keep bags close and use registered taxis after dark in the capital.

Altitude is the real concern and it varies a lot across the region. The capital sits near 3,400 m, valley towns are several hundred metres lower and easier, and trekking passes exceed 4,800 m. Acclimatise for two days before any high walk, and consider sleeping in the valley first, which is a genuinely gentler start. Mountain roads are the other hazard: night travel on unpaved routes is best avoided.

## History

The region was the core of Tawantinsuyu, the empire the Inca ran from Cusco between roughly 1438 and 1533. Under *Pachacuti* it expanded fast. The estates and ceremonial sites built then are what visitors see today. Machu Picchu was a royal retreat, Moray an agricultural site, and Sacsayhuamán the stronghold above the capital.

Spanish control after 1533 was not immediate. A rebel Inca state held out in the Vilcabamba region to the northwest until 1572, and Choquequirao belongs to that late period of retreat.

Colonial rule reshaped the countryside around estates and textile workshops. In 1780 *Túpac Amaru II* led a large rebellion that began at Tinta in the south of the region. It was put down within two years, but it remains the founding reference point for Andean resistance.

## Country facts

Quick practical facts for Peru at a glance:

CURRENCY
**PEN**

EMERGENCY
**911**

ELECTRICITY



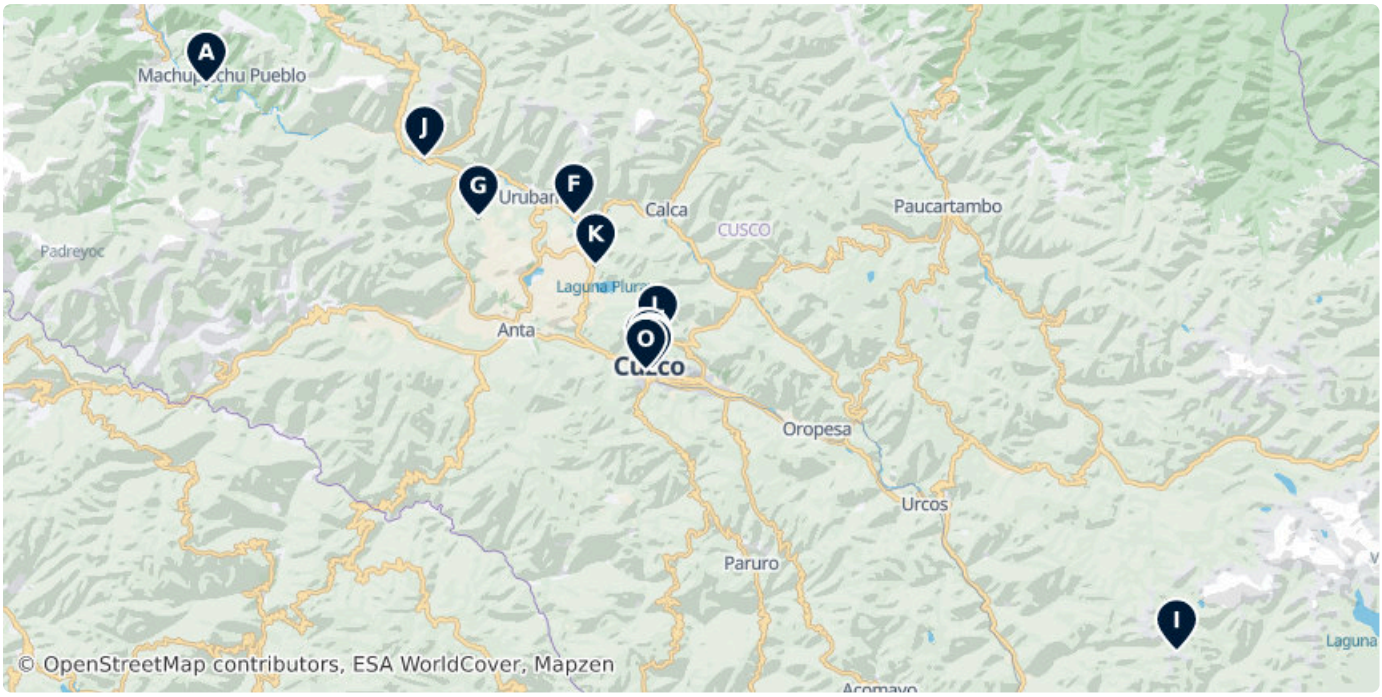
Type A / Type B / Type C
220 V · 60 Hz

LANGUAGES
Aymara, Spanish, Quechua

TAP WATER
**Not safe to drink**

# Cusco: Absolute Must-Sees

The ancient Inca capital and its surroundings: Machu Picchu, the colonial core of Cusco, and the great sites of the Sacred Valley.






## A Machu Picchu

Perched on a 2,430-meter mountain ridge in the Eastern Cordillera, this 15th-century Inca citadel is a renowned UNESCO World Heritage archaeological site.

Peru (-13.16401, -72.54526)



## B Saqsaywaman

This 15th-century Inca citadel and ceremonial center features massive zigzagging dry stone walls, combining a defensive fortress and religious complex.

Cusco, PE (-13.50906, -71.98284)

Mo–Su 07:00–17:30



## C Qoricancha Site Museum

Historically the most important temple in the Inca Empire, this sanctuary dedicated to the sun now houses a museum and archaeological ruins.

Santo Domingo, 08000 (-13.52026, -71.97514)

| | |
|---|---|
| Mo–Sa | 08:00–17:00 |
| Su | 14:00–16:00 |

+51 84 249176



## D Plaza de Armas

Serving as the administrative and religious heart of the Inca Empire, this historic central square is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site surrounded by colonial monuments.

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



## E Cusco Cathedral

The city's main Catholic church and temple showcases notable Plateresque architecture right off the central plaza.

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

| | |
|---|---|
| Mo–Su | 10:00–18:00 |



## F Sacred Valley of the Incas

Also known as the Urubamba Valley, this Andean region north of Cusco holds vital archaeological remnants of the Inca civilization.

(Unnamed Road), Peru (-13.32816, -72.07443)



## G Moray Ruins

Located on a high plateau at about 3,500 meters, this Inca archaeological site features distinctive ancient ruins.

Maras 08655, Peru (-13.33016, -72.19690)



## H Twelve-angled-stone

Originally part of an Inca palace wall, this famous archaeological artifact exemplifies the precision of Inca stone masonry.

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

Mo–Su Open 24/7

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



## I Rainbow Mountain

Rising over 5,000 meters above sea level near a major glacier, this high-altitude mountain is celebrated for its multi-colored sedimentary rock layers and mineral stripes.

Peru (-13.87023, -71.30295)

## J Ollantaytambo

Balconpata, Ollantaytambo 08676, Peru (-13.25655, -72.26580)



## K Chinchero

This high-altitude Andean village features ancient Inca ruins and panoramic views overlooking the Sacred Valley.

Peru (-13.39013, -72.04693)



## L Tambomachay

An archaeological site associated with the Inca Empire near Cusco, known for its historic stone aqueducts.

Peru (-13.47905, -71.96740)



## M White Christ

Made of white stone, this statue of Jesus Christ stands with extended arms and is illuminated at night.

(Unnamed Road), Peru (-13.50959, -71.97809)



## N Church of the Society of Jesus

A historic Jesuit church and Catholic place of worship located in the center of the ancient Inca capital.

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

Mo–Su 09:00–17:00



## San Pedro Market

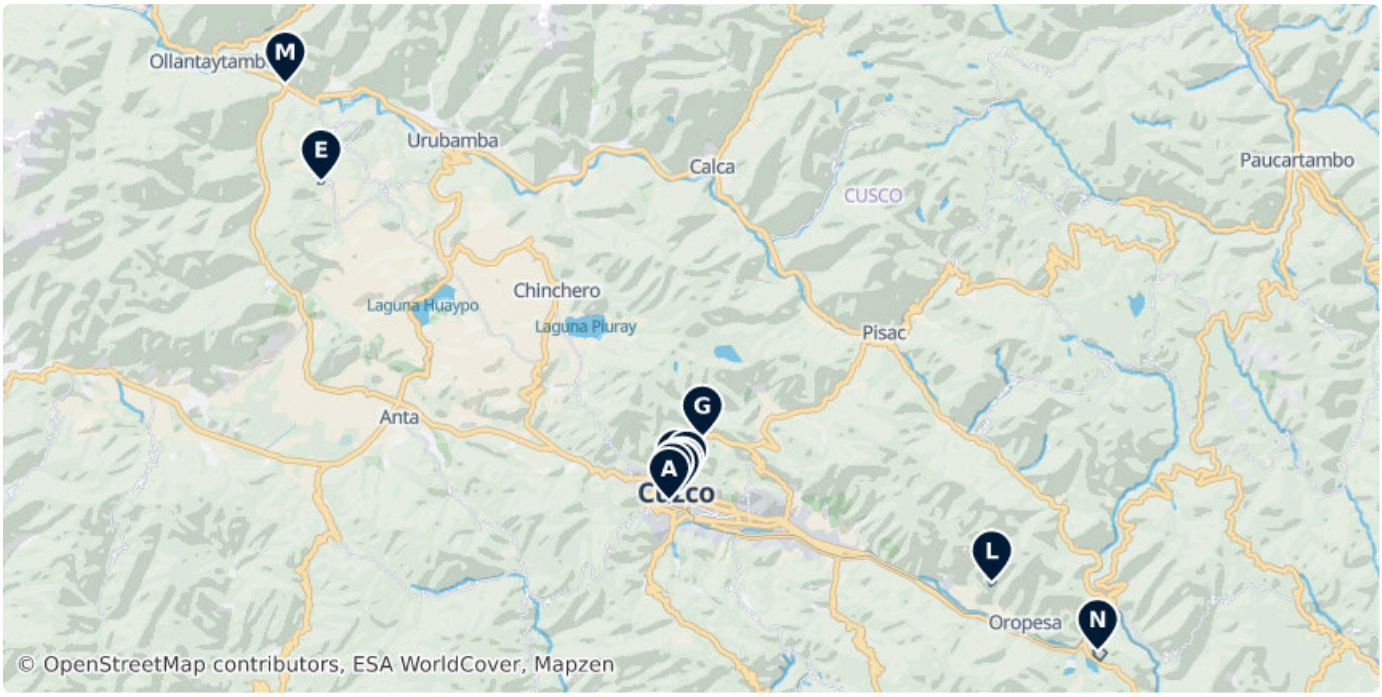
A bustling central market offering fresh fruits, vegetables, and local souvenirs.

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

| | |
|---|---|
| Mo–Su | 06:00–18:00 |

# Editor's Choice Cusco

Cusco blends Inca engineering with Spanish colonial architecture across its historic center and the surrounding Sacred Valley. This collection features major archaeological sites like the circular terraces of Moray, the water fountains of Tipón, and the Wari ruins of Pikillacta. Urban highlights include the massive Twelve-angled-stone, the artisan workshops of San Blas, and the produce stalls of San Pedro Market. Significant landmarks like the Cusco Cathedral and the White Christ statue overlook the city, while specialized museums explore the history of chocolate, pisco, and the Inca civilization.






## A 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



## B 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



## 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 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)



## E Moray Ruins

Moray is an archaeological site in Peru approximately 50 kilometres northwest of Cuzco on a high plateau at about 3,500 metres and just...

Maras 08655, Peru (-13.33016, -72.19690)



## F Q'enqo Chico Archaeological Site

Q'enqo, Qenko, Kenko, or Quenco is an archaeological site in the Sacred Valley of Peru located in the Cusco Region, Cusco Province, Cusco...

Mollococha, Cuzco 00800, Peru (-13.51035, -71.97175)



## G Red Fortress

Puka Pukara is a site of military ruins in Peru situated in the Cusco Region, Cusco Province, Cusco District, near Cusco.

Peru (-13.48335, -71.96216)



## H 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



## I White Christ

The statue of Jesus Christ with extended arms is made of white stone. It is illuminated in the dark.

(Unnamed Road), Peru (-13.50959, -71.97809)

## J ChocoMuseum

In this museum, you will get to known the history of chocolate and the process of its production. You can also taste the chocolate!

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

Mo–Su 08:00–20:30

chocomuseo.com/cusco/, +51 84 244765

## K Museo del Pisco

Bar and lounge specializing in Peru's national grape brandy. Features pisco tastings, cocktail workshops, and live music within a restored colonial-style setting.

(-13.51693, -71.97622)

Mo–Su 11:00–01:00

museodelpisco.org, +51 84 262709



## L Tipón

Tipón is a sprawling early fifteenth-century Inca archaeological site that is situated between 3,250 metres and 3,960 metres above sea...

Peru (-13.57014, -71.78386)

## M Naturavive

Adventure center known for the Skylodge, transparent luxury capsules suspended 400 meters above the Sacred Valley. Access to the site includes a via ferrata climb and zipline descent.

(Unnamed Road), Peru (-13.27161, -72.21901)

naturavive.com



## N Pikillacta

Pikillaqta is a large Wari culture archaeological site 20 kilometres east of Cusco in the Quispicanchi Province.

Peru (-13.61125, -71.71873)

# Peru's Hidden Gems

Beyond the famous trails, the Cusco region contains the salt evaporation ponds of Maras and the last remaining Inca grass rope bridge at Q'eswachaka, which is hand-woven annually. Explore the Temple of Wiracocha at Raqch'i and the remote ruins of Choquequirao, often called the sister city of Machu Picchu. The list includes Huchuy Cusco, a high-altitude site overlooking the Sacred Valley, and the artisanal market of Pisac, known for traditional Andean textiles and ceramics.






## A Pisac Market

In this beautiful Andean village, there is a small handicraft market in which you can buy souvenirs and typical Peruvian products.

San Francisco, Písac 08106, Peru (-13.42180, -71.84897)

Mo–Su 07:00–17:00

andeantravelweb.com/peru/destinations/cusco/pisac.html



## B Salinas of Maras

Maras is a town in the Sacred Valley of the Incas, 40 kilometers north of Cusco, in the Cusco Region of Peru.

Jirón Convencion, Peru (-13.33278, -72.15639)



## C Inca Rope Bridge

The last remaining Inca rope bridge, hand-woven annually from grass fibers by local Quechua communities. Spanning the Apurímac River, this UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage site follows ancient engineering techniques preserved for over five centuries.

(Unnamed Road), Peru (-14.38133, -71.48402)



## D Raqch'i

Raqch'i is an Inca archaeological site in Peru located in the Cusco Region, Canchis Province, San Pedro District, near the populated place...

Peru (-14.17496, -71.36930)



## E Choquequirao

Choquequirao is an Incan site in southern Peru, similar in structure and architecture to Machu Picchu.

Peru (-13.39350, -72.86967)



## F Huchuy Cusco

Huchuy Qosqo,, is an Incan archaeological site north of Cuzco, Peru. Its name is Quechua for "Little Cuzco." It lies at an elevation of 3...

Peru (-13.31337, -71.96491)



## Inka Bridge

The Inca Bridge or Inka Bridge refers to one of two places related to access to Machu Picchu, in Peru.

Peru (-13.17078, -72.54383)

## DATA SOURCES

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