

Inca Roots

The country of Peru has a wide arrange of possible travel destinations. Such activities include going to the beach on the west side of the country, the Amazon in the north and east, Lake Titicaca in the southeast or the Andes in the east. There are large cities such as Lima but also several small towns to visit. Peru, specifically Cuzco, was the heart of the Inca Empire and that history is still important in the lives of many Peruvians. While remnants of the Inca life continue such as Inca Cola, modern Peru allows for a harsh but rewarding trip.

The capital of Peru is Lima and has nearly eight million inhabitants. The city is smoggy and a bit congested but the central city is easy to navigate. A police officer in an elevated podium of major intersections tries to keep traffic in order. There are several museums in the city and a nice pedestrian walkway that leads to the main square, Plaza Mayor. The two main churches are the Cathedral and San Francisco church, both worth a visit. Several beaches are close by and there are many after dark entertainment opportunities associated with a big city. Lima is also the central hub for domestic flights as numerous



flights go to Cuzco daily as well as to the Peruvian jungle.

Arequipa is Peru's second biggest city and more attractive than the capital, as it surrounded by mountains, the most famous being El Misti. Though it is smaller than Lima it seems like Arequipa has more taxis. Going to a museum is one way to get away from the blowing taxi horns. The most interesting is the Museum of Andean Sanctuaries which includes Juanita, a petrified mummy from Inca times. The Incas sacrificed her but there was a debate on how she died. Some thought she was left at a mountaintop and died because of the elements, but the gash above her right eye indicates she died from a blow to the head. After death, she fell into a crevice and was covered by snow. This allowed for a well-preserved corpse that remains realistic. She appears to be Asian, but studies indicate she was a local.



There are many cobblestone tracks and an attractive city central park in Arequipa. Close to the center is an old monastery, Santa Catalina, built in 1580. There are several nice frescos on the walls, which are made of many soft colors. Wandering the "streets" in the monastery, there are many nooks and crannies there to explore. An interesting part of the monastery is where the laundry was done. There would be a stream of water running downhill. Located near the stream, are about 10 areas that looked like Lilly pads, where the clothes would be placed. Then a plug would be opened to allow water into the pad, the plug would be re-fastened and then wash would be done. When the clothes

were cleaned, the plug would come out thus releasing the dirty water.

The main day trip from Arequipa is Colca Canyon, the deepest canyon in the world. Completing the trip in one day is difficult, as it requires a departure of 2:30 in the morning and also a difficult ascent into the Andes. The tour starts at the canyon area around sunrise where there is a stop for breakfast and the chance to take a picture with a falcon, which climbs on people's heads. Then, to the canyon after passing some tombs and some small towns. The canyon is scenic and includes small cactuses and shrubs as well as some vast drop-offs. Visitors hope to see a condor soaring in the depths of the canyon.



A popular trip from both Arequipa and Cuzco is the city of Puno. The city itself is more of a crossroads and does not have a lot to see. Most people make arrangements to nearby Lake Titicaca from the city of Puno. There are many islands to visit in the lake but the most popular are the floating islands and Isla del Sol.

The floating islands are literally floating as they are made by reeds. The tour also includes a discussion on how they are made and history of the inhabitants and their culture. The islands are anchored in by large pieces of wood. So, if the people on the island don't like their neighbors they can move. Indeed, the residents of these islands moved to this lake to escape warring factions in Bolivia and Peru. These people were not warlike so they left and have lived peacefully on the islands ever since. They rely on fishing for food. Unfortunately, the introduction of trout is killing off the native fish.

Visitors sink slightly after departing the boat and stepping onto the actual islands. It's a bit of an odd feeling, like the first night's sleep on a waterbed. Most islands house about 100 people and all are designed about the same. Some of them do have small schools for the children and all are connected by boats, either motorized or the old reed boats. All rely heavily on tourism and attempt to sell a variety of merchandise to tourists.

Isla del Sol, still considered part of Lake Titicaca, is also a popular trip but usually trips originate from Copacabana, Bolivia. Copacabana is a more inviting place to stay than Puno and it is cheaper on the Bolivian side. A large Cathedral dominates the city. Also, the eastern part of the city is elevated so find a good hill to watch the sun set over Lake Titicaca.

The boat trip to Isla del Sol also offers good views before arrival on the island. Supposedly, this is where the "Fountain of Youth" is located. However, access to the fountain is via steep steps. There are places to stay on the island, but all require a trek up these steps, which is difficult even without luggage. The actual fountain is nondescript but it is supposedly the long sought out Fountain of Youth. There are several terraces around the fountain to walk on and look at the lake and the island. The locals also ask tourists to take a picture with a llama for a couple Bolivianos.

The Fountain of Youth is a great place to get reinvigorated. Indeed, the rest of Lake Titicaca as well as Peru are invigorating experiences because of all the possibilities. Though the trip can be physically demanded, it is worthwhile.

