



Five Affordable Destinations: South America

PERU

Peru's highland city of Cusco was the center of the Incan Empire. The well-preserved remnants of this once-great civilization sit amid a diversity of landscapes, from lowland jungle to high mountains, from cloud forest to sandy beaches. The Spanish colonists may have made their mark, but the majority of the population is of indigenous descent, with a variety of distinct customs, languages and even clothing.

What To See and Do:

Pound the cobblestone in Cusco and tour the Sacred Valley – a collection of Incan monuments and outposts strategically located near the ancient capital. Cusco is also the starting point for the Inca Trail: a two- or four-day hike through cloud forest highlands that culminates at the Sun Gate overlooking Machu Picchu, the jewel in the Incan crown.

To the Southeast over the high Andes lies Puno, on the Bolivian border and the shore of Lake Titicaca, the highest navigable lake in the world and the reputed birthplace of the Sun God. To the Southwest lie desert and the surf and sand dune hangouts of Peru's southern beaches. And to the Northeast lies the Amazon, the jungle and Iquitos, one of the largest cities not connected to the outside world via road.

Getting there:

Regular non-refundable flights from the Northeastern United States to Lima start between \$500 and \$600 on Peru's LAN Airlines or some U.S. carriers, but LAN often runs advertised specials during low periods.

Getting around:

Lonely Planet lists plenty of hostel bed options for \$8-\$10 per night, or double rooms in the \$10 to \$30 range. There are a limited number of train lines, but long-distance buses cover the entire country for about \$1.50 per mile, and local village-to-village transport is provided by shared minivans, called *colectivos*, which cost even less. Restaurants offer set full meal options, called *menús*, for a few dollars.