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# Visiting Peru

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## Introduction

Peru, a country of staggering geographical diversity and profound historical depth, beckons travelers with a unique blend of ancient wonders, vibrant cultures, breathtaking landscapes, and world-renowned cuisine. From the arid coastal plains and the soaring peaks of the Andes to the dense humidity of the Amazon rainforest, Peru offers an unparalleled spectrum of experiences. Its history stretches back millennia, most famously embodied by the Inca Empire, whose legacy endures in magnificent ruins like Machu Picchu and the living traditions of Quechua and Aymara communities.

This guide is designed to provide prospective visitors with comprehensive information to plan a safe, enjoyable, and enriching journey through this captivating South American nation. Whether you dream of trekking ancient trails, exploring colonial cities, spotting exotic wildlife, or indulging in culinary delights, Peru promises an unforgettable adventure.

Visitors to Peru can expect an immersion into a land where historical legacy and contemporary culture intersect. The ancient cities of the Incas, the mysterious Nazca Lines, and the colonial architecture tell stories from different epochs, each layer bringing a new understanding of Peru's heritage. Yet, Peru is not a land frozen in time. Its pulsating cities brim with life, showcasing a vibrant arts scene, bustling markets, and a culinary landscape that has earned global renown.

Furthermore, Peru is a place of striking natural beauty, with its landscapes varying dramatically from one region to another. In the Andes, the snow-capped peaks and rugged trails beckon adventurers, while the lush expanses of the Amazon offer a different kind of exploration—one through rivers and wildlife-rich jungles. Coastal Peru offers both leisure opportunities and insights into life shaped by the Pacific Ocean.

Travelers are encouraged to approach their journey with an openness to learning and appreciation for the rich cultural tapestries they will encounter. The diverse languages, customs, and traditions offer a chance for meaningful interactions. By treading lightly and respectfully, tourists can ensure that they contribute positively to the communities and environments they visit.

In conclusion, Peru offers travelers an adventure that is as invigorating as it is enlightening. Whether your interest lies in history, nature, or culture, this guide aims to equip you with the knowledge needed to explore Peru fully and responsibly. Prepare for an experience that will stimulate your senses, challenge your perspectives, and leave you with memories to last a lifetime. ¡Buen viaje!

## Chapter One: Getting to Peru

Embarking on a journey to Peru is often the culmination of dreaming about misty mountain citadels, ancient desert lines, or the vibrant pulse of the Amazon. But before you can stand awestruck before Machu Picchu or navigate the bustling streets of Lima, the practical matter of actually reaching this South American jewel needs addressing. Peru's relative location means that for many visitors, particularly those coming from outside the continent, the journey itself is a significant part of the adventure. Understanding your options for arrival is the first step in transforming those dreams into a well-planned reality.

The vast majority of international travelers find themselves descending from the clouds into Peru, making air travel the most common and often most practical method of arrival. The country's primary aerial gateway, handling the lion's share of international flights, is Jorge Chávez International Airport, conveniently located not quite *in* Lima, but in the adjacent port city of Callao. Its airport code, LIM, will become very familiar as you research flights. Think of LIM as the grand central station for Peruvian air travel; nearly all roads, or rather flight paths, lead here first. This bustling hub connects Peru to major cities across North and South America, Europe, and beyond, served by a wide array of international carriers.

Landing at Jorge Chávez can feel a bit overwhelming at first, especially after a long flight. It's a large, busy airport, constantly expanding to meet growing demand. Once you disembark, you'll navigate the usual airport procedures: immigration control, where officials will check your passport and determine your permitted length of stay (more on visa specifics in Chapter Two), followed by baggage claim, and finally, customs. While Peru is generally efficient, queues can form, particularly during peak arrival times, so a little patience goes a long way. Remember to have your passport handy and any required entry forms filled out, usually distributed during the flight.

Many major international airlines operate routes to Lima. From North America, carriers like LATAM, American Airlines, Delta, United, JetBlue, and Air Canada offer direct or connecting flights from various hubs. European travelers can find services from airlines such as Iberia, Air France, KLM, and LATAM, often flying direct from capitals like Madrid, Paris, or Amsterdam. Within Latin America, Lima is extremely well-connected, with frequent flights operated by LATAM, Avianca, Sky Airline, Copa Airlines, Aerolíneas Argentinas, and others linking it to virtually every major city on the continent. Booking well in advance is always advisable, particularly if your travel dates coincide with Peru's high season (roughly May to October) or major holidays like Christmas, New Year, Easter Week (*Semana Santa*), or Peruvian Independence Days (*Fiestas Patrias* at the end of July). Prices can fluctuate significantly, so using flight

comparison websites alongside checking airline sites directly is a good strategy to secure the best deal.

While Lima's Jorge Chávez (LIM) is the undisputed king of international arrivals, it's worth noting the existence of other airports designated as 'international', such as Alejandro Velasco Astete International Airport in Cusco (CUZ). However, don't let the 'international' tag mislead you if you're coming from afar. Cusco's international traffic consists almost exclusively of flights from nearby South American cities, primarily La Paz (Bolivia) and Santiago (Chile), and occasionally Bogotá (Colombia). For travelers originating in North America, Europe, Asia, or Oceania, flying directly into Cusco is usually not an option. The typical route involves flying into Lima first and then taking a domestic connection to Cusco. This is largely due to the operational challenges of Cusco's high-altitude location and runway limitations, which restrict the size of aircraft that can land there safely, especially fully laden for long-haul flights.

So, if your ultimate destination is the heartland of the Inca Empire, be prepared for that connecting flight from Lima. Many travelers book this domestic leg separately, while others find itineraries that include the connection. When booking, pay close attention to the layover time in Lima. Ensure you have sufficient time to clear immigration and customs, collect your luggage (you will almost certainly need to re-check it for the domestic flight), navigate between terminals or check-in areas if necessary, and clear security again. A minimum of three hours is often recommended, perhaps even more to allow for potential delays on your international arrival. Rushing through Lima's airport after a long flight isn't the most relaxing start to your Peruvian adventure.

The flight to Cusco itself is a relatively short hop, typically around 90 minutes, but it offers spectacular views as you soar over the Andes. Try to get a window seat for this leg! Other major Peruvian cities like Arequipa (AQP), Iquitos (IQT) in the Amazon, Trujillo (TRU), and Piura (PIU) also have airports served by domestic flights, nearly all operating as spokes from the Lima hub. Thus, regardless of your final destination within Peru, your entry point will almost certainly be Lima if arriving by air from outside South America.

Inside Jorge Chávez International Airport, you'll find the standard array of services expected of a major international hub. Currency exchange counters (*casas de cambio*) and ATMs are readily available, though rates inside the airport might be slightly less favorable than in the city. Numerous shops offer souvenirs, travel essentials, and local crafts, alongside duty-free outlets. Food options range from international fast-food chains to cafes and restaurants serving Peruvian staples - maybe your first chance to try an *empanada* or sip an *Inca Kola*. Free Wi-Fi is usually available, though sometimes limited in duration. Transport options from the airport into Lima city center (Miraflores, San Isidro, Barranco, or the Historic Center) include official airport taxis, shuttle services, and ride-sharing apps, though navigating this upon arrival requires some

awareness – a topic we'll touch upon more in Chapter Four: Getting Around Peru.

For the more intrepid traveler, particularly those already exploring neighboring countries, arriving in Peru overland presents a different kind of experience. This mode of transport, primarily via long-distance bus, allows for a slower, perhaps more immersive transition between countries, often through landscapes unseen from 30,000 feet. However, it demands more planning regarding border logistics, safety, and time commitment. Bus travel is the backbone of inter-city transport within Peru and much of South America, and several companies operate international routes connecting Peru with its five neighbors: Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil, Bolivia, and Chile.

The most frequently used land border crossing between Peru and Ecuador is the Aguas Verdes (Peru) / Huaquillas (Ecuador) point on the northern coast. This is a busy, somewhat chaotic crossing typical of many land borders in the region. Buses from Ecuadorian cities like Guayaquil or Cuenca terminate in Huaquillas, requiring passengers to cross the border on foot or by local transport (like moto-taxis) to Aguas Verdes, clear immigration procedures on both sides, and then catch an onward Peruvian bus from nearby Tumbes or continue directly if using a cross-border bus service. Companies like Cruz del Sur sometimes offer direct services that manage the border crossing for passengers, which can simplify the process. From Tumbes, you can connect to popular destinations like Máncora, Piura, Chiclayo, or Trujillo, or even embark on the long journey south towards Lima.

Traveling between Peru and Bolivia often involves crossing near the majestic Lake Titicaca. The primary crossing connects Yunguyo (Peru) with Copacabana (Bolivia), a popular route for travelers exploring the lake region from both sides. After enjoying Copacabana and perhaps Isla del Sol on the Bolivian side, you can catch a bus or shared taxi to the border. The process involves getting an exit stamp from Bolivian immigration, walking across the border (Kasani), and getting an entry stamp from Peruvian immigration in Yunguyo. From Yunguyo, transport is available to Puno, the main Peruvian city on Lake Titicaca. Another crossing exists further south at Desaguadero, which is busier with commercial traffic but also usable by tourists, connecting La Paz more directly with Puno or destinations further south in Peru like Arequipa or Tacna. High altitude is a factor here, so acclimatization is important.

The border with Chile in the far south offers perhaps the most straightforward and organized crossing, connecting Tacna (Peru) with Arica (Chile) via the Santa Rosa (Peru) and Chacalluta (Chile) control points, often referred to collectively as the Complejo Fronterizo (Border Complex). Frequent buses and *colectivos* (shared taxis) ply the route between Tacna and Arica. The immigration and customs procedures for both countries are usually handled within shared facilities at the border complex, making it relatively efficient. This crossing lies in the arid coastal desert region, a stark contrast to the Andean or Amazonian borders. Travelers often use this route when combining trips to southern Peru (Arequipa, Nazca) with northern Chile (San Pedro de

Atacama).

Entering Peru from Brazil overland involves traversing the Amazon basin via the Interoceanic Highway. The crossing point is Iñapari (Peru) / Assis Brasil (Brazil). This route has become more feasible with the highway's completion but remains less traveled by tourists compared to other borders. It connects the Brazilian state of Acre with the region of Madre de Dios in Peru, providing access to Puerto Maldonado, a gateway to the southern Peruvian Amazon reserves like Tambopata. This crossing requires specific planning due to the relative remoteness and distance from major tourist circuits in either country. Transport options might be less frequent than at other borders.

The border with Colombia is unique, situated deep within the Amazon rainforest in the tri-border area where Peru, Colombia, and Brazil meet. The main populated area involves Leticia (Colombia), Tabatinga (Brazil), and Santa Rosa de Yavari (Peru), located on an island opposite Leticia/Tabatinga on the Amazon River. There are no roads connecting this region to the rest of either Colombia or Peru. Travel between these towns is typically by boat. To enter Peru proper from here, travelers usually need to take a boat downriver from Santa Rosa or nearby locations towards Iquitos, a journey that can take several days by slow boat (*lancha*) or significantly less time by fast boat (*rapido*). Alternatively, one can fly from Leticia (which has an airport) to Bogotá and then internationally to Lima, or sometimes find flights between Leticia and Iquitos, though these can be infrequent. This border crossing is an adventure in itself, suited for those specifically exploring the deep Amazon.

Regardless of which land border you cross, the process generally involves similar steps. You must receive an exit stamp from the country you are leaving before proceeding to the immigration authorities of the country you are entering to receive an entry stamp. Ensure your passport meets the validity requirements (generally six months beyond your stay) and that you have any necessary visas sorted out beforehand (covered in Chapter Two). Customs checks may also be performed. Be prepared for potential bureaucracy and varying levels of efficiency. It's wise to change only a small amount of money at the border itself, as rates are rarely favorable, and be vigilant about your belongings in crowded border areas. Using reputable international bus companies often streamlines the process, as their staff may assist with the paperwork and procedures. Driving your own vehicle across borders involves additional complexities like temporary import permits and specific insurance requirements, requiring thorough research well in advance.

A less common, though possible, way to arrive in Peru is by sea. Several international cruise lines include Peru on their South American itineraries, typically docking at the Port of Callao, serving Lima, or occasionally at Salaverry, near Trujillo, providing access to northern archaeological sites. If you arrive via cruise ship, the disembarkation process, including immigration and customs, will generally be

coordinated by the cruise line itself. While a pleasant way to get a taste of coastal Peru, arriving by cruise ship usually means limited time for in-depth exploration compared to arriving by air or land as an independent traveler.

Once you've successfully cleared immigration and customs, whether at Lima's airport or a land border crossing, the next immediate step is figuring out your onward journey. From the airport, this means finding reliable transport into the city. From a border town, it might involve locating the bus terminal for your next destination or finding local accommodation for the night. Pre-booking your first night's accommodation, especially if arriving late, is highly recommended to ease the transition. Having some local currency (Soles) on hand for initial expenses like taxis or snacks is also crucial.

Choosing how to get to Peru largely depends on your point of origin, budget, available time, and travel style. Flying into Lima remains the most efficient and popular route for the majority of international visitors, offering a seamless connection to the country's extensive domestic travel network. Overland crossings offer a more grounded, adventurous entry, particularly appealing for those undertaking multi-country South American tours. Whichever path you choose, ensuring your travel documents are in order and booking major transport segments in advance will pave the way for a smoother arrival and allow you to focus quicker on the incredible experiences Peru holds in store.

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