

Peru: Travel by Train Not Only to Machu Picchu

Get acquainted with the multi-faceted Andes like never before while you sway along in one of the top mountain railways in Peru. Feel the magical thrill of climbing mountains in twists and turns as you pass verdant vineyards and arid, desolate areas to reach the second highest-altitude railway station of Galeta at 4781 meters above sea level. Presently the Qingzang-Tibet railway line holds the altitude record.



1. Trains to Machu Picchu

Machu Picchu is the famous ruined city of the Incas - this 15th century historical enigma sits atop the Urubamba Valley on a mountain ridge. Machu Picchu or the Old Peak is located in the Cusco region at 2430 meters above sea level. You can go back in history when you visit the cultural ruins of the classical Incas built with dry stone walls softly echoing from the past. This City of Incas was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983 and a public poll voted it as one of the New Seven Wonders of the World.

How to get there

You can hike up the Inca Trail if you feel fit for it; it is quite an extraordinary experience. However, to make it into an exhilarating journey hop onto the Peruvian mountain railways either from Cusco or from Ollantaytambo. The first train journey, the Expedition train, takes about four hours and opens up an unforgettable picturesque panorama while it safely chugs its way to the top.

You pass through the hushed Sacred Valley, chug your way alongside the Urubamba river roll down Cusco into the tropical jungles and then make the laborious climb to the final destination. All the while the train engine huffs and puffs you have all the time to gaze out the window and absorb the passing scenery and maybe take a sip of your hot coffee. Choose the class you wish to travel in and enjoy the services in the two dining wagons, or simply stay glued to the window in the observation wagon and go into an ethereal trance.

Contact

The Peru railways have quite a few trains going up and down from Cusco to Machu Picchu daily. All trains leave from the Poroy station in Cusco, descend to Andean foothills along the Urubamba River into the Sacred Valley before climbing up to Machu Picchu. More information at www.perurail.com.



Catch the train to Machu Picchu from Ollantaytambo after an overnight stay in this town. This train journey is for two hours and an early start gives you the option to explore the ruins longer. The train is a spectacular moving Cinerama with a 360 degree view of the fleeting geography – the plains, the rolling hills, and the top of the trees and suddenly you are among the trees and then the mystical climb into the clouds as you come to the famous stop.

Another train that goes to Machu Picchu is known as the Vistadome from Cusco. This is said to be a midrange train with nonalcoholic drinks and complimentary snacks served to passengers. The traveling experience is equally as good as it is in the other mountain railways of Peru.

Saving the best for the last is the Hirham Bingham said to be a train in a class of its own and the only deluxe train to Machu Picchu. This grand luxurious train has gourmet brunch on the way up and dinner on the return trip. The ticket charges include Machu Picchu entrance fees, guided tour fees, bus connections and entertainment costs.



Tips

Take the 7.20 train in the morning from Ollantaytambo, have a surreal experience breaking your fast on the train while you watch the river splash by and the trees swish close and as you complete your breakfast you may be reaching the clouds. Make a comfortable return trip on the 16.12 train in the afternoon.

If you wish to start a little later catch the train at 11.30, enjoy a leisurely lunch onboard before you get off at Machu Picchu at 13.06 hours. Spend the day exploring and wondering about the Incas and then relax on the 19.15 train back to Ollantaytambo. A beautiful day well spent is rounded off with dinner on board while you take a last look at the enchanting surroundings gliding past.

2. The awesome Lima to Huancayo Tren de Sierra

The track that was once the highest altitude train journey in the world is back; it plies twice in a month from Lima to Huancayo. The trip is so remarkable and the newly embellished train so classically modern that the whole experience will be etched in your mind for eternity. Within a few minutes of 'take-off' the train enters into the region of steep gorges. It passes through 69 tunnels, 59 bridges and ultimately goes through zigzags before the mouth gaping climb. The observation wagon is right at the front and so is the bar with blaring music and Pisco Sours; dancing in the open bar is allowed and can be great fun at an altitude of 5000 meters and still climbing!

Tips

The altitude needs slow adjusting, so drink plenty of water, do not be over active and gasp for oxygen; although there are nurses and oxygen bottles onboard, ready at hand. On the way back passengers are served lunch while the Tren de Sierra passes through several small villages and hills before reaching Huancayo.

3. The train to Puno (Lake Titicaca)

The Andean Explorer runs three times a week from Cusco to Lake Titicaca in Puno, traveling a stretch of 385 km in ten hours. This is another luxurious train with a dining car, an observation car and a bar-lounge to gaze out from. The interior décor is Pullman-style to give you the coziest atmosphere while you stare at the terrifyingly beautiful scenery outside.

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