

FAQs and comments

How do I handle the altitude?

Most of the activities offered by Incaventura occur at altitudes to which foreign visitors are unaccustomed. The unacclimatised may experience symptoms of altitude sickness, also known as soroche, such as shortness of breath, headaches, nausea, upset stomach and tiredness.

During the first couple of days at altitude, it is recommended that you avoid major physical exertion, and ideally eat lightly and avoid alcohol. Tea made from local herbs and leaves such as coca or muña are useful for alleviating the milder symptoms of altitude sickness, while menthol sweets can help a little with breathing. For those planning trekking and climbing expeditions, we recommend a gradual process of adaptation. A trek in the Colca Valley is good for getting used to exercise at moderate altitudes (2,000-3,500 metres) and should be undertaken before any attempt at mountain climbing. Likewise, an ascent of Misti or Mismi is recommended before tackling any of the higher peaks.

Some people find that acetazolamide (Diamox) pills are useful as a prophylactic (they accelerate the body's acclimatisation to altitude) or as treatment for mild altitude sickness. Be aware that these have significant diuretic effects, and make sure you consult a travel medicine specialist if you are considering using them. If you have a pre-existing medical condition that may be affected by altitude, you should consult with your physician or a travel medicine specialist before coming.

At the very high altitudes reached during mountain climbs, there is a risk of more severe altitude sickness, for which the only treatment is immediate descent. Our mountain guides are trained to notice the symptoms of altitude sickness and to take appropriate action.

Is it dangerous ?

In the 1980s and 1990s, Peru saw a downturn in tourism and was perceived as insecure due to political instability. Those times have passed now, and Peru is considered a generally safe destination. As in most of Latin America, petty theft is common in the larger cities, but violent crime against tourists is rare.

When travelling in Peru, you should exercise the same precautions as in any other setting:

Be careful when withdrawing money from an ATM. Use ATMs only during the daytime.

Don't wear ostentatious jewellery or carry around other valuables that are clearly visible.

Carry your money, camera and other valuables close to you (eg in jeans pockets or a money belt).

Make a copy of your passport and leave the original document in a secure place during excursions.

Exercise caution when walking around the larger towns and cities at night time. Make sure you know your route and try to stick to the main thoroughfares.

Use registered taxis only. Ask in your hotel, or any local business you are visiting, to order or recommend you a safe taxi.

Application of common sense will help you balance security with enjoyment of your trip. For example, you should be very careful carrying an expensive camera on city streets at night time, but in the countryside or small villages there is little risk. Where possible, valuables should be left in your place of accommodation: although security may not be 100% guaranteed, this is a lot safer than carrying them around.

What is the food like and can I drink the water ?

Peru offers one of the world's richest array of cuisines, with Andean, Spanish, Italian, African, Chinese and Japanese influences complementing a cornucopia of natural products and ingredients, from the exotic fruits of the Amazon, to the over 200 varieties of potatoes in the sierra, to the diverse fish of the Humboldt current. For more information on Peruvian cuisine, see the Peru Food page. Unfortunately, places oriented to tourists serve mainly pale imitations of international dishes, so visitors do not always experience the variety and richness of Peruvian food. Try asking local people (including Incaventura staff) which "typical Peruvian dishes" they recommend.

It is common for people visiting Peru to suffer at least a mild stomach upset at some stage. This does not mean you should be excessively cautious about which foods you eat: such experiences may simply be due to encountering different bacteria, and are known to occur even after eating in relatively expensive, tourist-oriented

establishments. To lower the risks, in your first week or so you may wish to avoid salads and uncooked vegetables, stick to peelable fruits such as mandarins and bananas, and only eat in cheaper establishments close to the time that meals are prepared (12:00-2:00 pm for almuerzo, the main meal of the day).

Visitors are often warned not to drink tap water, and many local people prefer to boil water or consume only bottled drinks. In fact, the tap water in cities and larger towns is usually safe to drink, and at least some Incaventura staff consider the tap water in places such as Cabanaconde, with its origins in mountain streams and springs, to be of excellent quality. However, if you prefer to stay on the safe side, bottled water and other drinks are readily available in most locations for between S/. 1-2.

How should I carry money ?

The unit of currency in Peru is the nuevo sol, written S/. Due to consistent macroeconomic management by successive governments, the sol has remained generally stable against foreign currencies, with the exchange rate varying between S/. 2.8-3.5 to the US dollar over the last five years.

All of Peru's cities and larger towns offer many places to change foreign currency and travellers cheques, and have ATMs that accept foreign debit and credit cards. How you carry money is up to you, although ideally you should have more than one source of cash. Larger shops, hotels and restaurants in the cities may accept US dollars, but you cannot rely on this. Smaller towns and villages generally do not have international ATMs or currency exchanges, so you must carry sufficient cash for the time spent in these places.

In Peru there always seems to be a chronic shortage of change, known as sencillo. S/. 100 and S/. 50 notes are difficult to break, and small businesses often have difficulty changing even S/. 10. After taking money out of an ATM, you should try to break large notes as soon as possible at a large business such as a supermarket. You should also try to maintain a supply of small-denomination coins, as you will need these to easily pay for public bathrooms, local taxis, toilet paper, meals in small restaurants, sweets, cigarettes, etc.

What vaccinations do I need ?

There are no requirements regarding vaccinations in order to enter Peru. However, it is recommended to be vaccinated against the following: tetanus, polio, typhus, diphtheria and hepatitis A. In some cases it is recommendable to be vaccinated against rabies as well. A valid yellow fever immunization is recommended for journeys into the Amazon jungle and is required when emigrating from yellow fever regions such as Bolivia. You should consult a travel medicine specialist to get the latest information on recommended vaccinations as well as advice on issues such as malaria prophylaxis (if travelling to the Amazon) and altitude-sickness pills.

What should I bring ?

To enjoy the adventures offered by Incaventura, it is important to have appropriate clothing and key items of equipment. In particular, if at all possible you should bring your own footwear, pack and sleeping bag. For detailed information on gear and clothing for trekking and climbing, see the Andes Gear page.

Some other items which would be useful to bring include:

Cosmetic and pharmaceutical products are often just as expensive or more so in Peru than in Europe or North America, and there is less variety. It is a good idea to bring supplies of products such as shampoo, moisturizer, insect repellent, sun cream, razor blades, etc.

Lithium batteries - these are much longer-lasting than other batteries and are generally not sold in Peru. They will help ensure your camera or headlamp do not stop working at a crucial moment.

Earplugs - Noise is a constant in Peru at all hours of the night and day -- from 3-day fiestas to lovers' quarrels at midnight to donkeys braying at 4am. Those from more tranquil environments may have difficulty sleeping or may be rudely awakened. Good quality wax or silicon earplugs are difficult to find in Peru, but will go a long way to helping you rest when you need to and remain refreshed for your adventures.

What is the weather like and when is the best time to travel with Incaventura?

Peru consists of three broad geographic regions: the coast, the sierra, and the jungle. The activities offered by Incaventura are mostly in the sierra, which experiences its dry season from May to September (April to November in Arequipa). This is a good time to travel but is also the tourist "high season" and in the peak months of July and

August some routes may be crowded, particularly in Cuzco.

The period from December to March is “summer” on the coast and the warmest and sunniest time of the year in that area. However, it also coincides with the rainy season in the sierra and there is a possibility that the weather may restrict some tourist activities, notably trekking. In general, the “shoulder” periods of April - May and September-October are good times to get the best of both worlds.

For detailed information on weather and climate, see the Peru Climate page.

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