



perfect PERU

Peru's prices keep rising, but it's still possible to explore this rewarding destination without breaking the bank. Our Regional Manager for Peru, Mark Garrett, discusses good value options for discovering this wonderful country.

Peru is one of my favourite countries. In it you find a bit of everything; amazingly friendly people, stunning countryside, beautiful colonial architecture, ancient history, great train journeys, Amazon rainforest and, of course, Machu Picchu. When I joined Audley four years ago we could offer two week, fully private, tailor-made itineraries for around £2,500 per person but since then much has changed. Soaring demand has sent hotel prices through the roof, the dollar has strengthened and airlines have slapped on fuel charges. The same trip now would cost £4,000 – or more.

Over the last few months I've been looking into ways of exploring Peru at 2004 prices. The quality of our services on the ground and the personalities of the guides are central to the experience, so I did not want to compromise this, but I did look at operational issues. During the peak season, from April to October, some excursions were being operated every day of the week. It therefore seemed viable to offer set departures on some of these routes. We have never been supporters of shared "seat in bus" excursions as you tend to lose

control over the group size and the experience provided, but I thought it worth exploring a concept of "Audley shared excursions" involving only our clients with strictly limited numbers. This didn't really help with exploring Machu Picchu which can be reached in so many different ways, but it does cut the cost of some of the most expensive places to visit, such as the Colca Canyon, the Sacred Valley of the Incas and Cuzco.

These "Audley shared excursions" will involve a maximum of eight people and will follow a similar programme to the private excursions that we will continue to operate: the only difference is that they will cost significantly less, and place less strain on the environment. You will still be able to opt to travel independently but you can, if you want to keep costs down, take "Audley shared excursions" for some of your travels, while still keeping your trip duration, international flights and accommodation completely flexible.

Peru has very limited hotel accommodation and soaring demand has meant the best hotels have raised their prices significantly although the credit crunch has resulted in an increase in the number



of deals available. We have been exploring alternatives and found a number of good value hotels that offer comfortable and characterful accommodation while keeping prices low. In Arequipa, for example, the Casa de Megar, the former residence of the city's bishop, has been turned into a hotel. It is a fine example of 18th century colonial architecture, with thick walls and internal courtyards, and though the guest rooms have few frills they do offer en-suite facilities. It was from this building that the bishop organised the first ascent of El Misti volcano, and you can still follow in his steps. At the head of the Colca Valley, the Pozo del Cielo is a good base for exploring the Colca Canyon. Set just outside the town of Chivay it has large guest bedrooms with private facilities, a good restaurant

and bar, and some interesting displays of local Andean life. In the Sacred Valley of the Incas the Casona Yucay is a converted colonial mansion with colourful courtyards and superb views of the surrounding mountain panorama: Simon Bolivar stayed here in 1835 and if it was good enough for him it's good enough for me. These three hotels are just some of carefully-selected accommodation options that can keep your travel plans within budget without sacrificing the country's charm and character.

Don't let the potential cost put you off a visit to Peru. It's a fantastic country and we can still offer high quality, tailor-made trips on a realistic budget.

Mark Garrett
South America Regional Manager



Machu Picchu



Countryside around Arequipa



Chinchero market, Sacred Valley of the Incas



Casona Yucay, Sacred Valley of the Incas



Pozo del Cielo, Colca Valley



Casa San Blas, Cuzco

Peru in style

There are also many top-end, boutique hotels in Peru these days and if price is no object, these offer a base of real luxury from which to venture.

Casitas del Colca, Colca Canyon

The fourth Orient Express property in the country, this provides 12 casitas with indoor and outdoor showers, a private terrace and heated plunge pool. The grounds include organic gardens, with their own beehives for honey.

Titilaka, Lake Titicaca

This is the first luxury hotel to open on the shores of Lake Titicaca, 45 minutes from Puno and in a remote, serene setting. Rather like the Explora hotels in Chile, this hotel runs its own excursions in the area, ensuring every day brings something new. Rooms are small but service is slick.

La Casona, Cuzco

Colonial furnishings and murals give this 11-bedroom hotel a classic feel, but underfloor heating and LCD TVs hidden in antique wardrobes introduce contemporary comforts. Alternatively, for a taste of 'Cuzco Cool' just around the corner the Carta Cartagena has a décor straight from a design magazine and facilities to match.

FACT FILE

A two week trip to Peru including Lima, Arequipa, the Colca Canyon, Lake Titicaca, Cuzco, the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu starts from £2,550 per person including return flights, all transfers, excursions (some private, some on a shared basis) and accommodation. For further details please contact our Peru specialists on 01993 838 620.



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