

DEPARTURES

— Travel —

7 Incredible Adventures in Cusco That Aren't Machu Picchu



Don't get us wrong, Machu Picchu should definitely be on your bucket list, but don't count out the other adventures that are just a short drive away.

Missed by the Spaniards in the 1500s and only rediscovered by Hiram Bingham in 1911, there's a reason [Machu Picchu is an icon](#) of mystery and the most famous archaeological site in South America. The once-forgotten, 15th-century Incan citadel built high in the Andes Mountains of Peru is mesmerizing, winning the adoration of archaeologists, explorers, and travelers so much so that [visitor rates have jumped](#) from 80,000 tourists in 1991 to over 1.5 million in 2018—that's an average of 4,300 visitors per day. Though this sprawling ancient site is remarkable (it's even recognized as one of the New Seven Wonders of the World), it can't withstand the world's mounting interest, leading UNESCO to contemplate placing the site on its "[List of World Heritage in Danger](#)" prior to the Peruvian government implementing stricter entry requirements, which now include hour-specific tickets.

Though Machu Picchu is certainly worthy of a visit, [Cusco](#) is home to myriad lesser-known and equally as impressive [natural and cultural wonders waiting to be explored](#). Whether you've already been to Machu Picchu or are planning your first trip to the Cusco region, be sure to add these experiences to your itinerary.



Learn Quechua Textile Traditions With Master Weavers in Chinchero

Set 45 minutes outside of Cusco in Chinchero is the Away Weaving Association of the [Centro de Tejedoras de Cusco](#), a women's group launched by indigenous Quechua weaver Nilda Callañaupa Alvarez to empower fellow artisans in 10 communities within the region. During a visit to the center, take weaving classes with a collective of over 50 women and girls in the central, open-air courtyard as you practice sustainable natural-dyeing techniques and ancestral Incan textile designs, such as *ñawi awapa*, the traditional ribbon of Chinchero that depicts an all-seeing eye of protection. After you've learned the cultural importance of the craft and the process of back-strap weaving while making your own piece, shop the center's array of ponchos, scarves, and blankets to directly support the weavers as they preserve ancient techniques and symbols.



Celebrate South America's Most Important Pilgrimage

On an expedition with [Mountain Lodges of Peru](#), travel three hours east of downtown Cusco to join thousands of locals in the Sinakara Valley for Qoyllur Rit'i, a celebration of the harmony of man with nature, the stars, and old mountain spirits known as *apus*. As the continent's most important pilgrimage, the three-day festival (also regarded as the Snow Star Festival) takes place during the sixth full moon of every year (around June) and includes a nearly 19-mile, round-trip journey that combines Catholic and ancient Incan beliefs—centuries-old ceremonies and rituals unfold, which honor the harvest season, the Pleiades star cluster, Catholic ideology, and the local glacier at the peak of Mount Sinakara, which is held to be sacred and regaled as a frozen star god.