

## Five Steps to Machu Picchu Guide

### Travel Younger.com



Machu Picchu is one of the most desired places to visit in the world, and is probably on more “bucket lists” than any other iconic location, but this very out of the way shrine is not the easiest place to get to. Since Kathleen and I recently did this trek, I wanted to offer you an easy step by step, by the numbers guide. Mind you, this is what WE did and is just one of the many ways to get there, so use what you can and do your own research.

One of the biggest problems is that there is a lot of MIS-information, a lot of OLD information (especially because the COVID-fueled rules have changed things), and a lot of DIS-information, ie, fraudulent and misleading marketing material designed to bring you to a web site which may or may not be legit or of value.

Most of you reading this are in some other country besides Peru, so...

#### **Step #1: Get to Lima**

Lima is the capital and largest city in the country and surprisingly easy to get to from the US and abroad. Many airlines have direct flights and as an example, a round trip flight from Miami, FL to Lima is less than \$300 round trip. SO first things first, figure out WHEN you wish to go and WHERE you wish to depart from.

#### **Step #2: Get to Cusco**

Cusco is the gateway to Machu Picchu and is an easy 90 minute flight from Lima, BUT is 11,000 feet higher elevation. DO NOT ignore the altitude warnings since it could upset a wonderful trip. Don't be paranoid, and if you know altitude is a problem, prepare for it. If you are not sure or have never been over 4000 or so feet (some warnings say 6,500, so use your best judgment), which is when symptoms start to show, then follow some easy steps which are provided by many other sites. The most important thing is to stay hydrated, avoid alcohol, and don't over exert yourself, and everyone who lives there or has gone there recommends cocoa TEA and cocoa leaves. They have been used by natives for years, so take that sage advice.

HOWEVER, if you'd like an adventure, we took the long way to Cusco over several days via [PeruHop](#), a comfy bus which usually leaves from Lima and offers a variety of options as to number of stops and days.

We met the bus at 0530 and a few hours later arrived in Paracas, a nice seaside town and the launch point for a cool bird sanctuary called Ballestas Islands. It takes about 45 minutes one way and is pretty nice.

After lunch we went to Huacachina, which is an amazing oasis in the middle of the desert with the largest sand dunes I have ever seen. A room there was very cheap and the next morning we visited a chocolate factory and winery. I have all this in more detail in my <http://www.TravelYounger.com> site, with lots of pictures.

We left there and on our way to Arequipa, the second largest city in Peru, we stopped at the Nazca Lines, which were fascinating, though smaller than I expected. Mind you, the BUS trip was overnight and took eight hours, so be prepared. Lots of history in Arequipa and it looks out over a beautiful volcano called Misti, about 19,000 feet high.

We stayed there two days and I did a day tour to Colco Canyon, again, more info on my blogs, but that was an early 0330 trip, and worth it. The next day we finally finished our long bus legs to Cusco, a 10 hour ride overnight.

### **Step #3: get to Aguas Caliente**

Since we did not want to be in Cusco any longer than necessary, we went immediately to Ollantaytambo, about one hour away via taxi, and about \$10 USD. BUT, you can take a direct train from Cusco to Machu Picchu (city of Aguas Caliente) for anywhere from \$54 to \$95 based on what is available mid-September and with one week notice. If you book longer or shorter in advance, and depending upon the time of year that price can vary.



You also have two different type trains to take: the Expedition, which is an ordinary train with no amenities, or the Vistadome, which has a nice wrap around glass viewing along the top ceiling line, plus we also were escorted to the last train car where we were entertained with live Peruvian music and dance. That truly made the ride more special and magical, but you can upgrade one way, and take the regular train on the return trip. Or vice versa.

Note: [www.PeruRail.com](http://www.PeruRail.com) and [www.IncaRail.com](http://www.IncaRail.com) seem to be the only direct sites to book your train, and it is very easy to get waylaid by lots of other sites offering tickets.

Note: getting tickets INTO MP is also fraught with false leads, so we were told that

<https://www.machupicchu.gob.pe/?lang=en> is the only official site, and run by the Minister of Culture, which seems to be the “real” one. We paid about \$38 per ticket but there seems to be

a lot of wiggle room in that price, too. There is another ticket option to Huayna Picchu, but that was closed when we visited.

Back to what we did: We took the train down to a lower elevation to “acclimate” and stayed in a very inexpensive AirBNB hostel for about \$15 per night. The town of Ollantaytambo is very small and can be walked end to end in about 10 minutes, but there is a great selection of eateries and the amazing Temple of the Sun which dwarfs the town and can be seen from every angle.

We stayed there one night, took the train early the next morning, then returned a few days later.

#### **Step #4: book a bus**

There is only one bus company that takes you up to the ruins, and the price is \$24 round trip and takes about 30 minutes. It can be harrowing if you are fearful of heights since it does wind up the mountain on a rough dirt road. Mind you, these drivers are very used to this road and may have been doing it for years, so control your fear and put your faith in them. The bus leaves hourly from an easy to find main street location, so you don’t need to get there too far in advance and your time slot is good for an hour, ie, your 2:00 pm slot allows you to enter as late as 2:59. NOTE: Our tour was at 2:00 and they didn’t let us in until the clock actually ticked over.

#### **Step #5: enjoy the magic**

Do you need a guide? Must you have a guide? Some sites say you do need and some say you MUST, but we went without and were just fine. They supposedly limit the number of daily/hourly visitors, and that number is volatile and seems to be changing.

Be prepared for crowds and roped off areas and even in this post-COVID time, the shrine was busy.

#### **Some FAQ:**

Q: How far in advance should you book?

A: Some say months, but we did it a few days before we left. It’s best to plan ahead, however, and I think 30-60 days should be enough until things are back to “normal.”

Q: Should I stay the night in Aguas Caliente?

A: I think yes. It’s a cute little town with a lot of charm and great restaurants. We booked a hotel for about \$18 USD.

Q: Should I hike up the hill to Machu Picchu instead of taking the bus?

A: It’s a 30 minute bus ride and would take a while to hike, but it would be beautiful.

I hope this helps, and if you have questions just ask. And have fun!