Below is the proposed itinerary for the trip. As is true on any adventure travel trip, plans for any specific day may be modified due to weather considerations, unforeseen circumstances, new opportunities, and group interests.

DAY 1

Arrive Cusco, afternoon tour including the ruins of Sacsayhuaman.

You'll be met at the airport upon arrival and taken to our hotel. Our first official meeting is at 1PM in the hotel lobby. After introductions and a trip orientation, we will spend the afternoon touring the main sights of Cusco, the ancient capital of the Incas. This three to four hour tour will help us start to acclimatize to the altitude (Cusco's altitude is 11,000 feet). Walking along ancient streets, we'll visit the most important places such as the Main Square and the cathedral that was built over the Inca palace of Suntur Wasi; Qorincancha, the temple of the sun, the most important temple for Inca Culture; and the ruins of Sacsayhuaman. We'll have dinner at a local restaurant tonight and undoubtedly go to bed early. Overnight Cusco. D

DAY 2

Visit archeological site of Chinchero, visit salt mines of Maras and terraces of Moray

We'll get an early morning start to our adventure in the Sacred Valley of the Incas, full of lush green fields and surrounded by striking mountain peaks. About an hour drive brings us to the archeological site of Chinchero, where colonial buildings rest atop Incan foundations, and the perfect place to start learning not only about Incan culture in the past but how it is integrated into today. After lunch we'll continue our learning in the afternoon with a visit to the natural Inca salt mines of Maras and the unique circular terraces of Moray, believed to be an Incan laboratory where they studied foreign plant species. We'll then continue to Lamay Lodge, our base for the next 2 nights, in time to settle in and relax. Today and every day, we'll have a late afternoon meeting with our guide for a daily briefing and then enjoy dinner together. B, L, D

DAY 3

Choice of visiting Pisaq town or hike over Challwacsas Pass, meet for Pachamanca lunch, visit Pisaq ruins

You have two great options this morning. For those most interested in the culture, you can spend the morning visiting Pisaq town, visit an Andean camelid exhibition, and meet some local community members. You'll have a little time to visit both the town and market before continuing on to Viacha. Those who choose a morning hike will drive to the community of Amaru and then hike for about 2.5-3 hours, climbing up to Challwacsas Pass at 14,200 ft where we can see the snow-capped giant peaks of Ausangate and Salkantay in the distance. We then descend to Viacha where the group will reconvene for a walk around town, learning about the agricultural activities of the community, particularly their artisanal potato growing practices.

Lunch today is a very traditional meal called a Pachamanca. The name comes from the Quechuan word "pacha", meaning earth, and "manka", which means pot, and involves baking meat and vegetables together under hot stones. Yum!! After lunch we'll have a guided tour of the archeological site of Pisaq, one of the larger ruins. It was believed to originally serve as a guard to the southern entrance of the Sacred Valley and is known for particularly impressive agricultural terraces and irrigation systems that date back to Inca times. We'll have the opportunity to thoroughly explore the complex free of crowds, with the sun setting behind the peaks, before returning to Lamay Lodge for the night. B, L, D

DAY 4

Visit archeological site of Ancasamarca, visit weavers or hike from Cuncani to Huacahuasi

Now that we have gotten a glimpse into this rich Andean tapestry, today offers the opportunity to go even deeper with an exploration into the heart of the Lares Valley. A scenic drive into the mountains along the celebrated "Inca Weaver's Trail" allows us to visit the unique and unspoiled archeological site of Ancasmapuca near the...
A scenic drive into the mountains along the celebrated “Inca Weaver’s Trail” allows us to visit the unique and uncrowded archaeological site of Ancasmarca near the hub-town of Lares. Ancasmarca is an old Inca site known for its variety of ancient food warehouses, dwellings, and farming areas. The site was strategically located to connect the higher part of the Sacred Valley and the cloud forest communities of the Lares.

We’ll have lunch in the town of Lares, after which we’ll again split into groups depending on what is calling us for the afternoon. After lunch you can choose between visiting the traditional and ancient weavers’ village of Choquecancha, with its imposing Inca ruins and colonial church, or hiking to the remote village of Huacahuasi. The hike starts in Cuncani and is a challenging 3 - 4 hour hike that goes over a 13,838 ft pass, passing farmhouses and fields. The local inhabitants, descendants of the Incas, have maintained their traditional way of life, growing an amazing variety of potatoes nearly year-round and using their llamas as transportation and alpacas as food and clothing.

Regardless of how you get to Huacahuasi, this is where we all spend the next 2 nights. Our lodge, which is run in joint venture with the local community and aims to protect the cultural heritage and the environment, provides an interesting insight into the evolving role of the original Andean people in both the culture and commerce of modern-day Cusco. We’ll all have some time to settle into our new lodge before gathering for our daily briefing and another delicious dinner.

DAY 5

Visit village of Huacahuasi and cooking class or hike from Quelquena, free afternoon

We again have options. Yes, the hardest part of this trip may be deciding what you want to do each day! The first option is to walk through the village of Huacahuasi and learn more about its heritage and daily activities, with a possible visit to a farmer’s home. Huacahuasi is a famous weavers’ village, where the men still wear traditional colorful ponchos and women’s attire includes wide handmade skirts and decorated hats. The expert weavers and farmers will share their stories, each depicted in artful textiles full of traditional Incan symbols and imagery. We’ll then continue on a gentle 1 - 2 hour walk to the Huacahuasi waterfalls, before returning to the lodge in late morning for a Peruvian cooking class, where your skills will be tested when you share the dishes with other group members for lunch. For those who prefer to hike, your option will depend on which hike was chosen yesterday. One option is to hike starting in Quelquena and is a 2-3 hour steadily ascending hike that goes over a 12,595 ft pass. Regardless of which you choose, you’ll have an unscheduled afternoon to relax, wander, or read. If you wander out from the lodge, you are immersed in scenes of community life, including women working on looms and children heading to school.

DAY 6

Visit community or hike over Ipsaycocha Pass

We’ll spend some time in the morning learning even more about the heritage and day-to-day activities of the Huacahuasi community. From there you can decide whether to spend more time exploring the Sacred Valley or hiking in the mountains. If you prefer to see more of the Sacred Valley, you will drive back for a visit to an ethnographic museum featuring the history of Peru’s rich civilizations of the past. Afterwards, you’ll have lunch in the Urubamba River countryside on your way to Ollantaytambo. Ollantaytambo is the oldest continuously inhabited community in South America and a fantastic place for meandering through charming maze-like streets.

Alternatively you can choose to embark on a spectacular hike through varied terrain and over a high pass to the adjacent valley. The wide and easy trail takes you uphill for 3.5-4 hours to the top of Ipsaycocha Pass (14,646 ft) where you enjoy stunning views of the surrounding mountains. As you hike, you may meet locals traveling from village to village with their goods and herds. You descend gently for about 40 minutes to Lake Ipsaycocha (14,081 ft), stop to enjoy lunch and relax for a bit, and then continue your descent for 2.5 hours to the village of Patacancha (12,624 ft) where high quality weavings are also produced. You’ll be met by our vehicles there and transported to Ollantaytambo in time to relax before we all meet for dinner.

DAY 7

Optional visit to Pinkuylluna, visit Ollantaytambo, train to Machu Picchu town

Want a quiet morning? Then enjoy a leisurely breakfast at the hotel. A gentle walk? Then leave about 7:30am to hike to Pinkuylluna, an Inca site with a magnificent view. Otherwise, you’ll have a full day to enjoy more of the Sacred Valley before a 45-minute train ride to Machu Picchu town. En route, you’ll see the ruins of Ollantaytambo and other archaeological sites before arriving in Aguas Calientes. Enjoy your last night in Peru in style at a hotel near Machu Picchu town.
Dine a quiet morning, then enjoy a leisurely breakfast at the hotel. Relax and then leave about 9.30 am to hike to Pinkuylluna, an Inca site with magnificent views of the town as well as of the main archaeological site across the valley. Something a little more strenuous to start your morning? Then leave an hour earlier and hike to even higher ruins at Pinkuylluna for even better views. Regardless of which option you choose, we’ll all meet for an hour tour of the archaeological site of Ollantaytambo. From its beginnings as the royal estate of Inca-Emperor Pachacutec to a stronghold against the Spanish conquistadors for Manco Inca Yupanqui, the temple at Ollantaytambo was regarded by the Incas as one of their most important ceremonial centers. As your guide leads you through a morning tour of the temple and explains its strategic architectural planning, you will also get a sense of its mystical history: a perfect introduction to the wonder of Machu Picchu. At noon we all embark on a scenic train ride along the famous Urubamba River to Aguas Calientes, the town below Machu Picchu, whose charm lies in a history that began as a small railway stop and evolved into a bustling town still bisected by the train tracks. Arriving in the afternoon, we’ll have time to relax in the beautiful setting of our hotel (InkaTerra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel) or go out exploring this colorful town before meeting for dinner.

DAY 8

Day at Machu Picchu including optional climb of Huayna Picchu or Machu Picchu Mountain

Today we have an entire day at Machu Picchu and the exact order in which we do things will depend on how early we start. Regardless of what time we start, we begin our day with a short uphill bus ride. We’ll start with a guided tour of 2 to 3 hours. Our guide will explain how the city is divided into three sections—the Sacred District, the Popular District, and District of the Priests and Nobility and help us understand the significance of the various temples and parks. Prepare to be awed by the imposing and skillful architecture of the Watchtower, the Temple of the Sun, and the royal Inca residences, among many others. The stonework has been painstakingly restored and the temples in particular are as amazing as you’ve heard. We’ll return to the Entrance for lunch (the only place you are allowed eat in the Sanctuary) and then have more time at the site to spend as you choose. You might take a moment to quietly sit and listen to the wind as you contemplate the history of Machu Picchu and its mysterious origins; walk to the Sun Gate; or hike up either to Huayna Picchu or Machu Picchu Mountain. Both provide dramatic views that stretch from the Urubamba River valley to the edge of the Amazon Jungle. The Sanctuary closes at 5 pm but you can leave earlier if you’re ready. We’ll be spending our final night back at InkaTerra Pueblo where we’ll share our final farewell dinner. B, L, D

DAY 9

Train back to Sacred Valley, return to airport or Cusco

This morning after breakfast we’ll return by train, enjoying one final ride through the beauty of the Sacred Valley and then by private vehicle to Cusco. If you’re returning today, we’ll have you back to the Cusco airport by 1 pm and you can plan for flights out after 3 pm. Alternatively you can be dropped off at your hotel if you want some more time in Cusco. If you’re staying on for more time in Peru, we’ll be glad to put you in touch with people who can help you plan the rest of your time. Peru is a fascinating place and a trip to Lake Titicaca, the Nasca Lines, or into the jungle would all be amazing additions. B