

Working in Peru

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Language

- The vast majority of Peruvians speak Latin American Spanish, though a few people in more rural areas speak Quechua.
- Spanish is an easy language to learn, and lots of excellent books and courses are available. The grammar and pronunciation is slightly different to the European version, but you will be understood. Those working in the tourist industries in large cities will probably speak some English, and many students at University level have a good working knowledge.

Pre-departure checks

- See below for common infectious diseases - seek up to date advice from your GP well before departure so you can be sure to be fully immune.
- Currently no visa is needed by a Western national for a stay of under 90 days duration, but things change, so check the [Foreign Office website](#) when planning a trip.
- It's worth having a contingency day or two in Lima after arrival, as delayed baggage on airlines is not uncommon. The city can be quite dangerous, and the Miraflores area, whilst more expensive, is safer and makes for a good base. It may be worth pre-booking a hostel for the first night, but make sure the taxi takes you to the right place as many hostels have the same names.
- There is no tourism office, so make sure you have at least a guidebook with you. The Footprints series are particularly good for South America.

Health considerations

- Rabies is still rife in Peru, and there are still reports of human cases. The rabies vaccine is fairly protective, and is a must – stray dogs roam even the big cities. It is worth having the full course of vaccines, which should be available at your local travel clinic or doctors. Even if you have been vaccinated, any bite **MUST** be taken seriously, and immediate lavage followed by medical treatment is essential – in prevalent areas, even those vaccinated will be given a course of boosters, and remember that the disease can take weeks to develop. Be especially careful in rural regions, and wear thick trousers if travelling by bike or motorbike.
- Malaria, Dengue fever, typhus and yellow fever are all prevalent in the Amazon basin region, and a full discussion of the potential health problems with your GP is well advised. Remember that whilst you may be based in one area on a project, you may travel afterwards so be prepared.

- Onwards travel to Yellow fever-free countries in southern and central America may well rely on production of a valid inoculation certificate at the port of entry – be prepared to be back in the plane if you have lost yours (this does not apply to re-entry to the UK).
- There is a free market on pharmaceuticals including antibiotics in Peru, so all drugs are readily available over the counter – medical training is mixed, and many drugs are available in Peru which are now deemed unsafe, so care is needed, and medical insurance well recommended.
- Peru has a big problem with parasitic disease, especially taeniasis and cysticercosis, which is hyperendemic in some highland areas, so special care is needed when eating pork.
- Some areas of Peru are at very high altitude – make sure you have good advice on altitude sickness - even the regular tourist route of the Inca Trail has high summits, the highest at 4200m.
- Muggings and street crimes are common, especially in the bigger cities
- Don't put anything down the toilets or you will cause a blockage – even toilet paper is best put in a bin if provided.
- Electricity can be variable in more remote regions – check out the visible wiring on electric showers before use

Transport

- Peruvian roads and driving standards are poor, especially in the more remote regions, so travel after dark is a significant risk. That said, there are some excellent and very affordable long distance buses which are significantly more enjoyable than the UK equivalent, often providing free food, alcohol and English videos to take your mind off the dodgy bridges!
- Earthquakes, flash storms and wildcat strikes can put paid to the best laid travel plans so it is best to adopt a slightly laid back approach to timings when travelling.
- Internal flights can be very cheap, and are a good way to save a day on a bus. The flights from Lima to Cuzco are increasing in frequency, and it's a spectacular journey, though the handbrake turn into the Cuzco airstrip needs strong nerves!
- Trains are good, though some again climb to high altitude. Thefts on trains are not uncommon. First class is recommended for comfort on longer journeys.
- Taxis are great and generally safe and very cheap. Some can be hired for long distance journeys at surprisingly low cost and can be a viable alternative to a hire car.

Culture

- Peruvians are very proud, and often very politically active – street demonstrations, with much banging of pans, are common and can paralyse Lima.
- More remote areas can be very poor, and the Campesino farmers have had little exposure to the West. Many are afraid of cameras, and have little knowledge of life outside their area. Attitudes to welfare, hygiene and visitors can be very different from area to area, and it is worth consulting locals in the nearest big towns before heading out into the wilds, as some areas can be dangerous.

Food and drink

- Tap water should be well boiled, and ice avoided. Wash all salads and fresh fruit and vegetables in purified water, which is easy to come by.
- Inca Cola is a popular bubble gum flavoured soft drink and worth at least trying – Coca Cola is ubiquitous however.
- Cuzquena is the best lager, as good as any imports, which are expensive
- Lunch is the main meal, and dinner eaten late, rarely before 8pm.
- Tea is served black, and Coca tea is common, and may help adaptation to high altitude – chewing of wads of Coca leaves is common practice - this is legal, cocaine is not.
- Watch out for Chicha, a potent corn based spirit which needs a strong liver.
- Food is varied, delicious and often spicy, local dishes are well worth a try.
- Vegetarianism is possible, though fish dishes are very common, and delicious!
- Food markets are incredible, and are the best source of fresh food.

Veterinary logistics

- There are several vet schools in Peru, working to various standards. Many are poorly equipped, and as in many countries, the students display a huge eagerness to learn from very minimal resources.
- Several successful UK collaborative projects have been run in the northern Cajamarca area (for more information, contact the Overseas Group).
- There is a minimal state veterinary service, and most new graduates struggle to find work. Most practices are one man bands, with clinics often being run in the practitioner's house.
- Dog ownership is widespread, as is the practice of tail docking and ear cropping. Preventative medicine is not widespread outside the rich areas, and dogs are often used as guard dogs, who should be treated with utmost respect.
- Rabies is common, and care must be taken on handling any strays.
- Good welfare is not well enforced, and cock and bull fighting is common in some areas.
- All medicines are available from vast pharmacy warehouses over the counter, and many farmers will self treat, often with limited success. Antibiotic resistance is suspected to be high.
- Whilst medicines are available, many other veterinary materials, especially consumables and field and lab kit are very hard to come by, and are best taken with you, though check with local counterparts.
- In the north, the milk industry is a major source of income. Average herd size is less than 10, and hand milking common. Many farmers are very poor, and their animals may be the sole source of income.
- AI is common in dairy areas, generally performed by travelling inseminators who seem to work on a door to door basis, providing basic veterinary advice, though by no means are all vets.
- Horses and donkeys are used for transport as much as pleasure in remote areas. Pacing horses are common in the Trujillio area, and are objects of great pride.
- Zoonotic diseases are common, and are an area where further research and practical solutions are much needed

And finally...

Peru is an amazingly diverse country, with jungle, mountains, amazing beaches and very friendly people. Relatively the cost of living is still very low, as are transport costs, so the Nazca lines, Macchu Pichu and Lake Titicaca are all worth a visit, as is the Amazon basin. There are amazing archaeological sites scattered all over the country. Independent travel is fairly easy once you get the hand of it, but tour guides are essential for the Inca Trail – Cuzco is full of these, so shop around – smaller groups and a good English speaking guide are worth finding. Porters are handy for all but the fittest walker. Tipping is expected for their heroics!