



# Exploring Peru

DISCOVER THE SACRED VALLEY AND THE AMAZON RIVER  
—TWO OF THE WORLD'S MOST DYNAMIC PLACES.

BY JUDY KOUTSKY

The explora property offers over two dozen different activities a day, including biking.

*(right)* Travelers can choose between half-day and full-day hikes. *(below)* Village visits and interacting with locals is a big part of the explora mission.



## SEEING THE SACRED VALLEY

The Sacred Valley—the heart and soul of the Inca Empire—has been quietly drawing travelers for years. The Inca empire was one of the most important in South America and at its height spanned a population of 10 million people from Columbia to Chile. The Sacred Valley, located between Cusco and Machu Picchu, was the site where the Incas built some of their most famous and important architectural structures. From a traveler's perspective, what makes this area so unique is that it's made of three different types of topography: valley, plateau and mountain and therefore, different activities and experiences are offered in each region. In the Urubamba River valley, travelers can explore Pisac, Ollantaytambo, and Moray archaeological sites. The Huaypo Lake is located in the plateau region and the massive Andes mountains—with their highest peak reaching 22,200 feet above sea level—appeals to even the most adventurous hiker. (Due to the high altitudes, though, it's recommended that travelers start by picking hikes and activities at a lower altitude and scaling up as they become acclimatized).



The scenery in the Sacred Valley is a huge draw.





## TRAVEL



(above) The canopy walk allows for great views of the Amazon. (right) The Amazon jungle is brimming with wildlife, including sloths.



## CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

The best way to see the Sacred Valley is by actively experiencing it through walks, hikes, bike rides and village visits. The *explora Sacred Valley Peru* ([explora.com](http://explora.com)) is a hotel that bridges the remote wilderness with unique, one-of-a-kind experiences. Through sustainable development, the *explora* property blends in with its surroundings while offering travelers 30 different “explorations” or experiences each day. That means if you’re traveling with your family or friends, each person can pick their own activity. Each group is limited to eight people and a guide.

Options include full-day hikes like *Cinco Lagunas*, *Amaru* and *La Verónica*, which gives travelers the chance to see a variety of flora and fauna. That includes the chance to see some of the 400 different orchid species in this region, as well as catch a glimpse of the llamas and alpacas native to the area. Those lucky enough might see the spectacle bear, a species that lives in the Andean-Amazonia region and is on the cusp of extinction. For experienced bikers, the 20-mile *Huaypo* ride might appeal. It explores the colonial town of *Maras* and its Inca salt-mines before a challenging descent to the *Urubamba River*.

Or, if you don’t want to choose just one activity, guests can do a full-day tour combining biking and hiking. The *Inca Tracks* excursion, for example, combines a vigorous three-mile hike that offers amazing 360-degree views of both *Cusco* and the *Sacred Valley*, before biking through the height of the *pampas*—treeless plains—and then into the local *Quechua* farmlands where shepherds can be seen tending their animals. Keep your eyes out for the more than 200 varieties of birds that reside here, including the *Andean condor* and the *giant hummingbird*, the largest of its kind in the world. Or, if you’re looking for less active, but equally rich cultural experiences, you can do an overland trip, such as the full-day *Cusco* tour. This includes exploring the fortress of *Saqsaywaman* and the temple of *Corincancha*, on which the *Santo Domingo* convent was built, as well as exploring the highlights of *Cusco* including the *Museum of Pre-Columbian Art*, the *San Pedro Market*, and the many art galleries in this picturesque town.

Since its recommended that visitors stay five nights at *explora*, you can combine biking, hiking and overland explorations throughout your stay for a well-rounded and in-depth *Sacred*

*Valley* experience. Plus, all the meals at *explora* are included in the price and feature freshly-made, locally-sourced ingredients, using *Peruvian* recipes.

## CRUISING DOWN THE AMAZON

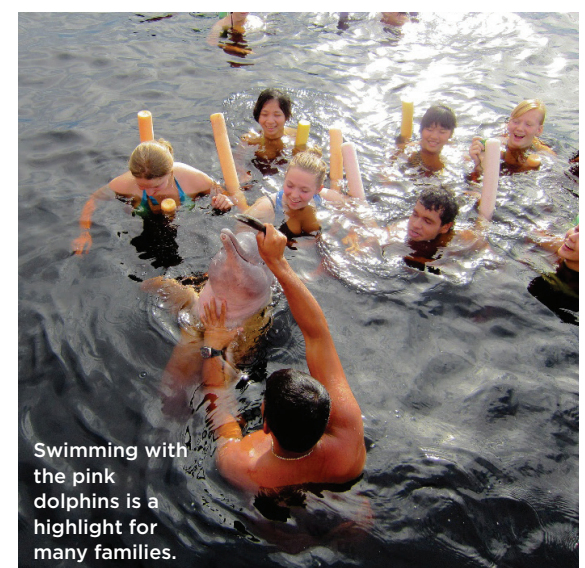
For many, an *Amazon River* cruise is a bucket list trip, but not everyone realizes that the *Pacaya Samiria National Reserve*, located on 5 million acres in the northern *Amazon* rainforest in *Peru*, is one of the most protected biodiversity regions in *South America* and home to some of the most elusive plants and animals in the world. More than 3,000 species of fish reside here and over a third of the world’s total species of plants and animals can be found in the *Amazon* basin.

*Delfin Amazon Cruises* ([delfinamazoncruises.com](http://delfinamazoncruises.com)) is the first and only cruise company to join the prestigious *Relais & Châteaux* portfolio. A family-friendly cruise line, it offers interconnecting rooms and special activities for kids (although it’s equally appealing to adults).

Mornings are spent gliding down the river, looking for *scarlet macaws* and *tree sloths* slowly waking up after a night in the jungle. You can go



Delfin excursions include boat rides to see flora and fauna.



Swimming with the pink dolphins is a highlight for many families.





(below)The Delfin III has 22 suites (and holds 44 passengers) making it the largest vessel in their fleet. (right) The sun deck has a Jacuzzi and lounge chairs.



swimming in a mirror-still lake that suddenly ripples with pink river dolphins or take walks with local villagers who will point out the places that poison dart frogs and anacondas call home. Spend nights fishing for red-bellied piranhas under a bright orange sunset. Other activities include early-morning bird-watching (one of the best places to bird watch in the world); kayaking and paddleboarding in the creeks and lakes looking for wildlife; or exploring along the canopy walk, one of the longest canopy walkways in the world, where travelers are 85 feet above the ground, providing amazing views of the Amazon rainforest and the animals within it.

The Delfin boats are more than a nod to sustainability. Their waterproof roof is made of local irapay leaves (seen on local village huts) and lamps are made from spare paiche fish scales. Lotions and mosquito repellents, found in all the suites, are made from native jungle ingredients. These small passenger ships—carrying from 8 to 44 passengers, depending on the vessel—create an intimate experience among guests. Most of the guides were born and raised in the Amazon, so they can tell first-hand stories about growing up there and the medicinal properties of the plants around.

During low water season (June through October) travelers will be able to walk the trails of the Amazon forests and see the animals and wilderness from the land. This is a good time for those travelers who want to do a lot of exploration on foot. Those who want more aquatic exploration are better off visiting during high-water season (November through May) when boats are able to explore corners of the rivers normally unattainable during the dry season.

Included in the Delfin rate are all meals (most made with local Peruvian ingredients), pisco cocktail and sours, national brand beers, house cocktails and houses wines. Few things can compare to sipping a pisco sour while watching the sun set over one of the longest—and most biodiverse—rivers in the world. 🍷



The floor-to-ceiling windows let travelers take in the Amazon, even from bed.

**Getting there:**

LATAM Airlines ([latam.com](http://latam.com)) flies to Lima, Peru, from 25 U.S. gateway cities including New York. If going to the Sacred Valley, guests will travel from Lima to Cusco. For the Amazon, travelers will transfer from Lima to Iquitos. Travelers can combine these two experiences by connecting via Lima.