Peru

Country Facts
Population: 29,546,963
Languages: Spanish, Quechua (Inca), Aymara
Predominant Religions: Christian (Roman Catholic)
Time Zone: Five hours behind Greenwich Mean Time
Voltage Requirements: 220 volts
Telephone Codes: 51, country code; 01, city code for Lima. From outside Peru, do not dial 0 after the 51; 051, city code for Puno; 054, city code for Arequipa; 065, city code for Iquitos; 084, city code for Cusco.

Introduction:
Lake Titicaca, which straddles Peru’s border with Bolivia, is the highest navigable lake in the world, and one of the most beautiful. The Inca ruins of Machu Picchu, which would be stunning anywhere, are truly spectacular in their Andean setting, high above the Urubamba River. And Cusco, once the center of the Inca Empire and now a vibrant gateway to Inca ruins, is also high in the Andes. Yet even at sea level, Peru can leave you breathless. With unspoiled beaches, coastal desert, deep canyons and dense Amazon jungle, its variety of natural wonders is astonishing.

Then, there are the cultural treasures. The contrast between old and new runs throughout the land: Poncho-clad indigenous people walk their llamas through modern cities, past Spanish cathedrals built on the foundations of ancient Incan ruins. Giant, stylized designs were etched in the earth by the Nazca — a great pre-Columbian civilization. Peru is where pre-Columbian culture reached its most graceful peak. Like the Parthenon in Greece or the Pyramids of Egypt, the Incan and pre-Incan ruins of Peru provide an unforgettable glimpse of the genius of a lost world.

Compassion in Peru:
Compassion International’s work in Peru began in 1985. As of 2010 more than 48,450 children participate in more than 230 child development centers. The Child Survival Program serves more than 1,900 mothers and caregivers and their babies through 37 centers. The Leadership Development Program serves more than 135 students. Compassion partners with churches to help them provide Peruvian children with the opportunity to rise above their circumstances and become all God has created them to be.

Cultural Information:
- Handshakes are customary among men and women, both when arriving and leaving.
- Male friends may hug and female friends may kiss each other’s cheeks; men may also lightly kiss the cheek of women friends. This is a European custom, which entered Peruvian society in the late sixties. It is very common among the middle and high class, but not as common among the lower class people. It is a good way of showing acceptance, especially with key persons, and there is no danger of appearing flirtatious.
• Titles are important and business associates are addressed by their title and surname until they request otherwise; Doctor is commonly used as a title of respect for lawyers and those with an advanced degree.
• At social events, be sure to shake hands and say good-bye to everyone individually.
• Peruvians enjoy having guests eat with them and frequently invite a business traveler to a meal in a restaurant or the host’s home. If you are invited to your host’s home, a gift is not necessary but a bottle of wine, fruit or flowers are always welcome.
• It is considered polite to eat everything you are served. Peruvians eat continental style with the knife in the left hand and fork in the right. If this is uncomfortable for you, don’t try it.
• Rice, beans, fish and corn are staples. Soups made from any of those ingredients are popular. You might enjoy ceviche [raw fish “cooked” in lemon and vinegar], or a papa a la huancaina [potato served with chile sauce].
• Fresh fruits and vegetables are served at any time of the year.
• Many women operating businesses, especially small-scale businesses, have considerable personal freedom and are becoming more common and accepted in general, but their presence remains rare in the top levels of large companies. In some areas they have a very strong presence, such as in NGOs and in the Judicial and Legislative systems.

Dos and Don’ts:
• Do find some time to relax in Cusco’s main plaza. It’s an enjoyable place to sit and watch the world go by. But don’t relax too much — the plaza is also a hangout for pickpockets and petty thieves.
• Don’t throw toilet paper down the toilet; use the trash can next to it.
• Do carry toilet paper with you. Many public places and restaurants don’t provide it.
• Don’t get into a taxi before negotiating the cost of the ride. Taxis in Peru don’t have meters.
• Don’t count on getting a hot shower or hot tap water, even in hotels that advertise they have it. Electricity, used to heat water, is sporadic in most medium-sized and small towns in Peru.
• Do take adapter plugs. Peru is a confusion of U.S.-style flat-pin plugs and European-style round-pin plugs. It’s best to be prepared for both.

Travel Tips

Personal Safety:
Most visits to Peru are trouble-free, but you should take precautions and be alert. Most crime consists of pickpocketing and purse snatching, so don’t take a bag and keep items such as wallets in front pockets, preferably zipped. Don’t go out alone after 10 p.m., except by taxi. In Cusco, there have been incidences of choke-and-robbing attacks against tourists, especially women traveling alone. Also, despite the capture of the leaders of the Shining Path and Tupac Amaru, two guerrilla groups, a terrorist presence still exists in remote mountain and jungle areas.
You'll notice the overwhelming number of taxis in Lima and the big cities; the taxi drivers will often honk their horns to pick up passengers, but avoid using the ticos [a diminutive for a Daewoo make] — they are unsafe as vehicles and are also the cheapest to rent. Whenever possible, you should call for a taxi.

Leave at home all unnecessary credit cards, social security card, library cards and similar items you may routinely carry in your wallet. Do not take more cash than you reasonably require for that day. Use the room safe or hotel safe to secure valuables as well as additional cash. Secure cash in multiple locations – wallet, various pockets, money belts. Carry items in front pockets, not back pockets. Do not display large sums of money in public; only make visible the amount of money that approximates your purchase. Maintain a close awareness of your purse, wallet, backpack, etc. as well as the people around you. It’s a good idea to keep one hand or arm in constant contact with these items especially in areas of high people traffic. Never leave items with cash in them [purse, wallet, backpack, etc.] on a bus, car, or any other location, even if the vehicle is being watched by Compassion staff or Compassion-hired contractors. Stay alert and be cautious at all times. Don’t take safety & security for granted.

Health:
Cholera is no stranger to Peru. Fueled by poor sanitation, the disease is spread by contaminated water, raw seafood, and unsanitary preparation of food. Except in the more deluxe establishments in major cities, sanitary conditions in restaurants can pose problems for travelers. Most hot, freshly cooked food should be safe. You should, however, peel fresh fruit and raw vegetables before eating. Also, make sure meat is cooked thoroughly, avoid local dairy products and assume tap water and ice are unsafe [stick with prepackaged or boiled drinks]. No matter how tempting it looks, it’s best to stay away from the street food.

Larger cities have adequate medical and dental facilities [private facilities are generally better equipped than public hospitals or clinics]. See your doctor about malaria suppressants if you’re going to visit rural areas [chloroquine-resistant strains are present in the eastern provinces that border Brazil]. Malaria is not present in Lima or in high-elevation areas such as Cusco, Machu Picchu and Lake Titicaca. Bring all prescription medicine needed for the trip.

If you fly into high-altitude areas [such as Cusco], allow some time for your body to adjust. Some people need 24 hours. You may experience altitude sickness [nausea, headaches, insomnia, dizziness, loss of appetite and general malaise], which can be serious. Drink plenty of liquids, avoid alcohol and smoking for the first few days, and see a doctor if symptoms seem extreme or persist (you may have to return to a lower altitude).

We strongly advise you to contact the CDC [www.cdc.gov] or check with your personal physician for more information about your specific health needs while traveling, including any recommendations for immunizations. Vaccinations for yellow fever, hepatitis and typhoid may be recommended, as well as anti-malarial medication.

Money:
Peru’s currency is the nuevo sol, available in bills of 10, 20, 50, 100 and 200 nuevos soles. It has been relatively stable to the dollar in recent years, exchanging for about three soles to the dollar. When exchanging dollars, bring crisp, new bills with no tears. Money changers and banks will refuse to change even slightly damaged notes.

**Weather:**
There is no single climate in Peru. The rainy season is October through April in the mountains, and most travelers come during the dry months that coincide with North American and European summer vacations. Bring a sweater (or something heavier) if you’re going to Cusco and Machu Picchu.

**Dress:**
In Lima and on the coast, temperatures vary little and are balmy enough for a shirt or T-shirt and light pants in the day. At night, it’s best to have a lightweight sweater or jacket for the coastal breezes. In the Andes, take precautions against both the plummeting temperatures at night and the high UV radiation during the day (wear long-sleeved shirts to protect against sunburn; also wear a sunhat and strong sunscreen). Fleece jackets are essential, as is a warm hat (wooly ones are available on every street corner).

*All information taken from Weissmann Reports, the World Factbook and Compassion International.*