

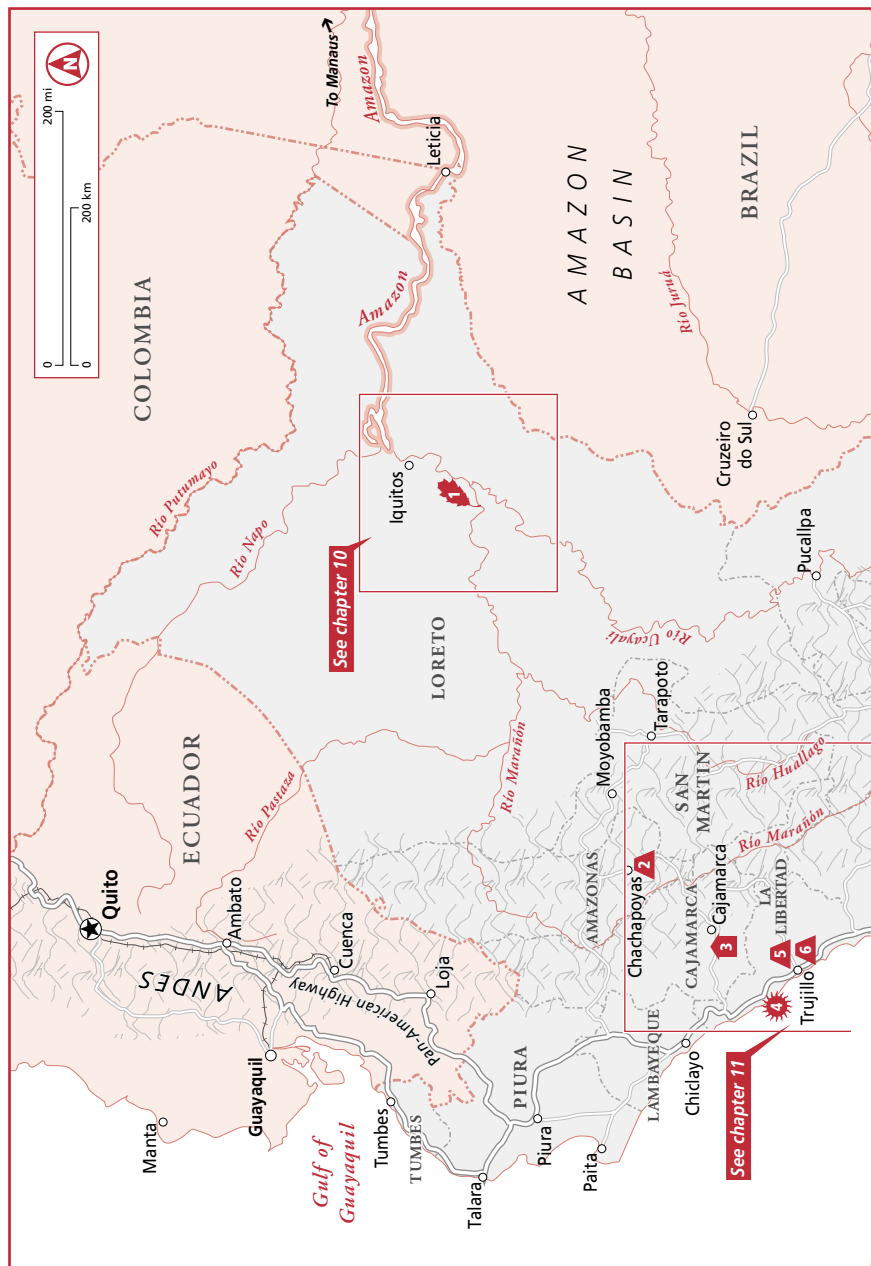
The Best of Peru

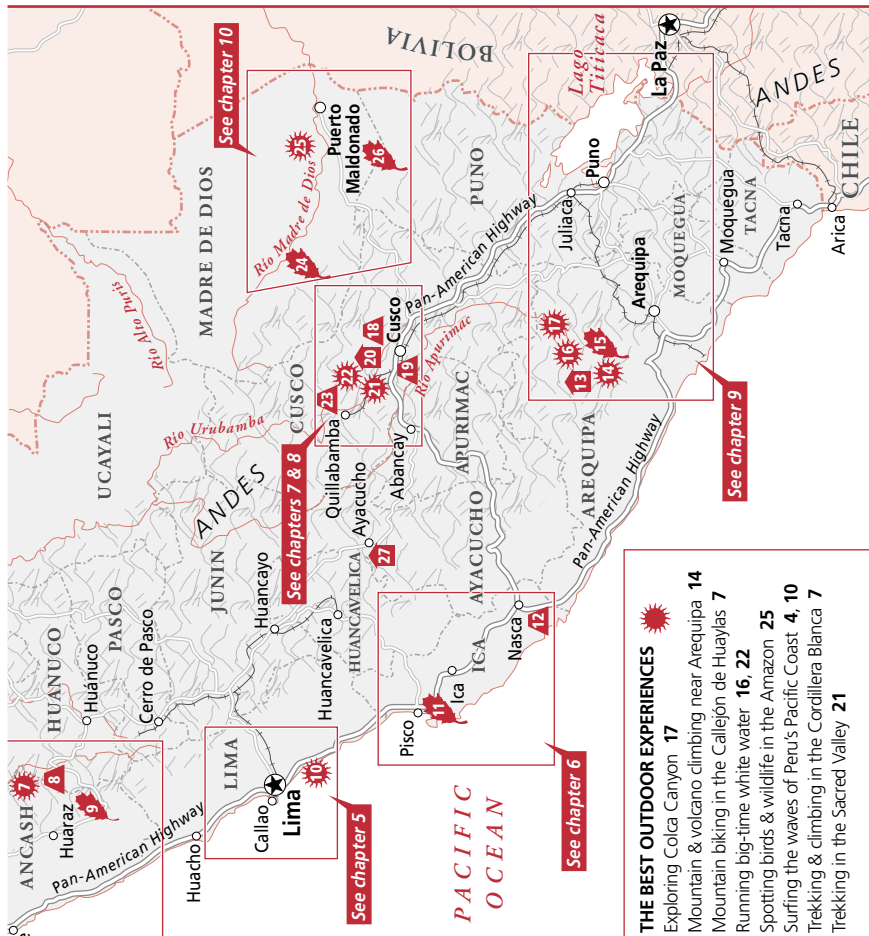
Peru is legendary among world travelers looking for exciting new experiences. Stunningly endowed in both natural and man-made attractions, Peru offers much more than most trips can even hope to take in: charming Andean highland towns with colonial architecture, remote jungle lodges in the Amazon basin, soaring snowcapped mountains and volcanoes, a 3,220km (2,000-mile) Pacific coastline, and, of course, Machu Picchu and the stunning legacies of the Incas and other sophisticated pre-Columbian civilizations. Peru is a place of brilliant hand-woven textiles and exuberant celebrations, exotic animals, and fascinating peoples. It is a country bursting with opportunities for memorable travel experiences and outdoor adventure. The following lists describe some of my favorite places and activities, from hotels and restaurants to outdoor experiences and festivals. But the fun of traveling to a fascinatingly diverse country like Peru is compiling your own unforgettable list.

1 The Most Unforgettable Travel Experiences

- **Soaring over the Nasca Lines:** One of South America's great enigmas, these ancient, baffling lines are etched into the desert sands along Peru's southern coast. There are giant trapezoids and triangles, the identifiable shapes of animal and plant figures, and more than 10,000 lines that can only really be seen from the air. Various thought to be signs from the gods, agricultural and astronomical calendars, or even extraterrestrial airports, the Nasca Lines were constructed between 300 B.C. and A.D. 700. Small-craft overflights dip and glide, and passengers strain their necks against the window to see mysterious figures such as "the Astronaut." See "Nasca" in chapter 6.
- **Gazing at Machu Picchu:** However you get to it—whether you hike the fabled Inca Trail or hop aboard one of the prettiest train rides in South America—Machu Picchu more than lives up to its reputation as one of the most spectacular sites on Earth. The ruins of the legendary "lost city of the Incas" sit majestically among the massive Andes, swathed in clouds. The ceremonial and agricultural center, never discovered or looted by the Spaniards, dates to the mid-1400s but seems even more ancient. Exploring the site is a thrilling experience, especially at sunrise, when dramatic rays of light creep over the mountaintops. See "Machu Picchu & the Inca Trail" in chapter 8.
- **Hiking the Inca Trail:** The legendary trail to Machu Picchu, the Camino del Inca, is one of the world's most rewarding ecoadventures. The arduous 4-day trek leads across astonishing Andean mountain passes and through some of the greatest attractions in Peru, including dozens of Incan ruins, dense cloud forest, and breathtaking mountain scenery. The

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trek has a superlative payoff: a sunset arrival at the glorious ruins of Machu Picchu, shrouded in mist at your feet. For those looking for less popular ruins treks, Choquequirao and other alternatives to the Inca Trail await. See “Machu Picchu & the Inca Trail” in chapter 8.

- **Floating on Lake Titicaca:** Lake Titicaca, the world’s highest navigable body of water, straddles the border between Peru and Bolivia. To locals, it is a mysterious and sacred place. An hour’s boat ride from Puno takes you to the Uros floating islands, where communities dwell upon soft patches of reeds. Visitors have a rare opportunity to experience the ancient cultures of two inhabited natural islands, Amantaní and Taquile, by staying with a local family. The views of the oceanlike lake, at more than 3,600m (12,000 ft.) above sea level, and the star-littered night sky are worth the trip. Even better, for those with an adventuresome spirit and extra time, are kayaking on Titicaca and spending the night on private Suasi Island. See “Puno & Lake Titicaca” in chapter 9.
- **Marveling as Condors Soar over Colca Canyon:** The world’s second-deepest canyon (twice as deep as the

Grand Canyon), Colca is the best place in South America to see giant Andean condors, majestic birds with wingspans of up to 3.5m (11 ft.). From a stunning lookout point nearly 1,200m (4,000 ft.) above the canyon river, you can watch as the condors appear, slowly circle, and gradually gain altitude with each pass until they soar silently above your head and head off down the river. A truly spine-tingling spectacle, the flight of the big birds might make you feel quite small and insignificant—and certainly less graceful. See “Colca Valley” in chapter 9.

- **Plunging Deep into the Jungle:** However you do it, and in whichever part of the Amazon-basin rainforest you do it, Peru’s massive tracts of jungle are not to be missed. The northern jungle is most accessible from Iquitos, and the southern Amazon, which features two phenomenal national reserves, Manu and Tambopata, is approachable from Cusco and Puerto Maldonado. You can take a river cruise, stay at a rustic jungle lodge, or lose yourself with a private guide, making camp and catching dinner along the way. See chapter 10.

2 The Most Intriguing Ruins & Other Historical Sights

- **Cantalloc Aqueduct & Chauchilla Cemetery:** An incredible necropolis dating to around A.D. 1000 and a sophisticated irrigation system in the area around Nasca are two of the south’s most interesting archaeological sites. Of the thousands of graves at Chauchilla, 12 underground tombs have been exposed. What they hold is fascinating: the bleached bones of children and adults with dreadlocks, and some of the garments and goodies they were buried with. Close to town, nearly three dozen

aqueducts represent a spectacular engineering feat of the Incas and their predecessors. The canals have air vents forming spirals descending to the water current and are still in use today by local farmers. See “Nasca” in chapter 6.

- **Colonial and Inca Cusco:** Vibrant Cusco, the ancient Incan capital, is a living museum of Peruvian history, with Spanish colonial churches and mansions sitting atop perfectly constructed Incan walls of exquisitely carved granite blocks that fit together

without mortar. Streets still have evocative Quechua-language names that date back to Incan times, such as Saqracalle (“Where the demons dwell”) and Pumaphaqcha (“Puma’s tail”). See “What to See & Do” in chapter 7.

- **Qoricancha–Templo del Sol:** The Incan Temple of the Sun is an exceptional example of the Incas’ masterful masonry. Dedicated to sun worship, the greatest temple in the Incan Empire was a gleaming palace of gold before the Spaniards raided it. During the summer solstice, the sun still magically illuminates a niche where the Incan chieftain held court. A sensuously curved wall of stone is one of the greatest remaining examples of Incan stonework. See p. 216.
- **Sacsayhuamán:** On a hill overlooking Cusco, the monumental stonework at Sacsayhuamán forms massive zig-zagged defensive walls of three tiers. Built by the Incan emperor Pachacútec in the mid-15th century, some blocks weigh as much as 300 tons, and they fit together seamlessly without mortar. The main pageant of the splendid Inti Raymi festival, one of the greatest expressions of Incan and Quechua culture, is celebrated every June 24 at Sacsayhuamán. See “What to See & Do” in chapter 7.
- **Pisac Ruins:** At the beginning of the Sacred Valley, just 45 minutes from Cusco, are some of the most spectacular Incan ruins in Peru. Equal parts city, religious temple, and military complex—and perhaps a royal estate of the Incan emperor—the ruins enjoy stunning views of the valley. A hike up the hillside to the ruins, beginning at Pisac’s main square, is one of the most rewarding climbs you’re likely to take. See “Pisac” in chapter 8.
- **Ollantaytambo’s Fortress Ruins:** Even though the Incas never finished

this temple for worship and astronomical observation, it is still extraordinary, perhaps the greatest evidence to be found of their unparalleled engineering and craftsmanship. On a rocky outcrop perched above the valley, dozens of rows of incredibly steep stone terraces are carved into the hillside; high above are elegant examples of classic Incan masonry in pink granite. See “Ollantaytambo” in chapter 8.

- **New “Lost” Incan Cities:** Archaeologists keep unearthing fantastic Incan ruins in and around Machu Picchu (which obviously qualifies as the most fascinating ruins of all). Most are still being excavated and documented, but Choquequirao, to which hard-core trekkers put off by the crowds and regulations of the Inca Trail are now hiking, and the recent discoveries Qorihuayrachina, Cota Coca, and Llactapata are all envisioned as new Machu Picchus. See “On the Trail of ‘New’ Incan Cities: The Discovery Continues” on p. 269.
- **Huacas de Moche:** On the outskirts of Trujillo, this complex of mysterious Moche adobe pyramids, the Temple of the Sun and Temple of the Moon, dates to A.D. 500. The Temple of the Sun (Huaca del Sol), today sadly eroded, is still mammoth—it was once probably the largest man-made structure in the Americas. The smaller Temple of the Moon (Huaca de la Luna) has been excavated; revealed inside are cool polychromatic friezes of a scary figure, the decapitator god. See “Trujillo” in chapter 11.
- **Chan Chan:** A sprawling city of adobe in the Moche Valley, just beyond Trujillo, Chan Chan was the capital of the formidable Chimú empire. Begun around A.D. 1300, it is the largest adobe complex of

pre-Columbian America. Among the nine royal palaces, the partially restored Tschudi Palace has unusual friezes and is evocative enough to spur thoughts of the unequalled size and sophistication of this compound of the Chimú kingdom, which reached its apogee in the 15th century before succumbing to the Incas. Chan Chan includes three other sites, all quite spread out, including a modern museum. See “Trujillo” in chapter 11.

- **The Ruins of Kuélap:** The remote site of Kuélap, hidden by thick cloud forest and more than 800 years old, is one of the man-made wonders of Peru waiting to be discovered by visitors. The ruins are still tough and time-consuming to get to, but the

fortress complex of 400 round buildings, surrounded by a massive defensive wall, rewards the efforts of adventurous amateur archaeologists. See “The Ruins of Kuélap” on p. 394.

- **Chavín de Huántar:** About 110km (68 miles) from Huaraz and the Cordillera Blanca are the 3,000-year-old ruins of Chavín de Huántar, a fortress-temple with excellent stonework constructed by the Chavín culture from about 1200 to 300 B.C. These are the best-preserved ruins of one of Peru’s most sophisticated and influential ancient civilizations. In a subterranean tunnel is the Lanzón, a huge and handsome stone carving and cult object shaped like a dagger. See “Huaraz & the Cordillera Blanca” in chapter 11.

3 The Best Museums

- **Museo Arqueológico Rafael Larco Herrera,** Lima: The world’s largest private collection of pre-Columbian art focuses on the Moche dynasty (A.D. 200–700) and its extraordinary ceramics. Packed shelves in this 18th-century colonial building hold an incredible 45,000 pieces. And it wouldn’t be a proper presentation of the Moche culture without a Sala Erótica, dedicated to the culture’s shockingly explicit ceramic sexual depictions. See p. 138.
- **Museo de la Nación,** Lima: The National Museum traces the art and history of the earliest inhabitants to the Incan Empire. It’s sprawling but very well designed, with scale models of major archaeological sites and great carved totems and textiles. See p. 138.
- **Convento y Museo de San Francisco,** Lima: The capital’s best colonial-era church, the Convent of St. Francis is a striking 17th-century baroque complex with gorgeous glazed ceramic tiles and carved ceilings. The museum

holds excellent examples of religious art and a splendid library, but deep beneath the church are some creepy catacombs, dug in the 16th century to house the remains of tens of thousands of priests and parishioners. See p. 134.

- **Museo Antonini,** Nasca: A private archaeology museum with a mission, this Italian initiative presents artifacts from the sophisticated Nasca culture and details the process of the excavations. In the museum’s backyard is the Bisambra aqueduct, an ancient Nasca stone irrigation canal. The museum is in possession of the world’s greatest collection of painted textiles, from the huge adobe city of Cahuachi nearby, but as of yet has no place to display them. See p. 172.
- **Convento y Museo de Santa Catalina,** Cusco: This handsome, early-17th-century convent was constructed on top of the Acllawasi, where the Incan emperor sequestered his chosen Virgins of the Sun. The museum’s collection of colonial and

religious art is terrific, the best place in Peru to study the painters of the famed Escuela Cusqueña, which forged a unique style of Amerindian art by combining indigenous and Spanish styles. See p. 210.

- **Museo de Arte Precolombino**, Cusco: This handsomely designed museum of pre-Columbian art possesses some pristine pieces representing the whole of Peru's history, all taken from Lima's overwhelming Larco Herrera museum. Housed in a colonial mansion on one of Cusco's prettiest squares, the museum is small enough to be engaging rather than exhausting. See p. 215.
- **Monasterio de Santa Catalina**, Arequipa: The Convent of Santa Catalina, founded in 1579, is hands-down the greatest religious monument in Peru. More than a convent, it's an extraordinary architectural complex, with Spanish-style cobblestone streets, passageways, plazas, and cloisters, where more than 200 sequestered nuns once lived (only a handful remain). Spending a sunny afternoon here is like being transported to another world: a small village in Andalucía, Spain. See p. 303.
- **Museo Santuarios Andinos**, Arequipa: The Museum of Andean Sanctuaries focuses on a singular exhibit,

one of the most important recent archaeological finds in Peru: Juanita, the Ice Maiden of Ampato. A 13- or 14-year-old girl sacrificed in the 1500s by Incan priests on a volcano at more than 6,000m (20,000 ft.), "Juanita" was discovered in almost perfect condition in 1995. Her frozen remains, kept inside a high-tech chamber, have been studied by scientific teams from the U.S. and Peru to elicit clues from her DNA. See p. 304.

- **Museo Tumbas Reales Sipán**, Lambayeque: Peru's newest major museum is stunningly modern on the outside, echoing the north's ancient Moche pyramids, and it holds the spectacular tomb of the Lord of Sipán within. One of Peru's most important archaeological discoveries, el Señor de Sipán is a Moche royal figure buried 1,700 years ago with a wealth of ceremonial ornaments and treasures. This museum is perhaps the best expression of Peru's ancient grandeur. See p. 389.
- **Conjunto Monumental de Belén**, Cajamarca: A historic architectural complex of carved volcanic stone, Belén comprises an extraordinary colonial church and two former hospitals housing medical and archaeological exhibits, including textiles and ceramics dating back to 1500 B.C. and interesting ethnographic displays. See p. 399.

4 The Best of Natural Peru

- **Islas Ballestas**: The Ballestas Islands, considered the "Peruvian Galápagos," are home to an amazing roster of protected species, including huge colonies of sea lions, endangered turtles, Humboldt penguins, red boobies, pelicans, turkey vultures, and red-footed cormorants. The islands are so covered with migratory and resident sea birds that they are known for their production of *guano*, or bird droppings. The Ballestas are part of

the Paracas National Reserve, two-thirds of which is ocean. See "Pisco & the Reserva Nacional de Paracas" in chapter 6.

- **Colca Valley**: The Colca Canyon is an awe-inspiring site and the best place in South America to witness giant condors, but the entire area, which Mario Vargas Llosa called the "Valley of Wonders," is extraordinarily scenic. From snowcapped volcanoes to patchwork valleys of green,

narrow gorges, and beautiful desert landscapes, Colca has it all. On the way to Colca Canyon, you pass the Salinas and Aguada Blanca Nature Reserve, where you can glimpse vicuñas, llamas, and alpacas from the road. See “Colca Valley” in chapter 9.

- **Tambopata National Reserve:** A huge reserve of rainforest in the *departamento* (province) of Madre de Dios, Tambopata has outstanding biodiversity: more species of birds (nearly 600) and butterflies (1,200) than any place of similar size on Earth, as well as a dozen different types of forest and gorgeous oxbow lakes, and at least 13 endangered animal species. The famous Tambopata macaw clay lick, where thousands of brilliantly colored macaws and parrots gather daily for feedings, ranks as one of the wildlife highlights of Peru. See “The Southern Amazon Jungle” in chapter 10.
- **Manu Biosphere Reserve:** Remote Manu—about as close as you’re likely to come to virgin rainforest anywhere—is the second-largest protected area in Peru. Its incredibly varied habitats include Andes highlands, cloud forests, and lowland tropical rainforests. One hectare (2½ acres) of forest in Manu could have 10 times the number of species of trees found in a hectare of temperate forest in Europe or North America, and Manu has the highest bird, mammal, and plant diversity of any park on the planet. The reserve is one of the world’s finest for birding (greater even than all of Costa Rica); other wildlife includes giant river otters, cocks-of-the-rock, and perhaps 15,000 animal species, as well as native Amerindian tribes that remain untouched by the modern world. See “The Southern Amazon Jungle” in chapter 10.
- **Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve:** The reserve, nearly 322km (200 miles) south of Iquitos, is the largest protected area in Peru and one of the best conserved in the world. Its dense, pristine rainforest and wetlands comprise 1.5% of Peru’s total surface area and contain some of the Amazon’s greatest wildlife, including pink dolphins, macaws, black caimans, spider monkeys, and giant river turtles. Found in the reserve (at last count) are 539 species of birds, 101 species of mammals, 256 kinds of fish, and 22 species of orchids. See “Into the Wild: Farther Afield from Iquitos” on p. 362.
- **Huascarán National Park:** For trekkers and climbers, the soaring peaks of the longest tropical mountain range in the world are a South American mecca. It’s a visual feast, with 200 alpine lakes, 600 glaciers, and incomparable mountain vistas. The park, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and World Heritage Trust site, contains nearly the whole of the 161km (100-mile) Cordillera Blanca. See “Huaraz & the Cordillera Blanca” in chapter 11.
- **Lagunas Llanganuco & Puya Raimondi:** Near Huaraz, the snow-capped peaks of the Cordillera Blanca are the biggest natural draw for trekkers, but the area is replete with all kinds of natural wonders. The Llanganuco lakes are two turquoise, glacier-fed alpine lakes that reflect the snowy summits of several 6,000m (20,000-ft.) mountains. In the valley of Pachacoto, 56km (35 miles) from Huaraz, are the famous Puya Raimondi plants: trippy bromeliad plants that soar up to 12m (39 ft.), flower just once in 100 years, and immediately die. The colorful flowers, against the backdrop of the Cordillera Blanca mountains, make for one of the prettiest pictures in Peru. See “Huaraz & the Cordillera Blanca” in chapter 11.

5 The Best Small Towns & Villages

- **Ayacucho:** A pristine colonial gem of a small city nestled in the Central Highlands, Ayacucho was until the mid-1990s prisoner to a homegrown guerrilla movement that precluded almost all visitors from being able to relish its collection of stunning colonial-era churches. Ayacucho is also ground zero for Peru's best handicrafts, and the best place to pick up treasures direct from artisans. See "A Gem in the Central Highlands: Ayacucho" in chapter 6.
- **Pisac:** The first of the Sacred Valley settlements outside Cusco, Pisac has a greatly colorful and lively artisans' market and some of the most splendid Incan ruins this side of Machu Picchu. A massive fortress complex clings to a cliff high above town, affording sensational views of the valley. See "Pisac" in chapter 8.
- **Chinchoero:** Just beyond Cusco, but not technically part of the Sacred Valley, Chinchoero is best known for its bustling Sunday artisans' market, one of the best in Peru. But the graceful, traditional Andean town, higher even than Cusco, has mesmerizing views of snowy mountain ranges, a lovely colonial church, and its own Incan ruins. In the pretty main square, you can still see the huge stones and 10 trapezoidal niches of an Incan wall, originally part of a royal palace. See "Urubamba & Environs" in chapter 8.
- **Ollantaytambo:** One of the principal villages of the Sacred Valley of the Incas, "Ollanta" (as the locals call it) is a spectacularly beautiful place along the Urubamba River; the gorge is lined by agricultural terraces, and snowcapped peaks rise in the distance. The ruins of a formidable temple-fortress overlook the old town, a perfect grid of streets built by the Incas, the only such layout remaining in Peru. See "Ollantaytambo" in chapter 8.
- **Colca Valley Villages:** Chivay, on the edge of Colca Canyon, is the valley's main town, but it isn't much more than a laid-back market town with fantastic hot springs on its outskirts. Dotted the Colca Valley and its extraordinary agricultural terracing are 14 charming colonial villages dating to the 16th century, each marked by a centerpiece church. Yanque, Coporaque, Maca, and Lari are among the most attractive towns, but these villages are best appreciated for their adherence to tradition. Natives in the valley are descendants of the pre-Incan ethnic communities Collaguas and Cabanas, and they maintain the vibrant style of traditional dress, highlighted by fantastically embroidered and sequined hats. See "A Typical Guided Tour of Colca Valley" on p. 325.
- **Cajamarca:** A mini-Cusco in the northern highlands, delightful Cajamarca surprisingly doesn't get much tourist traffic—yet. Beautifully framed by the Andes and sumptuous green countryside, with a historic core of colonial buildings where an important Incan city once stood, Cajamarca is elegant and easygoing. It's also very well positioned for day trips into the country and to fascinating archaeological sites; indeed, several of Peru's nicest and most relaxing country hotels are located here. See "Cajamarca" in chapter 11.

6 The Best Outdoor Experiences

- **Trekking in the Sacred Valley:** The most famous trek outside Cusco is, of course, the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu. But if you're not up to 4 strenuous days with a group along a highly structured trail, there are plenty of additional hiking options in the Sacred Valley. Other trails are much less crowded and share some of the same extraordinary scenery. Ollantaytambo and Yucaj are the best bases for walks in the pretty countryside of the Urubamba Valley. See chapter 8.
- **Running Big-Time White Water:** Just beyond Cusco in the Urubamba Valley are some excellent river runs, ranging from mild to world-class. Novices can do 1-day trips to get a taste of this thrilling sport, while more experienced rafters can take multiday trips and even hard-core rafting journeys along the Tambopata River in the Amazon jungle. The area around Arequipa and the Colca Canyon in southern Peru is even better for rafting. The easiest and most convenient runs from Arequipa are on the Río Chili. More advanced rafting, ranging up to Class VI, beckons on the Río Majes, Río Colca, and Río Cotahuasi. See "Extreme Sacred Valley: Outdoor Adventure Sports" on p. 240, and "Colca Valley" in chapter 9.
- **Exploring Colca Canyon:** Perhaps second only to the Callejón de Huaylas Valley in northern Peru for quality independent hiking is Colca Canyon. One of the most celebrated hikes is the descent into the canyon itself, from the Cruz del Cóndor lookout. There are others that are even longer and more demanding, but more accessible hikes are also possible; walking from one village to another in the valley should satisfy most peoples' urges to get outdoors. Excursions on horseback throughout the valley and into the canyon are also possible. Hard-core sports enthusiasts might take on remote Cotahuasi Canyon, deeper and more rugged even than Colca. See "Colca Valley" in chapter 9.
- **Mountain & Volcano Climbing Near Arequipa:** For mountaineers (and fit, adventurous travelers), the volcanoes just beyond Arequipa are perfect for some of Peru's best ascents. Several don't demand technical skills. Towering El Misti, which forms part of the Arequipa skyline, is an extremely popular climb, and the city's other major volcano, Chachani, also presents an accessible ascent. Peaks in the Colca Valley are great for serious climbers; these include the Ampato Volcano and Coropuna, which, at more than 6,425m (21,079 ft.) is perhaps the most stunning mountain in the Cotahuasi Valley and is for specialists only. See "Colca Valley" in chapter 9.
- **Spotting Birds & Wildlife in the Peruvian Amazon:** Peru's Amazon rainforest is some of the most biologically diverse on the planet. The southeastern jungle and its two principal protected areas, the Tambopata National Reserve and the Manu Biosphere Reserve, are terrific for viewing wildlife and more than 1,000 species of birds. One of the great birding spectacles is the sight of thousands of macaws and parrots feeding at a clay lick. Keep your eyes peeled for more elusive wildlife, such as caimans, river otters, and even jaguars and tapirs. See "The Southern Amazon Jungle" in chapter 10.
- **Surfing the Waves of Peru's Pacific Coast:** Brazil might be more popularly known as a surfing destination,

but wave connoisseurs dig Peru, with 2,000km (1,200 miles) of Pacific coastline and a great variety of left and right reef breaks, point breaks, and big-time waves. Beaches are mostly uncrowded, but the water is cold, and most surfers wear wet suits year-round. More than two dozen beaches attract *surfistas*. Northern Peru, best from October to March, is the top choice of many; surfers hang out in the easygoing fishing village of Huan-chaco, but the biggest and best waves in Peru are found at Puerto Chicama (also called Puerto Malabrigo), about 80km (50 miles) up the coast from Trujillo. The best beaches in southern Peru, where surfing is best from April to December (and at its peak in May), are Punta Hermosa, Punta Rocas, Cerro Azul, and Pico Alto. See “Side Trips from Lima” in chapter 5, and “Trujillo” in chapter 11.

- **Trekking & Climbing in the Cordillera Blanca:** The Cordillera Blanca, the highest tropical mountain chain in the world, is almost wholly contained in the protected Huascarán National Park. For walkers and mountaineers, the scenery of

snowcapped peaks, glaciers, lakes, and rivers is unrivaled in Peru. Fifty summits soar between 4,800 and 6,662m (15,748–21,857 ft.) high, so naturally, expert mountaineers are drawn to the Cordillera, but trekking and climbing opportunities abound for less experienced outdoor types. The classic trek is the 4- to 5-day Santa Cruz–Llanganuco route, one of the most beautiful in South America. See “Huaraz & the Cordillera Blanca” in chapter 11.

- **Mountain Biking in the Callejón de Huaylas:** Mountain biking is developing some legs in Peru. The top spot is the valley near the Cordillera Blanca, the pristine mountain range in central Peru. Hundreds of mountain and valley horse trails lace lush fields and push past picturesque Andean villages and alpine lakes. Hard-core peddlers can test their lung capacity climbing to 5,000m (16,400-ft.) mountain passes. For cycling camaraderie, check out the Semana del Andinismo in Huaraz, which features a mountain-bike competition. See “Huaraz & the Cordillera Blanca” in chapter 11.

7 The Best Architecture

- **Colonial Lima:** The old center of Lima Centro preserves a wealth of fine colonial-era buildings that have survived fires, earthquakes, and decades of inattention. Churches include San Pedro (the best-preserved example of early colonial religious architecture in the city), La Merced, and San Agustín. Equally interesting are the historic quarter’s few remaining *casas coloniales*, such as Casa Riva-Agüero, Casa Aliaga, and Casa de Osambela Oquendo. Though the capital’s unruliness makes appreciating its colonial core a bit daunting,

it’s worth the effort. See “What to See & Do” in chapter 5.

- **Cusco’s Incan Masonry:** Everywhere in Cusco’s old center are stunning Incan walls, made of giant granite blocks so amazingly carved that they fit together without mortar, like jigsaw puzzle pieces. For the most part, the colonial architecture has not stood up nearly as well as the Incas’ bold structures, which are virtually earthquake proof. The best examples are the curved stones at Qoricancha; along Hatunrumiyoc, an alleyway lined with polygonal stones and

featuring a 12-angled stone; and another pedestrian-only alleyway, Inca Roca, which has a series of stones that forms the shape of a puma. See “The Magic of Incan Stones: A Walking Tour” on p. 214.

- **Moray:** A peculiar Incan site with a mystical reputation, Moray isn't the Incan version of the Nasca Lines, although it sure looks like it could be. A series of inscrutable ringed terraces sculpted in the earth, the deep-set bowls formed an experimental agricultural center to test new crops and conditions. The different levels produce microclimates, with remarkable differences in temperature from top to bottom. See “Urubamba & Environs” in chapter 8.
- **Ollantaytambo's Old Town:** Though “Ollanta” is best known for its Incan ruins perched on an outcrop, equally spectacular is the grid of perfectly constructed *canchas*, or city blocks, that reveal the Incas as masterful urban planners as well as stonemasons. The 15th-century *canchas*, amazingly preserved, each had a single entrance opening onto a main courtyard. Rippling alongside the lovely stone streets run canals that carry water down from the mountains. See “Ollantaytambo” in chapter 8.
- **Machu Picchu's Temple of the Sun:** Even as ruins, Machu Picchu rises to the stature of great architecture. Brilliant elements of design and stonemasonry can be found around every corner, but perhaps the greatest example of architectural prowess is the Temple of the Sun. A tapered tower, it has the finest stonework in Machu Picchu. A perfectly positioned window allows the sun's rays to come streaming through at dawn on the South American winter solstice in June, illuminating the stone

at the center of the temple. A cave below the temple, carved out of the rock, has a beautifully sculpted altar and series of niches that create mesmerizing morning shadows. See “Machu Picchu & the Inca Trail” in chapter 8.

- **Colonial Arequipa:** The colonial core of Arequipa, Peru's second city, is the most graceful and harmonious in the country. Most of its elegant mansions and churches are carved from *sillar*, or white volcanic stone. The Plaza de Armas is one of the prettiest main squares in Peru, even though the cathedral was recently damaged by a major earthquake. Other colonial churches of note are La Compañía, San Francisco, San Agustín, and the Monasterio de la Recoleta. Arequipa also has some of Peru's finest colonial seigniorial homes, which feature beautiful courtyards, elaborately carved stone facades, and period furnishings. Don't miss Casa del Moral, Casa Ricketts, and Casa Arróspide. See “Arequipa” in chapter 9.
- **Iquitos's Unique Structures:** A humid Amazon river city, Iquitos might not be a place you'd expect to find distinguished architecture, but the rubber barons who made fortunes in the 19th century lined the Malecón Tarapacá riverfront with handsome mansions covered in colorful Portuguese glazed tiles, or *azulejos*. The best are Casa Hernández, Casa Cohen, Casa Morey, and the Logia Unión Amazónica. Also check out the Casa de Fierro, designed by Gustave Eiffel and entirely constructed of iron in Paris and shipped to Peru, or the wild wooden houses on stilts in the often-flooded shantytown district of Belén. See “Iquitos & the Northern Amazon” in chapter 10.

- **Trujillo's Casas Antiguas:** The colorful pastel facades and unique iron window grilles of Trujillo's colonial- and republican-era houses represent one of Peru's finest architectural ensembles. Several have splendid interior courtyards and *mudéjar*-style (Moorish-Christian) details. Fine homes grace the lovely Plaza de Armas and the streets that radiate out from it. Among those outfitted with historic furnishings and open to the public are Palacio Iturregui, Casa Urquiaga (where Simón Bolívar once lived), Casa de la Emancipación, Casa Ganoza Chopitea, and Casa Orbegoso. See "Trujillo" in chapter 11.
- **Cumbe Mayo's Aqueduct:** This weird and wonderful spot near Cajamarca draws visitors for its strange rock formations that mimic a stone forest, but a structure engineered by man, a pre-Incan aqueduct constructed around 1000 B.C., is pure genius. The extraordinary 8km (5-mile) canal is carved from volcanic stone in perfect lines to collect and redirect water on its way to the Pacific Ocean. Right angles slow the flow of water and ease the effects of erosion. The aqueduct is likely the oldest man-made structure in South America. See "Cajamarca" in chapter 11.

8 The Best Festivals & Celebrations

- **Fiesta de la Cruz** (across Peru): The Festival of the Cross isn't as solemnly Catholic as it might sound. Best in Lima, Cusco, and Ica, the festival does feature cross processions (although the decorated crosses are vibrant), but it also displays a surfeit of folk music and dance, the highlight being the daring "scissors dancers," who once performed on top of churches.
- **El Señor de los Milagros** (Lima): The Artist Once Again Known as Prince would love this highly religious procession, with tens of thousands of participants all clad in bright purple. The Lord of Miracles, the largest procession in South America, lasts a full 24 hours. It venerates a miraculous painting of Jesus Christ, which was created by an Angolan slave and survived the devastating 1746 earthquake, even though almost everything around it was felled.
- **Inti Raymi** (Cusco): The Festival of the Sun, one of the greatest pageants in South America, celebrates the winter solstice and honors the Incan sun god with a bounty of colorful Andean parades, music, and dance. It takes over Cusco and transforms the Sacsayhuamán ruins overlooking the city into a majestic stage.
- **Virgen del Carmen** (Paucartambo): The tiny, remote Andean colonial village of Paucartambo is about 4 hours from Cusco, but it hosts one of Peru's wildest festivals. Its 3 days of dance, revelry, drinking, and outlandish, scary costumes pack in thousands who camp all over town (there's almost nowhere to stay) and then wind up at the cemetery.
- **Virgen de la Candelaria** (Puno): Puno, perhaps the epicenter of Peruvian folklore, imbues its festivals with a unique vibrancy. Candlemas (or Virgen de la Candelaria), which is spread over 2 weeks, is one of the greatest folk religious festivals in South America, with an explosion of music, dance, and some of the most fantastic costumes and masks seen anywhere.
- **Puno Week** (Puno): Puno, the fiesta capital of Peru, rises to the occasion for a full week every November to mark its Amerindian roots. A huge

procession from Lake Titicaca into town remembers the legend of the first Incan emperor, who emerged from the world's highest navigable lake to establish the Incan Empire.

The procession deviates into dance, music, and oblivion. Day of the Dead, early in the week, is a joyous celebration that prompts picnics at cemeteries.

9 The Best Hotels

- **Miraflores Park Hotel**, Lima (☎ 01/242-3000): The top business traveler's hotel in Lima, this oasis of refinement and luxury is still small enough to cater to your every whim. The Park Hotel is the height of style, with handsome, spacious rooms, huge bathrooms, and an elegant restaurant and bar. There's a small pool and a gym/sauna on the top floor, overlooking the *malecón*, parks, and the coastline. See p. 118.
- **Country Club Lima Hotel**, Lima (☎ 01/611-9000): A revived hacienda-style hotel from the 1920s, this grand estate is luxurious and has plenty of character, but it remains a relaxed place that's good for families. Given its high standards, it's not a bad deal, either. At this good retreat from the stress of modern Lima, the country club aspect isn't neglected: Golf and tennis are both available. See p. 123.
- **Libertador Palacio del Inka**, Cusco (☎ 084/231-961): This distinguished luxury hotel in Cusco is just a couple of blocks from the Plaza de Armas and right across the street from the Incan Temple of the Sun. Elegant and traditional, with excellent service, the Libertador inhabits a colonial house where Francisco Pizarro once lived. Full of art and antiques, the rooms are refined with colonial touches. See p. 193.
- **Hotel Monasterio**, Cusco (☎ 084/241-777): Extraordinarily carved out of a 16th-century monastery, itself built over the foundations of an Incan palace, this Orient-Express hotel is the most dignified and historic place to stay in Peru. With its own gilded chapel and 18th-century Cusco School art collection, it's an attraction in its own right. Rooms are gracefully decorated with colonial touches, particularly the rooms off the serene first courtyard. See p. 193.
- **Casa Andina Private Collection**, Yanahuara (☎ 084/976-550): The Sacred Valley is exploding with new upscale accommodations, and this is one of the best, a large, mountain-chalet style hotel. Its lovely setting has great mountain views and is complemented by gardens and a new pool and spa. The best rooms are the two-story suites with private balconies. See p. 244.
- **Machu Picchu Sanctuary Lodge**, Machu Picchu (☎ 084/246-419): Peru's best-known hotel benefits from one of the world's most enviable locations, perched high on a mountain, just paces from the ruins of Machu Picchu. Remodeled and now charmingly rustic, with a nice restaurant and spectacular gardens boasting jaw-dropping views of the Incan citadel, it is always in high demand, even though it costs a very pretty penny for the privilege of a stay. It's one of those places where if you have to ask the price, you probably should consider alternatives. See p. 276.
- **Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel**, Aguas Calientes (☎ 084/211-122, or 084/245-314 for reservations): It's not next to the ruins, but this rustic hotel, a compound of bungalows ensconced in lush tropical gardens

and cloud forest, is full of character and by far the nicest place in Aguas Calientes. With loads of nature trails and guided activities, it's a superb retreat for naturalists. And after a day at Machu Picchu, the spring-fed pool is a great alternative to the thermal baths in town. Junior suites, with fireplaces and small terraces, are the most coveted rooms. See p. 277.

- **Casa Andina Private Collection**, Puno (☎ 051/365-992): A brand-new, upscale hotel perched on the banks of Lake Titicaca, this small but smart hotel has style and excellent service to go along with its stupendous views of the lake. If you can manage it, check out the fabulous luxury suite, with some of the most enviable views anywhere. See p. 296.
- **Sonesta Posada del Inca Lake Titicaca**, Puno (☎ 051/364-111): Gracing the shores of Lake Titicaca, this hotel is warmly designed, with a roaring fireplace and lots of Peruvian art. Rooms are spacious and comfortable,

and many have great views of the lake. Families might be especially interested in the tiny version of a Lake Titicaca floating community. See p. 296.

- **Colca Lodge**, Coporaque (☎ 054/202-587): A handsome Colca Valley ecolodge that hugs the banks of the river, this rustic hotel is large enough to accommodate groups but sensitively designed enough to ensure privacy and serenity. That's especially true if you find your way to the beautiful stone thermal pools, which no other hotel in the zone can match. See p. 329.
- **Hotel Libertador Trujillo**, Trujillo (☎ 044/232-741). One of the finest hotels in northern Peru, the Libertador boasts a coveted location overlooking Trujillo's lovely Plaza de Armas. It inhabits a striking colonial mansion and features nice extras, like a courtyard patio, good restaurant, outdoor pool, and both dry and steam saunas. Best of all, it's a very good value. See p. 380.

10 The Best Small Hotels, Inns & Lodges

- **Amazon Yarapa River Lodge**, northern Amazon (☎ 800/771-3100 or 065/993-1172). A splendid, award-winning conservationist lodge good enough to be partnered with Cornell University and host its faculty and students at its field lab, this place is also perfect for amateur botanists and biologists. Though isolated near the Reserva Nacional Pacaya-Samiria, the largest of Peru's protected areas and one of the top spots for wildlife viewing, the lodge, built by local artisans, is unexpectedly comfortable and attractive, with huge private bungalows, a lounge, and a hammock house overlooking the river.
- **Reserva Amazónica Lodge, Tambopata** (☎ 800/442-5042 or 01/610-0400). The swankest lodge in the

Peruvian Amazon, this is the place for a comfortable jungle experience. You'll still get plenty of jungle, whether spotting birds on a canopy walk, watching for caimans along the river, and stalking monkeys on a small island. But when it comes time to relax, you'll do it in style with cocktails and dinner in the stylish main house before retiring to your plush African-style bungalow. See p. 340.

- **Explorer's Inn**, Tambopata (☎ 01/447-8888): One of the most renowned and respected ecolodges in the Peruvian Amazon is this 30-year-old pioneer that hosts both ecotourists and scientists. About 3 hours upriver from Puerto Maldonado, the inn—which features thatched-roof bungalows—is superb for viewing

- otters, monkeys, and jungle birds. See p. 341.
- **Tahuayo Lodge**, northern Amazon (☎ 800/262-9669). The top lodge in Peru's northern Amazon, about 4 hours from Iquitos and associated with the Rainforest Conservation Fund, is the only lodge with access to the terrific Tamshiyacu-Tahuayo Reserve, ideal for wildlife viewing. It's remote and small, but features excellent jungle programs, including zip-line canopy ropes for treetop nature viewing. See p. 359.
 - **La Posada del Parque Hostel**, Lima (☎ 01/433-2412): A gregarious owner runs this great-value small inn, carved out of a 1920s mansion on an exceedingly peaceful street—a rare commodity near the center of Lima. The house bursts with Peruvian popular art, and rooms are spacious and nicely maintained for the bargain price. See p. 118.
 - **Niños Hotel**, Cusco (☎ 084/231-424): Even if this great little inn had no redeeming social and moral value, it would still be one of the best informal places to stay in Peru. The fact that it operates as part of a foundation that dedicates its profits to helping and housing Cusco's street children is a welcome bonus. The small Dutch-owned hotel, located in a restored and nicely if simply decorated colonial house, is charming, immaculate, and a great value. The trick is getting a reservation—try many months in advance of your arrival. See p. 197.
 - **Torre Dorada**, Cusco (☎ 084/241-698): Even though it's outside the city center, this exceptional, extremely friendly, and family-run boutique hotel, in a quiet residential neighborhood 5 minutes from downtown Cusco, more than makes up for the inconvenience with superb service and a warm ambience. The inn isn't luxurious, but you won't find a friendlier place in Peru, and the breakfast buffet is better than most top-flight hotels. See p. 202.
 - **Hostal Marani**, Cusco (☎ 084/249-462): Cusco is littered with all kinds of comfortable, good-value *hostales*, but this one, much like the Niños Hotel, wears its heart and commitment to social causes and disadvantaged Peruvian youth on its doorstep. Helping to fund initiatives of a Dutch foundation, the inn, which occupies a lovely colonial house in San Blas, is one of the best bargains in town, with excellent large rooms built around a relaxing Spanish-style courtyard. It's a win-win. See p. 202.
 - **Hostal Pisaq**, Pisac (☎/fax 084/203-062): On the main square of Pisac, which is overrun on market days, this friendly little inn has neat features for a budget hostel: hand-painted murals, a sauna, an attractive courtyard, and a little cafe serving home-cooked meals and great pizza from a wood-burning oven. See p. 239.
 - **Libertador Valle Sagrado Lodge**, Yanahuara (☎ 084/251-526): A small hotel that looks and feels like a tiny colonial rural village, this is a great spot to absorb the relaxing feel and gorgeous sights of the Sacred Valley. Isolated and serene, with enchanting views and very comfortable rooms and a nice restaurant, it's the kind of place for discriminating individual travelers who'd rather not share a dining room with large groups. See p. 245.
 - **El Albergue**, Ollantaytambo (☎/fax 084/204-014): An American-owned hostel right next to the railroad tracks—but much quieter than that would indicate—this comfortable little place has just a few rooms and shared bathrooms. Beds are excellent, and the vibe, with relaxing gardens

and Labrador retrievers running around, is great. There's also a cool wood-fired sauna. See p. 253.

- **Casa Arequipa**, Arequipa (☎ 054/284-219): The best new small hotel in Peru is this elite 1950s mansion masquerading as a sophisticated bed and breakfast. It feels like a European boutique hotel, with luxury linens, furnishings, and bathrooms that rival the finest upscale hotels in the country, but for a fraction of the price. Though it's in a residential neighborhood that's a short taxi ride from the beautiful colonial downtown of Arequipa, that minor inconvenience is a very small price to pay. The breakfast buffet and personal attention will make you think you're in a large five-star hotel. See p. 310.
- **La Casa de Melgar Hostel**, Arequipa (☎/fax 054/222-459): In a pretty colonial house made of *sillar* stone, this small inn exudes style and charm. With thick walls, multiple interior courtyards, and gardens, it's much nicer than most inexpensive hotels. Ground-floor rooms with vaulted brick ceilings look like they're straight out of a movie shoot. See p. 313.
- **Parador del Colca**, Yanque (☎ 01/242-3425): A favorite of sophisticated travelers venturing into the rustic Colca Canyon, the Parador, now owned by Orient-Express, has a unique country charm and elegance. Rooms have loft spaces, and there are

private patios with fire pits, an excellent dining room serving fresh country meals, and lots of hiking and horseback-riding opportunities. It enjoys sprawling gardens and views of the canyon. In the midst of an expansion and upgrade, with planned individual luxury casitas, the tiny inn is worth checking out while it's still a true bargain, since it's bound to become one of the swankest rustic inns in the country. See p. 329.

- **Hotel Posada del Puruay**, Cajamarca (☎ 076/828-318, or 01/336-7869 for reservations): In the gorgeous highland countryside just outside Cajamarca, this country hotel rests in a restored 1830 farmhouse. The grounds, with gardens, horses, and amenities such as a barbecue pit, are sure-fire selling points, but the inn also has huge rooms, friendly personal service, a very good restaurant, and an extensive video library. See p. 403.
- **Hacienda San Vicente**, Cajamarca (☎ 076/822-644): A small and funky inn in a former hacienda, this unique place probably isn't for everyone. Its oddball rooms are like caves carved into the hillside (rock walls even form a headboard or two). Everything is just a tad "off," but delightfully so. With skylights for moon views and a Gaudí-esque chapel on the premises, this place isn't afraid to be itself. See p. 404.

11 The Best Local Dining Experiences

- **Barbecuing Peruvian-Style:** The Peruvian version of a barbecue get-together is called a *pachamanca*; it's basically cooking meat and veggies over coals or hot stones in a hole in the ground. On weekends in the countryside, mostly in the mountains, you'll see families gathered around smoky subterranean grills, cooking up pork or beef and potatoes

and vegetables. (You can also get *pachamanca*-style dishes in some traditional restaurants.)

- **Chugging Chicha:** An ancient Andean tradition is the brewing of *chicha*, beer made from fermented maize. You can find it at a few traditional restaurants, but for an authentic Andean experience, the best place to get it is at a simple bar or home

that flies the *chicha* flag—a long pole with a red flag or, often, balloon—which is the local way of advertising that there’s home-brewed *chicha* available inside. Served warm, in monstrous tumblers for a few pennies, it’s not to many foreigners’ liking, but it’s one of the best ways to go native. *Chicha morada*, a refreshment made from blue corn, is something altogether different: It’s sweet and nonalcoholic, and it actually tastes good (especially with ceviche).

- **Going Native with Jungle Cuisine:** Peru’s vast Amazon is full of exotic critters and plants, so it’s logical that it would produce its own unique cuisine. Some of what restaurateurs deal in is endangered animals, though, so I don’t advise satisfying your curiosity to try sea-turtle soup or caiman, even if the locals do it. Local jungle dishes that you don’t have to feel bad about trying include *patanashca*, a steamed river fish wrapped in banana leaves; *juanes*, a kind of rice tamale; *timbuche*, a thick soup made with local fish; *paiche*, an Amazon-size local fish; and *chonta*, a hearts of palm salad. If you don’t make it to the jungle, another way of going native (in the highlands and along the coast) is to eat *cuy*, or guinea pig. See chapter 9.
- **Relaxing at a *Quinta*:** There are elegant restaurants in Lima, Cusco, Arequipa, and Iquitos, but there’s nothing quite like an informal *quinta*—an open-air restaurant specializing in Andean home-cooking. It’s an Andean tradition perhaps best explored in the crisp air of Cusco, which has a trio of *quintas* that are especially popular with locals on weekends. Look for informal garden or courtyard settings, large portions of Peruvian cooking, and reasonable prices. Most *quintas* are open only for lunch, so plan on it as your main

meal of the day. Not only will you eat well, but it’s also a great way to spend a sunny afternoon. See “Cusco’s *Quintas*” on p. 207.

- **Savoring a *Pisco Sour*:** Peru’s national drink is the pisco sour, a delicious concoction made from the white-grape brandy called pisco. Made frothy when mixed with egg whites, lemon juice, sugar, and bitters, it’s cold and complex, the closest thing to a Peruvian margarita. Try one with ceviche or a robust Andean meal—or just knock ’em back late at night at a gringo-filled bar.
- **Self-Medicating with *Mate de Coca*:** Coca-leaf tea, a perfectly legal local drink that has been a tradition in the Andes for centuries, is a great way to deal with the high altitude of the mountains, which can make your head spin and your body reel. As soon as you hit Cusco or Puno, head straight for the *mate de coca*—most hotels have it at the ready for their guests. And if that doesn’t work, strap on the oxygen tank (many hotels supply that for their guests, too).
- **Slurping Ceviche:** One of the classic dishes of Peruvian coastal cooking is ceviche—raw fish and shellfish marinated in lime or lemon juice and hot chile peppers, and served with raw onion, sweet potato, and toasted corn. It’s wonderfully refreshing and spicy. The best place to try one? A seaside *cevichería*, specializing in umpteen varieties of deliciously fresh ceviche.
- **Touring Ica’s Bodegas:** Peru, one of the great winemaking countries of the world? Probably not, but the southern desert coast does have a thriving wine industry. The most famous product is pisco, but the many traditional bodegas (wineries) throughout the Ica countryside also make regular table wines. A few

bodegas give tours and tastings. Ica hosts a hopping Wine Festival in March, which is a good time to tour the region if you're into wine and general merriment. Harvest time, late

February through April, is the other time to visit, when you can see people crushing grapes the old-fashioned way—with their feet. See “Ica” in chapter 6.

12 The Best Restaurants

- **Astrid y Gastón**, Lima (☎ 01/444-1496): One of the coolest restaurants in the country is this stylish modern place serving a creative brand of creole-Mediterranean fare. Behind a nondescript facade in the Miraflores district, a husband/wife team cooks and runs the colorful colonial dining room and cozy bar, favored by Limeño regulars. See p. 127.
- **Cebichería La Mar**, Lima (☎ 01/421-3365): A designer and celebrity-chef's take on the neighborhood *cevichería*, this is the hottest restaurant in Lima. It's only open for lunch, though, and doesn't take reservations, so it's a bit of a challenge to get a seat at this stylish hotspot. The focus is on moderately priced, delicious ceviche and traditional Limeño fare served up with hip twists. See p. 129.
- **La Hamaca**, Lima (☎ 01/242-7978): A mansion stuffed to the rafters with priceless Peruvian art and antiques, and a maze of spectacularly decorated small dining rooms is a cinematic experience. Imagine you're the *dueño* of a sprawling hacienda while you dine on classic Peruvian preparations. Retire upstairs for an elegant evening of dancing on weekends. See p. 128.
- **Restaurant Huaca Pucllana**, Lima (☎ 01/445-4042): One of the best places for dining in the capital has the most unique location: within the compound of an over 1,500-year-old adobe pyramid. The restaurant is both hip and relaxed, with a covered terrace looking out over the low pyramid and illuminated excavation walkways. The creative Peruvian menu offers new twists on classic *comida criolla* (creole cooking). See p. 128.
- **Manos Morenas**, Lima (☎ 01/467-0421): The best place for dinner and a show in Lima, this sleek Barranco restaurant serves good *criollo* cooking and features *peña* and Afro-Peruvian music and dance nightly. It's housed in an elegant early 1900s house, very appealingly converted. The show's not inexpensive, but it's usually a great evening out. See p. 132.
- **Restaurante Illary (Hotel Monasterio)**, Cusco (☎ 084/243-820): Cusco's top fine-dining option is within the exclusive confines of the top hotel in town. Even if the hotel is out of reach, the restaurant makes the perfect splurge date in Cusco. Whether you sit in the glassed-in corridor overlooking the colonial patio or the main dining room that very much looks the part of 16th-century monastery, dining here is a true treat. The Peruvian specialties, like the discreet service, are impeccable. See p. 203.
- **Cicciolina**, Cusco (☎ 084/239-510): Cusco's restaurant scene is constantly improving, adding more upscale, fine-dining options, and this new restaurant, which serves stylish novo Andino cuisine, is the best example of the trend. You might think you've landed in a chic Tuscan country eatery, but the menu is eclectic, with a soft spot for unusual spices. The hopping bar is a smart haunt for pre-dinner drinks, though the sexy, hushed dining room is the sleekest in Cusco. See p. 204.
- **MAP Café**, Cusco (☎ 084/242-476): Cusco's most chic and modern

restaurant is tucked into the colonial patio of the city's great pre-Columbian art museum. It quietly makes a dramatic statement with its understated, minimalist design: a glass and steel box. The food, nouveau Andean, is every bit as elegant and cleanly presented. With a super wine list and the opportunity to stroll through the museum after dinner, it's a perfect, sophisticated date restaurant. See p. 205.

- **Greens**, Cusco (☎ 084/243-379): A small and stylish restaurant in the cool San Blas district, Greens has a creative menu and funky decor, including low, comfy sofas and hipster tunes. The excellent, surprising menus of international and Peruvian dishes are reasonably priced. See p. 206.
- **Killa Wasi**, Huicho (Sacred Valley) (☎ 084/201-620): The restaurant of Hotel Sol y Luna, one of the best places to stay in the Sacred Valley, deters guests from venturing out and draws many from other hotels. The restaurant is elegant but relaxed, and the menu is full of creative *criollo* and nouveau Andean dishes. The pub upstairs is a good spot for a pisco sour late in the day. See “Urubamba & Environs” in chapter 8.
- **Indio Feliz**, Aguas Calientes (☎ 084/211-090): The town at the bottom of Machu Picchu is a little scrappy, so this Peruvian-French restaurant really stands out. In an attractive and very popular two-level dining room, it offers a great-value three-course menu. If by chance you just completed the 4-day Inca Trail trek, treat yourself to a meal here. See p. 278.
- **Sol de Mayo**, Arequipa (☎ 054/254-148): This is the best place in town for traditional Arequipeño cooking, which has quite a reputation in Peru. The setting, around a courtyard garden where strolling musicians play, is delightful. It's a perfect place to sink your teeth into local Peruvian specialties and is a great place to splurge. See p. 316.
- **La Trattoria del Monasterio**, Arequipa (☎ 054/204-062): A new, stylishly reserved restaurant carved out of the city's most distinguished walls, belonging to the Santa Catalina monastery, this laid-back Italian spot is a real find. With a menu designed by Peru's hottest chef, a nice wine list, a trio of quiet dining rooms, and accessible prices, it's a welcome change from noisier and more solicitous restaurants populating Arequipa's highly trafficked restaurant rows. See p. 316.
- **Zig Zag**, Arequipa (☎ 054/206-020): This chic and inviting restaurant has a unique specialty: stone-grilled ostrich. Healthier than other meats, ostrich is really good, as is another popular dish served here: alpaca (which is also healthier than red meat). In this two-level space with *sillar* walls and vaulted ceilings, the grilled meat is not the only thing that makes this a memorable dining experience. See p. 317.
- **Montecarlo**, Iquitos (☎ 065/232-246): The northern Amazon city of Iquitos has a handful of good restaurants serving Peruvian and jungle specialties, but this upscale place—glitzy on the outside but relaxed and elegant on the inside—is the best. Fish dishes are excellent, as is the service. If you want, you can gamble downstairs at the casino. See p. 365.
- **Club Colonial**, Huanchaco (☎ 044/461-015): An unexpectedly chic and stylish restaurant in the low-key beach resort of Huanchaco, this Belgian-French place has the kind of ambience you'd look to find in Barranco in Lima, not the north coast. The candlelit dining room is like a

cool expatriate's house, and the menu is a tantalizing mix of Peruvian and Franco-Belgian items. Whether you order meat or fresh fish, or even a Belgian standard, you're in for a treat. See p. 384.

- **Pueblo Viejo**, Chiclayo (☎ 074/228-863): Chiclayo might not be the dining capital of Peru, but its best restaurant is very good. An attractive two-story eatery that serves traditional but creative Chiclayano cooking and

comida criolla, Pueblo Viejo really stands out in the north of Peru. See p. 394.

- **El Querubino**, Cajamarca (☎ 076/830-900): A brightly decorated restaurant just off the Plaza de Armas, El Querubino is refined and stylish, but relaxed enough to be popular with locals. Dinner often features live but low-key music, and at lunch there's a nice daily list of value specials. See p. 406.

13 The Best Markets & Shopping

- **Miraflores**, Lima: The Peruvian capital has the biggest number of shops and selection of goods from across the country, as might be expected. The Miraflores district has dozens of shops stocked to the rafters with handicrafts from around Peru. For one-stop shopping, there are mini-malls of many stalls selling ceramics, textiles, and other souvenirs. The best silver jewelry and antiques shops are also in Miraflores. See "Shopping" in chapter 5.
- **Barrio de San Blas**, Cusco: Galleries around the Plaza de Armas of the old Incan capital are wonderful for all kinds of wool and alpaca fashions and silver jewelry. But especially flavorful is the picturesque and bohemian neighborhood of San Blas, which rises into the hills above Cusco, bursting with the studios and workshops of artists and artisans, as well as art galleries and ceramics shops. You can pop into several studios and see artists at work. See "Shopping" in chapter 7.
- **Pisac's Crafts Market**: Thousands of tourists descend each Sunday morning on Pisac's liveliest handicrafts market, which takes over the central plaza and spills across adjoining streets. Many sellers, decked out in the dress typical of their villages, come

from remote populations high in the mountains. Pisac is one of the best spots for colorful Andean textiles, including rugs, alpaca sweaters, and ponchos. See "Pisac" in chapter 8.

- **Pablo Seminario**, Urubamba: Urubamba leaves the Sunday tourist handicrafts markets to other towns in the Sacred Valley, but it's home to one of the coolest ceramics shops in Peru. Pablo Seminario, originally from the north of the country, now operates out of a lovely place that is equal parts home, workshop, storefront, and zoo. His work features funky pre-Columbian motifs. See "Urubamba & Environs" in chapter 8.
- **Chincheró's Handicrafts Market**: It's not as popular as Pisac's market, but in many ways, Chincheró's is more authentic, and the setting is just as spectacular. The big one is on Sunday, when the tourist buses come through, but less-hectic Tuesday and Thursday are probably better for making a deal. The quality of handicrafts is usually quite excellent. Take your camera; the sellers still wear traditional garments. See "Urubamba & Environs" in chapter 8.
- **Isla Taquile**, Lake Titicaca: The Taquile islanders are famous for their dress and exquisite textiles. Travelers can pick up some of the finest woven

and embroidered waistbands and wool stocking caps in Peru, including some that are normally reserved for community authorities. Because they're so finely made, Taquile textiles are more expensive than the mass-produced handicrafts you'll find elsewhere in Peru. Islanders operate a co-op on the main plaza and sell from stalls during festivals. See "Puno & Lake Titicaca" in chapter 9.

- **Arequipa:** Alpaca sweaters, ponchos, and hats are classic Peruvian souvenirs, and you can score them across the Andes and in Lima, but Arequipa is the top spot for really excellent export-quality goods. You'll find great designs in baby alpaca, vicuña, and wool. Visit any of the shops near the Plaza de Armas, including the alpaca boutiques that now inhabit the old cloisters of the La Compañía church. Another good spot, for slightly less

swank goods, is the general handicrafts market (*mercado de artesanía*), whose stalls are in what used to be the old town jail. See "Arequipa" in chapter 9.

- **Barrio Belén, Iquitos:** Handicrafts, particularly textiles and other items from the Shipibo tribe in the Amazon, are available at the large artisans' market out by the airport, but shopping of a very different sort is pursued at the popular market in the waterfront Barrio de Belén. The wildly colorful market, which spreads over several long blocks and is a riot of activity, sells everything under the Amazon sun; let your senses be the judge. Look for unusual Amazon fish and fruits, and exotic jungle meats, such as monkey and caiman. When it becomes too much, take a breather at the fresh juice stands. See "Iquitos & the Northern Amazon" in chapter 10.

14 The Best Reasons for Bragging Rights

- **Taking the High Road:** The Ferrocarril Central Andino, called the "Tren Macho," is the highest railway in the world, climbing to more than 4500m (15,000 ft.) on the way from Lima to Huancayo in the Central Highlands. Unfortunately, the passenger railway has experienced all kinds of problems in recent years; even when it's on, it only travels once a month from July to October. If it is running, though, it's a truly thrilling and occasionally vertigo-inducing ride. If you're one of the lucky few to ride it, you've got plenty to brag about. See chapter 5.
- **Surfing Big Sand:** The southern desert of Peru is a strange, unrelenting landscape, but it has the highest sand dunes in South America. An X-sport fast gaining in popularity is surfing the dunes on sand boards and

areneros (dune buggies). The biggest are near Nasca, but probably the prettiest spot is the dunes that ring the Huacachina Lagoon outside of Ica. See "Ica" in chapter 6.

- **Gazing at the Stars at Sacsayhuamán:** The Sacsayhuamán ruins are amazing enough by day; imagine those immense, elegantly laid stones at night, high above Cusco. At night, it won't be hard to perceive the Incas' worship of the natural world, in which the moon was a deity. If your visit coincides with a full moon in that gargantuan sky, you'll be talking about it back home for months. A similar experience would be hiking along the Inca Trail and spending that last night before pushing on to Machu Picchu under a full moon. See "What to See & Do" in chapter 7.

- **Lighting It Up at Tres Cruces:** Beyond the remote Andean village of Paucartambo, known for its Virgen de Carmen festival, is Tres Cruces, perched on a mountain ridge on the edge of the Amazon basin. Famous for its almost hallucinogenic, multi-hued sunrise, the spot was held sacred by the Incas, and it's not hard to see why. During the winter months (May–July), the special effects are beyond belief. To enhance your bragging rights, note that Tres Cruces is a royal pain to reach. See “Side Trips from Cusco” in chapter 7.
- **Hopping the Hiram Bingham Train to Machu Picchu:** Once upon a time, you could zip to the most famous Incan ruins by helicopter, but for my money, the new old-world luxury train named for the discoverer of Machu Picchu is even better. With wood-paneled cars, full white-glove meal and cocktail service, on-board Peruvian musicians, and an included tour of the ruins, it's definitely traveling in style. Sure, it costs several times the regular tourist train, but this is Machu Picchu, right? See “Machu Picchu & the Inca Trail” in chapter 8.
- **Scaling Huayna Picchu in Record Time:** Huayna Picchu hovers above Machu Picchu in the classic postcard shot of the ruins. People of all ages and decent physical condition can climb to the summit; to properly boast, you've got to race the steep stone path in close to record time (about 15 min. at last report). Even if you don't beat the record, you can savor the stunning, indescribable view as you wait for your heart rate to return to normal. See “Machu Picchu & the Inca Trail” in chapter 8.
- **Surviving “Dead Woman's Pass”:** Hiking the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu is one of the greatest coadventures on the planet. Enough said. See “Machu Picchu & the Inca Trail” in chapter 8.
- **Running a Class VI in Colca Canyon:** Extremely technical white-water rafting in the Colca (as well as Cotahuasi) Canyon is the stuff that bragging was made for. Imagine telling your friends that you hurtled down the river at the bottom of a canyon more than twice as deep as the Grand Canyon! This is for hardcore runners only; trips are expensive and lengthy. See “Colca Valley” in chapter 9.
- **Rumbling by Truck to Puerto Maldonado:** If you like tests of sheer perseverance, travel by truck from Cusco to Puerto Maldonado, the gateway to the Tambopata Reserve in the southern Amazon. It'll take between 3 and 10 days on a road that's 95% unpaved, but what's time (and a sore body) to a good story? See “The Southern Amazon Jungle” in chapter 10.
- **Trippin' Amazon-Style:** If spotting wildlife and trekking through primary rainforest isn't stimulating enough, you can do your best to imitate the ancient ways of Amazon tribes and shamans by taking part in an *ayahuasca* ceremony. The natural hallucinogenic potion, made of herbs, roots, and other plants, is supposed to mess with your mind. But for locals, it's a deeply respected ritual. See “Iquitos & the Northern Amazon” in chapter 10.
- **Fishing for Piranha:** If you visit a jungle lodge, you might have the opportunity to head out on the Amazon or its tributaries in a dugout canoe to fish for piranha. Most are surprisingly small, but their famous teeth are very much present. For a special dinner, have the lodge cook fry 'em up for you that night. See “Iquitos & the Northern Amazon” in chapter 10.

- **Bagging 6,000m Peaks in the Cordillera Blanca:** For expert climbers, the Cordillera Blanca is a mountaineering mecca. From May to September, fit climbers can score several 6,000m (20,000-ft.) summits in the Parque Nacional

Huascarán in just a couple weeks. Huascarán, at 6,768m (22,205 ft.), is the big one, the highest mountain in the Peruvian Andes and the tallest tropical mountain in the world. See “Huaraz & the Cordillera Blanca” in chapter 11.

15 The Best of Peru Online

- **www.peru.info:** The most comprehensive official Peru site, recently revamped, is the website of PromPerú. It has detailed sections on Peruvian history, festivals, trip-planning, and outdoor “adrenaline rushes,” all with extensive pull-down menus, as well as a stock of photo and video images and audio files.
- **www.saexplorers.org:** The website of the rightly famous South American Explorers (based in Ithaca, New York, with clubhouses in Lima, Cusco, and Quito, Ecuador) has vital information such as travel advisories, insurance providers, and links to websites on specific Peruvian destinations. You can also order the club’s “Information Packet” of fact sheets and member tips.
- **http://gci275.com/peru:** “Peruvian Graffiti,” a website by an American journalist and former resident of Peru, is an engaging compendium of Peruvian history, politics, media, and culture, as well as the latest news, from a very personal perspective. It’s an interesting place to start to get a handle on a complicated nation.
- **www.andeantravelweb.com/peru:** The Andean Travel Web, a private website run by gringos in Peru, is a miniguide to the country, with

information on all the major destinations and activities, transportation, the latest in Inca Trail regulations, local tour operators, and helpful things such as ecotourism links. It doesn’t cover northern Peru, however, sticking to the most well trodden regions.

- **http://gorp.away.com/gorp/location/latamer/peru.htm:** The travel wholesaler GORP features an entire page of personal essays on the great outdoors and adventure sports in Peru, including pieces on running the Amazon and birding, and a Top 20 of adventure activities.
- **www.livinginperu.com:** An English-language site directed toward foreign residents of Peru, this is the best place to get the latest news on Peru, including transportation issues, strikes, political developments, and other practical matters that affect not only residents but visitors. It also contains up-to-date cultural and event information.
- **www.traficoperu.com:** This online travel agent has details on practical matters—domestic airlines, bus transportation, and hotels—plus a few cheap domestic packages, and a good selection of regional and city maps.