

Alpaca and the Andes



How did they get here



Since ancient times, the South American Andes Mountains have been the ancestral home to the prized alpaca. Their fleece was **cherished** by members of the Incan civilization (referred to as "The Fiber of the Gods"), and their **graceful herds** of alpaca roamed the lush foothills and mountainous pastures. In the 17th century, Spanish conquistadors killed a large part of both the Incan and alpaca populations, forcing the retreating survivors to seek refuge in the high mountain plains known as the Altiplano. The high altitude and harsh landscape ensured only the hardiest of these creatures survived, and these ancestors of today's best bloodlines have provided a gene pool producing hardy, agile animals with dense, high quality fiber. In 1984, a small group of importers brought the first of a carefully selected herd of **highest quality** alpacas into the United States and Canada, and they immediately became a beloved part of the North American landscape.

Lets talk variety



There are two different alpacas types, the **suri** and the **huacaya**. The suri has fiber that grows quite long and forms **silky, pencil-like locks**. The huacaya has a shorter, dense, crimped fleece, giving it a very **woolly appearance**.

Alpacas have a life span of 15 to 20 years, so you can enjoy your alpaca for a long time. Not only do they have a long reproductive life, they will provide fleece for a lifetime, making your investment long-lived.

An alpaca's gestation period is 11 to 12 months, and they have single births (twins are extremely rare). A baby alpaca, called a cria, usually weighs between 15 and 20 pounds.

Types of fiber

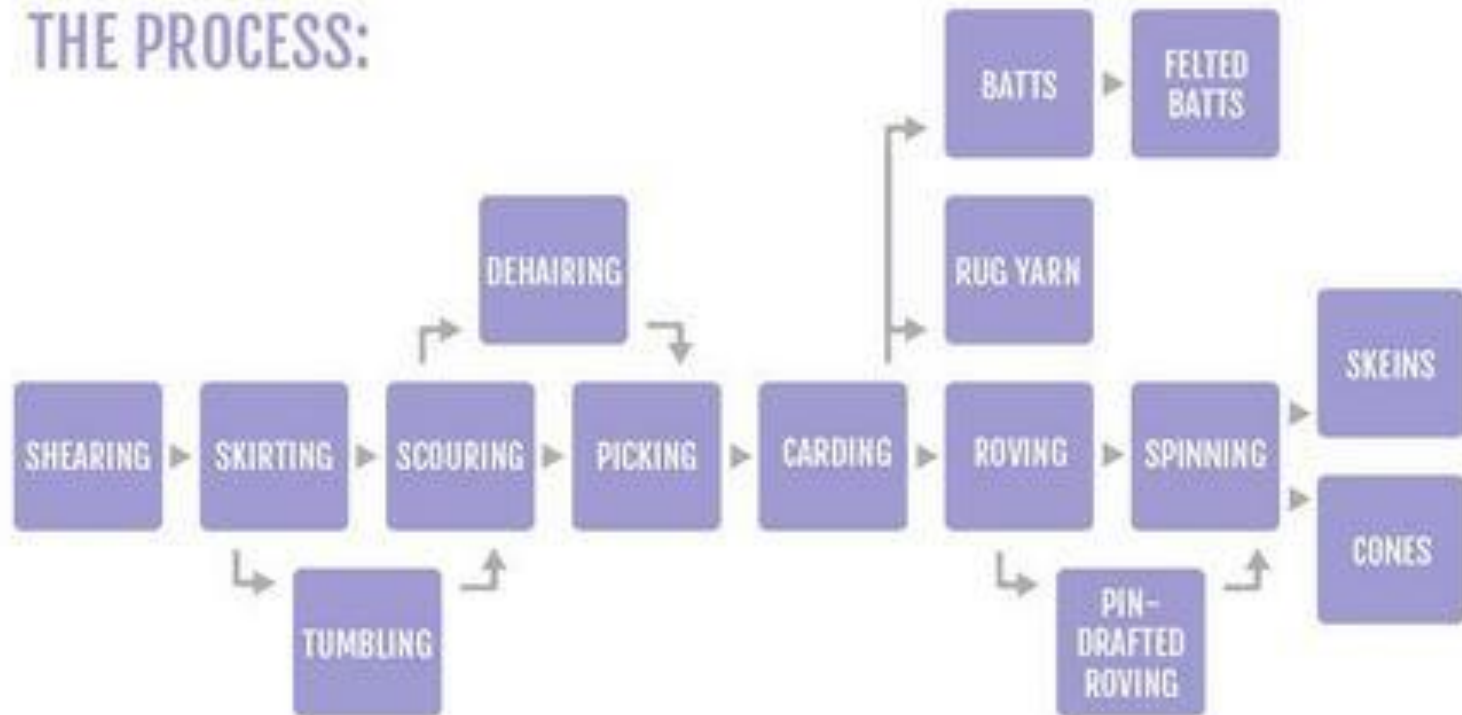


Alpaca fiber comes in 22 colors that are recognized by the textile industry, and there are many blends in addition to that. Alpacas are shorn for their **wonderful fleece** each year, which will produce 5 to 10 pounds of **soft, warm fiber** that is turned into the most **luxurious garments** in the world.



The Process

THE PROCESS:



The Chullo



The chullo is very important when it comes to status, identity and age in the Andean culture. In most cultures, the chullo is a typical form of headgear for men who live anywhere throughout the Andes Mountain range. Women only wear them for fiestas or special occasions. More often than not, almost every man wears this hat, as it has become a part of a distinctive cultural wear throughout the high mountains of the Andes. Chullos are widely seen being worn by the lower Peruvian class because they worked in the harsh weather conditions of the mountains on a daily basis. Those who live in the countryside are rarely seen without their chullo. However, depending on the region one is from, the meaning of the chullo can vary. For example, in the area of the Tacquile Island, men typically wear the chullo to indicate their marital status. The *chullo soltero* is a chullo worn by unmarried males. It has a mostly white upper area with a colored base and no ear flaps. The *pintay chullo* is worn by married men and is most often red and navy blue striped with rows of colorful stylized figures and designs.

Style of Chullo



Reference: *Andean Folk Knitting Traditions and Techniques From Peru and Bolivia* by Cynthia Gravelle LeCount

Peruvian Knitting Technique

As discussed by Andrea Wong in her craftsy class

- Every one is unique
- Generally knitted in Alpaca
- 22 stitches to the inch
- Twisting every stitch
- Purling every row using a knitting pin and hooked needles to get a very firm fabric

