

Machu Picchu, Peru

by Ignacio Maza

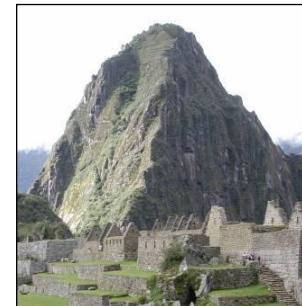
History: The citadel of Machu Picchu was built by the Incan Emperor Pachacútec in the 15th century and founded around 1450. The site was abandoned around 1570. Because of its remote location and very difficult access, Machu Picchu was unknown to the Spanish conquistadors and thus left undisturbed for centuries. It was in 1911 that Hiram Bingham, an American professor and archaeologist at Yale University, led an expedition that discovered Machu Picchu, with the help of local guides. In subsequent years, there were several expeditions to clear the forest and rebuild and preserve the ruins - an effort that continues today. Machu Picchu is a marvel of engineering, especially when you are on site and you see how difficult the access is. We do not know exactly what the purpose of Machu Picchu was. From most accounts, Machu Picchu was a religious, administrative, and trading center. The site was declared a Peruvian Historic Sanctuary in 1981 and a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983. In 2007, it was voted one of the New Seven Wonders of the World.



Depiction of Pachacútec

The ruins: There are two main areas of the ruins, separated by a series of open grass plazas. Standout locations are the Intihuatana, the Temple of the Three Windows, the Temple of the Sun, the Royal Tomb and the Temple of the Condor.

Hikes around Machu Picchu: For the fit and intrepid, you have several options: The most famous is the hike up the Huayna Picchu (or 'Young Peak') the steep mountain in the back of the ruins. This is the most demanding hike up a steep and narrow path. The second hike is all the way up to the Cerro Machu Picchu, a climb over 2,000 ft on a stone path. The third option is to hike up to Intipunku, the terminus of the Inca Trail.



Huayna Picchu

Practical advice:

- Bring a knapsack with water and snacks.
- Wear hiking shoes or comfortable walking shoes with good rubber soles
- Bring a hat and sunscreen
- Pack a small umbrella or rain jacket, especially October through May
- High season runs from June to September, normally cooler and drier than the rest of the year
- Dress in layers, as the weather is unpredictable
- The trains to/from Aguas Calientes have very limited overhead or storage space. If you are spending the night, pack a small overnight bag and leave your bigger suitcase at your hotel.

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