

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



The following information is provided as an informational guide for participants on Ecotribal's tours & expeditions and was up-to-date at time of writing and still is to the best of our knowledge.

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO GO TO PERU?

As soon as you can is the short answer; not least because air travel to Peru is becoming more expensive annually and, as carbon emissions quite rightly become included in the overall cost equation, then the price of flights is likely to rise further. Economic and environmental issues aside, the right time to go to Peru really depends on where your main focus is going to be. For the Andes and also the Amazon, the best time of year is the dry season between May and September. It is equally stunning in landscape and culture outside of these months, but more likely to have persistent rain in the mountain and jungle regions. For Peru's coast, however, the best time of year is between October and April, when it is sunny nearly all the time and generally hotter. The main exception to this is the very north of Peru where there are fine beaches (e.g. the very trendy surf beaches around Mancora). There, the sea is warm and the weather sunny all year round. Some of the uplifted coastal desert plains such as Nazca in the south and Sechura in the north have a similar climate.

DO I NEED A VISA?

EU, US, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand citizens can all currently stay in Peru as tourists for up to 90 days without a visa. However, the situation does change periodically, so always check with your local Peruvian embassy some weeks before departure. The above mentioned nationalities are given 60 or 90 day Tourist Cards on arrival (these are handed out during the flight and must be filled in before arrival at Lima airport). Other nationalities should seek advice from Ecotribal or their closest Peruvian Embassy. Unless you specifically ask for 90 days when being issued a Tourist Card on arrival, you may only be issued a Tourist Card for 60 days.

IS FOOD INCLUDED IN THE COST?

Except while camping or staying at lodges in the rainforest, all food and drink must be paid for by the tour participant at the time of consumption; these costs are not included in the tour price. Alcoholic drinks are not included in the price of the Tour or Expedition.

WHAT KIND OF FOOD CAN I EXPECT?

Peruvian cuisine is excellent, though little known. On the coast and in cities like Cusco it is possible to eat as well as anywhere in the world. Developing on the coast out of a blend of Spanish, African and indigenous influences, Peru's *comida criolla* is rich in spices. Peruvian seafood dishes are exquisite and many of them are made to ancient and unique recipes. In the Andes there is plenty of fine trout, and *novo andino* cuisine makes good use of local ingredients, often preparing alpaca steaks in delicious cheese or spicy sauces. In smaller remote towns of the Andes and Amazon areas the choice is more limited, but *chifas* (Peruvian Chinese), roast chicken with fries, burgers, empanadas (pasties), a wide range of sandwiches and sometimes even pizzas can usually be found with ease.

On tours and expeditions to the Ashaninka, food is mainly limited to what we take in with us – a combination of fresh vegetables, tins, rice, pasta, dried fruits, nuts, biscuits and energy bars. Ashaninka cooks working with Ecotribal prepare hot food over a fire twice a day (usually for breakfast and at dusk) and we generally snack for lunch, particularly while trekking. The Ashaninka's staple food is manioc (a tuber also used to make beer), fish and forest game.

Vegetarian food is widely available though limited in choice. Some of the *comida criollo* dishes (like the delicious cold potato starter *papas a la huancaína*) are vegetarian anyway. Vegan food is usually available in the *chifa* restaurants; otherwise, it is difficult to find on most menus. There is a good network of health food stores and vegetarian restaurants in the major cities of Peru, so it's generally possible to stock up. If your reason for being vegetarian is standards of animal's welfare, much of the food in the Andes and Amazon regions comes from traditionally reared and relatively happy animals. A lot of the food available in these regions is also organically grown, though without certification or tracking, so it's hard to be certain.

WHAT IS THE WATER LIKE?

Tap water is not recommended for drinking in South America, but bottled water is available everywhere except when off the beaten track in the jungle. In this situation we boil or filter our own water supplies on a daily basis. On the trek to Parijaro we make use of some pure subterranean springs. On jungle expeditions to the Ashaninka it is generally necessary to wash in the river or streams. Ecotribal urge tour or expedition participants to use only biodegradable soaps and shampoos, avoiding contamination of the water.

CAN I TAKE PHOTOS OF TRIBAL PEOPLES?

Ecotribal encourages and promotes a sound etiquette around taking photos, particularly of individuals and small groups of people. On tours and expeditions to remote villages in the Andes or Amazon we insist on asking permission before taking photos of individuals or small groups of people. Your Tour Leader will be able to advise and assist with this matter.

In and around Cusco you can expect some people to demand payment in return for you taking a photo of them. It is forbidden in law to take any pictures of military installations or personnel, this tends to be a sensitive issue in Latin American countries.

WHAT ARE PHONES & INTERNET CONNECTIONS LIKE FROM PERU?

South America has a good telephone and internet services in towns and cities, even in small relatively remote towns. There is no need to carry or use a mobile phone. Our Tour Leaders have a Peruvian mobile phone for logistical organisation and emergency use. We ask you not to give this number to friends or relatives at home. In remote situations we have access to solar radio communications systems when required.

CAN SOMEONE GET IN EMERGENCY CONTACT WITH ME WHILE ON AN ECOTRIBAL TOUR OR EXPEDITION?

If someone needs to contact you while you are on tour, the best method is via Ecotribal's UK office who will be in regular contact with the Tour Leader. Except while in remote rainforest regions, such as on tours with the Ashaninka, public phone and internet communications is cheap and easy. Our Ashaninka base village also has a solar powered satellite public phone kiosk for incoming and outgoing calls.

WHY WE ASK PARTICIPANTS FOR AN EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBER?

Ecotribal ask participants to give an emergency contact and telephone number on their Booking Form. This will only be used in an emergency or other justifiable and exceptional circumstances.

WHAT LANGUAGES ARE SPOKEN IN PERU?

The first national language of Peru is Spanish, but *quechua*, ancient tongue of the Incas, is still spoken by almost half of the country, particularly in the mountains. In the Amazon regions there are still over 30 different tribes with their own unique language and many more local dialectical differences. Good English is more common than it used to be but still mainly limited to the tourism and reception sector in busy places like Cusco, and to the professional classes.

WHAT IF I HAVE A MEDICAL CONDITION OR DISABILITY?

If you require medication or have a condition or disability that demands particular attention or medication – such as diabetes or asthma – you must inform Ecotribal when booking and also discuss with your Tour Leader prior to the start of the tour or expedition. We will make every effort to include everyone, but given the difficult nature of terrain on some of our tours and expeditions we reserve the right to refuse participation on medical or ability grounds.

DO I NEED ANY VACCINATIONS?

It is your responsibility to seek medical advice (e.g. from your GP or Health Practice) on appropriate vaccinations or preventative medicines – such as malaria prophylactics – for the tour or expedition destination you have booked on. We strongly recommend you do this at least 3 months prior to departure if possible since some courses of inoculations require more than 6 weeks and should not overlap others. If you have any certificates of vaccination these should be carried with your passport in a safe place. If you fall ill, they may be of vital assistance.

HOW DIFFICULT IS THE 3-DAY JUNGLE TREK TO PARIJARO?

The dry-season hike to Parijaro (anytime between May and October) follows the Cutivireni Valley up a gradual rise keeping to the river banks most of the time, but also cuts through some sections of the forest here and there where the river bank is impassable. It's moderately challenging, and includes some boulder-scrambling and river-crossing, requiring mental and physical stamina, but not necessarily high levels of fitness. There are no well-beaten trails nor obvious footpaths, and the only bridges are fallen tree trunks. We have had teenagers and people in their 50's cope admirably and there's no reason that anyone reasonably fit and older than this could not cope well. Our guides and leaders always move at the slowest hiker's pace.

An alternative route to Parijaro involves a long and much steeper climb, but we only use this in the rainy season. This is harder walking and much steeper, and at this time of the year it is hotter and more humid.

It is possible, with prior organization, to adapt the tour to suit the needs and wants of people who aren't looking for hikes, rafting or physical adventure. An even greater emphasis can be placed on cultural exchange, with visits to less remote communities and smaller waterfalls. How easy it is for us to adapt, depends on the balance of the group, since we always divide into two sub-groups when visiting remote Ashaninka communities in order to minimize our impact on them.

More detailed information for Ecotribal tour and expedition participants can be found on the relevant pages at www.ecotribal.com