



OFFICIAL VISIT GUIDE 2026

# Machu Picchu

Aguas Calientes · From 12.90€

<https://machupicchu.visit-tickets.com/en/> · Skip-the-Line Tickets & Official Prices

## History & Experience

### ORIGIN & HISTORY

## The Lost City of the Incas

**TIQETS** **4.18** ★★★★★ 294 {pdf\_label(lang, 'reviews')}

Perched high in the Andes at **2,438 meters**, Machu Picchu stands as a testament to Inca engineering and spiritual ambition. Built in the **15th century** during the reign of Emperor Pachacútec, this citadel was not a military fortress but a royal estate and ceremonial center. The Incas carved terraces into the steep mountain ridge, creating a harmonious blend of architecture and nature that defied the harsh terrain. Its strategic location offered both privacy for the elite and protection from external threats, hidden deep within the cloud forest.

For centuries after the Spanish conquest, the site remained largely unknown to the outside world, preserved by its isolation and the dense jungle canopy. While local Quechua farmers knew of the ruins, they were never systematically explored or looted. This obscurity protected the site from the destruction that befell many other Inca monuments, allowing it to remain intact until its "rediscovery" in **1911**. The lack of colonial records meant that its original purpose and name were lost to history, adding to its mystique.

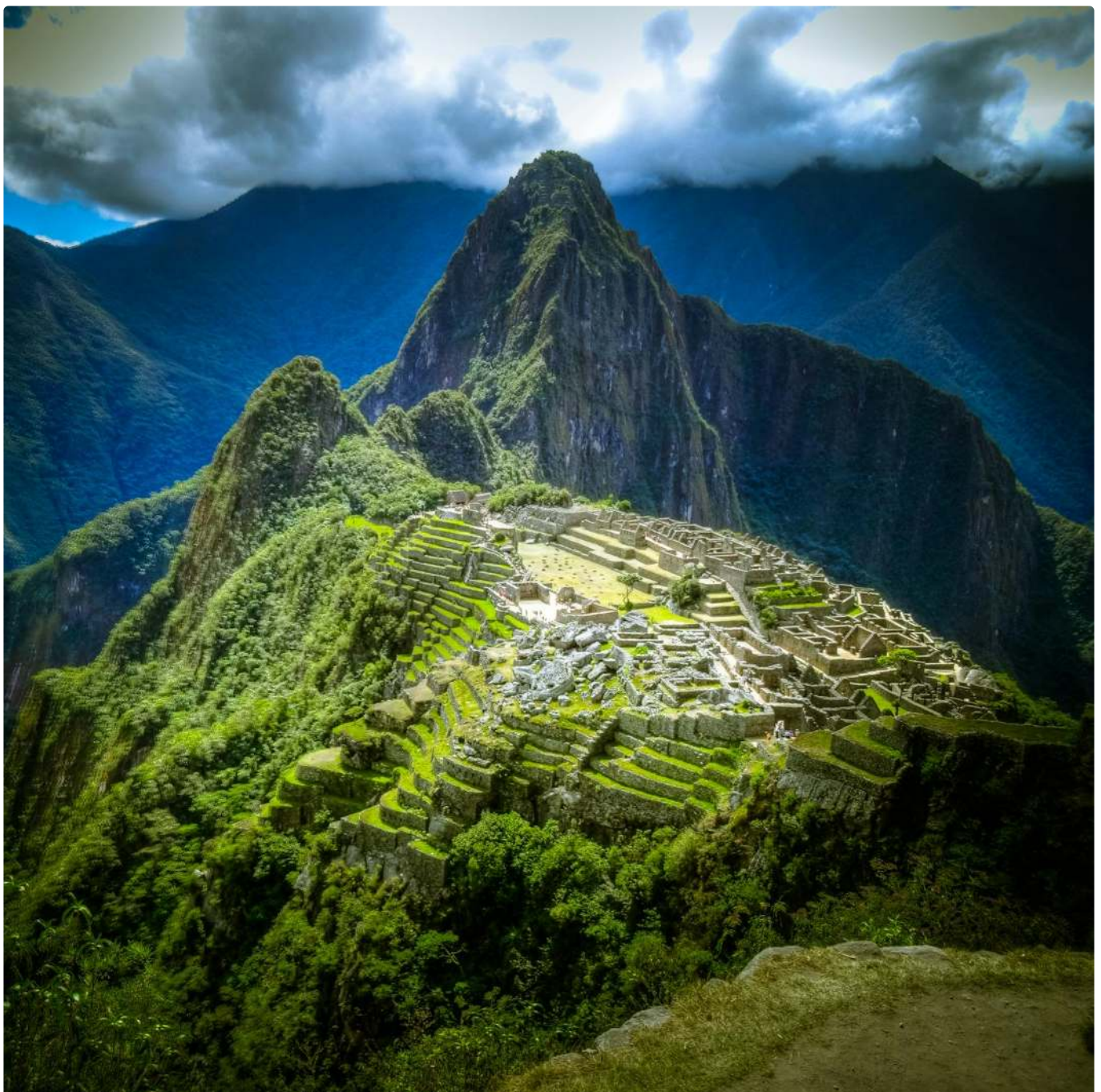
American historian **Hiram Bingham** brought Machu Picchu to global attention, although he was guided there by a local farmer. Bingham's publications sparked international fascination, transforming the site into an icon of South American heritage. However, recent archaeological studies suggest that the site served as a royal retreat for the Inca nobility, featuring sophisticated hydraulic systems and astronomical alignments. The precision of its stonework, where blocks fit together without mortar, remains a marvel of ancient craftsmanship.

Today, Machu Picchu is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**, recognized for its cultural and natural significance. The surrounding sanctuary protects diverse ecosystems, from cloud forests to alpine meadows. Preservation efforts are ongoing to manage tourism impact while maintaining the site's integrity. The name itself, meaning "**Old Mountain**" in Quechua, contrasts with the neighboring Huayna Picchu, or "Young Mountain," highlighting the dual peaks that frame this lost city. It remains a symbol of the Inca Empire's grandeur and resilience.

## THE EXPERIENCE

As you emerge from the bus or complete the steep walk from Aguas Calientes, the first sight of Machu Picchu is often described as **brehtaking**. The misty peaks of Huayna Picchu loom over the terraced ruins, which seem to grow organically from the mountain itself. The morning light casts long shadows across the stone structures, revealing the intricate layout of temples, plazas, and residential quarters. The air is crisp and thin, carrying the scent of eucalyptus and damp earth, enhancing the sense of being in a sacred, untouched place.

Walking through the site, you feel a profound connection to the past. The **precision of the stonework** invites you to touch the walls, imagining the hands that shaped them centuries ago. The panoramic views of the Urubamba River snaking through the valley below provide a sense of scale and isolation that is both humbling and exhilarating. Whether you are standing at the Intihuatana stone or gazing from the main terrace, the atmosphere is one of quiet reverence, where history and nature converge in perfect harmony.



## PREPARING FOR YOUR VISIT

## Practical Information

**ADDRESS**

Cusco Region, Peru · Access: Train to Aguas Calientes then Bus or walk. No direct road access.

**OPENING HOURS**

Open daily from 06:00 to 17:00. Entry strictly controlled by 2h30 or 4h time slots. Check your ticket.

**PRICES**

From €12.90 for basic options. Entry tickets are limited, book months in advance.

**VISIT DURATION**

Allow 3 to 5 hours for a complete visit including the main circuit and a hike (Huayna or Mountain). Time slots are strict and non-refundable/non-changeable.

**PHOTOS**

Personal photography is allowed without flash or tripod. Drones are strictly prohibited throughout the archaeological site and penalized.

**AUDIENCE**

Family-friendly, but physically demanding. Not suitable for people with reduced mobility for the hikes. A guide is recommended for children.

## HOW TO GET THERE

## Access & Transportation

**Bus**

: Consettur to Machupicchu — 1 min à pied

Alejandro Velasco Astete Airport (314 min) · Machu Picchu Pueblo (9 min)

**Car**

Alejandro Velasco Astete Airport (258 min) · Machu Picchu Pueblo (4 min)

**Bike**

Alejandro Velasco Astete Airport (355 min) · Machu Picchu Pueblo (3 min)

**On foot**

Machu Picchu Pueblo (3 min)

## LOCALISATION

## Où se trouve Machu Picchu ?



 Aguas Calientes

 13°9.282' S, 72°31.526' O



## ORGANIZATION

# Organization

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**Urban Sector (Lower Level)**

This area contains the main residential quarters, agricultural terraces, and the Temple of the Sun. The precise stonework and drainage systems are evident here, showcasing Inca engineering. Visitors can explore the royal quarters and observe the integration of architecture with the landscape.

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**Main Plaza & Intihuatana (Middle Level)**

The heart of the site, featuring the Temple of the Three Windows and the Intihuatana stone. This is the most photogenic spot, offering panoramic views of the surrounding peaks. The astronomical alignments and ceremonial significance of these structures are highlighted by guides.

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**Huayna Picchu & Mountain (Upper Levels)**

These steep hikes offer elevated perspectives of the citadel and the Urubamba River valley. Huayna Picchu is narrower and steeper, with narrow stairs and ladders, while Machu Picchu Mountain is wider and less strenuous. Both provide iconic views and a sense of accomplishment.

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## ACCESSIBILITY

**Accessibility for people with reduced mobility**

Partial access to the main circuit, steep climbs prohibited.

**Families**

Family-friendly, but physically demanding for young children.

**Audio guide**

French, English, Spanish



## Must-sees

### SELECTION

## Must-See Wonders of the Citadel

### 01

Main Plaza

#### Intihuatana Stone

Known as the "Hitching Post of the Sun," this carved stone is used for astronomical observations. It is the most **photogenic and crowded** spot, often visited early in the morning. The stone aligns with the sun during solstices, demonstrating Inca astronomical knowledge.

💡 The Spanish never found this stone, which is why it remains intact. **Local legends** suggest it holds spiritual power.

### 02

Urban Sector

#### Temple of the Sun

A semi-circular temple with precise windows aligned to the solstices. The stonework here is exceptionally fine, reflecting its ceremonial importance. It offers a glimpse into the **religious practices** of the Inca elite.

💡 The temple's foundation is built on a natural rock outcrop, showing the Incas' respect for **natural formations**.

### 03

Hike

#### Huayna Picchu

The iconic peak dominating the site, offering the most famous view of Machu Picchu. The hike is **steep and physically demanding**, with narrow stairs and ladders. Quotas are strict to preserve the site and ensure safety.

💡 The name means "**Young Mountain**," contrasting with the older Machu Picchu peak.

### 04

Urban Sector

#### Royal Quarter

A smaller, more refined area believed to be the residence of the Inca emperor. The stonework is finer than in other parts, indicating its **elite status**. It includes a small temple and residential structures.

💡 This area was likely reserved for **high-ranking nobles** and priests.

05

Main Plaza

### Temple of the Three Windows

A key ceremonial structure with three large windows aligned to the solstices. The interior features niches for offerings and statues. It is central to understanding the **spiritual significance** of the site.



The windows allow sunlight to illuminate the interior at specific times of the year, marking **important rituals**.

06

Lower Sector

### Agricultural Terraces

Extensive terraces that once supported crops and prevented erosion. They showcase the Incas' advanced **agricultural techniques** and hydraulic engineering. Some terraces are still used for farming today.



The terraces create a **microclimate** that allows diverse crops to grow at high altitudes.

07

Entrance Area

### Guardian's House

The first structure seen upon entering the main site, offering an early panoramic view. It is a simple stone building with a well-preserved roof structure. This spot is ideal for **iconic photos** right after arrival.



It was likely used by **guardians** to monitor access to the sacred city.

08

Hike

### Machu Picchu Mountain

A less steep but longer hike offering a different perspective of the citadel. The trail is wider and more accessible than Huayna Picchu, making it suitable for **less experienced hikers**. The views are equally stunning.



This route is less crowded, allowing for a more **peaceful experience**.

## TIPS

## Essential Tips for a Smooth Visit

**TIMING**

Arrive 1 hour before your time slot. Security checks are strict and lengthy; late arrival may result in cancellation without refund.

**BILLET**

Book tickets months in advance, especially for high season (May-June, Sept-Oct). Use the official Ministry of Culture website or authorized agencies.

**PARCOURS**

Choose Circuit 2 for the classic panoramic view if not climbing Huayna Picchu. Visit the Intihuatana early in the morning to avoid crowds.

**PHOTO**

The Guardian's House offers the best initial panoramic view. Early morning light provides the most dramatic shadows and colors.

**PAUSE**

Bring water and snacks as shops on site are expensive and rare. Hydration is crucial at 2,438 meters altitude.

**ENFANTS**

The site is family-friendly but physically demanding. A guide is recommended for children to keep them engaged and safe.

**AUDIOGUIDE**

Audioguides are available in French, English, and Spanish. They are useful for self-guided tours but a live guide offers deeper historical context.

**CONFORT**

Pack waterproof clothing as weather changes quickly. Wear sturdy shoes for the uneven stone paths and steep climbs.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## FAQ

**How far in advance should I book tickets for Machu Picchu?**

It is strongly recommended to book several weeks, or even several months, in advance, especially for high season (May-June, Sept-Oct). Tickets are limited by time slot and sell out quickly. Expect fast sales on the office.

**What is the difference between Circuit 1 and Circuit 2 of Machu Picchu?**

Circuit 1 includes the option to hike Huayna Picchu (very limited quota) and offers more direct access to the Temple of the Moon. Circuit 2 is the classic route, descending towards the citadel with the iconic panoramic view.

**Where to buy official entry tickets?**

Only on the official Ministry of Culture website ([tuboletto.cultura.pe](https://tuboletto.cultura.pe)) or via authorized agencies. Beware of unofficial third-party sites. Booking must be made with the visitor's passport to match entry checks.

**Do I need to book the train and bus separately?**

Yes, the complexity of booking lies in the separation of tickets. The site entry ticket does not cover the train or bus. You must book the train (PeruRail or Inca Rail) and the bus (Consettur) independently of the archaeological site.

**Is it possible to visit Machu Picchu without a guide?**

Yes, self-guided tours are allowed. However, a guide is recommended to understand the history, architecture, and spiritual details of the site. Without a guide, you risk missing the significance of the temples and the Inca ruins.

## DID YOU KNOW?

## Anecdotes &amp; curiosities

**Rediscovered in 1911**

Hiram Bingham did not find the site by chance but was guided by a local farmer. Although the local population knew of it, Bingham revealed it to the world in **1911**, marking the beginning of its global fame.

**Meaning of the Name**

Machu Picchu means "**Old Mountain**" in Quechua, while Huayna Picchu is the "Young Mountain." This linguistic distinction reflects the shape of the two peaks dominating the city.

**Impressive Altitude**

The site is perched at **2,438 meters** altitude, offering vertiginous views of the Urubamba River. It dominates the valley from a 600-meter cliff, explaining its natural protection.

**Imperial Residence**

Considered a residence of Emperor Pachacútec in the 15th century, it was not a military fortress. It was a **royal and ceremonial retreat**, far from the noise of the capital Cuzco.

## AROUND THE MUSEUM

Aguas Calientes, the gateway to Machu Picchu, offers more than just a base for accommodation. The **Machu Picchu Museum** in the village provides a 3D reconstruction of the citadel and exhibits archaeological finds, helping visitors understand the site's history before or after their visit. For relaxation, the **Aguas Calientes Hot Springs** offer natural thermal baths heated by river water, perfect for soothing tired muscles after a hike. Nature lovers can explore the **Aguas Calientes Botanical Garden**, a suspended park with breathtaking views of the Urubamba gorge and local wildlife. For dining, **La Casa del Abuelo** serves renowned traditional Peruvian cuisine in the village center, offering a quick and authentic meal before heading up to the site. These amenities ensure a well-rounded experience beyond the ruins themselves.



Visiting Machu Picchu is more than a tourist activity; it is a **spiritual journey** into the heart of the Andes. The effort required to reach this remote citadel is rewarded by a sense of awe that lingers long after you leave. As you stand amidst the ancient stones, surrounded by mist and mountains, you realize why this place has captivated the world for over a century. It is a reminder of human ingenuity and the enduring beauty of the natural world, an experience that truly **changes you**.