



Volunteer Handbook for Peru

Hola!

Welcome to our Volunteer Handbook to Peru.

While no person or book or website can give a new traveler to Peru a full understanding of its culture, we believe that this Volunteer Handbook will go a long way in preparing you for your trip and the living experience there.

We have spent years revising this Volunteer Handbook, based on the experiences of our volunteers and staff who have spent significant time in Peru. They have all contributed their unique insights and advice to the information in this Volunteer Handbook.

Although there is some overlap, our Volunteer Handbook to Peru does not try to duplicate all of the general travel information you will find in published guide books such as the **Moon Peru** and **Lonely Planet Peru**.

Our main focus in the Volunteer Handbook to Peru is on travel information that is specifically relevant to a volunteer like yourself who will serve others in Peru and become a member of the local community.

We encourage you to share the Volunteer Handbook to Peru with your family and friends and anyone else interested in your trip to Peru. We also strongly recommend taking a copy with you on your trip.

As always, if you have any questions about the Volunteer Handbook to Peru or any other issues or concerns, please get in touch with us.

Regards,

Scott Burke
Founder & Director
Cosmic Volunteers
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania USA

BEFORE YOU GO

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1. Entry Requirements for Peru

In order to enter Peru, you must have a **passport** and **return ticket**:

Passport

- Must be valid for at least the next six months

Tickets for your departure from Peru

- Peru's Immigration Department has the right to ask you at the airport to show copies of either your return flight home or tickets for land travel if you are leaving Peru by land.

Visa

You do **not** need a visa to visit Peru if you are traveling as a tourist with a valid passport.

Indicate to immigration staff in Peru that the purpose of your visit is "tourism."

You will be issued a tourist card upon entry, which is valid for up to 90 days. You may renew your tourist status at a Peruvian immigration office (Oficina de Migraciones) for 30 days. The revalidation will cost twenty \$20 USD. Our Coordinator in Peru will assist you with your visa renewal. Visit this web page for visa application information:

www.peruvianembassy.us

2. Health Preparation

We strongly recommend that you **visit a travel doctor** at least two months before you arrive in Peru for information about immunizations and advice on how to stay healthy there.

We also strongly recommend that you obtain a **travel insurance** policy that will cover any medical costs you might have in Peru. Cosmic's staff uses Multinational Underwriters (www.mnui.com) for travel insurance policies. Cosmic Volunteers does not provide health insurance to participants.

For **vaccinations**, Peru does not require any vaccinations for entry into Peru. Cosmic Volunteers follows the current vaccination recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) which are listed on their website at wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/destinationPeru.aspx

If you take **prescription medicines**, make sure you have enough to last during your trip. Keep them in their original prescription bottles and always in your carry-on luggage.

For **comprehensive health information** for travelers to Peru, visit the CDC's website at wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/destinationPeru.aspx

3. Register Your Trip with your Home Government

An optional but highly recommended pre-trip step is to register your travel plans to Uganda with your home country's government. Doing this can be helpful if you lose your passport in Uganda or if there is a country-wide emergency and you need your embassy's help. You can register with your respective government online at the following websites:

USA Citizens: <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui>

UK Citizens: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/>

Canadian Citizens: <http://www.voyage.gc.ca/index-eng.asp>

Australian Citizens: www.ora0.dfat.gov.au

4. Power-of-Attorney

Another optional but recommended pre-trip step is to consider creating a Power-of-Attorney document (POA) which lets you appoint someone at home to manage important financial and legal matters on your behalf while you are in Peru. This is a particularly smart thing to do if you will be staying in Peru for an extended period of time, say at least one month. You can create a custom POA document for \$35 USD online with Legal Zoom, which Cosmic staff uses for its POA documents while traveling. Legal Zoom's website is <http://www.legalzoom.com/power-of-attorney/power-of-attorney-overview.html>. Keep in mind that, after Legal Zoom mails you the POA, you must get the document notarized by a notary public before the document can take effect.

5. Photocopy Important Documents

Before you leave home, make two sets of photocopies of all important documents. Put one set of copies in your checked luggage, and leave a set of copies at home with your family/friends. Keep your original documents in your carry-on bag while you are traveling to Peru.

Documents to Photocopy:

- Passport ID page
- Plane Ticket
- Contact information of Peru Coordinator*
- Contact Information for Cosmic in USA*
- Contact Information for family/friends at home
- Travel Insurance Policy
- Credit card(s)
- Travelers Checks (if you have them)
- Power-of-Attorney (if you have one)

* We will send you this information by email before you leave for your trip.

6. Contact Information

Before you leave home, we will send you the mobile numbers of your Coordinators in Peru and the US. **They will be your 24 hour contacts during your program.** Please carry their contact numbers on your person (not your bags) while en-route to and in Peru.

If your flight(s) to Peru is delayed for any reason, please first call your Peru Coordinator 24 hours to let them know of the delay. If you cannot reach him/her for whatever reason, please call your US Coordinator 24 hours.

For non-emergencies, please contact us at our regular office phone at 1-215-609-4196 or by email at team@cosmicvolunteers.org. Our office hours are Monday-Friday from 9am to 5pm EST. We monitor emails and voice mails on weekday evenings and weekends.

7. What to Pack

Carry-On Bag

- Passport
- Plane Ticket
- Contact information of Peru Coordinator
- Contact Information for Cosmic's office in USA
- Contact Information for home (family, friends)
- Travel Insurance Policy
- Cash (at least \$100 USD or equivalent)
- Credit card(s)
- Travelers Checks (if you have them)
- Any prescription medicine
- Any electronic equipment (laptops, mobile phone, camera, mp3 player)
- Toiletries (Toothbrush/paste, contact lens solution & case, feminine products)
- Reading materials
- Pen(s)

Tip 1: During air travel, some travelers prefer putting their passport, cash, credit cards etc. in a money pouch that is concealed under their clothes for security. We've found that it's just as safe and convenient to put your cash and credit cards in a front pants pocket, and keep your passport in a front shirt pocket.

Tip 2: While in Peru, we always keep our passports in a sealable plastic baggie (the kind used for sandwiches). This protects the passport from moisture in the hot climate where your passport can become soggy, especially if it's in your pocket while you're traveling around the country.

Checked Baggage

Don't overdo it. pack lightly so you can travel more easily and store your bag in small places. Think in terms of a backpack, duffel bag, or moderate-sized suitcase and a day pack. Because the climate is generally hot, you can often wash clothes out and dry them overnight. Bring lots of lightweight clothes. For men and women, it is better to dress conservatively.

Clothing:

- 5-6 pairs khaki pants (or jeans but jeans can be hot)
- 1-2 pairs shorts (for around the house and sports)
- 5-7 short-sleeved tops/t-shirts
- 1-2 long-sleeved shirts/tops
- Undergarments
- Women may want to bring a longer skirts instead of shorts and short dresses since it is more respectful of the culture
- Sturdy sneakers or shoes
- Sandals or flip-flops
- Cotton socks
- Sleepwear
- Light jacket or windbreaker
- A nice outfit for special occasions

Health and Hygiene:

- Handiwipes and anti-bacterial hand lotion
- Over-the-counter medications for pain relief, fever, diarrhea
- Insect repellent with DEET
- Sunscreen (stronger-the-better)
- Vitamins
- Toiletries (soap, shampoo)

Miscellaneous:

- Notebooks, pens, paper
- Glasses, contacts/solution - and bring a copy of your prescription
- Small travel pack/day pack
- Lightweight, quick-dry towel

8. Gifts and Donations

We are often asked by volunteers about this topic. We have a detailed article on the subject on our website (http://www.cosmicvolunteers.org/articles_donations.html). It's based originally on my experiences in Ghana over the years, but it applies to so many other countries that I wanted to post something for future volunteers. Basically, I am not a fan of bringing items from home – I've found it's better to buy any items in the host country. I can't tell you how many orphanages, schools, and AIDS organizations I've visited around the world that had rooms full of donated stuff they couldn't use – cold-weather clothes, expired medicines, books the kids didn't understand or found boring because of cultural difference, etc.

ARRIVING IN PERU

This section describes the normal schedule and activities for volunteers during their first several days in Peru. The major points will include the airport arrival, travel to the volunteer location, and introduction to the culture, host family, and volunteer work. Your actual schedule might vary from what is described below, depending on your arrival day and time as well as your volunteer location. Note that because many flights into Peru arrive in the evening/night, you will most likely spend the first night in Lima in a hotel, then travel to your host family and volunteer location the next day.

Arriving at the Airport in Lima

- When your plane lands in Lima, you will be directed to the **Immigration counters**. Have your passport and disembarkation card ready (you receive the card during the flight). The immigration officer might ask basic questions such as “How long are you staying in Peru?” or “Is this your first time to Peru?”.
- After the Immigration officer stamps your passport, walk to **baggage claim**.
- We strongly recommend that you **exchange currency** at the currency counter in the baggage claim area. Exchange at least US\$50 or equivalent for Peru sol. (It is always a good idea to walk out of the airport in any country with some local currency on you.)
- Grab your luggage, then walk through the **Customs** lines and to the exit doors.
- Before you exit the airport, the staff may ask you to show your **luggage tags** given to you by the airport check-in staff before you boarded your flight.
- You can rent a mobile phone for your stay in Peru, from a vendor inside the airport, so look out for the vendors before you leave the airport.
- When you walk through the airport’s **exit doors**, look for our Program Coordinator who will be holding a sign with your name on it.
- There are usually **big crowds** waiting outside the airport exit door. The scene can look chaotic and intimidating. Try to look calm (even if you’re not) and smile and scan the crowd for our Program Coordinator holding your name sign.
- You and our Program Coordinator will take a taxi to **leave the airport**. At this point, please **contact someone back home** to let them know that you arrived in Peru safely. Your Program Coordinator will offer their mobile phone for a brief call or text message.
- The Program Coordinator will take from the airport to either a hotel or to your host family (if you will be volunteering in Lima)

If You Do Not Find Our Program Coordinator at the Airport

If there is an extremely unusual situation in which you do not meet your Program Coordinator (such as a major flight delay): Call your Program Coordinator on their mobile (Ask airport staff how to make a call). If you cannot reach your Program Coordinator, call the Emergency Number listed earlier in this Volunteer Handbook 24 hours. We will direct you to take a taxi to a hotel, then make sure the Coordinator meets you there quickly. All costs will be reimbursed by Cosmic Volunteers.

YOUR FIRST DAYS IN PERU

Introduction to Peru

After your first night in Lima, your Program Coordinator will pick you up in the morning for your all-day introduction to Peru. This initial experience will be more informal and hands-on, with the Program Coordinator taking you around town to see life on the streets. This normally includes visits to local markets, cultural sites, and museums. They will also go over the major points about your stay such as staying healthy, street smarts, living with your host family, the volunteer work, contact information, etc. We also recommend that you take care of any practical errands such as:

- Buying a mobile phone* / SIM card / phone credit
- Exchanging money / travelers checks
- Using an ATM machine
- Buying electrical adapters
- Buy any toiletries

* You can rent a cell phone when you arrive in Lima from the airport. It typically costs \$20-\$30 month, and you rent the phone inside the airport before you leave the facility. Our Coordinator in Lima can help you with this after you meet up at the airport in the arrivals hall.

At the end of the first day, your Program Coordinator will drop you off at your host family. You will have the remainder of the evening to walk around your neighborhood or simply rest for the night.

Starting with your taxi ride from the airport, your road travel in Peru can really provide you with an unparalleled insight into the people, the sights, sounds, and smells(!) of Peru – all from the relatively insulated environment of a taxi or bus seat. So watch, listen, smile, ask questions, listen to life on the streets, and just try to soak it in. As *Verge Magazine* says (Winter 2008): "Fifteen minutes on a bus usually teaches you more about a country's social, political, and economic conditions than three hours studying a guidebook."

Introduction to Volunteer Work

On your second full day in Peru, your Program Coordinator will pick you up at your accommodations and accompany you to your **Volunteer Job** for introductions and a tour of the organization. You will meet with your Program Supervisor(s) for the first time and start learn some of the basics about the organization's work. There is also normally time for you to meet some of the people you will be helping such as orphanage children or street children. Depending on your specific schedule, you could begin your volunteer work today, such as playing with the children.

Jet Lag

Flying across multiple time zones disrupts your body's circadian rhythm, leading to sleep problems and other symptoms which fall under the condition known as "jet lag."

Symptoms often include insomnia, waking early, excessive sleepiness, headaches, irritability, digestive problems like constipation or diarrhea, muscle aches, and difficulty concentrating. Younger travelers and female travelers are more susceptible to jet lag, while some travelers are not affected much.

As a general guideline, the recovery rate from jet lag is one day per time zone traveled. So if you live in New York (nine hours behind Peru), it could take you as long as nine days to fully recover from the jet lag.

To recover from jet lag:

- Drink plenty of water before, during and after your flight
- Try to sleep on the plane if it's nighttime in Peru
- Adjust to the local day/night schedule immediately
- Try not to sleep until nighttime in Peru, no matter how tired you are
- Exercise daily (during daylight hours, especially early morning)
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol

WHILE IN PERU

Staying Healthy and Safe

The top causes of injury and death for travelers abroad are road accidents and drowning. This comes as a surprise to many, because the media tends to focus on terrorism, political strife, and infectious diseases as the most likely dangers for travelers abroad.

If you become ill or injured in Peru, please seek medical treatment immediately. Then as soon as possible, inform your host family and local Program Coordinator. They will contact our staff in the US so that we can assist in any way we can, such as notifying your family back home.

Note: Medical facilities require patients to pay up-front for their care, most often in cash. If you have travel insurance, you would then submit a claim with the insurance provider in order to get reimbursed for the medical expenses.

There are both government and private health facilities near all of our volunteer areas, with emergency and outpatient care available. There are also pharmacies (“drugstores”) throughout the country where you can buy medications. A doctor’s prescription is often required.

The three areas you need to focus on daily for staying healthy and safe in Peru are:

- **Food and Water**
- **Avoid Insect Bites**
- **Avoid Injuries**

Food and Water

Traveler’s Diarrhea is the most common illness suffered by travelers to Peru. It’s usually caused by bacteria in the food or water you consume, and usually occurs within the first week of travel. You must be extra cautious about food and water.

Some very important tips:

- Do not drink tap water at any time in Peru
- Do not consume ice cubes
- Drink only bottled water, boiled water, or carbonated drinks in bottles/cans
- Wash your hands often with soap and water
- Avoid restaurants that look dirty
- Avoid food from street vendors whose facilities do not look sanitary
- Avoid raw fruits and vegetables unless you peel them
- Brush your teeth using only bottled water
- Stay hydrated (see “Hot Climate”)

Avoid Insect Bites

Our volunteers locations (Lima, Casco) are NOT at risk for malaria. However, we include malaria information below in case you do any sightseeing areas where malaria is a risk. Please see the CDC web page (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/destinationPeru.aspx>) for a full discussion of malaria in Peru.

If you are traveling on your own to a malaria risk area: You must avoid insect bites from an infected female Anopheles mosquito because you are at risk for illnesses such as malaria and dengue fever. The first symptoms of malaria are normally fever, chills, sweats, headaches, muscle pains, nausea and vomiting (For a definitive diagnosis, you must have a lab test). The peak biting period for malaria is dusk and dawn.

To prevent insect bites:

- Stay indoors at dawn and dusk as much as possible
- When you are outside at night, wear long sleeves and long pants
- For sleeping, wear long sleeves and long pajama bottoms
- For sleeping, use a mosquito net treated with permethrin
- Use an insect repellent with 30%-50% DEET

Avoid Injuries

- As a **pedestrian**, you must be very cautious, especially at night:
 - Vehicles always have the right of way
 - Assume that vehicles will not stop for you
 - Jogging can be very dangerous due to traffic and uneven surfaces
- As a passenger in any vehicle:
 - Try to avoid traveling in vehicles late at night
 - Never sit in the front seat of any bus or taxi (most accidents are head-on)
 - Always wear seat belts when possible
 - Do not take private, unlicensed taxis or cars
 - Never ride on the top of any vehicle
 - Do not ride on any motorcycles, either as driver or passenger
- If you take a trip to a beach area or river: We strongly recommend that you **do not go swimming**. Again, drowning is one of the top causes of injury and death for travelers abroad. Your safety is not worth risking for a few minutes of swim time.
- Do not have contact with **animals**. You could get rabies, insect bites, and skin rash/infections, etc.

Personal Greetings

- It is considered polite to greet all people you come into contact with, even if you will only meet people briefly such as shop owners.
- When entering a home or shop, always use a verbal greeting:
 - *Buenos días*, or good day
 - *Buenas tardes*, or good afternoon
 - *Buenas noches*, or good night
- Upon leaving, it is polite to say goodbye (*Adios* or *Hasta luego*), even to shop owners with whom you've had minimal contact.
- Shaking hands is the most common form of greeting.
- Women may give and receive a kiss on the right cheek, but this should be initiated by the woman. This is a less formal greeting.
- Upon meeting, people might ask you seemingly personal questions about your marital status, family, job and financial status. In Peru this is considered polite, not rude. Answer with modesty, especially regarding financial matters.

Dress Code

When you are at your volunteer job, you should mostly wear pants (like khakis), tops that cover your shoulders, and some sort of covered footwear. Out of respect, please do not show up for your first day of volunteer work wearing shorts and flip-flops! During free time, you can dress casually. However for more formal things like meetings, visits to churches etc., the less skin shown the better. For women, no short-shorts or short skirts.

Learn some basics about Peru before you arrive:

- Peru's President is Alan Garcia (2006 –)
- Population is 29 million
- Life expectancy is 70 years
- The literacy rate is 93%
- Peru is divided into 25 regions and the province of Lima

General Etiquette

- Many Peruvians refer to foreigners as gringos (or gringas) or as "mister" ("mee-ster"). Neither term is intended or should be received as an insult.
- Refer to Amerindians as *indigenas*, not as *indios* (which is a derogatory term)
- Sustained eye contact with visitors will often be minimal.
- Don't use your index finger to motion a person to approach you. Instead, place your palm down and gently sweep your fingers toward you.

- Bargaining is considered acceptable in markets and with taxi drivers, even hotels, but do no overdo it.
- Topics like politics, religion, and drugs should be handled tactfully.
- Peruvians are not always punctual, so be patient.

Table Manners

- Keep both hands above the table during a meal, not on your lap
- Do not drink until everyone has been served and a toast has been made.
- The customary toast in Peru is "Salud!"
- Traditional manners suggest that you men stand up if a lady leaves the table, then stand again when she returns to the table.
- When you leave or join a table, say "buen provecho" ("bon appetit")
- If you invite someone out to coffee or a meal, it is expected that you will pay.
- Guinea pig is a traditional Peruvian dish that is eaten in many regions.
- Dinner is served later in Peru compared to many other countries, sometimes as late as 9 or 10 PM.
- No one shows up for dinner invitations on-time. Arrive at least 30 minutes after the invitation indicates.
- Don't show up without a hostess gift if you are invited to someone's home. A cake dessert, or "paneton," is a common gift to bring, as are wine and chocolate.

Money

The **nuevo sol (PEN)** is the legal currency of Peru. The exchange rate is 1 USD = 2.9 PEN. However, US dollars are also in circulation and are often used for larger purchases. There are some places that accept credit cards, but: **expect to pay cash for everything.**

We recommend that you **bring from home at least \$100 USD** (or equivalent currency) in cash. Do not bring bills larger than \$20, because money exchangers might consider them to be counterfeit (there's only a small chance of this, but it's one less hassle you can easily avoid).

While in Peru, the best way to get cash is to use an **ATM machine**. ATM's dispense money in soles. There are ATM's in most towns even in rural areas.

If you need **fast cash from home**, your family can send you instant cash using services like Moneygram (www.moneygram.com) or Western Union (www.westernunion.com), with Moneygram by far the cheaper option. If you do not need the money in a timely manner, have your family make a deposit at your bank account back home, then you can withdraw the money in cash using your ATM card.

For **daily spending money** during your trip, count on spending \$5-\$15 per day. The actual amount can vary considerably, depending on factors such as:

- Your daily commuting costs between your host family and volunteers job
- How many meals / snacks you buy
- Whether you buy / use a mobile phone
- Extra sightseeing you choose to do
- Shopping for clothes, toiletries, souvenirs

You can **exchange your cash** for soles at the airport, as well as at banks and private money-changers on the street. Ask your Program Coordinator to find a bank or a reputable private money-changer.

We do not recommend **travelers checks** because it can be very time-consuming. Instead, Visa has a prepaid card that acts as an ATM card and debit card, but is not tied to any bank account. You should also bring at least one **credit card** to use for emergencies, such as cash advances.

Climate

Lima

Lima's climate is mild overall but has high humidity. Average daytime temperatures range from 81 F (26 C) in January to 67 F (20 C) in September. Nighttime lows range from 60 F (19 C) in August/September to 69 F (27 C) in February. Lima is very humid though, and has morning fog from June to December and persistent low clouds from May to November.

Cusco

Cusco's average daytime temperature is in the 60's F year-round. From May-September, the nighttime temperature gets into the 30's F. October is the warmest month on average. The coolest month is June, and January is the wettest month on average.

Culture Shock

You have probably heard the term “culture shock”, but what is it exactly? Webster’s Dictionary defines it as “a sense of confusion and uncertainty sometimes with feelings of anxiety that may affect people exposed to an alien culture or environment without adequate preparation.”

If you have never traveled abroad, you can experience a **high level of culture shock** during your trip to Peru.

Some potential examples of culture shock in Peru:

- Modest living conditions of locals
- Lack of public facilities like bathrooms

- Fast and aggressive traffic, especially in larger towns
- Often little English is spoken, including by host families, market vendors, taxi drivers, etc.
- Visits to markets can seem overwhelming, especially if you have never seen live animals for sale, **very** strong odors, and an incredibly crowded and busy scene.
- The level of air quality can be shockingly bad to foreigners.
- As mentioned earlier, people might ask you personal questions, so be prepared to answer with politeness and modesty.
- Crossing the street can be a challenge due to heavy traffic
- Vehicles honk horns constantly and loudly

Please understand: **You are in a different country now**, one that has cultural practices, life experiences, needs, infrastructure (lack of), and a worldview that can be very different to the ones you are used to. You can either fight this type of reality or **learn to adapt to it**. We strongly suggest the latter. You have to accept the responsibility that comes with being a stranger in a strange land.

How can you handle culture shock?

- Be humble and respectful
- Observe & Listen
- Be Inquisitive
- Ask Questions
- Do not judge
- Do not act offended by comments or questions
- Offer your help
- See yourself in others
- Smile

Saving the World

It is admirable that you want to have a positive impact on people's lives in Peru. After all, that should be why you signed up to volunteer in Peru, and that is why Cosmic sends volunteers there.

But please understand: **You will not “save the world” during your trip to Peru**. Or on any trip abroad, for that matter. If you even have the phrase “save the world” in your vocabulary, you are in for a rude awakening in Peru and your stay will be filled with major disappointment and disillusionment.

A typical pattern of some foreign volunteers is to show up in the local community, see an endless number of problems to be solved, start to make elaborate plans to solve those problems, work feverishly on executing those plans – then, ultimately experience a great deal of frustration when they realize that they have taken on too much, too quickly. Neophytes to traveling abroad can feel this even more intensely.

Our advice for you is to “work small.” As Chinese Buddhism says, “The sage does not attempt anything big.” Focus your efforts in Peru on one person, one project at a time, because those small successes lead to big accomplishments **over time**.

For example, if you are at an orphanage, simply focus on giving the children your time, your caring, and love. Yes the orphanage might need a new roof, or more books, or even medicines for the children – and you can help out with those projects if you wish; but focus first on the kids and making them feel loved.

Volunteer Work & Schedule

Our programs in Peru are individually-based as well, meaning that you will often be the only volunteer at your organization. You must be a resourceful, self-starter who can jump in on day one and start to contribute. Before you leave home, ask us what supplies you might bring from home, such as sports equipment or art supplies for the kids

Generally speaking, your work schedule will be Monday through Friday, from 9 AM to 5 PM. If there are slow times at your volunteer job, please speak to your supervisor for guidance. Also speak to your Program Coordinator for guidance.

Food

The primary ingredients found in nearly every Peruvian dish are **rice, potatoes, chicken, pork, lamb, and fish**. Most of these meals include one of the different kinds of "aji", or Peruvian hot pepper, which mainly are: yellow aji pepper, red aji pepper, red rocoto pepper

At restaurants, at lunch time or in a special situation (someone's birthday, for example), they mostly go to "Cevicherias". This kind of restaurants serves all kind of sea food. The most traditional meal in Peru, the one that at least in South America represents the Peruvian food, is the Ceviche. This is a cold dish, which mainly consists in pieces of raw fish, cooked by the juice of lemons, served always with onions, camote (one kind of sweet Peruvian potato) and of course, Peruvian aji pepper.

Be very careful if you try **food from street vendors**, because of concerns about diseases such as cholera and dysentery.

For drinks, **bottled water** can be found in shops and restaurants all over Peru. For soft drinks, you will find Coke, Fanta Orange and Sprite everywhere. You normally have to drink the soft drink at the shop because the shop returns the bottles to the bottler.

Do not be surprised if you **lose weight** in Peru. A variety of factors can contribute to this, like decreased appetite in the hot climate, lots of walking, lack of western fast food, and the fact that you might find Peruvian food unappealing.

Religion

Over 80 percent of Peruvians are Catholic, with the rest Evangelical (12%) and other denominations.

For Women Travelers

As a female visitor in Peru, you most likely will not experience unwanted attention from men. However, keep in mind that you are not at home and that different rules apply. Women generally play a submissive role to men in Peru. A woman who acts like a man will not be respected. Men you meet may misinterpret your appearance, body language, or simple presence as invitations to approach you. Even a smile to a stranger may be misunderstood. You will need to modify your behavior in order to avoid unwanted attention.

Here are some tips on avoiding unwanted attention:

- Do not wear skimpy clothes
- Wear a “wedding ring” and say you are married
- Never admit that you’re traveling alone. Tell people that your boyfriend or husband will be along shortly to join you
- Steer the conversation in another direction by asking questions – about local culture, politics, news
- Use humor to diffuse the situation
- If the man persists, be very direct and firmly tell him to stop, and be specific
- Walk in a group at night
- If you go to nightclubs, go with a group of friends
- Do not go to a secluded area or hotel/apartment with a man you do not know well

Romance

Getting involved romantically during your trip, whether with a fellow volunteer or local Peruvian, can be a complicated and outright dangerous thing. There is the risk of pregnancy as well as STD’s like HIV. If you do become involved and have sex, always use a condom. Also keep in mind the social aspects of romance, especially if you are involved with a Peruvian. There is definitely a pronounced double-standard against women. Women generally play a submissive role to men. Showing affection in public is generally not acceptable.

Mobile Phones

We encourage volunteers to have a mobile phone in Peru, especially for volunteers staying a month or more. This can be a phone you bring from home or a phone you purchase in Peru.

- You can bring a phone from home, but the phone must be “unlocked.”
- Most mobile phones from America are purposely locked by the carriers and will not work in Peru.
- With an unlocked phone, you just need to buy a SIM card in Peru. The SIM card will have a local Peru telephone number
- You can rent a cell phone from the airport, as mentioned earlier
- New mobile phones in Peru start at around \$40
- SIM cards are bought separately and cost about \$10 USD
- Mobile phone usage in Peru is mostly pay-as-you-go
- You buy phone credits (“units”) from street vendors and phone shops
- Incoming calls are free – including incoming international calls

Family and Friends Calling You from Home

Your folks back home will be able to call you on your mobile phone. They can use their landline phone to direct dial your Peru number. However unless they have an “international” phone service plan, direct-dialing can get very expensive. We recommend instead that they buy prepaid phone cards from a company like Nobelcom. Another option – one that we recommend – is for them to call you using an Internet phone service like Skype or Yahoo. The connections are much clearer this way, and it's usually slightly cheaper than calling from landline phones.

Giving Out Your Contact Information

You will meet a lot of people during your stay, even if you are staying only one week. Locals will frequently ask for your contact information, so that they can stay in touch with you after you return home. In our experience, these requests are genuine and innocent, and even if you give them your information, you will never hear from 99% of them. One way to manage this situation is to carry business (calling) cards that you can give out, that have your name, email address, country and telephone number. You can get 250 **free** customizable business cards with Vista Print (www.vistaprint.com) which ships worldwide. If someone gives you their contact information and you promise to contact them – follow-through and do it.

Local Transportation

Lima has an extensive public transportation system consisting of buses and trains. While some travelers do sometimes feel unsafe, because of the quality of the vehicles as well as the passengers, overall we do recommend taking public transportation. The buses are the most practical way to get around, and inexpensive too. Our Coordinator will show you how to travel to your volunteer job.

“Micros” are the most common type of buses in Lima. These are large buses, much like the ones you would find back home. There are smaller buses that are known as “combis” which look like small vans, and don’t carry as many people.

Taxis are available and typically inexpensive. However the rides can be harrowing because of the haphazard driving habits of the drivers. If your Spanish is not great, the drivers might try to overcharge you. But taxis can be useful, due to the fact that buses do not run all day and do not go to every location in a given city.

Internet

- Internet connections are very slow, usually dial-up speed
- Very few households have Internet access in Peru
- Internet cafe’s are available in most towns, even in rural areas
- Internet access typically costs US\$.50 per hour
- Finding free (or any) wireless access for your laptop is not likely
- Strongly consider creating a new email address (like Yahoo or Gmail) to be used only during your trip. Before you leave home, forward all emails from your regular email account to this one. The reason is security – because you will be using public computers, you want to avoid password snatchers gaining access to your true personal email account.

Bringing Your Laptop

- Feel free to bring your laptop to Peru, but understand that – as mentioned in the “Internet” section above – you have a small chance of finding a wireless connection.
- If you do bring your laptop to take notes or show people photos you have, we urge you to buy a local **surge protector** in Peru to protect your battery and hard drive.
- Do not keep any **sensitive information** on your laptop in case of theft, such as your bank account information, passwords, etc.
- Some volunteer locations can have a **dusty environment**, so cover your laptop at all times to protect it from damage.
- Protect the laptop from excessive banging as you travel around Peru.

News on Peru

- Yahoo: news.yahoo.com/fc/World/Peru
- El Comercio: www.elcomercio.com.pe
- El Diario de Cusco: www.diariodelcusco.com

Parcels/Letters

You can also send and receive parcels and letters via the post office. Parcels/letters usually take 7-14 days to reach Peru. When sending parcels/letters from Peru, do not use Peru's postal system – use an international carrier instead like DHL or UPS because it's safer. Also, take the parcel to the office unsealed, as the customs officer may want to inspect the contents. Caution: Your family/friends should NOT send anything valuable by post.

At the End of Your Program

At the end of their programs, our volunteers sometimes take time to travel around Peru for extra sightseeing. Otherwise, they depart from the airport in Lima. You as the volunteer are responsible for the cost of your return taxi to the airport. However, your Coordinator in Lima will meet you in Lima before you leave for home, to make sure you are all set, say goodbye, and to get your impressions of your experience. Your Coordinator will also be more than happy to assist you with advice on sightseeing around Peru.

Returning Home

When you return home from your trip, the “reverse culture shock” can be just as significant as the culture shock when you arrived in Peru.

- Returning home is often not a predictable process and can be more stressful than you anticipate.
- You might find yourself different than you were before you left home.
- You might feel like a “stranger” even among friends and family.
- You might get frustrated because it is difficult for others to know what your experiences have meant to you and how you might have changed.
- You may need significant time to return to your old roles and relationships.
- Be aware that things at home may have changed while you were away, both in the society and among friends and family. Even if you have heard about these events, the impact at home may not have been obvious.
- Your friends and family might notice that you have different patterns of behavior, speech, or new attitudes.
- Strange as it may seem to others, returnees often grieve for what they have left behind. You might be missing overseas friends, a stimulating environment, the

feeling of being special, experiencing greater freedoms or responsibilities, or special privileges.

Some strategies for coping with returning home:

- Make contact with other volunteers who have successfully gone through the experience of returning home from abroad. This can help you through a difficult period of re-adaptation.
- Maintain personal and professional contacts with friends and institutions in Peru.
- Write and reflect about your experiences in a journal. This can be private or can be shared with friends, family, or the world (via a blog).
- Tell others your stories, show them your photos and videos.
- **On a medical note: If you become ill with a fever or flu-like illness up to one year after returning from Peru, seek immediate medical care and tell them you were in Peru. You could have malaria.**

AND FINALLY . . .

Make the most of every moment. Explore side streets. Take miracle walks. Perform random acts of kindness: buy fruit and share it, give flowers, pass out pens, coins and other useful and interesting things. Say hello. Smile. Take pictures. Share them. Learn about the depth of poverty. Count your blessings. Refuse to take things for granted. Give presents carefully. Play with everything. Share your toys. Blow bubbles. Spread laughter. Be kind to animals. Offer to help. Clean up your own mess without being asked. Clean up someone else's mess too. Ask questions. Answer questions. Collect addresses of people you meet. Send them postcards and email from home. Be aware that you are foreign and exotic. Hold babies. Giggle with children. Listen to old people. Be brave. Invite a dangerous stranger to dinner. Pay the bill. Learn to say thank you in the local language. Sing out loud, songs you sang as a child and songs children will teach you. Try something totally new. Don't just sight-see, sight-think. Donate energy. Spend time. Give hugs. Be thoughtful about donating, spending, and giving money. Support good work done by local people, buy a man a bike, pay a child's school tuition, offer a mother seed money and supplies to start a small business out of her home. Teach. Learn. Explore your own cultural perspective. Be subjectively aware. Touch the world. Allow the world to touch you. Come home safely . . . And remember, a true gift of seeing the world is to return where you started and see your place for the first time.