

TREASURES OF NORTHERN KINGDOM

Discover Northern Peru history in 8 days & 7 nights

This journey through the landscape and history of Peru's little-known northern region is a revelation and a magical experience for many of our visitors. The program is intended for travelers with a special interest in archaeology, and a taste for adventure. This region is still new to tourism, but we have taken every care to provide as comfortable a stay as possible, with air-conditioned vehicles, expert guides and the best possible accommodation.

We mingle trips on foot and/or horseback with light motorized excursions and longer road journeys, visiting astounding locations and rarely seeing more than a handful of other travelers at each place.

Note: *our horseback excursions may also be done on foot, but this option is only available to strong, fast hikers, due to long distances and time constraints.*

On the deserts of the north coast we see the archaeological marvels of the pyramid-building **Moche** and **Lambayeque** civilizations, along with sumptuous artistic treasures displayed in wonderful museum collections. And we are able to follow this story across many centuries through the highlands of the **Chachapoyas** region, where another civilization once flourished, building astounding fortified mountaintop settlements and embedding colorfully painted tombs into craggy limestone cliffs. Here the ancient **Chachapoyans** long thwarted the imperial ambitions of the Incas, until they were finally overwhelmed -- and we see the mummies and beautifully-crafted artifacts of an Inca-**Chachapoyan** realm where Incas once ruled alongside local nobility.

Towards the end of our journey we reach **Cajamarca**, the historic place where the **Incas** in turn met their downfall at the hands of Spanish invaders, in 1532. Finally we return to sea level and the desert coast, where the pleasant valley city of **Trujillo** is home to numerous historic Spanish colonial buildings, a picturesque beach resort, and some of the most famous and spectacular sites of the **Moche** and **Chimú** cultures, ending our journey with a flight to Lima.



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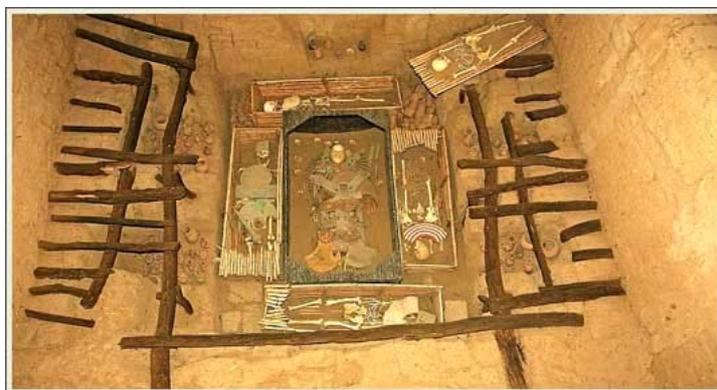
Day 1: Lima to Chiclayo: the “Cracked Pyramid”, Túcume, and the Royal Tombs of Sipán.

We take an early morning flight from Peru’s capital to the northern city of **Chiclayo**, and after some rest time we set off for the mud-brick pyramid that made world headlines in 1987 with one of the most sensational finds of recent archaeology. Known as the **Huaca Rajada** -- the “Cracked Pyramid”, because of the deep gulleys weathered into its flanks -- this eroded adobe platform yielded fabulous ancient treasures from a series of deeply buried tombs of the pre-Inca Moche culture, who lived in the valleys of Peru’s north coast 1,500 years ago. To get there we drive east up the broad, flat Reque valley past fields of sugarcane studded with varicolored pastel foothills of the great Andean chain, then arriving at the modern village of **Sipán**. Here we see the tombs themselves, with superb reconstructions of the burials of priests and chieftains, together with their sacrificed guards and companions.

A highly informative site museum tells the story of this extraordinary civilization, who created some of the finest pottery, jewelry and gold working of the Americas -- while also staging macabre costumed rituals of combat, sacrifice and propitiation as they sought to mediate a never ending struggle between the forces of Order and Chaos.

We return to Chiclayo for a delicious lunch of Peru’s northern-style cuisine, and then continue on to Lambayeque, where we visit the **Royal Tombs of Sipán Museum**. This modern building, representing the style of a Moche pyramid, was built to house the stunning and priceless objects unearthed at Sipán. (A single looted object from the tombs was intercepted at an auction in the U.S. -- carrying a reserve price of \$1.6 million!)

Here we see the incredible array of precious symbols and images, stones and shell necklaces, ear-plugs and headdresses that were worn and displayed at **Moche** ceremonies, and also learn what is known of their meaning. This astonishing visit ends at an “animated waxworks” exhibit of the lords and retinue of the Moche court, allowing us to glimpse and imagine the world of an unfamiliar but dazzling civilization that thrived here at a time when Europe was sliding into the Dark Ages after the fall of the Roman Empire.



After these sensational experiences we drive to an oasis of calm at **Tucumé**, today's final destination. Here we see the chronological sequence that followed the fall of the Moche, at a site where their descendants, the **Sicán** culture, continued to amass millions of adobe bricks for the building of mighty pyramids (including the longest of its kind in the world, at more than 700m/2,300ft) but were now influenced by highland tribes, and began to abandon their old ways. The history of this scenic site -- extensively investigated by the famed Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl -- leads us all the way to the Incas, who conquered the region not long before they, in turn, were conquered by the Spanish. We can climb to a viewing platform with superb views of the surrounding pyramids and the dry woodland habitat of the Leche valley. We can also visit the small, intimate and low-tech site museum, to enjoy the excellent collection of excavated objects, dioramas of daily life, and models of the pyramids.

We return to Chiclayo for an overnight stay.



Day 2: Chiclayo to Chachapoyas: Across the Andes to the Amazon.

We drive northward from Chiclayo across Peru's coastal plains, following the Pan-American Highway, then turn east onto the Trans-Andean route, ascending gently through regions of dry forest interspersed with irrigated farmland. Our road loops towards the lowest pass of the Peruvian Andes, at 2,135m/7,000 ft, where we cross the continental divide and enter the Upper Amazon basin. Following the valley of the Huancabamba/Chamaya river system we pass broad ribbons of bright green rice terracing, forming a striking contrast with the cactus and dense thorn-scrub vegetation of the mountainsides. Lower downstream we pass the massive dam and intake of the Olmos irrigation project, ultimately destined to divert much of this water through a 23Km/14.2 mile long tunnel to the Pacific slope of the Andes.

We reach the bridge over the Marañon, one of the great tributaries of the Upper Amazon, which was formerly believed to be the source of that mighty river. Here we enter the Peruvian department of Amazonas, former home of a mysterious and powerful civilization, the **Chachapoyas**, whose remnants we will explore during this journey.

We follow the Utcubamba River, the main artery of the **Chachapoyan** heartland, first ascending a dramatic canyon then winding up the mountainous valley which leads us to El Chillo, our hotel at the foot of the high road to the mountaintop site of **Kuelap**, tomorrow's destination.



Day 3: Chachapoyas: Kuelap, the great walled city of Northern Peru.

We spend a full day visiting this huge and mysterious site, beginning with a drive through places whose names -- Choctamal, Longuita, and **Kuelap** itself -- evoke a lost language and a vanished ancient people who spoke it, the **Chachapoyans**. We don't know what they called themselves, but the Incas who finally conquered these fierce warriors knew them by their Quechua soubriquet, Chachaphuyu -- Cloud People -- after the cloud-draped region where they lived.

Kuelap's existence was first reported in 1843. For years it was believed to have been a **Chachapoyan** fortress, and when we first catch sight of it from the fossil-encrusted limestone footpath that leads there it is hard to believe it was not. The massive walls soar to a height of 19m/62ft and its few entranceways are narrow and tapering, ideal for defense. Yet the archaeological evidence now suggests that this was principally a religious and ceremonial site.

Chachapoyas was not a nation or an empire, but some sort of federation of small states centered on numerous settlements scattered across their mountainous territory. The earliest settlement dates obtained here suggest that its construction began around 500A.D. and, like the Moche coastal pyramids, it was built in stages as a series of platforms, one atop the other.

It is now a single enormous platform nearly 600m/2,000ft long, stretched along a soaring ridgetop. Seen from below, its vast, blank walls give no hint of the complexity and extent of the buildings above. When we reach its summit we find a maze of structures in a variety of styles and sizes, some of them faced with rhomboid friezes, some ruined and some well preserved. Here we can try to imagine the lives of the **Chachapoyan** elite and their servants who lived here, enjoying a breathtaking view of forested Andean mountains and valleys.

So distant and neglected was this region until recently that little archaeological research has been done at this important site, and our knowledge of it remains vague. An adjacent site named La Mallca, larger though less dramatic than **Kuelap**, has not been studied at all. Even today, Kuelap's remoteness ensures that only a handful of other visitors are there to share it with us.

We return to El Chillo for dinner.

Day 4: Chachapoyas to Leimebamba: Journey to the cliff tombs of Revash, and on to a traditional Andean town.

We follow the Utcubamba valley upstream, spotting herons and perhaps an Andean torrent duck in the river as we slowly ascend the valley. At the village of Santo Tomás we turn off the main highway, crossing the river and ascending a side valley where vivid scarlet poinsettias the size of trees overhang the walls of typical Chachapoyan farms, with verandas surrounded by wooden columns, and topped with tile roofs. Soon we meet our wranglers and the calm, sure-footed horses that will carry us up the trail to Revash.

Throughout this journey we gaze up at huge cliffs that loom ever closer. These limestone formations, laid down in even layers over geological aeons, tend to break away in neat collapses, often leaving extensive overhangs and protected ledges beneath them. In such places the ancient Chachapoya built the tombs where they buried their noble dead.

A gigantic fold in the cliffs, testifying to millennia of unimaginable tectonic forces, lies ahead of us, and at the top of the fold one such cave houses a group of tombs, ruined structures still bearing their original coat of red and white pigment. But they are far off, and this is not yet Revash. Another hour brings us to a viewpoint much closer to the cliffs, and here we see two adjacent sets of caves, featuring cottage-sized structures covered in still-bright mineral-oxide paintwork. Some of them look like cottages, with gabled roofs, others like flat-topped apartments. They are adorned with red-on-white figures and geometrical symbols -- a feline, llamas, circles, ovals -- and bas-relief crosses and T-shapes, which perhaps once told the rank and lineage of the tombs' occupants. They are silent, empty, their contents long ago looted, their facades still straining to tell a story whose meaning was lost long ago.

Retracing our steps we continue our road journey to Leimebamba, which we reach mid-afternoon. This settlement was established by the Incas during their conquest of the region, and continued as a colonial town under the Spanish. It retains much of this antique charm in its balconied houses with narrow streets where more horses than cars are parked. We go a little further up the highway and pull in to the spacious garden environment of the Leimebamba Museum, where we settle in to guest rooms specially provided for visitors. Then we visit this delightful collection of extraordinary artifacts recovered from another group of cliff tombs discovered as recently as 1997 at the remote Laguna de los Condores, high in the mountains east of the town.

The exhibits, cheerfully displayed in well-lit rooms, offer a sample from the mass of artifacts recovered from this amazing discovery. In 1997 a group of undiscovered cliff tombs -- similar in style to those of Revash -- was spotted above the remote Laguna de los Condores by local farmhands. Although they looted and damaged the site, a mass of priceless objects and a trove of vital information was rescued. We see gourds carved with animal and geometrical symbols, an array of colorful textiles, ceramics, carved wooden beakers and portrait heads, and a selection of the dozens of quipus (Inca knotted-string recording devices) recovered from the site. A big picture window offers a view of the temperature- and humidity-controlled temporary "mausoleum" where more than two hundred salvaged mummies are kept.

Archaeologists are still uncertain as to how most of this material came to be so startlingly well-preserved, in tombs that during the rainy season were actually behind a waterfall! But perhaps the most striking thing about the tombs is that they contain burials from all three periods of local history: the Chachapoya cultural heyday, the post-Inca invasion period, and the post-Spanish conquest. Archaeologists are continuing to study the material, seeking to learn more about the Chachapoya and their relationship with their Inca masters. The quipu finds have been especially valuable to scholars seeking to decode the Inca record keeping system.

After our museum tour we can visit the Kenticafé across the street, for a cup of the best coffee in Chachapoyas, where we may see dozens of the region's exotic hummingbirds flitting among the strategically placed feeders, perhaps including the dazzling and highly endangered Marvellous Spatuletail.

Day 5: Leimebamba to Cajamarca: across the Marañón canyon.

This day offers us new perspectives on the multitude of natural environments of the Peruvian Andes. We climb through dairy country, where cattle graze in green pastures studded with rock outcrops, dells and belts of woodland. As we go higher this landscape gives way to a high altitude puna region of smooth slopes densely covered in a beige bunch-grass known as ichu. We cross a high pass at 3,500m and begin a long traverse to a lower pass, where we look down on the distant Marañón river, which we crossed for the first time four days ago. A long, winding descent brings us at last to a warm, irrigated valley filled with mango trees, coconut palms, papaya and banana plantations. Soon we reach Balsas, a village at the bridge over the Marañón.

We cross the mighty river into the Department of Cajamarca, and climb through an arid canyon environment of tall cactus and gnarled trees. Eventually we reach farmland again, rolling country of wheat, barley and oat fields, and we begin to see adobe farmhouses. And we spot farmers and their children wearing the characteristic large, broad-brimmed Cajamarca straw hat. We pause in the city of Celendin for lunch, and continue on to our destination, the regional capital of Cajamarca. We arrive late afternoon at the Cajamarca suburb of Baños del Inca, where the spacious Laguna Seca Hotel offers us a welcome rest and a room with its own huge hot tub and unlimited piping-hot thermal spring water.

Day 6: in Cajamarca: colonial Spain and the last days of the Inca empire.

Our hot springs hotel provides a wonderful and well-earned finale of luxuriant relaxation, with delicious dining, spa facilities, and a spacious private hot pool in every room. The springs themselves are famous, the site of a historic first encounter between the Inca emperor Atahualpa and the Spaniards who, unknown to him, had come to conquer his empire. The Inca was himself enjoying a hot soak at the very moment of his victory over rival armies in a long and bloody war of succession, when a small contingent of mounted Spaniards rode out from Cajamarca to visit him, and to arrange a fateful "unarmed" meeting in the city square next day. The rest, as they say, is history.

Today we drive into the city center, and up to the hilltop now known as Colina Santa Apolonia. This was a sacred mountain to the Cajamarca people who held sway in this valley for nearly two thousand years, until the Incas conquered them, and ancient rock carvings can still be seen on its summit.

Today we look out over the modern city of some 250,000 inhabitants, spread out over a valley at 2,700m/8,850ft surrounded by low mountains. After viewing the lay of the land we descend the steps into the old city center, which lies directly below us.

Spanish colonial houses line the streets here, and the churches, such as San Francisco and Belén, wear facades of intricate, fantastical baroque-mestizo stonework, although all trace of the Inca halls from which Francisco Pizarro and his conquistadors launched history's most fateful and treacherous ambush have disappeared. Nevertheless, we visit one Inca stone building that still stands, its smoothly rounded stone walls and perfectly fitted stones testifying to its noble Inca origins. Local folklore holds that this was the room which the Inca Atahualpa offered to fill once with gold and twice with silver, in exchange for his freedom. This forlorn monument is a suitable spot to hear the story of Atahualpa's fabulous ransom and its tragic denouement.

We visit the Museum in the old colonial hospital of the Church of Belen, to get in touch with and see some fine artifacts from an older culture -- known to us as the Cajamarca -- who occupied this valley for some 2,000 years before finally succumbing to the Inca expansion.

After lunch at a fine local restaurant we pay a visit to the nearby rock formation at Otuzco, where over thousands of years the pre-Inca Cajamarca peoples left hundreds of elaborate niches, or "windows", hewn into bedrock, in which they buried their dead. We return in time to make the most of the facilities at the hotel before dinner.



Day 7: Cajamarca to Trujillo: from mountain city to coastal desert

We start out at 8am, aiming to reach Trujillo by mid-afternoon, in order to visit some of the city highlights before dinner. The condition of the first part of this road may vary, so we adjust our departure time accordingly.

The route across the rolling mountain scenery of the Cajamarca valley and dramatic descent through rugged ravines to the coast offers another sample of Peru's startling varieties of terrain and geography. We will stop for an open air picnic lunch at a scenic spot overlooking the great lake behind the Gallito Ciego dam. If time allows we can combine this with a visit to the nearby petroglyphs of Yonán. By early afternoon we meet the Pan-American highway 120 Km. north of Trujillo, and finish our journey on a major paved highway.

In Trujillo we have time to get our bearings in the city center, with its spacious Main Square, and marvelous colonial-period adobe buildings in the coastal colonial style, featuring huge barred windows and massive wooden doorways.

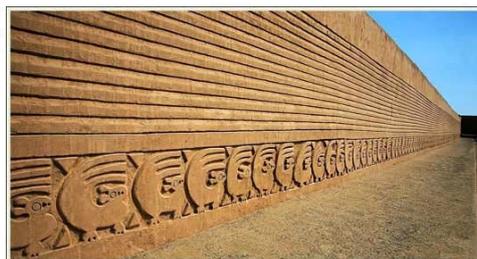
We take time to see one of these -- the Casa de la Emancipación, now a bank, but open to the public. This is the former colonial mansion where rebellious local citizens proclaimed independence from Spain, ahead of the rest of Peru, in 1820. The colonial atmosphere and decor have been faithfully preserved, and there is a display model of old Trujillo, from a time when a fortified wall protected the city from pirate raids.

Day 8: Trujillo to Lima: the great adobe platforms of Huaca de la Luna and Huaca del Sol,

the picturesque beach resort of Huanchaco, and the pre-Inca city of Chan Chan. In the morning we drive a short way from Trujillo, to visit the Huaca de la Luna, and the Huaca del Sol, two huge flat-topped pyramids built by the Moche culture between 0 and 600A.D. The Huaca de la Luna is an extraordinary demonstration of what patient long-term archaeology can achieve. Here, at a site that has been well known and frequently looted for centuries, excavations have revealed layer upon layer of ancient construction, uncovering wall after wall of colorful friezes that were deliberately buried by the Moche, and had not seen the light of day for one-and-a-half thousand years. Bloodthirsty fanged deities and exotic gods in the form of spiders, snakes, felines, octopi and other marine creatures rub shoulders with lines of dancers, warriors and naked prisoners, and scenes of ritual combat. One wall is covered with such a multitude of mystifying symbols that it has been labeled simply "The Complicated Theme" -- until some future genius can offer a plausible explanation of them. A site museum to display material unearthed here is under construction, and when opened it will be part of this visit.

We make our way through Trujillo to the seashore, stopping en route to see the Huaca del Dragón, a pyramid built by the Chimú culture, a dynasty that assumed power after the Moche in this part of Peru until they were conquered by the Incas.

At the nearby beach resort of Huanchaco we have a chance to try the superb seafood of Trujillo at a restaurant overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Here fishermen still paddle out to sea, kneeling on caballitos de totora -- one-man reed rafts which have been used for millennia to collect the abundant bounty of the Pacific Ocean.



After lunch we visit the great Chimú center of Chan Chan, the largest adobe city ever built. It was in fact an elite settlement, a series of nine enormous palaces belonging to successive rulers of the Chimú realm. At its height the population here may have reached 50,000 people. Many of them were artists and craftspeople, who made the sumptuous goldwork, textiles and pottery for which the Chimú were famous.

At the Tschudi palace enclosure we enter a labyrinthine series of courtyards lined with clay friezes of fish and ocean birds, and surrounded in places with open meshwork-style adobe walls, believed to represent fishing nets. We visit inner patios, residences, administrative buildings, temples, platforms and storehouses, and a huge reservoir where “sunken gardens” may have produced specialized crops for the Chimu nobility.

We return to Trujillo in time for our evening flight to Lima.

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| Fixed Departure | Saturday |
| Private Departure | Daily |
| Operates | All year |
| Physical Demand | None |

Included in your trip:

Private overland transportation
Guided tours
Entrance fees
Meals mention in the itinerary
Hotel Accommodation

NOT included:

Airport taxes
Domestic flights
Excess baggage
Tips

AIR TICKETS :

For domestic flights, we suggest to contact Éxito Travel, a wholesaler based in United States. They are familiar with our operations and are used to book flights for our clients according to their respective itineraries. When booking your tickets, please provide them the information on your trip itinerary and they will do all the necessary bookings. If you book with a different agency this may lead to some logistic problems as it is important that the group travels together on the same planes.

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