



Women-Led
Inca Trail
to Machu Picchu

Abercrombie & Kent

PERU

A&K'S WOMEN-LED INCA TRAIL

There are many ways to arrive to Machu Picchu. However one of our favorites sure is the Inca Trail! And inspired by the ancient backdrops and the Inca spirit, we have brought it to another level with our Women-Led Inca Trail Hike. However, in addition to the luxury we may offer here, we have added another A&K touch: the company of the women from the Village of the Flowers. As proud locals and the living legacy of the Incas they will be helping with the portage, while sharing the experience, determination and love for their ancient culture.

As part of a women empowerment project, the ladies are now part of the entourage, accompanying our guests to the Sun Gate to see Machu Picchu the way the Incas did centuries ago, while sharing their pride and love for their ancient culture.

This is an AKP initiative empowers Andean women to do jobs that were traditionally taken by men. And by sharing their experience and determination, they can transmit their energy to our travelers to make their way to Machu Picchu, hiking the famous Inca Trail!

Development and empowerment!



Day 1 - Cusco – Km 104 – Inti Punku – Machu Picchu – Aguas Calientes

BXL

We leave early to take our train to km 104 on the rail road to Machu Picchu. We will notice a dramatic change in ecological levels, from Quechua to cloud forest. The latter will provide the backdrop for our walk. Upon disembarking from the train at Km104, we will register with the SHMP authorities to begin our walk. We will follow an uphill path through magnificent geography to Wiñay Wayna, where we will have a short break and check in with the SHMP to continue our walk. When we arrive at the Inti Punku, the entrance to Machu Picchu, we will enjoy our first view of the sacred city. This magical place will surprise us with impressive geography, as well as with the evidence of the high intellectual and spiritual development achieved by the Andean people, under the rule of the Inkas. We will cross the archaeological site to take our transport to the town of Aguas Calientes, where after checking into our hotels, we will have a well-deserved rest.

Day 2-Aguas Calientes/Machu Picchu/Aguas Calientes

Early in the morning we will take our bus to the archaeological site of Machu Picchu, to enjoy a guided tour of this marvelous city. We will explore sacred places as well as the places where Andean man demonstrated the extent of his knowledge. Machu Picchu was a place dedicated to the study and worship of the cosmos and the earth, a place where the knowledge and spirituality of the Andean man were combined to achieve a universal balance according to the Andean concept of duality. You will have the chance



to hike the Huayna Picchu Mountain (usually seen in the background of the classic vista of Machu Picchu) from where quite spectacular views of Machu Picchu are seen from a different angle –as well as the breathtaking and dramatic panorama of the

surrounding mountain peaks and the great gorge of the Urubamba canyon- can be fully appreciated. Afterwards, we go back to Aguas Calientes by bus and take the afternoon train to Ollantaytambo or Poroy station. Arrival and transfer to Cusco city.

Inclusions

- *1 private guide for each 8 passengers
- *Walking sticks
- *First aid kit & Oxygen tank
- *Equipment porters (not guest's belongings)
- *Inca Trail entrance fees
- *Huayna Picchu entrance fees
- *Box Lunch
- *Bus tickets from Machu Picchu to Aguas Calientes on DAY 1
- *Bus tickets to/from Machu Picchu on DAY 2
- *Vistadome train from Aguas Calientes to Ollantaytambo or Poroy station on DAY 2
- *Private transfer to KM 104 on DAY 1
- *Private transfer to Cusco city on DAY 2

Mountain Landscape, Sacred Valley

On a rolling plateau north-west of Cusco stands the Village of Flowers. Your encounter with the Andean people begins here, above the village on a high country promontory of bare red earth. The views are stupendous and the air sparkles. An open lake spreads out below, mountains rise behind you, and one of the great peaks of the south Peruvian Andes, Salcantay (6,270m/20,565ft), soars in snowcapped splendor beyond the hills to the west.

Here you meet the welcoming villagers who will lead you on a gentle downhill walk through the hills and valleys of their world. You suddenly find yourself part of a procession (and there is absolutely nothing more Andean than a procession!) There are drummers, pipers, weavers and dancers, all dressed in the colorful style common in the Peruvian Andes, but also different in each locality.

You walk among them, together with perhaps some village dogs - but most notably, there are llamas! It's a llama procession too! These aloof yet amenable South American animals will carry your pack - though they hope you understand they are doing you a huge favor. You can lead one if you want. Just ask our staff!

The sound of drums and bamboo flutes fills the air as you follow a gentle trail downslope. This is your musical theme for today, the music of so much village life in the Andes. It's satisfying to know that every step of this mountain ramble helps our Andean friends to thrive while celebrating their local customs in an entirely new way - by sharing them and showing them to world visitors.

You cross a landscape of coarse, dry Andean bunch grass, known as ichu, which offers grazing for the hardy llamas while also supplying tough binding material for making adobe bricks, and thatching houses.

Ahead of you a small earth mound marks



the boundary between two communities. Women sit on red earth, leaning against staked backstrap looms and offering you a foretaste of the local textile traditions. Their fingers race deftly across handspun threads as they show off weaving skills seemingly embedded in their Andean DNA.

Approaching the lake shore the land becomes more generous and fertile, with crops growing on either side of a trail now enclosed by trees and shrubs. It's astonishing how much of what you see

growing around you is used in people's daily lives. Your women companions point out some of the shrubs, lichens, tree bark and flowers they collect for dyeing textiles and as medicines for treating common ailments.

Your hour-long mountain stroll comes to an end as we reach the flats of the lake shore, arriving at the entrance to the local community center, where more villagers, activities and refreshments await us.



The Village of the Flowers

This is your chance to meet and mingle with the living descendants of a culture thousands of years old. You learn how these resilient and self-reliant highlanders manage their locally produced stores and supplies, breed guinea pigs (as food, not pets!) and fatten them on barley and kitchen scraps, while handling a multitude of household chores.

Your experience will vary slightly, according to the season. The Andean annual cycle begins with the early planting season, as winter gives way to the southern hemisphere spring and intermittent rains begin. During the rainy months, the fields around you are planted and lush with ripening crops. Later you may encounter the harvest, when barley, a variety of tubers, alfalfa, and most especially potatoes, are piled, bagged or spread out to dry in village yards.

During the rainless winter months agricultural work diminishes while other activities intensify. It is the season for repairs and home maintenance and handiwork. Roofs are replaced, houses built, irrigation channels dredged and repaired. Community building projects proceed at astounding speed, though it is also the season of feasting and saint's days.



Amidst all this busyness there is a spell when fields remain untouched, soil unturned, and time is set aside for ritual offerings of gratitude to Pachamama, the Earth Mother, and the asking of blessings for the coming year.

Whatever the season of your visit, you will always encounter those essential Andean traditions inherited from the Inca past - a reverence for the living spirit of nature, and a natural ease in daily work, at certain times

individually, at others as a community.

Our guests are often moved by the open and heartfelt hospitality of these Peruvian villagers, as they invite us into their lives and show us their ways. Hours seem to pass in minutes, and the experience ends all too quickly. Now the time has come to say farewell to the Village of Flowers, as you depart for lunch and the comforts of the modern world.

The Short Inca Trail

A vast lattice-work of stone-paved highways once linked the towns and settlements of the Inca empire into a thriving, living world of cultures and languages throughout western South America. The best-preserved and most famous surviving remnant of this road system is known today as the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu.

A special privilege awaits as you approach this climactic visit to Machu Picchu. Journeying on foot as the Incas did, you marvel at that stunning mountain scenery while passing through remote sacred settlements, just as they did. Today you ascend from the Sacred Valley of the Incas and its river to meet the high mountain trail whose destination is Machu Picchu.

Kilometer 104

A Drive to the station in Ollantaytambo to board a train to your trailhead, then sit back and enjoy one of the world's great train rides. The railroad snakes alongside the roaring whitewater torrent of the Urubamba River, dropping past glimpses of Inca ruins, through ever-changing scenery, from high mountain peaks and valley farmland down into dense tropical forest and a deep, mist-enshrouded gorge.

Five miles before the Machu Picchu station the train makes a simple halt at the marker for Km.104. Amidst sub-tropical forest, opposite a suspension footbridge over the Urubamba, a select few who aim to trek this last leg of the journey to Machu Picchu disembark. You are one of them!

If you happened to visit the Village of Flowers earlier in your journey, there may even be familiar faces awaiting you here. Some of the women who served and laughed with you then are here today, welcoming you at the trailhead. These Andean women, now dressed in local-style hiking gear, will be helping you along the trail, carrying lunch and some of your belongings, as you wish. They will good-naturedly support and encourage you along the way, as they share your experience.



Shortly after crossing the bridge and setting out you encounter the Inca site of Chachabamba - your first experience of an Inca ruin surrounded by forest, empty but for the echoes of a mysterious past. Some of its buildings enclose huge natural boulders, carved long ago into shelves and geometrical forms, the signature architectural style of Inca ceremony and ritual. Notice the series of carved stone channels, well preserved though no longer flowing, where spring water once gushed into sunken ceremonial baths.

Ascending then crossing a ravine, you leave the forested valley floor and begin a steady, climbing traverse over open mountain slope, where the tropical sun reminds you why you wore sunblock and a hat. Scattered flowering shrubs and epiphytic orchids, attended by

occasional hummingbirds, splotch patches of color onto the mountainside. Up ahead terraced ruins come into view beyond another, deeper ravine. Here and there wooden shelters provide shade and a place to sit. You stop for water and perhaps a snack.

The trail switchbacks into the upper ravine, and you enter an oasis of cool forest humidity where an enchanted waterfall cascades down the slope from high above. Crossing a wooden bridge beneath cool spray you climb again, skipping over gnarled roots and meeting moss-covered stone walls on your left as you reach another small shelter - a very old one made of well-cut stone, built by another people long ago. You have arrived at the Inca ruins of Wiñay Wayna.



Forever Young

Wiñay Wayna, "Forever Young". This is the Quechua name for *epidendrum secundum*, an orchid that flowers year-round. It was growing everywhere here when the archaeologist Paul Fejos rediscovered the site in 1941. Its Inca name was lost by then, so he chose to name it, poetically, after the orchid.

Even in translation the name sounds magical. It fits the place perfectly; a fairytale quality lingers here. What mere mortal would build a settlement in this place? A narrow stone stairway climbs through an intricate maze of small stone houses; a mountainside has been sculpted into a broad fan of steep terracing where crops once grew; an ascending chain of ritual baths is crowned by a temple complex whose gateway frames an astounding view of snowcapped Wakay Willka. Everything is made from blocks of carefully carved white granite.

There is something gentle, delicate, almost feminine about the place. And why not? Women always held subtle but significant power in the Andean world, and still do. They were prominent among the burials found at Machu Picchu, too; the highest-ranking individual found there was a priestess, interred with her precious possessions, including, rather poignantly, her faithful companion - a dog. And they are with you here and now, these Andean women - traditional attendants and custodians of the alpacas, the farmhouse stores, the village textiles, the home - helping you along the trail with their nourishment and encouragement.

Turning the last corner of the exit trail at the top of the site, your last, glorious view back to Forever Young is unforgettable: a creation of inspired architects, a five-hundred-year-old scenic astonishment.



Machu Picchu

You join the main Inca Trail here. It is not far to Machu Picchu now, and the way is more level. You dawdle through an enchanted world of green twilight and tall primary cloud forest that towers over tree ferns and giant begonias. The Inca construction of the trail becomes obvious. High stone retaining walls drop into the forest to your right, while occasional structures - resting platforms, passing places and one rather steep stairway - punctuate the route. Then you leave the forest abruptly as the trail opens onto a ridgetop at the stone house and doorway of Inti Punku, the "Gate of the Sun".

For this is where you first see Machu Picchu. A dark green ring of mountains spanning the horizon ahead. The prominent peak of Wayna Picchu in the middle distance. The stone outlines of a pale city etched upon a broad ridge below you, glowing softly in the afternoon sun.

People come this way for different reasons. Maybe yours came into focus for you today. But if you have any doubts, any weariness, you will forget them now - because this is where you know exactly why you took the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu.





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