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## **‘Virgen del Carmen’ Festival- Peru**

**11-day trip departing July 10<sup>th</sup>**

**15-day trip includes optional 4-day extension to Lake Titicaca**

### **Overview**

Imagine being invited by Peruvian friends to visit their country. Surely it would be an insider’s experience and a great chance to meet the people and get a close up look at their living traditions; a trip where you’re invited for home-cooked meals and asked to join in celebrations.

For two weeks we will immerse ourselves in the living traditions of the Peruvian Andes. We’ll meet artists, archaeologists and local friends who invite us inside their country and their homes, giving us a unique access into the wonderful, cultural heart of Peru.

Of course no trip to Peru would be complete without spending time meandering through the cobbled streets of Cusco, exploring the splendid Sacred Valley and of course a pilgrimage to the breathtaking Inca sanctuary of Machu Picchu.

There will also be some high-energy options for those seeking a physical adventure, like rafting the Urubamba River and hiking along the Inca Trail for a day en route to Machu Picchu.

The extension to the Lake Titicaca region is highly recommended. The days we spend there not only expose us to the stunning beauty of the highest navigable lake in the world, but also to its residents and their weaving, ceramic and mask-making traditions. Last, but not least, our friend Ana invites us to her alpaca ranch for a home-cooked meal in an unmatched natural surrounding.

### **Signature Experiences**

- Private visit to the small weaving and farming community of Chahuatire with Nilda Callanaupa. She has lectured at Harvard and National Geographic and is the person most responsible for the revival of the weaving arts in Peru in the last 20 years
- Participate in one of Latin America’s most vibrant fiestas, the ‘Virgen del Carmen’ festival in Paucartambo
- Visit the workshops of some artist friends near Puno - a potter and a mask-maker
- An overnight home-stay with a local community on Amantani island on Lake Titicaca
- Visit to a friend’s Alpaca ranch with a home-cooked lunch and the option to hike in a cactus forest, ride horses or just relax and appreciate the wide-open spaces
- Truly intimate group size - limited to a maximum of 12 travelers (minimum 4) to promote interaction and encourage exchange between our clients and the local people we meet in the Peruvian Andes

Sunday, July 10<sup>th</sup>

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Our trip leader and driver will meet you in Cusco. After a coca leaf tea to help us acclimatize to the altitude of 11,000 feet, we’ll drive to Urubamba, nestled in the Sacred Valley around 1 ½ hours from Cuzco.

The climate is marvelous and the scenery spectacular. Urubamba’s altitude (9,500 feet) is 1,500 feet less than that of Cusco, making it an ideal place to acclimatize coming from sea level. En route, we’ll stop in Pisac, famous for its Sunday market and well-preserved Inca ruins. (Meals: B/L)

4-star lodging in Urubamba

Monday, July 11<sup>th</sup>

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Nilda Callanaupa has been an invited expert at National Geographic and at Harvard speaking on the weaving traditions of Peru. She is without doubt the leading voice for traditional weaving (and weavers) in Peru today.

Today she is also our guest leader, taking us on a private visit to Chahuatire, a community of 120 families dedicated to weaving and agriculture.

Following a brief stop to buy fresh-made bread for the village, we'll meet the weavers and observe the process from shearing to dyeing to final production. After a picnic lunch, we'll work off the meal with some hiking in their remote and beautiful mountain hamlet. (Meals: B/L)

4-star lodging in Urubamba

Tuesday, July 12<sup>th</sup>

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Today you'll choose your preferred mode of transport - river raft or mountain bike.

**Bike:** you'll ride down to the mysterious microclimate terraces at Moray and walk through a few of the 5,000 salt pans near Maras, still used today. (Meals: B/L)

**Car:** follow roughly the same route as the bikers, with less physical exertion. (Meals: B/L)

**Raft:** your river ride will include two wonderful hours watching the valley pass by as you navigate the Urubamba river and enjoy a picnic lunch. (Meals: B/L)

4-star lodging in Urubamba

Wednesday, July 13<sup>th</sup>

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We'll rise early to catch the 7:30 train from Ollantaytambo. Those of us who are physically fit and interested in a physical challenge will take the train from Ollantaytambo, getting off at kilometer #104 for a one day hike along the Inca Trail. Our 5-6 hours of hiking will be rewarded by some incredible Inca ruins, culminating in the descent to Machu Picchu from the Sun gate in the late afternoon.

The rest of us will enjoy some less demanding exploration of the wonderful ruins and market at Ollantaytambo. We'll take a later, evening train to Aguas Calientes and meet up with the rest of the group tonight. (Meals: B/L)

3-star lodging in Aguas Calientes

Thursday, July 14<sup>th</sup>

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We'll have another early morning, getting the bus to ride up the zigzagging road to Machu Picchu to be amongst the first to arrive at the ruins shortly after sunrise, around 7am. Our guide will explain the history of this magical complex and unveil the nature of its most important structures. After, you'll have a few hours on your own to explore secret corners of the site or just meditate and feel the energy of this special place. (Meals: B only)

We'll board the late afternoon train in Aguas Calientes, below the ruins, for the 4-hour trip to Cusco, arriving in the evening.

4-star lodging in Cusco

Friday, July 15<sup>th</sup>

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Cusco is typically crowded with tourists from all over the world, and for good reason. It is one of the most beautiful cities of the Americas, if not the world. We'll start in the morning exploring Cusco from above, descending by horseback through a series of nearby ruins, stopping for a picnic lunch near Saqsaywayman and arriving in the city's center in the early afternoon. (Meals: B/L)

4-star lodging in Cusco

Saturday, July 16<sup>th</sup>

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The celebration of the 'Virgen del Carmen' is one of the most vibrant and colorful in all of Latin America. The 3 ½ hour drive to Paucartambo will be rewarded by an unforgettable day at the peak of the annual three-day festival, which pays homage to the Virgin of Carmen and draws thousands of revelers from all over Peru (and the world).

*Warning:* There are few public bathrooms, few places to sit and mostly street vendor food available today, as well as large crowds and some public drinking.

For most travelers, the pageantry, costumes, song and dances of the more than 16 'comparsas' and the rich history of this celebration make these inconveniences pale in comparison to the rewards of participating in the festival.

Of course, anyone would rather not endure the bumpy, dusty ride or the crowded conditions at the festival may opt to stay in Cusco for a free day of exploration.

Those that opt for the trip to Paucartambo will return to Cusco in the late evening, as there are no accommodation options locally.

*Note: total driving time (to and from Paucartambo) is 7 hours today*

4-star lodging in Cusco

Sunday, July 17<sup>th</sup>

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After a solid week of full-on exploration and activity, you deserve a free day to enjoy Cusco on your own, do some shopping, people watch from an outdoor cafe, write postcards or just relax and recharge for the next leg of our adventure – Lake Titicaca. (Meals: B only)

4-star lodging in Cusco

**\*\*OPTIONAL PROGRAM EXTENSION**

Monday, July 18<sup>th</sup>

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Today we say goodbye to Cusco and the Sacred Valley and drive towards Lake Titicaca, the highest navigable lake in the world. We'll stop in the small, pretty town of Lampa where we'll stay overnight. (Meals: B/D)

*Note: 4 hours driving time from Cusco to Lampa, plus time for stops along the way.*

3-star lodging in Lampa

Tuesday, July 19<sup>th</sup>

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After breakfast we'll make the 45-minute drive to Pukara to visit a friend's home and ceramics workshop. Honorato and his family work with the potter's wheel, selling clay vessels throughout the region. (Meals: B/L)

After Honorato demonstrates his skills at the potter's wheel (and perhaps take a turn ourselves) we'll head towards Puno, stopping en route to see the dramatic ruins of Sillustani.

4-star lodging in Puno

Wednesday, July 20<sup>th</sup>

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Today and tomorrow we'll dedicate to experiencing Lake Titicaca, visiting three of its most charming islands. Starting with the nearby Uros floating islands, we'll continue on to Amantani, where the local community will invite us lunch in their homes. After lunch, we'll hike to some of

the most significant sites on the island. Tonight the community members of will host us for a simple dinner and lodging in their homes. (Meals: B/L/D)

Lodging with the local community (very basic conditions)

Thursday, July 21<sup>st</sup>

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We'll depart Amantani early, around 7:30am and navigate to Taquile Island. We'll have time to hike on the island, meet the local community and learn about their traditional crafts. After lunch on the island, we'll return by fast boat to Puno.

Once back on land, we'll visit our friend Javier's mask-making workshop. He and his family have been making some of the brilliant masks and costumes worn by the city's thousands of dancers during the annual 'Virgen de la Candelaria' festival. (Meals: B/D)

4-star lodging in Puno

Friday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>

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After breakfast we'll drive to our friend Anita's ranch for a morning of activities to choose from including: horseback riding, hiking through a cactus forest or just relaxing and soaking in the wide open, peaceful spaces. We'll finish our stay at the ranch – and our time in Peru - with a home-cooked meal and a toast to our two weeks together!

Transfer to the Juliaca airport for our 17:55 flight to Lima, connecting with our international overnight flight(s) back to the US. (Meals: B/L)

Saturday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>

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Arrive home