



A Weekend in

Cusco

An Incan Escape

WORDS & PHOTOS BY DALTON GAUDIN

A land where one could spend a hundred lifetimes exploring, Peru is a place of dreams and lore. Since it's impossible to see it all, exploring Cusco and the surrounding Sacred Valley will fill any long weekend adventure.

Friday

Around the **Plaza de Las Armas**, the central square, flame marks are still visible on walls. It's evidence of a last-ditch effort

by the **Inca King Atahualpa** to save his empire from Spanish conquest: burning **Cusco** to the ground with flaming arrows. History abounds, and visitors can find many pre-colonial

indigenous treasures preserved at the **Museo Inca** and the **Museo de Arte Pre-Colombino**.

But this is not just a city of shadows and relics. It is a vibrant place. **San Blas** is a lovely bohemian neighborhood with vendors, friendly restaurants and an anchoring fountain. Walk down **Calle Carmen Alto**, visit with the locals, and enjoy the sunset while dining on Andean-cheese crêpes at **La B'om**.

Saturday

Some say the walls

of **Saqsaywaman** are older than the **Inca**. Some say giants moved the stones, or that the ancestors sang to them to make them walk. Either way, the stones are megalithic, and the view from this hilltop fortress is unbeatable. Only here can one truly admire **Cusco's** sprawling beauty.

Spend the afternoon at the ruins of **Tambomachay** and **Puka Pukara**. By early evening wander the streets around the city center. There are labyrinths of nooks and crannies: bars, bookstores, spas, cafés, pot- ters, and magical bo-

tanicals. Hidden plazas and mercantiles abound. Be friendly and kind, and secret doors will open all around.

The sunset's blue and orange wane is perfect, and it glows with golden sodium at night. Grab dinner at **Inka Grill**. It has a **Peruvian** version of the tamale (humita) that defies explanation.

Sunday

Hire a guide with a large car. Rise before the sun and drive northwest to **Chin-**

chero. Visit **el Balcón del Inka** textile center to learn about the symbology and fabrication of the local garb. Have lunch in **Ollantaytambo** and visit the ruins. Ancient terraces still line the walls, and **Inca** grain houses sit undisturbed. Be sure to see the **Salineras salt mines** and just admire the wondrous landscape. **E**

if you go...

Be ready for an adventure! As a guest to the area, greet everyone with a smile and an open heart. Knowing Spanish will also come in handy. Be sure to tip well. Don't forget to bring a camera – it's hard to capture a bad picture.

Getting Around: This city must be explored on foot. That being said, taxis are everywhere. They are cheap – ranging from 5 to 10 soles depending on destination.

Events: June is festival month in Cusco. Monday, June 24 is **Inti Raymi**, a festival to the sun god, and the **Saqsaywaman**

puts on a giant performance at the park. **Todos Santos** (All Saints Day) is November 1 and **Día de Los Muertos** (Day of the Dead) is November 2, with candlelight vigils at the cemeteries. These are big celebrations for the locals, and if visiting during this time, all are invited to participate.

Forecast: Being on the oth-

er side of the equator, May through October are mostly cold and dry, November through April are the warmer months. Regardless the season, always be ready for rain!

Who to follow:
@DaltonGaudin
onsiteexpeditions.org
destinostourscusco.com