

The 4-Day Inca Trail Guide

Route, training, packing and altitude, from the local team that walks this route.

4 Days / 3 Nights

About 33.4 km · Route 1

Highest point 4,207 m a.s.l. (13,802 ft)

SANTU
TOUR OPERADOR

Free guide · Information updated October 2026 · santucusco.com

FREE GUIDE · INCA TRAIL

Everything You Need Before You Walk to Machu Picchu

The Classic Inca Trail is a four-day walk of about 33.4 km along original Inca paths, over Dead Woman's Pass at 4,207 m a.s.l. (13,802 ft) and into Machu Picchu through the Sun Gate. This guide gathers what we tell every traveler before they come: the route, how each day feels, how to train, what to carry and how to handle altitude.

> Information updated October 2026. Access conditions, schedules, fees, circuits and regulations can change, so please verify current conditions before your trip.

IN THIS GUIDE

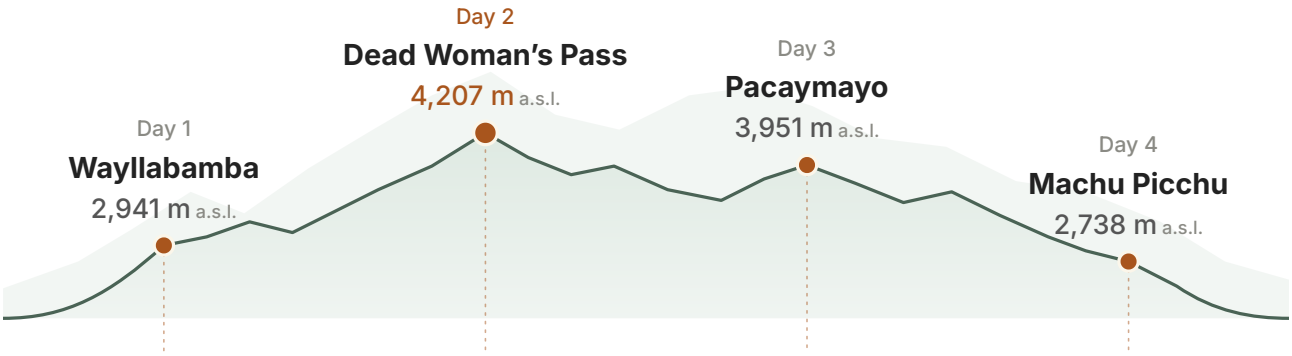
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> **How to read the numbers.** Distances, hiking times, elevation gain and loss refer to the walking section of each day, not to the length of the whole day. Times are approximate and vary with your pace and the weather. Distances and altitudes come from Santu's own GPS trace.

INCA TRAIL · ALTITUDE

Highest Point Each Day

The trail climbs to 4,207 m a.s.l. (13,802 ft) on day 2, then descends toward Machu Picchu.



DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4
10.8 km · 5–6 h	7.48 km · 6–7 h	9.98 km · 8 h	5.17 km · 2 h

Distance and time are walking data for each day's trail section, not the length of the whole day. Times are approximate and vary with your pace and the weather.

ROUTE MAP

Inca Trail Route Map

Route 1 runs from Piskacucho (Km 82) to Machu Picchu via Wayllabamba, Dead Woman's Pass (Warmiwañusca) and Inti Punku, the Sun Gate: about 33.4 km over 4 days and 3 nights, according to Santu's own GPS trace.

DAY	ROUTE	WALKING	HIGHEST POINT
Day 1	Cusco – Km 82 – Wayllabamba	10.8 km · 5–6 h	2,941 m a.s.l. (9,649 ft)
Day 2	Wayllabamba – Dead Woman's Pass – Pacaymayo	7.48 km · 6–7 h	4,207 m a.s.l. (13,802 ft)
Day 3	Pacaymayo – Wiñay Wayna	9.98 km · 8 h	3,951 m a.s.l. (12,963 ft)
Day 4	Wiñay Wayna – Machu Picchu – Cusco	5.17 km · 2 h	2,738 m a.s.l. (8,983 ft)

The interactive map, with each day's route, campsites and archaeological sites, is on the guide page at santucusco.com/free-inca-trail-guide/.

DAY BY DAY

How Each Day Really Feels

Times are approximate and vary with your pace and the weather. Distances, elevation gain and loss come from Santu's own GPS trace.

DAY 1 OF 4

Cusco – Km 82 – Wayllabamba

Your first steps on the original Inca Trail, from Km 82 to the camp at Wayllabamba.



DISTANCE	HIKING TIME	HIGHEST POINT
10.8 km	5–6 h	2,941 m a.s.l. (9,649 ft)
DIFFICULTY	**MEALS**	**ELEVATION GAIN / LOSS**
Moderate	Lunch, Dinner	+788 m / −498 m

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hike the original Inca Trail.
- Explore Llactapata archaeological site.
- Scenic views of the Sacred Valley.
- Experience your first mountain campsite.

Your adventure begins early in Cusco as we travel through the Sacred Valley toward Km 82, the official starting point of the Classic Inca Trail. After meeting the trekking team, including porters and cooks, we begin walking along original Inca stone paths.

The trail follows the Urubamba River and passes small archaeological sites such as Llactapata, where your guide introduces the history of the Inca civilization. We arrive at Wayllabamba camp for dinner before the next day's challenge.

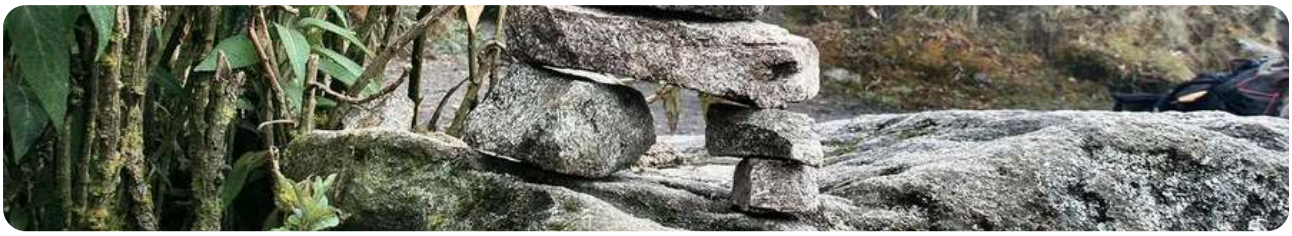
ON THE TRAIL

Terrain	Dirt and stone path along the valley, with ups and downs.
Ascent / descent	Moderate, sustained climbs; no big descents.
Weather	Warmer than the following days; it cools in the late afternoon.
What to eat	Lunch on the trail and dinner at camp. Bring snacks for the walk.
Where you rest	Camp at Wayllabamba.
It often surprises people	It "looks easy", so many people start too fast.

DAY 2 OF 4

Wayllabamba – Dead Woman's Pass – Pacaymayo

The highest and most challenging day of the trek.



DISTANCE	HIKING TIME	HIGHEST POINT
7.48 km	6–7 h	4,207 m a.s.l. (13,802 ft)
DIFFICULTY	**MEALS**	**ELEVATION GAIN / LOSS**
Challenging	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	+1,286 m / −635 m

HIGHLIGHTS

- ✓ Reach Dead Woman's Pass.
- ✓ Incredible panoramic Andes views.
- ✓ Cloud forest scenery.
- ✓ The most rewarding challenge of the trek.

The second day is considered the most challenging and rewarding section of the trek. After an early breakfast, we ascend through cloud forest toward Warmiwañusca, known as Dead Woman's Pass, the highest point of the Inca Trail at 4,207 m a.s.l. (13,802 ft).

After resting at the summit, we descend into the Pacaymayo Valley, where camp is prepared for dinner and the overnight stay.

ON THE TRAIL

Terrain	Stone steps and steep path through cloud forest and high puna.
Ascent / descent	Long climb to the pass, then a long stepped descent that is hard on the knees.
Weather	Changeable; colder and windier near the pass.
What to eat	Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included. Keep a snack within reach.
Where you rest	Camp at Pacaymayo.
It often surprises people	The descent costs almost as much as the climb.

DAY 2 SURVIVAL TIPS

What will you feel? Faster breathing, heavy legs and the urge to stop. That is normal: slow your pace, not your spirit.

Manage your energy Short steps, brief and frequent breaks, and no rushing on stretches that "feel good".

Keep at hand Water, a snack, a poncho, a jacket, a hat and sunscreen.

DAY 3 OF 4

Pacaymayo – Wiñay Wayna

Cloud forests, original Inca stairways and hidden archaeological sites: often the most beautiful day of the trek.



DISTANCE	HIKING TIME	HIGHEST POINT
9.98 km	8 h	3,951 m a.s.l. (12,963 ft)

DIFFICULTY	MEALS	ELEVATION GAIN / LOSS
Challenging	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	+938 m / −1,816 m

HIGHLIGHTS

- Visit Phuyupatamarca ruins.
- Walk through cloud forests.
- Explore Wiñay Wayna archaeological site.
- Scenic original Inca staircases.

Day three is often considered the most beautiful day of the Classic Inca Trail. After crossing the Runkurakay Pass, the trail descends through lush vegetation and ancient stone pathways toward Phuyupatamarca, known as “The Town Above the Clouds”.

Continuing through tropical cloud forest, we arrive at the archaeological site of Wiñay Wayna. Tonight’s campsite is near Wiñay Wayna, before the final approach to Machu Picchu.

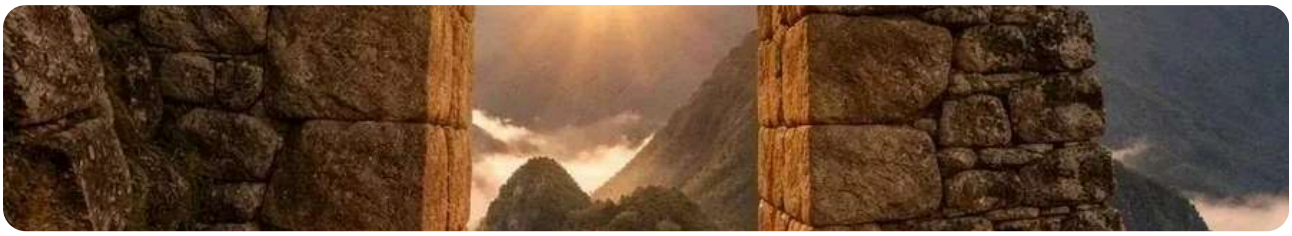
ON THE TRAIL

Terrain	Stone staircases, damp stretches and paths through vegetation.
Ascent / descent	A second pass and many stepped descents.
Weather	Frequent mist and humidity; keep your poncho at hand.
What to eat	Lunch on the trail. Eat something even if you are not hungry.
Where you rest	Camp near Wiñay Wayna.
It often surprises people	It is the longest day and the most beautiful.

DAY 4 OF 4

Wiñay Wayna – Machu Picchu – Cusco

Sunrise at the Sun Gate, then a guided visit to Machu Picchu.



DISTANCE	HIKING TIME	HIGHEST POINT
5.17 km	2 h	2,738 m a.s.l. (8,983 ft)

DIFFICULTY	MEALS	ELEVATION GAIN / LOSS
Moderate	Breakfast	+578 m / −827 m

HIGHLIGHTS

- Arrive at Machu Picchu through the Sun Gate.
- Sunrise views over the Lost City of the Incas.
- Guided tour of Machu Picchu.
- Scenic train journey back to Cusco.

The final day begins before sunrise as we hike toward Inti Punku, the Sun Gate of Machu Picchu. From the Sun Gate, the view of Machu Picchu surrounded by mist-covered mountains is unforgettable.

After descending into Machu Picchu, your guide leads a complete tour of the citadel. Following the visit, we return by train to Ollantaytambo, followed by a private or shared transfer to Cusco.

ON THE TRAIL

Terrain	Stone path, then the final steps up to Inti Punku.
Ascent / descent	A climb to Inti Punku, then a descent to the citadel.
Weather	Cool morning and, with luck, clear skies.
What to eat	Breakfast only is included on this day. Lunch in Aguas Calientes is not included.
Where you rest	Return to Cusco the same day.
It often surprises people	The mix of tiredness and emotion when you see the citadel from above.

TRAINING

How to Prepare for the Inca Trail

You do not need to be an athlete to hike the Inca Trail, but being reasonably fit will help you enjoy it more. The key is consistency, not extreme workouts. Prepare gradually, at your own pace, and avoid pushing yourself too hard just before you travel.



Build your stamina

Walk regularly, cycle or use an inclined treadmill. Short, frequent sessions you enjoy work better than a few exhausting ones.

Strengthen your legs

Gym work for your thighs, glutes and calves helps, along with a little balance practice. Choose exercises that suit you, or ask a trainer.

Practice uphill and downhill walking

If you can, enjoy a few hikes with hills and long descents, wearing the shoes you plan to use and carrying your daypack.

Allow time to acclimatize

Plan at least one full day in Cusco (3,399 m a.s.l.) or the Sacred Valley before your trek. Rest, drink water and take it easy. A gentle half-day walk in the Sacred Valley, such as the Perolniyoq waterfall, also helps you adjust and test your boots.

> **Good to know:** being fit helps you enjoy the trek, but it does not protect you from altitude sickness. Anyone can feel it, whatever their fitness. If you have a health condition, talk to your doctor before you travel.

THE SMALL BACKPACK

What to Carry in Your Daypack

Keep within reach only what you need during the day. Camping equipment is normally carried by the trekking crew, depending on the service you book. Tick off what you already have.

Daypack checklist

- [ ] Water
- [ ] Sunscreen
- [ ] Hat
- [ ] Waterproof poncho
- [ ] Jacket
- [ ] Snacks
- [ ] Camera / phone
- [ ] Documents (passport)
- [ ] Personal medication
- [ ] Toilet paper
- [ ] Headlamp
- [ ] Power bank



How to Choose and Pack Your Daypack

1. **Top lid.** Quick pocket for small items.
2. **Chest strap.** Spreads the weight and stops the pack from bouncing.
3. **External pockets.** Snack, sunscreen and poncho without opening the whole bag.
4. **Capacity.** 25–35 L is enough for a day of walking.
5. **Side compression straps.** Compress the load so it does not shift.
6. **Hip belt.** About 70% of the load should rest here, not on your shoulders.

HOW TO PACK IT

- Adjust the hip belt first.
- Keep heavy items close to your back.
- Put things you use often in external pockets.
- Use an inner waterproof liner.
- Test the pack fully loaded before your trip.

WHAT YOU DO NOT NEED TO CARRY

- Spare “just in case” clothes
- Several pairs of shoes
- Books, laptop or heavy photography gear
- Extra bottles and full-size toiletries

FOOTWEAR

Your Footwear Can Change Your Experience

Four days of stone steps, mud and long descents.

- **Grip:** a deep-lug sole holds on wet stone and mud.
- **Comfort:** firm ankle support and room for your toes on long descents.
- **Break them in:** wear them on several long hikes before your trip.

Footwear checklist

- [ ] Trekking boots or shoes with a deep-lug sole
- [ ] Waterproof or water-resistant
- [ ] Ankle support that holds the foot
- [ ] Worn in on several long hikes
- [ ] Tested with the socks you will wear
- [ ] Spare dry socks in your daypack



> Never wear brand-new hiking shoes for the first time on the Inca Trail. Break them in on several long hikes, with the socks you will wear.

What to Look for in Hiking Footwear

1. **Mid/high cuff.** Supports the ankle and helps prevent injuries on uneven ground.
2. **Durable materials.** Leather or synthetic, with breathable mesh for durability and comfort.
3. **Good cushioning.** Midsole that absorbs impact and protects your knees on long stone descents.
4. **Deep-lug sole.** Excellent grip on stone, mud and wet ground. Ideal for Inca Trail paths.
5. **Lacing system.** Firm laces and hooks for a secure fit. Keeps the foot stable on climbs and descents.
6. **Waterproof membrane.** Keeps feet dry in rain and wet terrain, yet lets the foot breathe.
7. **Reinforced toe cap.** Protects your toes from knocks against rocks and roots on the trail.
8. **Comfortable fit.** Snug without squeezing. Try boots with the socks you will actually wear.

	RIGHT TREKKING SHOE	URBAN SHOE
Grip	Trekking sole with deep lugs	Smooth sole that slips on wet stone
Stability	Holds the foot and protects the ankle	Too soft or no support
Moisture	Waterproof or water-resistant	Soaked by the first drizzle
Comfort	Already worn and tested on hikes	Designed for walking in the city

TREKKING POLES

Do I Need Trekking Poles?

Poles are optional, but most walkers are glad to have them.



They take pressure off your knees on the long stone descents and keep your rhythm steady on the climbs.

- **Support on descents:** they share the impact and protect your knees.
- **Balance:** they help you keep a steady rhythm on the climbs.
- **Stability:** extra confidence on wet or uneven ground.

> **Required on this route: your poles must have rubber tips fitted. Poles are allowed on the Inca Trail trek with rubber tips, but not inside the Machu Picchu citadel.**

How to Choose and Use Trekking Poles

1. **Grip.** Ergonomic, cork or foam; absorbs sweat and does not slip.
2. **Wrist strap.** Rest your weight on the wrist, not only on the hand.
3. **Correct length.** On flat ground your elbow should be near 90°.
4. **Adjustment system.** Shorter for climbing, longer for descending.
5. **Weight and material.** Aluminum or carbon fiber: light and shock resistant.
6. **Rubber tip.** Mandatory on the Inca Trail: protects the stone and prevents slipping.
7. **Bare metal tip.** Damages the stone and is usually not allowed through the checkpoint.

Allowed on the Inca Trail trek with rubber tips · not allowed inside the Machu Picchu citadel

HOW TO USE THEM

- **Set the length.** Your elbows should be near 90° on flat ground.
- **Adjust on the go.** Shorter for climbing, longer for descending.
- **Use the straps.** Rest your weight on the wrist, not just your hand.

WEATHER

What Weather Will You Really Find?

On a single hike you pass through different ecological zones and conditions. SERNANP reports a rainy season from November to March, with large temperature swings depending on altitude.

MORNING
Cool, with strong sun as soon as it rises. Start dressed in layers.

MIDDAY
Warmer, with more radiation. Take off layers and use sunscreen.

AFTERNOON
Mist or rain is possible, especially in forest areas.

NIGHT
Cold at camp, even more so at altitude.

> **The golden rule.** Dress in layers. In a single day you can go from icy puna to cloud forest, so layers work better than one thick jacket. Temperature shifts with altitude · Rain gear in your daypack · Conditions can change quickly.

ALTITUDE

Altitude on the Inca Trail

PLACE	ALTITUDE
Cusco	3,399 m a.s.l. (11,152 ft)
Km 82 (Piskacucho), start of the trek	2,605 m a.s.l. (8,547 ft)
Wayllabamba, first campsite	2,941 m a.s.l. (9,649 ft)
Dead Woman’s Pass (Warmiwañusca), highest point	4,207 m a.s.l. (13,802 ft)
Inti Punku (Sun Gate)	2,738 m a.s.l. (8,983 ft)

Altitudes come from Santu’s own GPS trace; Cusco is the standard figure for the city.

The issue is not only being at altitude: how you arrived, how much you rested, how you hydrate and how you manage effort all matter. Arrive in Cusco with spare days. If you have a health condition, or take regular medication, ask your doctor before you travel, including whether altitude medication is right for you.

> **True or false?** “I can acclimatize to the altitude in a single day in Cusco.”
> **False.** We recommend at least one full day in Cusco or the Sacred Valley before you start, and more time if your schedule allows. One night’s sleep is not enough.

PLACES AND EXPERIENCES

Moments You Should Not Miss



Llactapata

What to look at: The terraces and the open valley from above.

Photo tip: shoot a wide frame with the river in it.

Dead Woman's Pass (Warmiwañusca)

What to look at: The highest pass and the stone offerings left by travelers.

Photo tip: take your photo fast; the wind and cold do not forgive.

Runkurakay

What to look at: Its circular shape and the view of the trail.

Photo tip: climb to one side to show the scale of the site.

Sayaqmarka

What to look at: Its elevated, narrow position above the valley.

Photo tip: use the afternoon light if the sky opens.

Wiñay Wayna

What to look at: Its agricultural terraces on the mountainside.

Photo tip: take a group photo on the steps with the terraces behind you.

Inti Punku (Sun Gate)

What to look at: The first view of Machu Picchu from the Sun Gate.

Photo tip: turn to the rising sun, not only to the citadel.

FOOD

Fuel Your Inca Trail Adventure

Simple nutrition tips to help you feel your best on the trail.

Before you hike

Eat a familiar, balanced breakfast before setting off. Include carbohydrates and some protein to help fuel your morning.

During the hike

Bring energy bars, nuts, dried fruit and a few of your favorite sweets. Eat small amounts regularly rather than waiting until you feel exhausted.

Stay hydrated

Bring a refillable water bottle on Day 1 so you can refill it during the trek. Drink regularly throughout the day. On long or demanding days, electrolyte drinks or oral rehydration products may be useful when appropriate.

After the hike

Eat a balanced meal with carbohydrates, protein and vegetables to replenish energy and support recovery.

> A little preparation goes a long way. Bring snacks you know your stomach tolerates, and don't wait until you feel hungry or exhausted to eat.

MISTAKES

The 10 Mistakes to Avoid

1. Wearing new shoes
2. Carrying too much weight
3. Walking too fast on Day 1
4. Not acclimatizing
5. Not protecting yourself from the sun
6. Not bringing rain protection
7. Not drinking water regularly
8. Not bringing a thermal layer
9. Underestimating the descents
10. Thinking the Inca Trail is "just walking"

> **True or false?** "If I go slowly, I can make up the time by walking faster later."
> **False.** Speeding up to "make up time" is exactly mistake #3 on this list: it burns more energy than it recovers and you pay for it the next day.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Walk with Purpose

- **Respect the trail.** Stay on marked paths.
- **Protect the heritage.** Do not touch or climb the walls.
- **Respect wildlife and plants.**
- **Look after water sources.**
- **Reduce plastics.** Avoid single-use items.
- **Respect porters and communities.**
- **Photograph without altering the place.**
- **Take your waste with you** or leave it where it belongs.

PERMITS AND PRACTICAL NOTES

Permits and Practical Notes

- Permits often sell out 3 to 6 months ahead. Book as early as you can.
- You need your passport during the trek, and your personal data must match the permit reservation.
- A student discount requires a valid student ID.
- Campsites may vary under government regulations.
- All times are approximate.
- Huayna Picchu is not included (ticket USD 85 per person).



Santu guides, porters and travelers on the Inca Trail.

LOCAL OPERATOR · FAST RESPONSE · PERSONALIZED SERVICE

Plan Your Inca Trail with a Local Team

Tell us your dates and we will check availability for you.

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Email info@santucusco.com
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Response within 24 hours.

Santu Tour Operator · Sacred Valley, Cusco, Peru