

Costs & Information on being a Threads of Peru Volunteer

Threads of Peru is seeking motivated, independent self-starters to work as volunteers. At this stage we do not offer inclusive placements with food and accommodation.

This information is provided as a guideline only and your actual costs will largely depend on your personal tastes and also ability to bargain / negotiate!

If you are frugal and live under Peruvian conditions you can get by very cheaply in Cusco (Shared bathrooms, kitchen's, etc.).

Threads of Peru support

Threads of Peru is an active NGO with a range of projects. Our mission is to support the Andean people of Peru, the activities of our volunteers must support this mission and never take away from it. We believe strongly in a reciprocal relationship between the volunteers and Threads of Peru, we also believe that our support of the Andean people can never be supplanted by the individual interests and desires of volunteers.

We charge a \$50 week volunteer fee that provides you with support and direction.

NOTE: This does not cover accommodations and living expenses.

While we realize that you will be contributing your time and knowledge, we are a very small organization, and it takes people, time, and effort to provide you with ample and valuable support for your volunteer position.

In exchange for this fee we will provide:

- Airport pickup (if required)
- Initial meeting with Director of Threads of Peru designed to give an overview of company, projects, and briefing on cultural norms in Peru.
- Volunteer Information package on arrival.
- Assistance in locating appropriate accommodation.
- Assistance in locating discounted Spanish classes.
- All costs covered in regards to making field trips with ToP.
- Personalised reference.
- 1-2 weekly meetings with the appropriate staff, to discuss the direction of your project.

The volunteer fee can be open to negotiation for longer term volunteers (i.e. more than 6 months).

Accommodation expenses

Range \$50 month - \$300 + per month

A good average for a budget is \$100-\$200 per month.

\$50 will get you a room, out of the centre, with a shared bathroom. (probably not very appealing to most people). \$100 Share house (i.e. possibly with other foreigners). Outside the centre.

It's about 200 a month for a furnished basic room / small apartment with hot water, Cable TV and wi-fi internet. (Centrally located). Nice, central apartment, fully furnished with all amenities you could pay \$300 or more a month, but this is luxury living!

Also keep in mind that in your first few weeks in Cusco its advisable to stay in a hostel to get a feel for the city before renting a place. Budget on paying around \$10 a night in something very basic.

We can give you advice about good areas to stay as well as which publications are useful to find houses.

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Food

There are several good supermarkets in Cusco and you can do a good shop up on approximately \$25 - \$50 per week (depending on tastes). If you have a very simple diet and only shop in the markets and don't have a need for packaged foods, the price could be a good deal less than this!

A word on staying in indigenous villages

When people think of staying in a remote village in the Andes with indigenous peoples, it's often a romantic and appealing idea. It's attractive because it's the obvious way of connecting with them and learning about their way of life. Generally, Threads of Peru staff make visits of 1-3 days to the villages (sometimes slightly longer). We don't recommend a stay of longer than 5 days. Currently, Threads of Peru staff sometimes camp in tents, stay in the school or less commonly board with a local family. One of the families have recently developed a room for 'home-stay' which may be a little more comfortable for foreigners.

We say to all potential volunteers that they should not 'program' long stays in the villages without first making an initial 'test' visit to see how they think they could cope. Things to keep in mind:

These villages are remote, 2-3 hours walking to the nearest road, and there is little to no traffic on the road. (there is no emergency backup, telephones, etc.)

The villages are located at a high altitude, around 4000m, which is only a little less than the highest point on the Inca Trail. (i.e. you do feel 4000m altitude, even when you are well acclimatized)

There is no electricity or heating and it's really cold at night in the high mountains.

The living conditions of the indigenous people are very basic. Their homes have dirt floors, many skins to act as beds, and rooms are often filled with smoke from the cook fires. If you sleep in their homes there is a good chance of encountering an unpleasant bed bug or two.

If you are staying in the village you should be prepared to eat the food that they prepare for you, which largely consists of potatoes and/or llama, guinea pig or fish. It is considered rude to not accept food and claiming to be a vegetarian is not culturally understood. This food is often prepared under what might be considered 'unhygienic' standards to foreigners.

The Andean people speak Quechua as a first language. Most men speak some Spanish as a second language but they are not particularly proficient and they can be flummoxed by a foreigner's pronunciation! So the vast number of volunteers who have some level of Spanish find that it's only sufficient for basic communications (food, sleep, etc). It is not useful for complex studies and we have had problems in the past with people trying to communicate in Spanish, thinking that they are getting 'good info' when they're not. That said, speaking through a translator is also complicated and fraught with difficulties but generally a better option. However, Threads of Peru funds do not stretch to allow for translators staying for long times in the villages.

Threads of Peru wants to remain sensitive to potential long term impacts of our visits to the communities and what kind of effect our presence is having on a highly traditional culture. We are currently working on the idea that 'less is more' but are constantly reviewing our perceptions.

Our goal is to help the Andean people. We feel that most of the help can be done from Cusco, and that staying in the communities for long periods, while gratifying to the volunteers, is not necessarily beneficial to the Andean people. Of course, it depends on the specifics of the project.

This information is provided so that you can have realistic expectations and be well prepared for what to expect. If you have read all of this and you think that you can and should stay in the villages for longer periods, then we do invite you to explain what your thinking is and to make a preliminary visit to the communities.

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Dining out / dancing / nightlife

Cusco is a cosmopolitan city that has over a million visitors pass through each year. This means that there is a very wide range of restaurants, catering to the 5 star tourist to the backpacker. Inevitably, as a foreigner in Peru you will go to some of the nice restaurants and cafes that abound around the city. For a main course expect to pay between \$5 and \$15. At cheap, Peruvian restaurants you can pay as little as \$1 for your meal.

If you drink or enjoy the nightlife, then costs can add up considerably! (this of course depends on taste but most bars cater to a foreign wallet! (you pay almost as much for alcoholic drinks in Peru as you do in your home country).

Language classes

Spanish Classes cost from \$4 to \$10 an hour.

Depending on your levels, budget and interest you can enroll in group or private classes. Different schools offer vastly ranging extra curricular activities that appeal to different people so you are best to shop around when in Cusco to see what school has a vibe that appeals to your personality.

If you are going to be volunteering long term, then we also suggest several months of Quechua classes. (these should only be attempted if you already have a good degree of proficiency in Spanish, as good Spanish will be more useful to you than basic Quechua).

We can provide you with advice and also some discounts for language classes.

Other 'extra curricular' activities

Cusco is a hub for tourism in South America. As such it also has its fair share of volunteers, and long term ex pat residents. This has both positive and negative sides. If you are looking for a true immersion experience where you are 'hard core' and the only gringo in town, then Cusco is not for you. That said, it's also possible to form friendships with a great deal of Peruvians and once you get out of the centre you can also have an 'immersion' experience. The benefit of the big long term foreign population in Cusco is that there are a lot of activities that you can do to meet others, or learn about the culture.

Apart from the extra curricular activities offered by many Spanish schools (cooking, cinema, salsa there are a wealth of other things to do, such as:

- South American Explorers Club has weekly or bi-weekly talks and a great newsletter that alerts you to most happenings around Cusco.
- Discotheques offer Salsa classes almost nightly.
- Learn a musical instrument.
- yoga
- Library service at CBC
- Hikes around Cusco
- Learn to weave

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Flights to Cusco

It's around \$160 US return from Lima to Cusco if bought in advance. We can assist you in buying flights for this price (if they are available for the dates you want!) Lan Peru has a \$178 foreigners tax so in order to avoid paying this you should first look at StarPeru or TACA.

Bus to Cusco

The bus from Lima to Cusco is 80 soles on a standard bus (i.e. \$27) or \$40 in first class bus. It's a 22 hour bus trip so sometimes paying the extra \$10 for first class is well worth while.

Transport

A combi within Cusco costs 60 centavos (about .25 cents US) or a taxi costs 2.5 soles, nearly \$1US.

A bus to Urubamba is \$1, or an express taxi just below \$2.

Longer bus trips (i.e. to Puno) greatly depend on the style of transport you use. You can take the standard bus which costs \$7 or a deluxe tourist bus that costs \$35.

Communications

Internet cafes are plentiful and cheap in Cusco, at around \$1 per hour.

If you have a laptop, then wireless is also easy to find at various points around town.

International phone calls are generally cheap and available at many places.

If you have your own laptop we strongly suggest that you bring it as it helps enormously in project work.

A Peruvian cell phone can be purchased for around \$25-30 and is a good way to be connected for volunteers.