

# The Moonstone Trek

Peru



## Summary

With Inca Trail permits running out earlier than ever and 500 people starting the trail most days during peak season, we are delighted to be able to offer a fantastic alternative trek that can be substituted into most of our Inca Trail trips. This is an isolated route with unexplored ruins, discovery at every turn and great mountain views - an excellent introduction to high Andean trekking.

The trek starts in a quiet, rural valley between Cuzco and the Sacred Valley and finishes in Ollantaytambo, only seven miles upstream from the start of the Inca Trail. It passes through seldom-visited Andean villages, Inca and pre-Inca ruins and heads onto a beautiful altiplano plateau surrounded by glaciated peaks. Most groups won't encounter any other tourists for the entire trek and the combination of stunning mountain scenery and wildlife, fascinating relics and real isolation is truly rewarding.

The information within these trip notes can also be found on our website: <http://www.exodus.co.uk/peru-holidays/moonstone-trek-option>

## At a glance

- No trekking permit required
- No stringent regulations or personal weight limits
- 4 days point-to-point walking with full portage
- Altitude maximum 4600m, average 3600m
- Full board on trek

## Highlights

- Unexplored ruins both Inca and Pre-Inca
- Seldom walked trails and few other tourists (if any!)
- Beautiful mountain vistas
- Hanging glaciers and rugged summits



## IS THIS TRIP FOR YOU?

There are 4 days walking with full portage, at a maximum altitude of 4600m, average 3600m. A little higher and tougher than the Inca Trail - Activity Level 4, Moderate/Challenging (classified as 'Challenging/Activity Level 5' for family groups), this trek is remote and on some fairly rough paths, some sections of which present mild exposure. Anyone of reasonable fitness and with prior walking experience should find no real difficulties, except for a satisfying challenge in ascending the high-pass (about 800m of ascent to about 4600m). No prior experience of trekking at altitude is required.

You can find more information, including a direct day by day comparison between the Inca Trail and the Moonstone Trek itineraries here:

[http://www.exodus.co.uk/assets/pdf/Exodus\\_Inca\\_Trail\\_Guide2015\\_16.pdf](http://www.exodus.co.uk/assets/pdf/Exodus_Inca_Trail_Guide2015_16.pdf)

As this trip spends considerable time at altitude, we ask you to refer to the altitude warning below. All of our itineraries have built in acclimatisation days before starting the trek.

Walking distances and hours stated within the itinerary are given as approximates only. Timings stated include lunch and photo stops and will vary depending on the pace of your group

## HOW DO I BOOK IT?

Simply book onto any of our guaranteed Walking & Trekking departures that do the standard Inca Trail and put a note on your booking that you want the Moonstone Trek. One of our sales team will then be in contact to confirm your choice of route. If you are in any doubt, please call our sales team on 0208 772 3943

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

When Inca Trail permits have sold out on a given date, the Moonstone Trek can be booked in place of the classic Inca Trail at no extra cost - just request it at the time of booking. The trip must be guaranteed and there is no minimum number of people required to operate the Moonstone trek. However, most people prefer to trek with a group and so we try to avoid running it for just one or two people wherever possible. Special permits are not required and so this route can be booked after Inca Trail permits have run out. Should you opt for the Moonstone Trek on a date where Inca Trail permits are still available, a supplement will apply - please enquire for details.

If chosen, it completely replaces the first three nights of the Inca Trail trek and clients will receive a separate pre-trek briefing in Cuzco. All trekkers will leave Cuzco at roughly the same time in the morning to drive to their respective start points.

The Moonstone Trek finishes in Ollantaytambo, from where those walking the route take the train down to Aguas Calientes - the village below Machu Picchu and meet with the rest of the group. Those walking the Inca Trail will have walked down from the Sun Gate that day and won't have explored the ruins. The next morning, the whole group heads up to the citadel for a guided dawn tour. There should be ample time to walk up the Sun Gate to get that classic view or explore the cloud forest around Machu Picchu.

The trek uses horses rather than human porters and so does not have the weight limit imposed by porters on the Inca Trail. It is also a little tougher than the standard Inca Trail, as it goes higher and covers slightly more distance and so is graded as a Level 4 (Moderate/Challenging) trek. The altitude chart below shows the altitudes for the trek.

For those choosing the Moonstone Trek, the itinerary below replaces those days in the trip when the group walks the standard Inca Trail.

For 'The Inca Trail' (code TPT) and 'The Inca Trail in Comfort' (code TPQ) these are days 4-7 of the Ex London itinerary (or days 3-6 of the land-only itinerary).

For 'Inca & Amazon Family Adventure' (code FNP) these are days 5-8 of the Ex London itinerary (days 4-7 of the land-only itinerary).

For 'Inca Trail & Amazon Rainforest' (code TPJ) these are days 8-11 of the Ex London itinerary (days 7-10 of the land-only itinerary).

For 'Peru Explorer' (code APX) these are days 13-16.

For 'Inca Trail, Titicaca & Nazca' (code TPD) 8-11 of the Ex London itinerary (days 7-10 of the land-only itinerary).



## LAND ONLY ITINERARY

The entries in bold at the end of each day indicate the type of accommodation normally used and which meals are included. Please see the Accommodation section below for further information.

### Day 1 - Start Trek

An early start as it's a very busy first day! We take a private minibus to the trailhead, stopping first to explore the nearby ruins from which the trek takes its name. This is a large site with several distinct Inca remnants, clearly of religious importance. As with the rest of the trek, we are most likely to have the site completely to ourselves. The Moonstone itself is a large carving on an enormous boulder, and its significance is not yet understood.

The trailhead is in a quiet, dusty valley and we soon climb high enough from the floor to enjoy some great views. At around lunchtime we stop to explore the imposing pre-Inca fortress of Wata that straddles the trail. The ruin has not yet been accurately dated and pottery can often still be found lying on the ground. The path then traverses along a green side valley as we make our way above a few tiny villages before entering the village of Chillipawa, where we camp.

Walk Profile: approx. 10.5km / 6-7hrs walking **Full-service Camping (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)**

### Day 2 - Cross Accoccosa Pass

A long, steady climb with plenty of rest stops to aid acclimatisation takes us above the villages and into the high pampas - rugged meadows of long grass. We normally stop for lunch shortly before the crest of the Accoccosa Pass (and the very rare Andean Flicker is sometimes seen (although often heard!). The last leg of the pass is on loose red scree, but the view from the top makes it all worthwhile: a broad, hidden valley surrounded by snowy peaks - the Huayanay Range on the left, the Urubamba Range straight ahead and beautiful, triangular Mt Veronica (5,800m) to the right. We have time to explore this plateau and experience walking in the high altiplano before returning to our camp for a well-deserved hot dinner. The camp's isolation, well away from any settlements, results in spectacular night skies when clear.

Walk Profile: approx. 8.8km / 4-5hrs walking **Full-service Camping (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)**

### Day 3 - Trek to Huayrapunku and Inca Quarry

We start after breakfast by following the stream from down this hidden valley into a narrow canyon. Rare polylepis trees grow here and we pass through a small grove as we leave the canyon. Our path then turns North and traverses very high above a deep and steep valley separating us from the Huayanay Mountains. This is probably the most spectacular section of the trek and we roughly follow a (now defunct) Inca aqueduct spectacularly carved out of the cliffs to take water from the hidden valley of our campsite to the Sacred Valley several miles away. At the end of the traverse we have a short but steep climb up to our lunch spot, a flat, ridge-top meadow facing straight across the Sacred Valley to the snowy Urubamba Range.

After lunch we walk down to Huayrapunku. Meaning "Gate of the Wind", this is a ridge-top Inca shrine oriented to Mt Veronica, of which it has a simply incredible view. Finally a short walk brings us to our final campsite in amongst the granite stones of the Canchiqata Quarry. It was here that huge blocks were cut from the rose-coloured granite before being dragged down the mountainside and across the river to the Sun Temple at Ollantaytambo.

Walk Profile: approx. 11.8km / 5-6hrs walking **Full-service Camping (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)**

**Day 4 - End Trek**

Photographers are advised to wake up before dawn this morning, to watch the sun rise over the Sacred Valley from our campsite high above it. The sun's first rays catching the glaciers of Mt Veronica certainly makes the effort more than worthwhile. This is our last day on the trek and we descend from the pampas down into the lush valley floor along the enormous stone ramps on which the Incas dragged the stones. We cross the river and explore the huge Sun Temple complex to see where the stones ended and what use they were put to. Our trek ends as we board the train to Aguas Calientes, where we join the rest of the group at the hotel.

Walk Profile: approx. 8km / 2-3hrs walking **Full-service Camping (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)**

On some days this trip climbs faster than commonly published ascent rate recommendations. Based upon an assessment by our external safety and medical advisors and our risk assessment process, we consider the ascent rate is acceptable due to the additional safety measures that are in place for our customers. All our trips operating at high altitude meet our internal altitude safety standards that minimise the risk of serious incidents occurring whilst travelling at altitude.

A number of medical conditions or medications can reduce your body's ability to acclimatise. This may affect your performance and make you more susceptible to AMS. If you are worried about any pre-existing conditions, such as heart conditions, or your overall physical ability, you must seek medical advice prior to booking. The drug Diamox (also known as acetazolamide and normally only available on prescription) has been shown to aid acclimatisation in some individuals, and therefore may reduce the risk of AMS. Clients considering using Diamox should speak to their doctor about the drug, its side-effects and a prescription. Please note that while we endeavour to assist all our clients in achieving their goals, there may be times when your leader decides to delay or stop your ascent based on your overall condition, or the onset of AMS.

If you are not taking out Exodus Travel Insurance, make sure that your policy covers you up to the maximum altitude on this trip (if trekking in the Himalaya your policy should also cover the use of a helicopter for emergency medical evacuation).

**ALTITUDE WARNING**

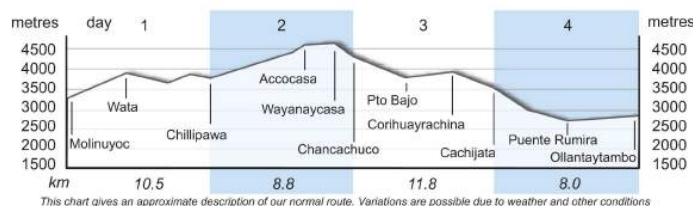
This trip includes one or more nights over 3500m above sea level, where there is a genuine risk of being affected by Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS). If left untreated AMS can be life-threatening. We expect most clients to experience some mild symptoms of altitude sickness, such as headaches and shortness of breath while walking or sleeplessness. Our leaders are trained to identify symptoms of severe AMS and if a client requires extra care, arrangements such as rapid descent will be made immediately.

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR ALL CLIENTS**

Exodus operates a 24 hour duty office for emergencies, which can be contacted on 0044 (0)1582 640 045.

Every time that you travel abroad you should take the time to read the warnings in the essential information in the brochure or at [www.exodus.co.uk/about-exodus/essential-information?](http://www.exodus.co.uk/about-exodus/essential-information?)

Full joining instructions including local emergency numbers, and details of how to reach the start point, will be sent to you approximately 2 to 3 weeks prior to departure. If you do not receive these at least a week before departure, or require them earlier please contact our office or your travel agent.





The information in these Trip Notes is given in good faith. Where differences exist between the Trip Notes and our current brochure or website, the Trip Notes supersede the brochure and website. All holidays can be subject to unexpected changes; in order to enjoy them you should be prepared to be flexible where necessary. Occasionally, as stated in our brochure, it may not be possible to follow the itinerary as planned. This may be for a variety of reasons - climatic, political, physical or other. In these circumstances we will make the best possible alternative arrangements that maintain the integrity of the original itinerary.

As fuel prices, airport taxes and exchange rates fluctuate, and airlines manage their rates to match demand, it is proving harder than ever to guarantee our Flight Inclusive prices. Although we endeavour to keep our website as accurate as possible, daily fluctuations mean that our Flight Inclusive price may be out of date. For accurate prices we recommend that you contact one of our Travel Experts, or your Travel Agent.

The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Travel Advice Service advises British tourists on the potential dangers they might experience when travelling overseas. We liaise closely with them and adhere to their travel advice. For up-to-date advice on all countries, please visit [www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice). Should there be any change to advice prior to or during travel, we may have to cancel or curtail a tour at short notice, or re-route an itinerary part way through.

*Prices and exchange rates were correct at the time of publication. The most up-to-date prices can be found on the Exodus website.*

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## HOW TO BOOK YOUR TRIP

### 1. Check availability

Go online to check availability, or contact us by phone or email.

### 2. Secure your place

You can provisionally hold a place on this trip, usually for between three and seven days.

### 3. Complete your booking and payment

When you're ready to book, go to [www.exodus.co.uk](http://www.exodus.co.uk) for online booking, book over the phone or you can complete a booking form (available online or on request by calling us). We accept all major credit and debit cards, or you can pay by cheque. Book with confidence: Exodus is fully licensed and bonded as a tour operator. We hold Air Traffic Organisers Licence (ATOL) number 2582 issued and bonded with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). We are also bonded to the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and we are members of the Federation of Tour Operators (FTO) and ABTA - The Travel Association. This means you can book your Exodus holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected.