



Are you planning to walk the Inca Trail?

Hiking the Inca Trail is one of the most popular activities of many travellers to Peru. The trek usually takes 3 - 4 days, and you will be able to enjoy the spectacular scenery of the Andean mountains. You will walk through different ecological and climatic zones, over high passes (up to 4200m) and through lush tropical forests, visiting beautiful ruins along the way. At the end, your efforts will be rewarded with the breathtaking views of the most famous of all, the ruins of Machu Picchu.

For a trek such as this, considerable amounts of equipment such as tents, gear and provisions have to be carried along. To allow you to enjoy your trip, porters will be employed to carry the loads.

You may already be aware of the porters' working conditions in various other popular trekking areas such as the Himalayas. The porters on the Inca Trail are mainly recruited from the poor peasant communities in the area and often leave their farms to supplement their meagre income. They work extremely hard to make your trail experience memorable.

On January 1, 2001, new regulations concerning the use of the Inca Trail, including porter issues, have been launched. However, the implementation of these rules is not yet satisfactory.

As a responsible traveller, you may want to know what you can do to support the porters' struggle for a 'fair go'. The porters depend on this work, but some companies treat them better than others. Below, you'll find a few ideas that can help make their life a bit easier:

There is a load limit of 25 kg per porter imposed on the tour operators organising Inca Trail tours. However, this limit is not enforced, making it virtually meaningless.

- *Please do not ask porters to carry your backpack on top of their regular loads, not even for additional payment. This would grossly exceed the permitted load limit.*

The costs of Inca Trail tours vary greatly from relatively expensive (often reputable companies) to very cheap (local budget offers). Tours you may book through an Australian operator will still be delivered by a locally contracted company. Generally, if you pay more, you find that a better porter:client ratio is in place. However, it also means that more additional items may be carried such as toilet tents, folding chairs, more food and so on. Interestingly, the salaries paid to the porters is very low regardless of how much you pay for the trip. There are very responsible overseas companies trying to minimise negative impacts of tourism on the hosts and to enforce

rules related to fair treatment of local tourism workers. More expensive operators may generally provide more for the porters, but this is not automatically the case. Clients should still keep an eye out for signs of porters' maltreatment.

- *Please try to book through reputable companies rather than local 'cheapies' which often use a very poor porter:client ratio and leave the porters to fend for themselves.*

Many companies give porters minimal or no food, minimal or no fuel, and no shelter for the night. Porters are usually only allowed to carry up to 5kg for their own needs. This means, they often go hungry, drink only cold water and sleep under boulders or tarpaulins.

- *If you have surplus food, perhaps you want to share this on the trail. However, this should not lead to companies relinquishing their responsibility to feed their staff.*

The porters' pay is poor, and often they have to pay for their own food and transport from this money. Furthermore, many companies expect that damaged or lost equipment is to be paid for by porters at grossly inflated prices. This leaves very little to take home to their families, sometimes nothing at all.

- *If you wish to give the porters a tip at the end of the trip, please be aware that tips given to the guide or cook to be distributed to all is often not passed on. Similarly, any presents you may want to leave, such as warm clothing, may be collected accusing the porter of theft. Try to make clear that your gifts are meant for specific people.*

Sick or injured porters may be left to their own devices and sent off the trail without assistance. There is also no insurance or assistance with medical costs.

- *Please insist that sick or injured porters are looked after.*

Porters have little chance to complain about unfair or exploitative treatment as they would not be hired again.

- *Please be kind to the porters. They are lovely people trying hard to make a living. If you notice anything on your trip that you feel does not meet the standards of decent treatment of employees, please report this to the local tour operator and also the overseas company if you made your bookings on your home country.*

If you are interested in more information on porters, have a look at web sites of organisations such as the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG), www.ippg.net or Tourism Concern, www.tourismconcern.org.uk/campaigns/campaigns_porters.htm

Enjoy the unforgettable experience and don't forget those who make it possible!

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