

PIONEER EXPEDITIONS



Do something extraordinary.....

Cotahuasi canyon trek • Peru 13 Days

This expedition explores the wild, remote region of the Andes mountain range around Cotahuasi in southern Peru. Below Cotahuasi the Cotahuasi river runs through the deepest canyon in the world. Although this canyon has been run by a handful of extreme rafting / kayaking expeditions this is a little trekked area with few organised expeditions.

This challenging expedition encompasses real adventure with the natural wonders and fascinating ancient history of the region. We will trek along wild and rocky trails, encountering spectacular mountain scenery and picturesque hamlets deep in the canyon.

Highlights

- Trekking the entire length of the world's deepest canyon, the remote Cotahuasi. With its spectacular scenery of lofty peaks and rushing rivers
- Beautiful colonial architecture of the city of Arequipa
- Spectacular altiplano and volcanic scenery

Overview:

Traversing the deepest canyon in the world (3354 m - 160m deeper than the nearby Colca Canyon), sometimes crossing the river using harnesses on cable crossings and over rustic but sturdy suspension bridges. . Trekking through this impressive gorge a lot of time will be spent in unknown isolation with chances to see ancient civilisation, including evidence of past occupations, amphitheatres and the burial sites of the lost city of Marpa.

The headwaters of the River Cotahuasi have their source in the Cordillera de Huanzo, a remote and very rarely visited part of the Peruvian Andes in the extreme north west of the Department of Arequipa, and discharge some 300km later into the Pacific Ocean as the River Ocoña. Although the Cotahuasi region was declared a Zona Reserva Turistica in 1988 very little was known about the area and even less about the canyon until a kayak / raft expedition first ran it in 1994. In pre-Colombian times the canyon was a more travelled route; an Inca road ran through most of the length and many sections still remain, as well as agricultural terracing and ruins. This Inca road may well have been based on routes previously built and used by the Huari culture from 600-1000AD.

PIONEER EXPEDITIONS



Itinerary

Day 1 Arequipa (B)

Arrive in Arequipa (2,300m) a nice colonial town with plenty of interest, where we will rendezvous with our expedition leader and transfer to our hotel.

(please note that we would be happy to organise your international flights, any accommodation in Lima, internal flights to Arequipa - but the guided part of your tour will start in Arequipa).

Arequipa is Peru's second city, set in a beautiful desert valley dominated by volcanoes. It is also known as "The White City" as much of the city is built from a white volcanic rock known locally as "sillar", giving it a distinctive atmosphere. The historic centre has been declared a UNESCO heritage site and contains many fine colonial buildings and churches. Of particular interest are the Santa Catalina convent (a beautiful "mini-city" shut off from the outside world until the 1970s) and the Andean Sanctuaries Museum (containing frozen Inca human sacrifices discovered on nearby volcanoes by National Geographic expeditions).

Breakfast, Hotel

Day 2 Arequipa to Cotahuasi (B,L,D)

Leaving early, we set off into the spectacular mountain scenery around Arequipa. Our route initially follows the Pan American highway through the desert, then inland following the Majes river valley (well known for the production of wine and pisco, Peru's national drink) before climbing towards the Andean mountains. We climb steeply to reach the high altiplano passing close to the mighty glacier covered flanks of Coropuna (at 6,425m the highest peak in southern Peru) and Solimana volcanoes. The road reaches around 4750m in the highest section before dropping steeply to the village of Cotahuasi. Despite the bleak and hostile terrain, some interesting high altitude plants and wildlife species can be found in this region: the domestic South American llamas and alpacas are commonly seen grazing and with luck we will also see their beautiful and much rarer wild cousin - the vicuña. Today we will climb on dirt road to high altiplano and view spectacular scenery as we pass Coropuna and Solimana Volcanoes. This is a long days drive (approx. 12 hours with stops)

Breakfast, lunch, dinner, hostel

Day 3 Cotahuasi (B,L,D)

Cotahuasi is the main centre for exploring the network of valleys and canyons that contain the headwaters of the River Cotahuasi. A short drive takes us to the nearby highland village of Pampamarca and a chance to visit the bizarre rock formations at Huito and the Uskune waterfall.

We return via the thermal baths at Luicho, an opportunity to soak and relax before beginning our trek through the canyon! Andean condors are present in the whole Cotahuasi region and with luck we will be able to spot one of these majestic birds (with a potential wingspan of over 3m!) soaring gracefully on thermals.

Breakfast, lunch, dinner, hostel

Day 4 Mayu to Quechualla (B,L,D)

A short drive (on a new road in the canyon) takes us to Mayu. Enroute we can visit the Sopia waterfall.

From Mayu we start our trek on foot and continue deeper into the canyon, at times following remains of the original pre-Colombian trail and passing the archaeological site of Huaña, consisting of the remains of storehouses & agricultural terraces that once lined this route in ancient times. Beyond Quechualla we continue to reach the side valley of Uswa, the deepest point of the whole canyon. Quechualla itself is a pretty little hamlet with its streets covered in vines; grapes and wines are grown and produced here in season.

PIONEER EXPEDITIONS



From Quechualla the trail climbs for several hours out of the canyon to reach the small highland village of Huachuy, at 3,200m the highest point of the trek.

Breakfast, lunch, dinner, camping

Day 5 – Day 6 - Cotahuasi Canyon via Huachuy to Marpa (B,L,D)

We will trek to Huachuy (approx. 7 – 8 hours trekking – mostly uphill. Day 6 is the longest and toughest day of our trek (approx 10-12 hours). We continue through the rugged scenery along the canyon's rim to reach an abandoned mining camp on a ridge at Estacion. From here the trail begins a long steep rocky descent back down into the canyon to reach the ruins of Marpa. We camp below the site by the river.

Breakfast, lunch, dinner, camping

Day 7 The Lost City of Marpa (B,L,D)

Today is a well deserved rest day, where we can explore the ruins of Marpa. These are by far the largest in the canyon; it is possible the site once covered an area similar in size to Machu Picchu. Probably dating initially from the Huari period, extensive areas of terracing as well as residential areas cover the steep canyon walls on both sides of the river, showing that the ability to plan and build cities on steep mountainsides was not confined to the Incas! We spend a day here to relax and explore this impressive site more thoroughly.

Unlike Machu Picchu, the lost city of Marpa sees few visitors due to its inaccessible location and we can explore the terraced fields, amphitheatres and burial sites (Chulpas) in relative peace.

Breakfast, lunch, dinner, camping

Day 8– 11 Cotahuasi Canyon to Barrera (B,L,D)

Below Marpa the canyon is hardly known except to a few river runners; the route continues beneath rocky walls, with sections of the original trail and archaeological remains showing that it was once an important route in pre-Colombian times.

On day 8, we trek down to Lillima (which involves a cable crossing to get to the right hand bank – approx. 6 – 7 hrs trekking. On day 9, we have another 6-7 hours trekking to Barracoa. On day 10, the rivers Marán and Chachas join the Cotahuasi in quick succession to form the River Ocoña, which continues to the Pacific Ocean ; near the second confluence is the village of Chaucalla (900m). By day 11, the canyon starts to open out and we have finally reached the Andean foothills and lowlands. After another day of trekking, we spend the final night of the trek at Barrera.

Breakfast, lunch, dinner, camping

Day 12 Barrera to Arequipa (B)

In Barrera we meet our transport for a full day's drive (9 hours) following a rough road down the Ocoña River valley to meet the Pan American highway; which takes us through Peru's rugged desert coastal plain before climbing into the mountains back to Arequipa.

Breakfast

Day 13 Arequipa (B)

We transfer to the airport for our onward flight home.

PIONEER EXPEDITIONS



Rating:

difficulty



comfort



Please Note:-

While our intention is to adhere to the day to day route as printed, a degree of flexibility is built into the itinerary and night stops may vary from those suggested. The day to day schedule should be taken only as a general guide. We cannot accept responsibility for changing the proposed itinerary or any inaccuracies or errors. A variety of factors, including adverse weather conditions and difficulties with transportation, can lead to enforced changes. The expedition leader will make any changes where necessary.