

# You're coming to Peru!

It's an exciting, scary moment when you book your ticket. Now you're committed! But what is about to happen? Here's a rundown of what to expect. This information was last updated May 2014.

Make sure you've filled out the Confirmation Package online and paid your deposit to confirm your placement at [bluesparrow.org/confirm](http://bluesparrow.org/confirm).

Print the last page of this document and carry it with you on your flight.

Plan to arrive a few days before your Blue Sparrow assignment begins to adjust to the culture, language, and altitude. You may choose to spend a few days in Lima before venturing to Huancayo—an 8 hour bus ride and a 3200m (10,500ft) climb. Once in Huancayo, take it easy to avoid altitude sickness (*soroche*). Familiarize yourself with altitude sickness at [http://wikitravel.org/en/Altitude\\_sickness](http://wikitravel.org/en/Altitude_sickness).

## *Shots & Medication*

Many volunteers are concerned about which vaccinations to get before coming to Peru. The only required shot is Yellow Fever, and only if you plan to travel to the jungle (areas below 2000m, excluding Machu Picchu). This and most other travel vaccines are available at local clinics for far cheaper than in your home country. If you're particularly concerned, talk to a doctor at home and decide on a plan that feels good for you.

Over-the-counter (non-prescription) medicine is very easy to get and much cheaper in Peru. Even antibiotics such as Cipro and Amoxicillin are available without prescription, so consider carefully what you truly need to purchase and pack. If you take a prescription medication, try to pack enough to cover your entire trip. It's a complicated process to receive medicine in the mail.

## *Packing*

At high altitudes like in Huancayo, temperature variation is extreme. From May to August, it will be hot (27 C/85 F) during the day and cold (0 C/32 F) at night. Dress in layers and bring a sweater for the evenings. Don't trust the weather report. Even when it doesn't feel hot, wear sunscreen because you burn much faster at altitude. Buildings in Peru don't have heat, so 10 C/50 F can feel cold after several hours. Rain is unlikely from May to August, the dry season in the mountains. This is also when the most extreme temperatures occur--both hot and cold. However, from October to April it's rainy most days and temperatures stay around 12 C/60 F.

Insects are minimal, except in the jungle. There are some mosquitos and no-see-ums, and quite a lot of small, harmless spiders.

Short on space? General toiletries, bug spray, sunscreen, and so on are easy to find in Peru at reasonable prices. Sweaters are especially bulky to pack, but easy and cheap to buy in Peru, which is famous for wool and textiles. Alpaca sweaters make a great souvenir, too.

## *Key Items*

- Sturdy walking shoes for rough terrain
- Sleeping bag\*
- Long underwear or layered clothing (shirts, sweaters, socks)
- Light waterproof jacket (rainy season)
- Flashlight
- Books/MP3 player or something to entertain yourself
- Sunscreen and sunglasses (dry season)
- A small gift from home for your host family—food or candy unique to your country is always a good choice

\*We strongly recommend bringing a sleeping bag if possible. We have a few available to loan, but can't guarantee availability. If space is limited, consider purchasing a sleeping bag in Huancayo for US\$20 and wool blankets for about \$7 each.

#### *Airport, Visas, and Arrival*

Check the visa requirements for your country. North American and EU citizens generally receive a free tourist visa for up to 183 days upon arrival at the airport. Be clear how long intend to stay in Peru; you cannot extend your visa inside the country. There is a US\$1 fine for each day you stay past your visa expiration.

When you arrive you will receive an immigration form that requires you fill out a top and bottom part. The immigration officer will give you the bottom half with your visa time marked down. This is your Tarjeta Andina. Keep this in a safe place, as you will need it to exit the country. If you lose this form, you will have to pay a US\$20 fine.

By now you should have already decided on how you'll get out of the airport and to the bus station or hostel. If not, review the Confirmation Package on the website. If this information changes, email us.

#### *From Lima to Huancayo*

From Lima, you'll take an 8-hour bus ride to Huancayo. Keep in mind that the highest point of the trip, 4500m, is about 4 hours in. You will certainly feel the thin air, but it gets better soon after as the bus descends to Huancayo at 3300m. The day journey offers some fantastic views of the Andes. You can also travel overnight, but upon arrival you'll need to wait an hour or two as the bus arrives quite early. We generally pick you up between 9am and 10pm. Sometimes you might need to take a taxi to the office. Get in touch before you depart Lima to confirm departure and arrival times with us. When you arrive in Huancayo, call us from the payphones visible from the arrival platform.

You can also fly from Lima to a small airport outside Huancayo for \$40-80 each way (45 min, [www.lcperu.pe](http://www.lcperu.pe)).

#### *Altitude*

Huancayo sits at an altitude of 3300m (10,500ft). Take it easy in the first days. Avoid running or exercise until you've acclimated. Physical health has little to do in predicting altitude sickness, and everyone is susceptible. Altitude sickness (*soroche*) is much more likely if you strain your body in the first days. It can also present itself weeks after arriving. *Soroche* begins as a painful headache and continues into diarrhea and vomiting. Only in extreme cases is medical treatment necessary. Take time to read [http://wikitravel.org/en/Altitude\\_sickness](http://wikitravel.org/en/Altitude_sickness) for more information.

#### *Money, Banks, ATMs*

Peruvian currency is called the *sol* (plural *soles*). '10 soles' is written 'S/.10'. The exchange rate is approximately S/. 2.75 to the US dollar.

**Debit cards** are the best way to access your money within Peru. ATMs are plentiful both in Lima and Huancayo, and accept nearly all foreign cards. Be sure your card has a Mastercard or Visa logo--this usually means you'll have no trouble. If not, talk to your bank. Always ask about spending limits and international transaction fees. Most banks charge about US\$5 per withdrawal. Credit cards, as opposed to debit cards, charge cash advance fees if you haven't made prior arrangements. You will often need to show your passport to make credit card purchases in-store, so carry cash or plan ahead.

**Other methods** include Western Union and Moneygram transfers, traveller's cheques, and US dollars or Euros. You will need to show your passport to receive transfers, perform anything in a bank, and in some cases, to change money. Traveller's cheques are easy to change at banks, but are converted to Peruvian currency at unfavourable rates. We discourage foreign cash. Bills must be in near-perfect condition to be accepted. Any torn, folded, or discoloured bill can be rejected at the bank's discretion.

In general, only large American-style stores will accept cards. You will need to carry cash for daily use. Keep in mind that most stores are small and can't or won't accept bills larger than 50 soles. When they do, the shopowner will often go down the street trying to get change. This is common, so don't panic as you watch your money disappear. Taxis and buses only accept 20 soles or less. They'll ask you for 'sencillo' (sen-SEE-yo), meaning small change. ATMs dispense 50 and 100 sol bills, so be strategic and try to break large bills at large stores or ask for *sencillo* at the bank.

Bargaining is a way of life in Peru. Most items have no prices and you must be prepared to barter with the shop owner. Ask your host family for cost estimates to avoid being ripped off. The minimum taxi fare within Huancayo is S/. 3—always barter. On the other hand, not all prices are negotiable. Fruit and vegetable prices are fairly rigid. Pharmacies and corner stores have set prices. If in doubt, try bartering and see how they respond. In the end, the price you pay is what feels acceptable to you. Treat bartering as a fun part of Peruvian culture and don't feel bad if you paid more than someone else.

If you need to securely store extra cash/passports/etc, we have a safe at the office.

#### *Internet access & Communication*

Most of the schools have a decent Internet connection that you can use. For making Skype calls and downloading, use an Internet café as some schools have a limited monthly download allowance. The costs are generally US\$0.33 per hour (webcam, faster connection, etc). We strongly suggest getting a cell phone with a local number so we can stay in touch. Phones start at \$25 and you pay as you go for calls.

#### *Mail*

The best way to receive personal mail is to pick it up at the post office. Tell your friends to address letters and packages like this:

Your Full Name (as it appears on your passport)  
Correo Central  
Huancayo, Peru

You must go to the post office and check to see if your mail has arrived. Letters take 10-15 days; packages take 2-4 weeks.

We can receive mail for your host family after you leave. Just send it to:

Blue Sparrow c/o Matthew Jeppesen  
Correo Central  
Huancayo, Peru

There are no postal codes in Peru. If you want to send mail home, there is a post office in the center. International letters and postcards cost \$3 to send.

#### *Getting around*

Taxis are affordable, safe, and fast. Before getting into a cab, talk to the driver and tell them where you'd like to go and agree on a price. In Lima, a trip within the tourist district costs about 8 soles (\$3) and a trip across the city costs about 15 soles (\$6). In Huancayo, most fares are no more than 5 soles (\$2). Overcharging foreigners is common, especially in Lima. Hotels will help you get a cab, but it will cost more than if you find it yourself.

The bus system very cheap, but chaotic and a bit hard to understand, especially in Lima. There are no set bus stops and routes are not posted. We'll help you learn the primary routes to and from your volunteer post.

#### *Markets*

There are several small shops or bodegas in every outlying area where you can buy basic goods such as bread, water, other beverages, snacks, some fruits and vegetables and stationary. You will need to travel to Huancayo for a wider selection. The largest market in Huancayo is Mercado Modelo. On

Sundays, Huancavelica street is transformed into a great market stretching over 15 blocks. There are three North American-style supermarkets and one shopping mall in Huancayo. (Yes, there's a Starbucks.)

### *Health & Food*

There are pharmacies everywhere in Huancayo, as well as doctors, dentists and several hospitals. Quality of care is not as high as Western facilities, but certainly acceptable. You will get sick while you're here, most likely in the first week as your body adapts to new bacteria and food. This is almost never serious, and generally lasts 24 hours. If you are sick for more than three days, it's worthwhile to go to a pharmacy and explain your symptoms. The pharmacists are very knowledgeable and will dispense appropriate medicine. In severe cases, you can go to a hospital and see a doctor for less than \$20.

Food poisoning is an unfortunate reality in Peru. Common sense is a good guide. Avoid eating meat off the street and try to eat cooked vegetables instead of fresh. Never drink tap water unless boiled. Peruvians also follow this guideline, so any beverage offered to you is safe to drink. As unpleasant as food poisoning can be, try not to be so careful as to miss out on the experience. Huancayo is just hours away from the Amazon, and boasts the most delicious fruit you've ever tasted. Some of our worst experiences have come from relatively nice, European-owned restaurants and American fast food chains. You never know. The bacteria in Peru is very different, and your system will react unpredictably.

### *Security*

By day, Huancayo is relatively safe. However, Huancayo is the hub city for the Andes and the increased traffic combined with the surrounding poverty means decreased safety. Markets are known for pickpocketing, but violent crime is rare. At night, be alert. Again, most crime is petty theft and violent incidents are few and far between.

Be conscious that pricey items will make you stand out. Leave your valuables at home when you are out in the city. Dress casually (jeans, T-shirts, sweaters, rain jackets), while avoiding flashy items.

### *Cultural Considerations*

**Tiping** is not common. If you leave more than 1-2 soles at a local restaurant they may come after you to return your 'forgotten' money. Mid-range and upscale restaurant sometimes include a 10-12% service charge in the bill. Check the menu or receipt, or ask your waiter.

**Dress** is very American in Lima and somewhat more modest in Huancayo. Women are fine to wear jeans or dresses, but bare white shoulders will attract attention. Especially in Huancayo, men rarely wear shorts except for sports. At school, teachers dress very formally and students wear uniforms. We ask volunteers to dress modestly—no shorts, tank tops, or revealing clothing—but feel that casual dress is appropriate. T-shirts and jeans are fine for teaching.

**Formal greetings** are expected almost every time you meet anyone, even friends. Expect to offer a greeting and shake hands (men meeting men) or kiss on the cheek (mixed gender pairs or women meeting women) every time you meet or see a Peruvian, including your host family, teachers, and so on. In certain situations, such as meeting the director of a school, you might only shake hands and not kiss. Upon walking into a store, it's important to greet the shopowner with *buenos días* or *buenas tardes*, depending on the time of day.

Likewise, it's important to consciously say goodbye (*ciao*) or thank you (*gracias*) when leaving a store or friends. Somewhat hilariously, when running into a friend on the sidewalk more time is spent greeting and saying goodbye than actually talking. Don't worry too much--if you forget you won't have grievously offended anyone. At worst, you'll be a strange, slightly rude foreigner.

### *Things to do*

On your days off, you might want to check out some local attractions. Your host family will also provide many recommendations, but here are a few of ours:

#### -Huancayo

- Eucalyptus steam rooms
- Browse textiles and Alpaca products at Mercado Modelo
- Plaza de la Constitución, the main square
- Casa de las Artesanías, an artisanal market at the corner of Plaza de la Constitución
- Huancavelica Street has a 15 block market on Sundays
- The Huaytapallana glacier is about 2 hours drive from the city of Huancayo
- Real Plaza: Burger King, American snacks, and a modern 3D cinema
- Day trips to the Jungle (4 hour drive)

#### *Travel in Peru*

We expect that you'll want to travel before or after volunteering. If you're staying for a few months, that may come during your volunteer period. We need advance notice before you travel, so that we can make sure your position can be covered. Calling on Monday to say you're leaving Wednesday is unacceptable. Let us know as soon as possible, at least two weeks before you plan to leave.

Be realistic about the time you need to travel. Machu Picchu isn't a weekend trip. It takes 21 hours by bus to get to Cusco from Lima, or 2 hours on a flight. Treks are 3-4 days long. Consider how many days you want to see Cusco and the surrounding, too. There are lots of amazing places to visit in Peru, but expect a full day of travel to get to most places.

#### *Spanish*

Start thinking now about learning and practicing classroom vocabulary, especially computer terms that you may not have encountered in Spanish. Check out the documents are [www.bluesparrow.org/guide](http://www.bluesparrow.org/guide).

Print the following page and carry it with you on your flight.

# Blue Sparrow Contact Info

Matt: 954999918

[matt@bluesparrow.org](mailto:matt@bluesparrow.org)

Serei: 954888896

[serei@bluesparrow.org](mailto:serei@bluesparrow.org)

Peru's country code is +51. To dial one of these numbers from outside Peru, you'll need to dial your country's exit code (011 in the US, 00 in many other countries), then 51 and the number: 011.51.954.999918. Within Peru, dial the number as shown.

## Other contact information:

Should an emergency occur (i.e. replacing a stolen passport, arrest, etc) in which Blue Sparrow cannot assist, it is strongly recommended you contact your Embassy or Consulate.

## The Office

Ask taxis for "Alas Peruanas en Pilcomayo" and keep going 3 blocks. Look for the white houses on the right. (S/.8 from the center.) Or take any combi going to Chupaca.

## Mailing address:

Residencial Villa Natura B-8  
Av. Coronel Parra cdra 21  
Pilcomayo, Huancayo, Junín  
Peru

## Help! I'm lost in Lima!

If all else fails and you're unable to reach one of us, here are some recommended hostels in Lima. Both have English-speaking staff. To find them, give the address to a taxi driver and you'll be fine.

### **Barranco Backpacker's Inn (US\$11 for a 6-bed dorm)**

Malecón Castilla 260

A una cuadra del Parque Municipal de Barranco

Barranco, Lima

1.247-3709 | [www.barrancobackpackersperu.com](http://www.barrancobackpackersperu.com)

(From the park, look for the old train wagon. Turn right, then walk 1 block toward the ocean. Backpacker's is the white building with the green gate at the end of the block, on your left.)

Note: This is our preferred hostel. It's in a quiet neighborhood near the ocean and has a strict quiet hours policy at 10pm. It's best if you're looking for a quiet, restful place to stay.

### **Hostal Loki (US\$12 for a 4-bed dorm)**

Av. José Gálvez 576

Miraflores, Lima

1.651.2966 | [www.lokihostel.com/en/lima](http://www.lokihostel.com/en/lima)

Note: Loki is the best-known hostel and any cab can find it just saying "Loki", but it's also known for loud parties all week long. Loki is in Lima's most modern and active district, so it's good if you want to go out.

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