

The Cordillera Huayhuash, Peru

The Cordillera Huayhuash is often said to be the most beautiful part of the Peruvian Andes. It's a land of high grassy valleys, clear mountain lakes, tumbled glaciers and snow-shrouded peaks - all overarched by an impossibly deep-blue sky, where condors soar. The Huayhuash is a landscape of awe-inspiring height and scale, with six peaks over 6000m - including Yerupaja (6617) the second highest mountain in Peru - and several passes over 5000m.

Until a few years ago, the Cordillera Huayhuash was a wild mountain territory where that few outsiders had seen. Sendero Luminoso guerillas terrorized the area in the 1980s and early 90s and few people lived in these harsh, high altitude conditions permanently. Until the late 1990s, the Huayhuash remained largely undiscovered by Peruvians and foreigners alike, keeping it mysterious and unspoilt: a real zone for adventure.

The twenty high peaks of the Cordillera Huayhuash have long held the fascination of climbers. Joe Simpson's epic retreat from Siula Grande - that became the *Touching the Void* drama - first brought the Huayhuash to international fame. In recent years, while other trails have become overpopulated, the Huayhuash has become safe, and has won a reputation as the most challenging - and most beautiful - trekking destination in Peru.

Although the Huayhuash environment is harsh and remote, the landscape here is a peopled one. Quechua speaking herders live in tiny hamlets of stone walled, grass roofed dwellings. On the fringes of the range are adobe villages, surrounded by the terraced fields of subsistence farmers. People here are poor. Although trekkers are discovering the area, tourism has brought little benefit to the people of the Huayhuash themselves. The Moving Mountains Project is working closely with the people of the Huayhuash to reverse that trend.

How we Move Mountains in the Cordillera Huayhuash

Our brand of trekking helps bring much needed income in the Huayhuash. Moving Mountains walks use only local guides, born and bred in the Huayhuash, who know and love it better than anyone. Though our accommodation is mainly camping, we stay where possible in villages with local people and enjoy local hospitality for meals. All after-expenses profits from our trips benefit schools in the Huayhuash. In 2009 we are working with the village school in Pacllon, where we finish our trek. The school has requested computers and a photocopier, and we also hope to build latrines. We will also provide books and classroom materials for schools in the villages of Llamac and Huayllapa, which we visit along the way, to improve educational facilities for the children of the Huayhuash.

The Walk

Our 14 day trek makes a circuit of some 170kms right around the Cordillera Huayhuash. The route leads through a series of breathtaking high passes, all well above 4000 metres, and some above 5000m, in the shadow of awe inspiring, glacier-shrouded peaks. We rarely descend below 3000m, making this a taxing high-altitude trek which demands good levels of fitness. Most gear is carried by pack donkeys led by our *arrieros* (donkey drivers). Walkers carry their personal gear including clothing, sleeping mats and sleeping bags. Expect to carry about 10-15kgs, depending on how lightweight you pack.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Lima. Pickup from airport and transfer to comfortable hotel. Rest of day for relaxing or sightseeing.

Day 2: Depart Lima to the mountain town of Chiquian (3400m). This 8 hour drive takes in spectacular views of the Callejón de Huaylas. Overnight in simple Chiquian inn.

Day 3: Acclimatisation day in pretty mountain town of Chiquian. Morning at leisure, afternoon visit to artisan's studio. Overnight Chiquian.

Day 4: Drive to adobe mountain village of Llamac (2 hours). Afternoon acclimatisation hike to see Pre-Colombian ruins. Overnight in Llamac homes. Dinner with a local family.

Day 5: Trek commences. Llamac (3300m) to Matacancha (4200m), following the Llamac river steadily uphill to our first campsite on the grassy meadows of Matacancha.

Day 6: Matacancha (4200m) to Mituchocha (4220m) taking in the first pass Punta Cacanán (4700m) and then descending to camp at beautiful Laguna Mituchocha.

Day 7: Mituchocha (4220m) to Carhuacochoa (4150m). A steady climb leads to Paso de Carhuac (4650m) followed by the descent to camp Laguna Carhuacochoa, brimming with trout and offering spectacular views of Yerupaja (6617m).

Day 8: Carhuacochoa (4180m) to Huayhuash (4022m). Here we choose between two routes: the gradual climb to Carnicero Pass (4600m) or the demanding Siula pass (4800m) which leads past three spectacularly blue glacial lakes.

Day 9: Huayhuash (4022m) to Viconga (4395m) via the Portachuelo de Huayhuash (4750m). We descend past Viconga lake, often the haunt of llamas and alpacas. Time to relax in the natural hot springs at Viconga.

Day 10: Viconga (4395m) to Huanacpatay (4320m)
The second highest pass of the trek, Punta Cuyoc (5000m) is crossed today. Spectacular mountain views from the pass in clear weather, followed by the descent to the Huanacpatay Valley and our camp on the dramatic Pampa Elefante.

Day 11: Huanacpatay (4320m) to Cutatambo (4100m). Challenging climb over Cerro San Antonio (5050m) our highest pass. Breathtaking views to Siula Grande Base Camp and Siula glacier. Steep descent to camp at Cutatambo.

Day 12: Rest day at Cutatambo – optional hike to Siula Grande Base Camp to view Siula Glacier, of Joe Simpson fame.

Day 13: Cutatambo (4100m) to the mountain village of Huayllapa (3600m) following the gentle Quebrada Calinca. Stay in small inn or villagers' homes. Tonight there's a musical evening: a talented village musician plays the Andean harp and sings.

Day 14: Huayllapa (3600m) to Gashpapampa (4500). A big day's walk, crossing the Punta Tapush pass (4750m) after a long, steep climb out of Huayllapa. Camp at (supposedly haunted) Gashpapampa.

Day 15: Gashpapampa (4500m) to Jahuacocha (4065m). Today we cross Yaucha Pass, the last on the trek, and descend to Jahuacocha, a beautiful spot to set up our camp for the next two days. Will fish trout this afternoon for tonight's dinner.

Day 16: Rest day at Jahuacocha. Help prepare a traditional *pachamanca* feast, hike around the lake, and enjoy *pachamanca* for our last mountain dinner.

Day 17: Jahuacocha-Pacllon (3300). Descend to the village of Pacllon where we will visit one of the schools the project is aiding. Traditional village meal served by Pacllon family. Transfer to Huaraz.

Day 18: Rest day Huaraz – chance to visit Monterrey hot springs, go to the market, shop for handicrafts. Final dinner together.

Day 19: Early departure from Huaraz for Lima.

Day 20: Optional Lima sightseeing and depart Lima.

The spirit of Moving Mountains walks

Walks with the Moving Mountains Project are different. We want the experience we offer to be a world away from typical tourist treks. Being a not-for-profit trekking outfit already sets us apart. We are also unique in that we walk in small groups with a maximum of just six walkers. On our walks we aim for deep "mountain immersion" which means feeling the isolation and harshness of the high mountain environment, as well as the warmth and inspiration of real cultural exchange with the people of the Huayhuash. We can't promise that you won't see other tourists, but you can be sure you'll be experiencing a much more authentic Huayhuash than them. The spirit of our treks means that we journey as a team. Our small group of walkers, guides and *arrieros* works together. We aim to have no "them and us" divisions between walkers and staff. We eat together, hike together and laugh together. Walkers are welcome to lend a hand in meal preparation and camp setup, if they wish. Our Australian guide is bilingual and our Peruvian guide and *arrieros* are learning English. Walkers are encouraged to learn a little Spanish before the trek to help them get the most out of the adventure. We want you to be moved by the experience of walking with us.

Equipment

For a comfortable Huayhuash trek you'll need well worn in, sturdy boots, a rucksack with a comfortable harness, a warm sleeping bag, an inflatable camp mattress, down jacket or similar very warm jacket, waterproof jacket, waterproof overpants, gloves, hat, wool or polypropylene thermals, lightweight, quick drying trousers/shorts, sun hat, sun glasses, sun screen. A comprehensive gear list will be sent when you book. To keep our costs down, so that we can do more to help in the Huayhuash, we ask you to bring your own tent, if you have one. Please talk to us if you don't so we can arrange to hire one for you. (Donkeys will carry your tent and our *arrieros* will be glad to set it up for you, and pack up in the morning, if you like).

Weather

The trekking season in the Huayhuash is in the dry months of May – September. In this season, there's little rain and days are warm and sunny (15-20°C). Under clear skies, at high altitude, nights can be very cold – up to -15°C, though rarely less than -5°C.

Fitness and preparation

The Huayhuash circuit is a reasonably strenuous high altitude trek. We cover an average of 15kms each day, walking for six to eight hours, depending on terrain. The walk demands sustained effort, good pacing and endurance, as well as some mental toughness. In preparation we recommend that hikers undertake an hour of sustained aerobic exercise such as running, swimming or bike riding, four or more times a week in the months leading up to the trek. It's also essential to have done some multi-day hikes prior to this trek. Some long day walks or weekend walks are also recommended as part of preparation for a Moving Mountains trek in the Huayhuash.

Costs

AUD \$2700

Cost is inclusive of all accommodation, airport transfers, all meals on trek, all trekking services including experienced guides, donkey hire and *arrieros*' (donkey drivers') costs. Tent hire will incur an additional charge.

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