



On The Trail of The Incas. A ride through the Salcantay Mountains to the foot of Machu Picchu 14 nights; 7 ½ days riding: start Cusco and end Lima.

Introduction

Machu Picchu contains a great deal of stone steps, narrow passageways and it's a UNESCO World Heritage site, all of which mean that it's not riding territory! However, you can ride horses from the Sacred Valley, along narrow mountain trails that run through the Salcantay Mountains and emerge near the entrance to Machu Picchu. The trails we follow were originally carved out by the Incas and are part of the 14,000 mile network of Inca Trails that link northern Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador representing the area that was the Inca Empire.

What makes this ride so special is the scenery and the sheer scale of the scenery: from the Sacred Valley you are surrounded by permanently snow-capped peaks, many of them are over 6,000 m. The views are simply stunning and to ride through this country is something very few people ever do. But it's not all riding; we also explore some of the Inca sites in and around Cusco and a special treat is saved for last. On the final day we fly back to Lima and head to the beach to experience one of Peru's hidden secrets, the Paso. The Paso shares a characteristic with the Icelandic Horse, it has that fifth gear and can tölt. The Paso is in wonderful contrast to the small, tough mountain horse we ride at altitude which are fit, love their work, are sure-footed - and have the most incredible stamina.

The Peruvian creole

When Christopher Columbus discovered South America there were no cows, sheep or horses on the entire continent: evolution had taken Latin mammals along another path. The Conquistadors introduced horses to the continent in about 1550 – Tudor times. A mounted cavalry against foot soldiers is a bit of a mis-match which is part of the reason the conquistadores were so successful (militarily speaking).

The Peruvian Creole lived in high country where life is harsh. The grazing is adequate, but not lush and there has been no anthelmintic policy at all since Tudor times. Consequently the breed today has "shrunk". Unlike its neighbours in Ecuador, Chile and Argentina, the creole here is a good hand shorter (approx 14:2hh). But these horses are tough and superbly adapted to their environment. Some of the trails we ride are up to 5,000m and there are

very few horses that would cope with the thin air as well as these do. Nowadays fodder is grown in the Sacred Valley (alfalfa and clover leys) which means the horses' level of nutrition is much improved. Anthelmintic are imported from the USA which means there's a regular worming policy which is also improving the horses' quality of life. The Peruvian Creole has some way to go to catch up with its

neighbours, but if it's a tough, high-altitude specialist you're looking for, look no further.

The breed originated from Barb and Andalusian horses. It served the partisans in their quest for freedom in the 19th century and shortly after, the Quechua Indians claimed the breed for use as a dual purpose beast of

burden and riding animal.



The terrain: the High Andes

Think of Peru as consisting of three distinct strips that run north-south, parallel to one-another: an arid, parched desert strip that runs along the coast; the Andes which are snow-capped and reach a high point of 6,768m (Mnt Huascarán); and the Amazon on the east side of the Andean watershed which is hot, steamy and absurdly lush. You could not have a greater contrast!

We fly in to Lima which is in the arid zone and this really is a desert environment: the fact that there's a capital city planted here is incongruous. Next morning we fly to Cusco (3,300m) and quite high enough to make you feel lethargic for a day or two. The ride takes place in the country east of Cusco and goes up to 4,752m.

So you can see that part of the challenge is the physical one of adapting to the various environments.

The Riding Itinerary

Day 1: Getting to Peru.

There are several airlines that serve Lima, but none that fly directly from London. We can offer advice and quote for the various options, each with pros and cons. After the long transatlantic flight we'll meet you at the airport and drive you to the overnight hotel in Lima which allows time to restore energy and prepare for tomorrow's journey to the Inca heartlands.

Saddle time: 0 hrs
Distance: 0 Km
Overnight: hotel

Day 2: Getting to Cusco.

[NB. Some flights allow this connection to be made on the same day, eliminating the need to overnight in Lima.]

An early start today and, after a good breakfast, return to the airport to catch the morning flight to the Imperial Inca city of Cusco. We transfer to the hotel which is cozy and family-run, within two blocks of the city centre. The traditional Cusco welcome includes a mug of coca tea, a local brew that helps stave off the effects of the altitude. At 3,300m or 10,000ft, the air in Cusco is rare and you should take it easy over the next day or two to enable your body to acclimatise. In the afternoon we'll visit Qoricancha, the Inca Temple of the Sun.

Saddle time: 0 hrs
Distance: 0 Km
Overnight: hotel
Altitude: 3,300 m



Riding in the Pumamarca Valley, near Cusco.

Day 3: Meet your horse.

After breakfast drive to the stables and meet the horses. The sturdy mountain ponies are healthy, well trained and maintained on good pasture in the foothills of the Andes.

Today is all about getting to know your horse. The ride out into the Pumamarca Valley will be a gentle affair as you continue to acclimatise. Riding through the Andean landscapes is spectacular and our guide

will point out the Inca terracing where agriculture flourished under seemingly impossible conditions; he'll explain how, according to Inca legend, the Gods inhabit the surrounding Andean peaks. Our ride up to the Ccorao Pass is rewarded with a panoramic view of the Sacred Valley of the Incas. After a picnic lunch we ride back to the stables for a riding debrief before returning to Cusco for overnight.

Saddle time: 4 ½ hrs
Distance: 15 Km
Overnight: hotel
Altitude: 3,300 m

Day 4: Riding into the Andes

This morning we rejoin our horses to begin our trans-Andean adventure.



Into the mountains.

We follow a trail to the pass at Qoriqocha and continue onwards to the meadows at Chitipampa where llamas and alpacas have grazed since the Inca times. The llama played an important role in Inca society and was used as both a pack animal and for symbolic sacrifice to the Gods. The alpaca fleece is the source of one of the finest wools in the world. You can obtain reasonably-priced woolens from villages along our route. Stop for lunch at 4,200m with views across to the Urubamba Cordillera which rise to 6,200m. The trail passes through colourful Andean villages and descends to Chincheros, a picturesque market town with a strong Inca heritage. We overnight at a lodge in town.

Saddle time: 6 hrs
Distance: 25 Km
Overnight: hotel
Altitude: 3,700 m



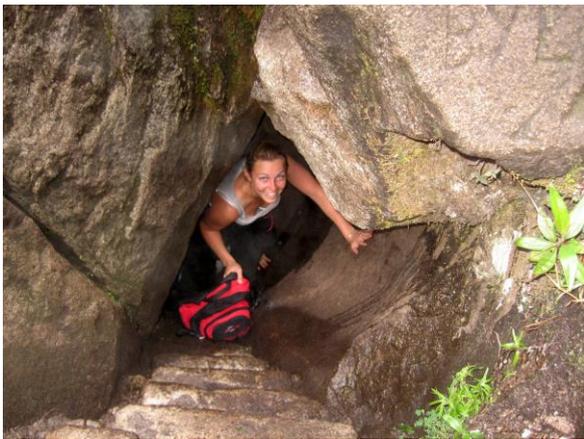
Quechua children, the modern Incas

Day 5: Through the Sacred Valley to Maras.

Stretch your legs with a gentle walk to the Inca complex at Chinchero, where impressive agricultural terraces spill down the mountainside and the dwellings on the site display precision stonework that is the hallmark of Inca architecture throughout their empire. Current thinking is that this site was an agricultural research centre where different crop varieties were tested.

Rejoining the horses we mount up and ride through the Sacred Valley of the Incas. The route passes by the Inca salt pans at Maras where solar energy was used to evaporate water from a saline solution to yield salt. The fertile Sacred Valley was the bread basket of Cusco and was stoutly defended at both end of the valley by the two imposing fortresses at Pisac and Ollantaytambo. We stay two nights in Urubamba, in the middle of the valley, in an hotel.

Saddle time: 6 hrs
Distance: 32 Km
Overnight: hotel
Altitude: 2,870 m



This is why we don't use horses today!

Day 6: Rest day

This valuable rest day marks the final stage of our acclimatisation. Enjoy the marvelous sites in the Valley before starting the high altitude camping sector of the ride.

The fusion of Inca, colonial and modern lifestyles is evident in varying degrees throughout Peru but in Pisac Inca heritage predominates. Traditional costumes are worn and life in the surrounding hills is based on the family unit; the town lies in the shadow of the Inca fortress that perches on the mountainside watching over the access route into the Valley. To walk through the fortress complex and down the terracing to the market provides a glimpse of how life was in Inca times. After exploring Pisac we drive to the archaeological site at Moray where theories abound as to why the Incas excavated a huge and completely circular hole with large terraces and sides that slope steeply to what appears to be a

ceremonial stage at the bottom. The walk down and up will leave you breathless in more ways than one!

Saddle time: 0 hrs
Distance: 0 Km
Overnight: hotel
Altitude: 2,870 m

Day 7: On the Trail of the Incas.

Ride out of the Sacred Valley and note how the flora changes, the air becomes cooler (and thinner) and the views even more majestic. The size of human dwellings change abruptly: towns, then villages and finally isolated communities as population density decreases as altitude increases. By lunchtime we should reach the Huacawasi Pass at 4,700m and from there the panoramic view of the snowy peaks of the Cordillera Urubamba are outstanding.



The view at 4,700m.

Descend to Laguna Pata Qocha at 4,000m where camp is pitched. The wranglers take great care of the horses and tend to them before and after each day's ride. Camp staff will have travelled to the site in advance carrying all the equipment on a mule train and with their expert support high altitude camping becomes a surprisingly comfortable experience. Camp meals are a highlight of any wilderness trek and to see the camp chef creating miracles over his camp stoves brings new meaning to the term "Haute Cuisine"!

Saddle time: 6 hrs
Distance: 28 Km
Overnight: camp
Altitude: 3,970 m

Day 8: Lares hot springs.

Leaving the lakeside camp and riding around the shore of the lake to descend into the Huacawasi Valley. Small settlements mark the route and the village of Cuncani has a school and craft centre which may have local handcrafts for sale. The weavings from this region are made on a "backstrap" loom and are especially finely made. Buy one if you can, the

proceeds from one sale goes a long way in these parts.

The destination for the day is the thermal springs at Lares. The natural spring water has been channeled into pools ranging from very hot to very cold – take your pick! We camp by the pools and tonight we'll eat a typical highland barbeque called Pachamanca.

Saddle time: 6 hrs
Distance: 26 Km
Overnight: camp
Altitude: 2,860 m



[The camp at Lake Pata Quocha](#)

Day 9: Through the valley.

Thoroughly clean and refreshed we leave the hot springs to rejoin the trail. Today we will be following an ancient "Inca Trail" that connected the Andean highlands to the lowland jungles that eventually descend to the Amazon basin. At its peak, some 40,000km of trails linked together to form the Inca's Andean road system. Paved Inca Trails radiated out from Cusco to transport soldiers, administrators and the Inca himself to the far corners of an ever expanding empire. This remote section of trail has changed little since the Inca's heyday and takes us to Qochayoq, a colourful, traditional village where life is based more on Inca values than on modern day society.

We establish camp near the village and learn how the Apus (the Inca Gods) still protect the llamas and alpacas that we see grazing in their natural habitat.

Saddle time: 7 hrs
Distance: 32 Km
Overnight: camp
Altitude: 2,970 m

Day 10: Final riding day.

After our final camp breakfast, we hold a "thank you and goodbye" ceremony for our support crew who will be heading for home today. This too is our final ride which climbs to Chayulla and drops through the Patacancha Valley where we say farewell to our trusty mounts. We transfer by bus to Ollantaytambo in the Sacred Valley.

This evening we dine in a local restaurant, overnight in hotel and look forward to our visit to Machu Picchu.

Saddle time: 3 hrs
Distance: 12 Km
Overnight: hotel
Altitude: 2,870 m

Day 11: Explore Ollantaytambo

The Inca Fortress at Ollantaytambo was the site of one of the final battles between the Incas and Spanish conquistadors. The fortress is a masterpiece of construction and engineering and although never completed, it remains today as imposing as it must have been to the Spaniards some 500 hundred years ago. We have a free morning to explore it and the town itself which is a living example of an Inca garrison town.

After lunch take the train, an hour-and-a-half of clickity-clack, to Aguas Calientes which is the jumping off point for Machu Picchu. We dine in town and visit the hot springs that give this town its name.

Saddle time: 0 hrs
Distance: 0 Km
Overnight: hotel
Altitude: 2,870 m



[Machu Picchu](#)

Day 12: Machu Picchu.

Machu Picchu never fails to impress, regardless of the weather, how many times you've visited before nor the crowds, it rises magnificently above its surroundings. The sheer beauty of its setting and the mystery that surrounds this "Lost City" is the stuff of legends and it's little wonder it's one of the "7 Wonders of the World". The site itself is reasonably compact and we have a whole morning to explore it. A guided introduction will help you orientate yourself and the practicalities of its construction but a couple of hours of free time to discover its hidden nooks and crannies is perhaps the most enjoyable way to appreciate Machu Picchu. A walk to the Sun Gate is rewarded with the picture postcard view of the site

and for those with the energy and a head for heights; the climb up the peak of Wayna Picchu provides another perspective.

The spectacular railway journey back to Cusco delivers us to the city in time for our farewell dinner. Pisco Sour, a classic Peruvian cocktail, is served as a fitting aperitif to toast the success of the trip.

Saddle time: 0 hrs
Distance: 0 Km
Overnight: hotel
Altitude: 3,300 m



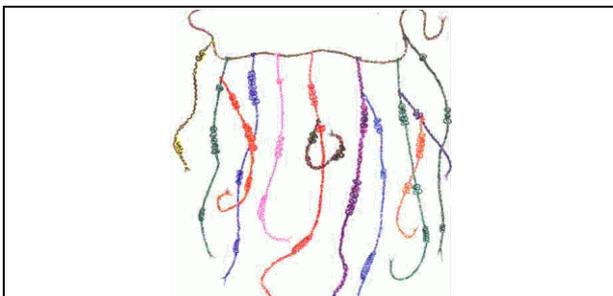
Quechua hamlet

Day 13: The Paso beach ride.

The flight to Lima departs early in the morning to give us time to get to the beach and ride the Pasos. This Peruvian horse descends from stock introduced by the Spanish in the sixteenth-century. Thanks to its unique, inborn, four beat lateral gait, the Peruvian Paso is one of the smoothest riding horses in the world. The beach ride will blow away any cobwebs left over from last night and work up an appetite for our final lunch in Lima.

We return to the airport in the afternoon for the overnight flight to London

Saddle time: 2 hrs
Distance: 10 Km
Overnight: air plane
Altitude: 25m



Above: a "Quipu". The Incas had no written language and used a series of knots on colour-coded strings to convey messages across the empire.

Day 14: Return home.

Fly from Lima to Heathrow.

Conquistador: literally means "conqueror" in Spanish and Portuguese. Two of the most famous Conquistadores were Hernan Cortes, who conquered the Aztec Empire in Mexico, and Francisco Pizarro who conquered the Inca Empire in Peru and Ecuador; surprisingly, they were cousins. The primary motivation for the conquistadors was self-enrichment, and the entire epoch is riven with duplicity and in-fighting. The dream for all the conquistadors was to find the mythical "El Dorado" or 'city of gold'— which doesn't actually exist!

In summary

- 7 days riding horses
- 1 "rest" non-riding day
- ½ day riding Pasos on the beach
- 4 travelling & sightseeing days
- 3 nights camping
- 9 nights hotels and lodges

Price

From £2,225, "Land Only" (land only means flights are not included).

Flight budget

The ride begins in Cusco and ends in Lima which means you need the internal flight Lima-Cusco-Lima which can be added to any international flight.

Your flight schedule depends on what you intend to do before or after your ride (see "Staying On" below). There are so many possible flight schedules that it's best to speak to us and we can explain the options. A return to Lima would cost from £650 to £1,000 depending on the season and how far in advance you reserve the flight. The Lima to Cusco to Lima flight is about £200.

What's included:

Full board in Cusco and during the ride, days 2 to 12. B&B on days 13 and 14.

Tents and all camping equipment
Local guides (English speaking).
Saddle horses and packhorses.
Entrance to Machu Picchu and tour.
All travel by minibus and train.
Airport transfers in Lima and Cusco.

Not included:

International flights (please call us for options)
Visas (Not required for British passport holders)
Travel insurance (mandatory)
Tips for guides
Sleeping bag during the camping phase.

Saddlebags

Each person will be given 2 saddlebags to hold things like waterbottle, camera, sun cream and wet weather gear. The rest of your gear is moved by 4X4 or packhorse (depending on the terrain).

Tack

English-style snaffle bits are used, but you ride creoles with one hand; the horses respond to neck-reining, minimum contact and go off your leg.

A cut-down variant of the US cavalry McClellan saddle is used. If you imagine a Western saddle but remove the horn and a great deal of the skirting, you end up with a McClellan. The Peruvian variant uses a single girth and no cinch. The stirrups are closed "Conquistador" style.

There's no need to take a seat-saver.

All horses are equipped with twin saddlebags.

Rider's weight limit is 90 Kg. Riders over this weight can be accommodated, but will require a second horse to use on alternate days. This will attract a small additional fee.

Rider safely

You must wear a riding hat and appropriate foot wear. Gloves and half-chaps are recommended. The rule is to be comfortable and you'll ride better.

There are several points where you have to dismount and lead your horse. For this reason a hybrid boot such as the Ariat "Creston H2O Insulated" is recommended.

Machu Picchu: built around 1450 and occupying 33,000 Ha it is the most famous site in South America. At 2,430 m it is actually lower than Cusco. The conquistadors never knew of its existence and it was lost to European eyes till Hiram Bingham re-discovered it in 1911. It is not "The Lost City of the Incas", a title that belongs to Vilcabamba, which is deeper in the jungle and was the final citadel the Incas built. The third and equally impressive citadel is Choquequirao, overlooking the Apurimac River.

Staying on

International flights can be changed, before ticket issue, free of charge. All our rides are tailor-made and can be "topped-and-tailed" with private arrangements. Please talk to us for ideas, but here are a couple:

- Take the train across the Altiplano ("high plain") to Lake Titicaca; spend a few days in Puno and explore the floating reed islands.
- Visit the Nazca Lines south of Lima

- Take a short flight from Cusco down to Puerto Maldonado which is the gateway to the Amazon. There are a couple of fantastic eco-lodges and wildlife research centres where you can stay.
- Spend a few days in Lima: excellent sea-food, great arts scene and a very Latin beat.
- From Lima take a boat trip to Isla las Ballestas for excellent birding and wildlife, often called "the poor man's Galapagos"!
- Ecuador is the neighbouring country and you can access the Galapagos with a flight from Lima via Guayaquil directly to Baltra.

Suggested flight schedule

The flights we recommend leave London in the evening, fly via Madrid and arrive in South America the next morning to connect with an internal flight to Cusco. We will meet you at Cusco airport. We will provide the transfer to Lima airport at the end of the ride. All flights booked through Venture Co are financially protected via Venture Co's ATOL 5306.

Travel insurance

Please speak to Campbell Irvine Direct:

http://www.campbellirvinedirect.com/ventureco_home.htm



The mysterious Nazca Lines

Visa.

British passport holders do not require a visa for Peru.

At a glance

The grade of the ride: [7/10]



Accommodation grading: [8/10]



Rider fitness required: [8/10]



Cultural immersion: [8/10]



More about “At a glance”

We grade this ride pretty highly in each category: it is a full-on wilderness riding experience and you know from day one that you are not in England anymore! The horses, terrain, meals, language, customs, manners and everything else, are all different!

Ride rating: we rate this riding experience 7 out of 10 because the horses are calm and manageable; they are very fit and remarkably sure-footed, particularly when negotiating narrow trails and fording rivers; you need to trust them to find their footing. The riding style is different from English: gentle contact, neck-reining and guiding your horse with leg pressure (they move away from pressure).

There are several places where you need to dismount and lead due to steep ascent or descent. If you are uncomfortable doing this, the wranglers will assist.

The trails are glorious and the wilderness feeling is epic. Some of the days are quite long and you do need to be fit enough to meet the challenge. If you ride 3 times a week, for a couple of hours per ride, for the 2 or 3 weeks preceding the ride, you'll be in shape for this ride.

This is the most authentic, exhilarating and all-absorbing ride you could wish for.

Accommodation: we grade this at 8 out of 10, which may seem incongruous with the presence of camping but the properties where we stay have bags of character and the 3 nights camping are well supported.

The nights we camp are necessary: the country is so remote that there is simply no alternative! If you

want to experience these mountains and arrive at Machu Picchu the same way the Incas did, then you have to camp. This is remote Peru at its finest. There are no villages, roads or hotels, and the price of visiting such pristine wilderness is the need to be self-sufficient.

The level of hospitality we are shown along the way is outstanding. While camping the wranglers and camp staff look after with genuine kindness and give simple, uncomplicated hospitality.

Rider fitness: you do need to be in shape; “riding fit” is the label we attach to this ride. Long days (up to 7 hrs in the saddle) and for multiple days in succession will test your stamina, but this ride is achievable by anyone enjoying regular exercise. You don't need to be an athlete, but you will enjoy it much more if you ride regularly for a couple of weeks before visiting Peru. There is also a “traveller's myth” that if you're physically fit, you'll adapt to the altitude better; there's no medical evidence to substantiate this, but it certainly does no harm!

This is a wilderness experience so we have “Standard Operating Procedures” in place; an SOP is a written policy describing the actions that would be followed in the event of an emergency. This includes helicopter evacuation from strategic points.

Cultural Immersion: Venture Co prides itself on providing riding opportunities that take you directly into contact with the indigenous community. The guide, wranglers, hacienda hosts and even the boatmen and drivers will all be eager to talk to you and show you their “normal”; their life and their world. They are proud of their heritage and flattered that you are travelling half way around the globe to learn all about it. This, surely, is the essence of travelling. The real pleasure for any horseman is to compare how we do things to how they do things. It's not the devil in the detail; it's the delight in the detail that makes this ride so special.

Language

You will be surprised how little English is spoken in South America generally, and in Peru in particular, bearing in mind how close “Uncle Sam” is and how influential American culture is. If you can learn a few words of Spanish it will go down very well, and you'll get more out of your trip.

What's the weather going to be like?

Peru is an unusual shape, long and narrow. The three distinct zones that run north-to-south each have very different weather patterns which further complicates this tropical country's climate. Weather is also unpredictable in the mountains, particularly where there are peaks over 6,000m. During this ride it's not unusual to feel warm humid up-drafts that have come directly from the Amazon (sea level) to 5,000m. Even stranger are the insects born upon these up-drafts: Amazon mosquitos that the locals call "tears of the jaguar". The likelihood of rain is ever-present and snow can fall for 9 months out of 12.

Cusco (Peru) Climate Chart (Monthly Averages)												
Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
High Temperature (C)	22	21	21	11	22	21	21	22	22	22	22	22
Low Temperature (C)	7	7	7	4	2	1	-1	1	4	6	6	7
Precipitation (mm)	163	150	109	51	15	5	5	10	25	66	76	137

Payment Schedule.

If you decide to join this ride a deposit of £300 is due; the [Booking Form](#) is available on our website in the footer of each page. Email it back to us and the deposit can be paid by bank-to-bank transfer (free), cheque (free) or via payment card (Fee: 3% for credit cards and 1.5% for debit cards).

Eight weeks before you set off the balance is due to be paid to Venture Co.

Please note that the best airfares are **instant purchase** tickets, which are non-changeable and non-refundable once the ticket has been issued. When you are sure about your travel plans (do you wish to stay on after the ride or not?) you are best advised to secure your flights at the earliest opportunity. Late bookings may require a higher priced airfare, depending on airline availability. Call us for guidance.

Health Advice.

For detailed information and advice see <http://www.nomadtravel.co.uk> and click on their "travel clinics" option. Vaccination requirements change periodically so we advise that you check with your nearest specialist travel clinic as soon as possible. In the South West we are fortunate to have "Travel Health Consultancy" in Exeter: www.travelhealthconsultancy.co.uk 01392 430 590. Travellers to South America do not currently require a Yellow Fever certificate.

Equipment Brief:

A detailed clothing and equipment list will be provided in the Field Manual but to give you an indication, here is a summary:

- Baggage - a holdall (55 to 75 litre capacity) suitable to be packed in a truck each day; a hold-all from Helle Hanson, North Face etc are ideal.
- Clothing – tops made from natural fibres; and a wicking top during the ride.
- Footwear – a multi-purpose boot and short chaps & sandals.
- Sleeping Bag – is required.
- General - camping gear such as torch, water-bottle, penknife, sunscreens and insect repellent.
- Camera - with spare batteries.

The Field Manual.

A detailed guide will be mailed to each rider with your booking confirmation. This booklet is packed full of relevant, up-to-date information including clothing lists, vaccination advice, money matters, suggestions about the level of fitness and emergency procedures.

Financial Security

Venture Co Worldwide Ltd holds an Air Travel Organisers Licence granted by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA); our ATOL number is 5306. All ventures and expeditions purchased "with flights" are ATOL protected by the CAA which means that your financial security is assured when you join us. "Ride Only" bookings are protected by Venture Co's Client Trust account.

