

Peru

Cacti

A Greentours Itinerary

Day 1

Depart UK/Europe

Day 2

Lima

Afternoon arrival in Lima, rendezvous with your Trogon Tours leader and transfer to the hotel. This first evening is mainly logistical, but it also serves to introduce the scientific and visual rationale of the journey ahead: a cactus-focused route through southern Peru that has been designed around published diversity, endemism and landscape distinctiveness, rather than around generic sightseeing.

Day 3

Lima to Arequipa

After breakfast, we will transfer to the airport for our flight to Arequipa. Upon arrival, we will settle into our hotel and hold a full introductory session on the Cactaceae of Peru and southern Peru. During this briefing, we will review the main genera represented in Arequipa, the importance of endemism in the region, and the ecological contrast between lomas, dry valleys and volcanic highlands. Arequipa is an ideal base for this trip because the department alone contains 56 non-cultivated cactus taxa and 21 endemic taxa, making it one of the richest practical starting points for a specialist route in Peru.

The afternoon may include a gentle city-based orientation, preparation of photographic gear and discussion of field technique. This day is intentionally moderate because the later route involves long overland travel and higher elevations. In addition, Arequipa sits within the same regional context that explains much of the cactus diversity we will encounter during the tour: the dry western Andes, where cactus communities reflect strong climatic and topographic structuring.

Day 4

Arequipa to Atiquipa

Today we leave the city and drive south toward the coast, entering one of the most unusual ecosystems of the Peruvian desert. The destination is the Lomas de Atiquipa, officially recognized as the largest and most diverse lomas system in Peru, with 19,028.02 ha of vegetation mosaic including forests, cactus stands, shrublands and

annual herbs. This transition from urban Andean valley to coastal fog oasis is one of the most visually striking changes in the itinerary.

Once in the Atiquipa area, we will begin our first field exploration of the lomas and adjacent arid slopes. Scientifically, Atiquipa is much more than a scenic stop: its cactus flora includes 15 genera and 20 species, with a strong endemic component. For photographers, the late afternoon light often works beautifully on the combination of steep slopes, fog-washed vegetation patches and cactus silhouettes. Depending on season and conditions, this first session will emphasize habitat reading, composition and the documentation of cactus growth forms in landscape context.

Day 5

Atiquipa

We will spend the entire day in the Atiquipa sector, working different elevations and microhabitats. The district and ACP Lomas de Atiquipa showed that cactus richness is especially high between 600 and 1200 m, and that the lomas zone itself holds 16 species. This makes the site unusually productive for a single-day intensive outing and particularly suitable for a small-group specialist trip.

The day will be designed around both observation and photography. In practical terms, this means alternating between wider scenic stops and slower sessions devoted to stem architecture, spination, branching patterns, flowers or fruits when available, and cactus-habitat relationships. Because the lomas are fog-dependent ecosystems, the visual atmosphere can be especially attractive in the main scenic period from July to November, although cactus-focused departures remain possible outside that window as long as expectations are adjusted away from peak greenness or flowering.

Cumulopuntia tumida, like many other cacti here, is found only in the Atiquipa area. It forms low cushions or clumps with ovate stem segments and has large, feathery yellow flowers. We'll see clump-forming *Corryocactus brachypetalus* and *Corryocactus prostratus*, *Cylindropuntia rosea* with hopefully still some rose-pink blooms, riotous *Opuntia pestifer* and even the original Shell Mould Prickly Pear *Opuntia stricta*. Also growing here are *Armatocereus matucanensis*, *Neoraimondia arequipensis*, *Haageocereus decumbens*, *Haageocereus subtilispinus* and crawling *Haageocereus platinospinus* which does rather look like someone's dropped a bomb on it. Reaching as high as 4m, *Eulychnia ritteri* is an impressive cactus, whilst *Loxanthocereus gracilis* is a real beauty with orange or red-pink blooms.

Atiquipa also gives the tour a deeper ecological and historical dimension. Coastal lomas have been described as isolated fog oases and centers of biodiversity and past human activity on the Peruvian coast.

Day 6

Atiquipa to Cháparra

After an early breakfast, we depart from the lomas and continue toward the Cháparra Valley, entering a different expression of southern Peru's cactus landscapes. If Atiquipa represents the fog-fed desert fringe, Cháparra represents the dry valley system where endemism and species turnover become especially important. The valley documented 23 cactus taxa, including 18 endemics to Peru and two to Arequipa, which makes this one of the strongest localities in the south for a specialized route.

During the afternoon, we will begin exploring selected sectors of the valley. The photographic emphasis here changes subtly from the previous days: in addition to single-plant portraits and details, Cháparra is excellent for illustrating cactus communities in relation to rocky slopes, valley geometry and dry Andean light. Because the valley spans a broad environmental gradient, it also helps participants understand why southern Peru is so important for cactus biogeography at a regional scale.

Amongst the many species here are *Oreocereus hempelianus*, a little barrel with bright orange flowers, and *Islaya islayensis*, another egg-shaped barrel cacti. Neat barrels of *Melocactus peruvianus* are topped by neat pink blooms. The flamboyant flame-flowered, *Matucana haynei* subspecies *hystrix* is even more attractive. There's *Neoraimondia arequipensis*, *Armatocereus riomajensis* and *Weberbauerocereus weberbaueri*. We'll see the extraordinary architectural (in the extreme messy sense of the word!) *Browningia candelaris*, *Trichocereus schoenii*, and *Trichocereus chalaensis* whose beauty is all in its elegant species. We will be hoping that *Corryocactus brevistylus* has some of its impressive yellow blooms on show. This is an important genus here with *Corryocactus brachypetalus*, scrambling orange-flowered *Corryocactus prostratus*, and the rather beautiful orange-yellow blooms of *Corryocactus acervatus*. *Loxanthocereus hystrix* and *Loxanthocereus peculiaris* both have long bright orange blooms. *Mila nealeana*'s yellow blooms are almost as big as the plant itself while gorgeous white-flowered *Pygmaeocereus bylesianus* is even more spectacular! There's some fine low mound-forming *Cumulopuntias* such as *Cumulopuntia leucophaea*, *Cumulopuntia multiareolata* and *Cumulopuntia zehnderi*, which like many of the cacti found here, have very small overall ranges and are largely endemic to the fog desert fringe.

Day 7

Cháparra to Arequipa

We will use the morning for a second field session in the Cháparra Valley. This is valuable because cactus observation usually rewards repeated and slower work rather than constant movement. The extra time allows for additional photography, comparison among forms, and the possibility of revisiting sectors that were especially

productive the previous afternoon. For groups strongly interested in scientific interpretation, this is also the best moment to discuss endemism, local habitat specialization and the conservation significance of narrowly distributed species. After lunch we will return to Arequipa. Evening at leisure, equipment check, and preparation for the ascent to Andagua.

Day 8

Arequipa to Andagua

Today we enter the highland portion of the route. The road from Arequipa to the Valley of the Volcanoes through the Majes–Tipán– Viraco corridor, culminating in the ascent to Andagua, and indicates 323 km from Arequipa to Andagua, with the town at 3587 m. This is one of the most scenic overland drives of the itinerary because it links agricultural valleys, increasingly dry mountain slopes and eventually the volcanic landscapes for which the area is famous.

The Valley of the Volcanoes is not simply a backdrop. Official Peruvian tourism material describes it as a landscape with 36 miniature volcanic cones, extensive lava features and three lagoons, while UNESCO emphasizes the broader uniqueness of the volcanic landforms within the Colca y Volcanes de Andagua UNESCO Global Geopark, designated in 2019. This route is especially attractive for travelers who appreciate the overlap between botany, landscape and Earth history.

Arrival in Andagua by afternoon. Depending on weather and light, we may do a short introductory walk around the village or save energy for a sunset session. The evening atmosphere in this landscape is often superb for photography, especially when the volcanic cones begin to cast long shadows over the valley floor.

Day 9

Andagua – Valley of the Volcanoes

This is the key day for the volcanic portion of the tour. Here, highlight the Huanacaure twin volcanoes, located 2.2 km north of the main square of Andagua, as the most representative volcanic forms nearest the village, and also identifies Shanquillay waterfall and the Ucuya viewpoint in Soporo as major attractions. These points are useful as vantage areas for understanding the spatial arrangement of volcanoes, lava fields and the vegetation matrix in which cactus populations occur. From a botanical standpoint, the area has become even more significant because the recently described *Corryocactus volcanicus* was documented from this valley. The itinerary passes through a landscape that is not only beautiful and under-visited, but still capable of yielding new species to science.

This day should be worked slowly and photographically. The visual opportunities are very different from Atiquipa and Cháparra. Here the emphasis shifts toward cactus-in-volcanic-landscape compositions, broad panoramas, lava-derived topography, and

the contrast between austere high-Andean vegetation and sculptural volcanic forms. In particular the dense spiny cushions of *Cumulopuntia ignescens* will be much admired both as a cactus and as part of the landscape. These half-metre wide low-growing mounds are topped by small flaming orange and yellow blooms.

Day 10

Andagua to Arequipa

We will enjoy one final morning in the Andagua sector before beginning the return to Arequipa. Depending on group priorities, this can be used either for additional landscape photography or for a short-targeted session focused on cactus observation in nearby accessible sectors. A second morning is especially valuable in mountain-desert environments, where changing light can transform the same locality from one day to the next.

During the return journey, participants will again traverse the elevational and landscape transitions that make this route so strong as an integrated natural history program. By the end of the trip, the group will have experienced three distinct but connected dryland worlds of southern Peru: the fog oasis, the endemic-rich dry valley and the volcanic highland system. Farewell dinner in Arequipa.

Day 11

Arequipa to Lima

After breakfast we will transfer to the airport for our flight to Lima, where participants will connect with their international departures. This itinerary is designed so that travelers leave not only with photographs, but with a much clearer understanding of why southern Peru is one of the most compelling cactus destinations in the country: high diversity, high endemism, spectacular landscapes, active botanical discovery and strong interpretive depth.

Day 12

Arrive UK/Europe

If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at enquiries@greentours.co.uk.

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