

SALKANTAY TRAIL Peru

pass, and meanders its way through a lush subtropical rainforest. The high point both geographically and scenically is the 4,630-m-high (15,190-ft.) Abra Salkantay, which is some 400 m above the highest point on the Inca Trail. Upon reaching this rocky pass, hikers are afforded unparalleled vistas of Mount Salkantay: a peak that rises to a mighty 6,271 m (20,574 ft.) and one that has long been considered sacred by the inhabitants of the Peruvian Andes. The Incas believed the peak, whose name stems from a Quechua word meaning “wild” or “uncivilized,” was a deity that was instrumental in controlling fertility and weather in the region west of Cuzco.

From the pass, the trail descends more than 2,000 m (6,562 ft.) into a beautiful cloud forest, where fog often wraps the vegetation. The change in flora as well as temperature is dramatic. Eventually the pathway links up with an ancient Inca road that leads to the ruins of Llactapata. If possible, travelers should try to camp close to this stepped archeological complex, which is currently thought to have been a ceremonial site that supported Machu Picchu and might have once performed an astronomical function. From it, the views towards the slopes of Machu Picchu are striking—making it the ideal spot to stay on the penultimate night of a trek.

After leaving Llactapata, the route is mostly downhill or flat all the way to Aguas Calientes. Upon reaching this bustling little tourist town, which is bordered with cliffs, lofty cloud



↑ Vegetation at higher levels is not as dense as lower down.
→ Taking in the sights of Machu Picchu.
↓ Along the train tracks to Aguas Calientes.

**The trek’s focus is on nature,
and it is a less-trodden
and more affordable alternative
to the Inca Trail.**

