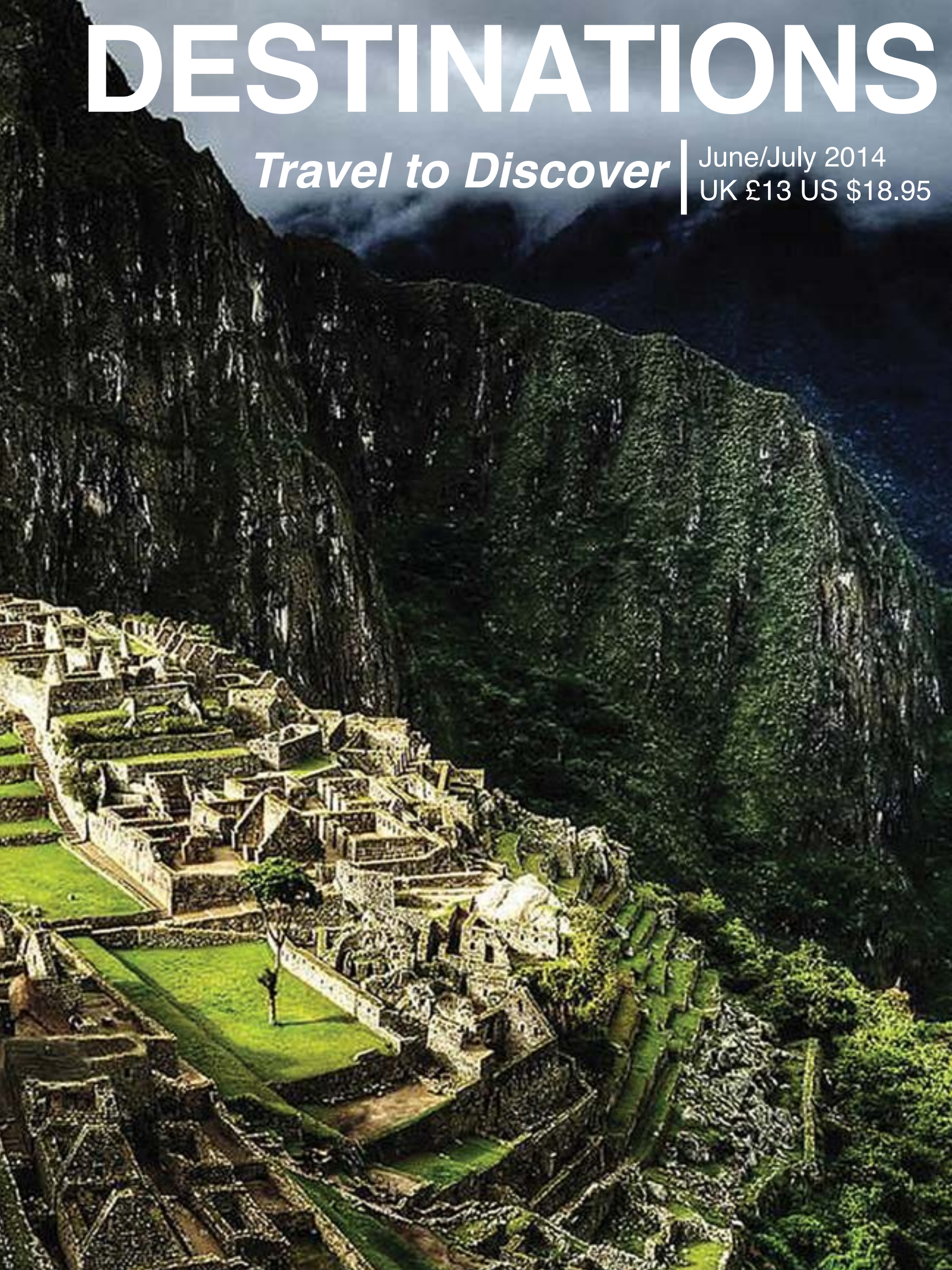


DESTINATIONS

Travel to Discover

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MACHU PICCHU

The Lost City of the Incas

written and photographed by Ana Berenguer



Alpacas over look the ancient lost city of the Incas



The train runs daily from Cuzco or Ollantaytambo to Aguas Calientes



Campers set up their tents while hiking the Inca Trail

Machu Picchu is the site of an ancient Inca city, high in the Andes of Peru. Located at 2,430m (8,000ft), this UNESCO World Heritage site is often referred to as “The Lost City of the Incas”. It’s one of the most familiar symbols of the Incan Empire and also one of the most famous and spectacular sets of ruins in the world. A visit to Peru would not be complete without seeing it.

HISTORY

These remarkable ruins became known to the scientific world in 1911, after the American archaeologist Hiram Bingham was led to the site by locals. Perched dramatically 1000 ft above the Urubamba river, it is also the end point of the most popular hike in South America, the Inca Trail.

The story of Machu Picchu is quite a remarkable one; it is still unknown exactly what the site was in terms of its place in Inca life. Current researchers

tend to believe that Machu Picchu was a country resort for elite Incas. The Incas started building it around 1430AD, but it was abandoned as an official site for the Inca rulers a hundred years later at the time of the Spanish conquest of the Inca Empire. One thing that is clear is that it was a remarkably well hidden place, and well protected.

Machu Picchu was built in the classical Inca style, with polished dry-stone walls. Its primary buildings are the Intihuatana, the Temple of the Sun, and the Room of the Three Windows. These are located in what is known by archaeologists as the Sacred District of Machu Picchu.

CLIMATE

It is located in a subtropical zone, or dense wood, the reason why the climate is mild, warm and damp. One can perceive two distinct seasons during the year: the rainy season from November to March, which is a time of heavy rains and the dry season from April to October brings on higher temperatures.

“Perched dramatically 1000 ft above the Urubamba river, it is also the end point of the most popular hike in South America, the Inca Trail.”

GET IN

There are a few ways to reach Machu Picchu:

- Hike the Inca Trail (you need to book months in advance in high season and you cannot go independently)
- Train from Cuzco or Ollantaytambo, either on a day trip, or overnighiting in Aguas Calientes.
- From Aguas Calientes, there are two ways to reach the ruins: by bus or walking

Depending on when you arrive, the site may be quite crowded or nearly deserted. The busiest periods are in the dry season (June-August), with the slowest being in February, the height of the rainy season, when the Inca Trail is closed. Most visitors arrive on package tours and are in the park between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. All visitors must leave Machu Picchu by 5p.m.

To access the site, you must have a ticket for Machu Picchu – which are available in advance from machupicchu.gob.pe or from various ticket offices described on that website, including one across from the town hall in Aguas Calientes. Machu Picchu tickets are NOT sold at the entrance gate and are limited to 2500 per day.

BY BUS FROM AGUAS CALIENTES

If arriving by train into Aguas Calientes, walk out of the station and keep going roughly straight over a foot bridge to the bus departure area. Frequent buses leave to the ruins starting at 5:30 a.m. The journey takes around 1/2 hour to slowly wind around the switchbacks and up to the park. Buses depart when full, which typically means they run quite regularly. At popular times, there may be a lengthy lines for the busses and a lengthy line to buy bus tickets, so plan the return trip accordingly in order not to miss departures.

BY FOOT FROM AGUAS CALIENTES

From Aguas Calientes to get to the ruins themselves it is also possible to walk along a similar 8km route that the buses run, which will take about 1-2 hours up, and around an hour back down. This route is mainly stairs, connecting the switchbacks that the buses take. It is a strenuous and long hike but is very rewarding, recommended to start around 05:00 a.m. when the gate at the bridge opens.

BY FOOT VIA THE INCA TRAIL

Hiking the Inca Trail is a great way to arrive as you first see the city through the Sun Gate (instead of arriving from below as you do from Aguas Calientes). Every traveler needs to travel with a tour agency because of the rules and regulations of entering the park.

There are also other options available for hiking to Machu Picchu. This is important to know as the Inca Trail hike is limited to the amount of people that can go on it each day. There is a much steeper price on this trek and it is necessary to book far in advance to get a place on the dates you will be there.

FEES/PERMITS

The current fee schedule and online tickets are available at the official government website and from ticket offices listed on that website.

There are three types of tickets:

- (1) Only entrance to Machu Picchu,
- (2) Machu Picchu + climbing Huayna Picchu,
- (3) Machu Picchu + climbing Cerro Machu Picchu

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EASTER ISLAND

Beauty in Mystery

by Nicolas Rivero

photos by Josh Huntz



Aerial view of Easter Island



Mysterious moai fill the island



Easter Island Volcano

Easter Island (Spanish: Isla de Pascua, Polynesian: Rapa Nui) is one of the most isolated islands on Earth. Officially a territory of Chile, it lies far off in the Pacific Ocean, roughly halfway to Tahiti. It is most famous for its enigmatic giant stone statues, built centuries ago, which reflect the history of the dramatic rise and fall of the most isolated Polynesian culture.

GET IN

Due to its extreme geographic isolation, many people assume that only the highly intrepid traveler can get to Easter Island. In fact, the island is accessible by regular commercial air service to its Hanga Roa

airport, and tourism is the main industry of the island.

The only regular flights are via LAN Airlines daily to Santiago de Chile and once per week to Tahiti.

GET AROUND

Easter Island is relatively small, so it is possible to get around fairly easily, even though public transportation is not available.

The most popular option is to visit archaeological sites with a tour company. It takes two full days to visit

all main archaeological sites of Easter Island and, thus, recommended minimum stay is at least three nights.

There are also plenty of rental cars, available by rental agencies in Hanga Roa, as well as other vehicles.

Bicycles are also available but you should be well-prepared since summer months can be exhausting due to combination of heat and humidity. Some protection against wind and rain is highly recommended between June and August.

ATTRACTIONS

The biggest tourist attractions on Easter Island are the Moai. The Moai are standing upon ceremonial platforms called Ahu.

Please note that the Moai and their platforms are protected by law and should not be approached under any circumstances. Do not walk on the

Ahu. It would be an extremely disrespectful gesture.

Rano Raraku and Orongo require entrance to national park that can be bought at the airport upon arrival. The same entrance is valid in both locations so make sure you keep your ticket safe. The rest of the island can be visited without an entrance.

Ahus are mostly located along the coastline of the island. Each clan typically had an ahu, even not all had moais and, thus, while you drive around the south coast

of the island, every mile contains several sites where you might see ruins.

Two exceptional sites are the volcanic craters of Rano Kau and Rano Raraku. The slightly inland quarry at “Rano Raraku” is where the majority of moais were created, on a hillside. This 300 foot volcano remnant provided the stones for the great figures and is where a visitor can see various stages of the carving, as well as partially-finished figures scattered around. Hiking to the opposite lip of the crater, where the most moai are found, is one of the most dramatic sites on the island.

Similarly, Rano Kau is the remains of a volcanic cinder cone, which like Rano Raraku, is filled with fresh rainwater and has a mottled unearthly appearance that is breathtaking.

Easter Island features two white sand beaches. Anakena, on the north side of the island, is an excellent shore-break bodysurfing location with a bit of north swell.

The second beach is a hidden gem called Ovahe, not far from Anakena. This beautiful and desolate beach is surrounded by breathtaking cliffs.

Scuba diving and snorkelling are popular. There are diving centers that rent the equipment and organize boat tours for diving: Atariki Rapa Nui, Orca and Mike Rapu Diving.

An often overlooked but particularly fascinating and “other-worldly” aspect of Easter Island is its extensive cave systems. While there are a couple of “official” caves that are quite interesting in their own right, there is also real adventure to be had in exploring all of the numerous unofficial caves on the island.

While the openings to most of these caves are small and hidden, many of them open up into large and inhibitingly deep and extensive cave systems. Note of caution: these caves can be dangerous in that quite a few run extremely deep.

Nightlife on the island is less active than in cities and the main attraction is definitely a Polynesian dance shows. Kari Kari on main street, Vai Te Mihi near the cemetery and restaurant Te Ra’ai outside Hanga Roa have their performance around the year. The discos, Toroko and Piriti, are the locations where you might blend in with locals if that’s what you’re looking for.

TOURS

Tours are the most popular way to explore the island. When you travel with a group, or at least with a local guide, you’ll cause less stress to the environment.

Local, native, tour guides can also show you aspects that you might otherwise never see or hear.

Travel agencies typically sell vacation packages that include accommodation and tours.

Trekking is fairly easy on Easter Island. It’s not necessary to hire a guide for this activity, you’ll only need a simple map and some advice from hotel reception or park rangers.

In most cases, trekking can be considered as a complementary way of seeing the island after visiting the most famous archaeological sites.

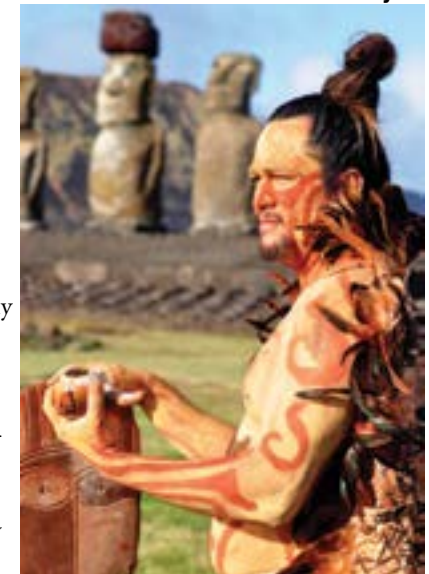
The most popular trekking options are recuperation zones and, thus, cannot be accessed with any kind of vehicles.

Terevaka, the highest point of the island, is an easy route. It takes approximately one hour and a half to reach top of the hill and one hour to return. You might get there with a horseback riding operator, as well (generally there’s tour every morning, depending on the weather).

Rano Kau can be easily reached by foot. When you reach volcan, just take the path on the east side of the crater to see some scenery not accessible with vehicles. Since there’s also a road to Orongo, you might reach Rano Kau with a bike or simply attend a tour.

North-east coast is a route that takes approximately five to seven hours and requires some planning and preparations ahead. You might just take a taxi to main beach Anakena and move along the coast all the way back to Hanga Roa. Horseback riding is also possible.

Locals do traditional rituals daily



CUBA

Caribbean Heat

by James Roos

photos by Sam White

ABLE to both confound and exceed expectations in equal measure, Cuba is an endlessly fascinating place. The archetypal tableau of revolutionary rhetoric, breathtaking beaches, classic cars gliding past faded colonial buildings and a population who dance on an endless ribbon of salsa and rum does of course exist, but for those prepared to dig beneath the dazzling surface, Cuba relinquishes so much more.

Art Deco architecture peeks between the crumbling mansions; unobtrusive art galleries are filled with exciting contemporary art to rival the scenes of London, Los Angeles and New York; private restaurants hidden in backstreets throughout the country nudge Cuba towards the upper echelons of fine dining experiences; while a program of arts festivals sees internationally renowned ballerinas, musicians and actors delight audiences for the modest reward of a state salary. Delve into the countryside and you'll find cloudforests and mountain ranges, birdwatching trails ripe for exploring, and panoramic plains filled with green-gold sugar cane that are a siren call for a growing number of visiting cyclists.

Continued on page 9

Castles built by the Spanish still stand



Locals parade through the streets dancing salsa



Cars from the 1950s fill the streets

CITIES

Havana: cosmopolitan capital with a swinging nightlife

Baracoa: a quaint beach-side town, and Cuba's first capital.

Pinar del Rio: center of the cigar industry

Santa Clara: Home of Ernesto "Che" Guevara's most successful battle during the Revolution. A mausoleum is erected on the outskirts of town and now holds his remains, recovered from Bolivia in the 1990s.

Santiago de Cuba: coastal city rich in Caribbean influence

Trinidad: World Heritage Site with charming, colonial-era buildings

Varadero: popular beach area, east of Havana, filled mostly with tourists.

BY PLANE

Jose Marti International Airport outside Havana is the main gateway and is served by major airlines from points in Canada, Mexico, and Europe. There are also regional flights from other Caribbean islands. Cuba's national carrier is Cubana de Aviacion, connecting the island to a handful of destinations in Mexico, South and Central America, Canada and Europe.

While Havana, is by far the most popular port of entry, There are also flights available to Antonio Maceo Airport from some of Cuba's nearest Caribbean neighbours, Jamaica, and Haiti. There are also flights from more distant locations, such as Miami, Toronto, Madrid & Paris.

BY BUS

Viazul is Cuba's hard currency bus line and is by far the best choice of public transportation to tour the island. They run comfortable air-conditioned long-distance coaches with washrooms and televisions to most places of interest to tourists.

Astro is the bus line that most Cubans use. Astro recently renewed their fleet with 300 new Chinese coaches that are as comfortable as Viazul. Astro has a much more extensive network than Viazul.

It is also possible to travel between some popular tourist destinations, such as Havana and Varadero, on special tourist minibuses carrying 4-5 people. The cost is a few dollars more but highly recommended if you are not planning to sleep the whole distance, plus you can ask the driver to stop along the way.

Yank Tanks

You will find an unusually large number of old U.S.-made cars on the street. Popularly known as "Yank Tanks," these are pre-revolution imports from the 1950s that have been nursed along for half a century, because the Soviet-made cars available during the Cold War were too scarcely allocated for most Cubans to buy (and other cars remain too expensive today).



BY TAXI

Official taxis are pretty expensive for long distances. If you're up for a little adventure, you can find some enterprising locals willing to play "taxi" with their old car for a little less money.

Taxis are the most convenient way to get around



with-in the big cities. There

"Taxis are the most convenient way to get around within the big cities."

are several types of taxis, including the official government taxis, the private and potentially unlicensed "yank tanks", and the small three-wheeled coco-taxis. They're fairly abundant and not hard to find, they tend to group in front of large hotels, but it will usually be cheaper to find one elsewhere.

BY CAR

You will find an unusually large number of old U.S.-made cars on the street. Popularly known as "Yank Tanks," these are pre-revolution imports from the 1950s that have been nursed along for half a century.

HITCHHIKING AND THE "AMARILLO"

The Cuban government's system for facilitating hitchhiking is by far the most economical way for foreigners to travel in Cuba,

though a flexible schedule and good Spanish are a must. Known as "El Amarillo" ("the yellow guy") for the yellowy-beige uniforms of its administrators, the system consists of points along main routes where certain vehicles are required to stop and pick up hitchhikers. Amarillo points ("el punto amarillo")

along major highways are often full service rest stops for hitchhikers, with water, peso-priced food, and a 24 hour indoor waiting area.

Hitchhiking is the only system where you can travel for Cuban prices without paying a tourist premium. Given that transportation is one of a tourist's biggest expenses in Cuba, this can make your money go much further.

BY BIKE

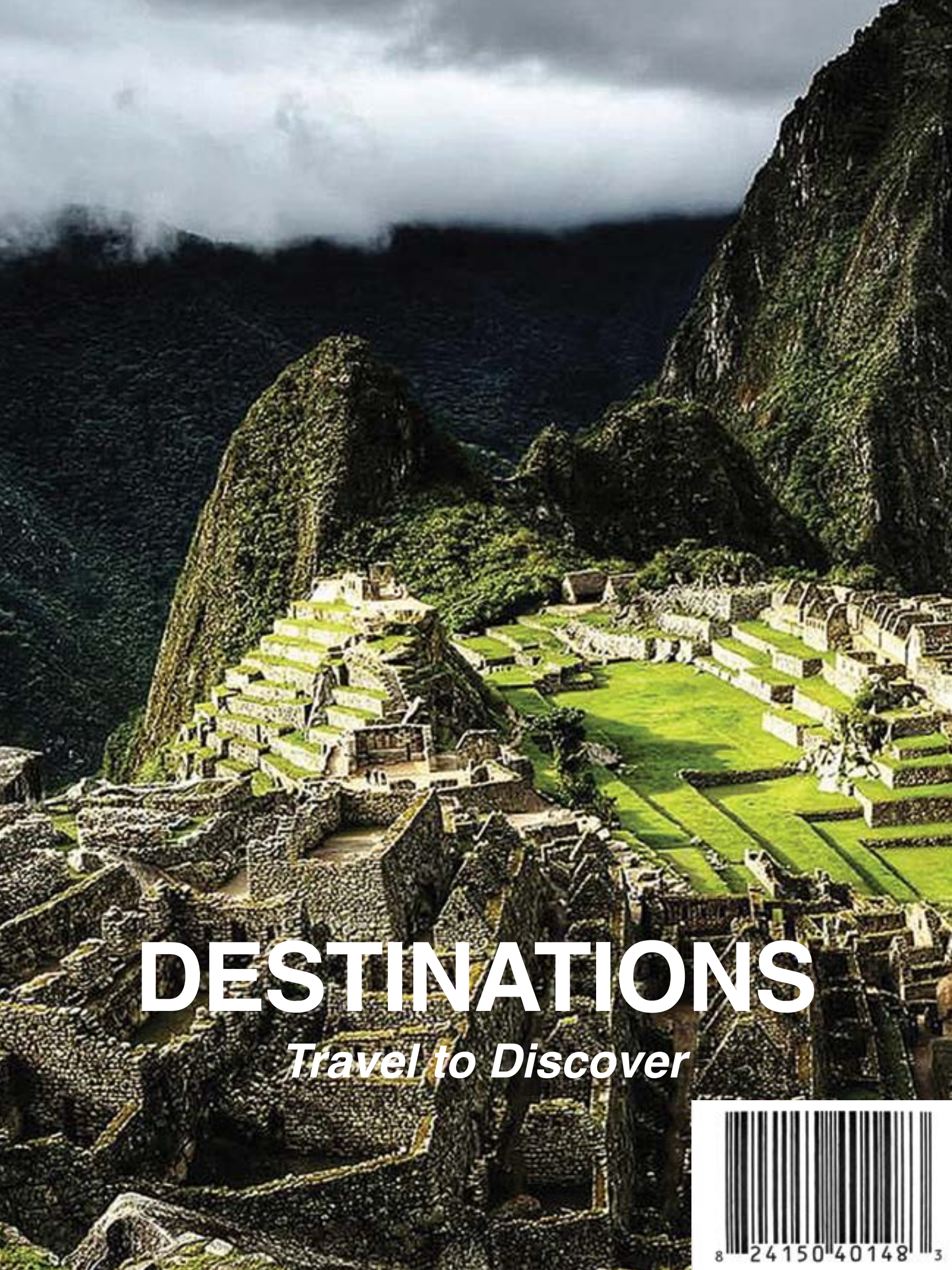
Calm roads and beautiful scenery make Cuba an ideal country for biking. You will have to bring your own bike as bikes suitable for trekking are not readily available in Cuba. Do not under any circumstances rent a bike in Cuba.

WHEN TO GO

The best times to go are between December and April, to avoid the horrendous storms and hurricanes before December and the sticky heat of the Cuban summer which can be unbearable for some.

EAT

Being that all restaurants are owned by the government and run by employees, the food in Cuba is notoriously bland. If you are expecting the fiery pepperpot spiciness found on some of the other Caribbean islands, consider that the national dish in Cuba is rice and beans. A popular saying goes that the best Cuban food can be found in the United States. Within Cuba, the best food will generally be found in your casa particular or in paladares (locally owned restaurants in private homes).



DESTINATIONS

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