

# Cusco

This article is about the city in Peru. For other uses, see [Cusco \(disambiguation\)](#). “Cuzco” redirects here. For other uses of “Cuzco”, see [Cusco \(disambiguation\)](#).

**Cusco** /ˈkuːzkoʊs/, often spelled **Cuzco** (Spanish: *Cuzco*, [ˈkuskɔ]; Quechua: *Qusqu* or *Qosqo*, IPA: [ˈqɔsqɔ]), is a city in southeastern Peru, near the Urubamba Valley of the Andes mountain range. It is the capital of the Cusco Region as well as the Cusco Province. In 2013, the city had a population of 435,114. Located on the eastern end of the Knot of Cuzco, its elevation is around 3,400 m (11,200 ft).

The site was the historic capital of the Inca Empire from the 13th into the 16th century until the Spanish conquest. In 1983 Cusco was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. It has become a major tourist destination, receiving nearly 2 million visitors a year. The Constitution of Peru designates it as the Historical Capital of Peru.<sup>[2]</sup>

## 1 Spelling and etymology

The indigenous name of this city is *Qusqu*. Although the name was used in Quechua, its origin has been found in the Aymara language. The word is derived from the phrase *qusqu wanka* ('Rock of the owl'), related to the city's foundational myth of the Ayar Siblings. According to this legend, Ayar Awqa (*Ayar Auca*) acquired wings and flew to the site of the future city; there he was transformed into a rock to mark the possession of the land by his *ayllu* ('lineage').<sup>[3]</sup>

“Then Ayar Oche stood up, displayed a pair of large wings, and said he should be the one to stay at Guanacaure as an idol in order to speak with their father the Sun. Then they went up on top of the hill. Now at the site where he was to remain as an idol, Ayar Oche raised up in flight toward the heavens so high that they could not see him. He returned and told Ayar Manco that from then on he was to be named Manco Capac. Ayar Oche came from where the Sun was and the Sun had ordered that Ayar Manco take that name and go to the town that they had seen. After this had been stated by the idol, Ayar Oche turned into a stone, just as he was, with his wings. Later Manco Capac went down with

Ayar Auca to their settlement...he liked the place now occupied in this city Cuzco. Manco Capac and his companion, with the help of the four women, made a house. Having done this, Manco Capac and his companion, with the four women, planted some land with maize. It is said that they took the maize from the cave, which this lord Manco Capac named Pacaritambo, which means those of origin because...they came out of that cave.”<sup>[4]:15–16</sup>  
—Juan Diez de Betanzos, *Suma y narración de los incas*.

The Spanish conquistadors adopted the local name, transliterating it into Spanish phonetics as *Cuzco* or, less often, *Cozco*. *Cuzco* was the standard spelling on official documents and chronicles in colonial times,<sup>[5]</sup> though *Cusco* was also used. *Cuzco*, pronounced as in 16th-century Spanish, seems to have been a close approximation to the Cusco Quechua pronunciation of the name at the time.<sup>[6]</sup> As both Spanish and Quechuan pronunciation have evolved since then, the Spanish pronunciation of 'z' is no longer close to the Quechuan pronunciation of the consonant represented by 'z' in “Cuzco”. In 1976, the city mayor signed an ordinance banning the traditional spelling and ordering the use of a new one, *Cusco*, in the municipality publications. Nineteen years later, on 23 June 1990, the local authorities formalized a new spelling related more closely to Quechuan: *Qosqo*.

In English, both “s”<sup>[7][8]</sup> and “z”<sup>[9][10]</sup> are accepted, as there is no international, official spelling of the city's name.

## 2 History

### 2.1 Killke culture

The Killke people occupied the region from 900 to 1200, prior to the arrival of the Inca in the 13th century. Carbon-14 dating of Saksaywaman, the walled complex outside Cusco, has established that the Killke culture constructed the fortress about 1100. The Inca later expanded and occupied the complex in the 13th century and after. On 13 March 2008, archaeologists discovered the ruins of an ancient temple, roadway and aqueduct system at Saksaywaman.<sup>[11]</sup> The temple covers some 2,700 square feet (250 square meters) and contains 11 rooms thought

to have held idols and mummies,<sup>[11]</sup> establishing its religious purpose. Together with the results of excavations in 2007, when another temple was found at the edge of the fortress, indicates there was longtime religious as well as military use of the facility, overturning previous conclusions about the site.<sup>[12]</sup>

## 2.2 Inca history

See also: [Kingdom of Cusco and Inca Empire](#)

Cusco was long an important center of indigenous peoples. It was the capital of the [Inca Empire](#) (13th century-1532). Many believe that the city was planned as an effigy in the shape of a puma, a sacred animal.<sup>[13]</sup> It is unknown how Cusco was specifically built, or how its large stones were quarried and transported to the site. Under the Inca, the city had two sectors: the *urin* and *hanan*. Each was divided to encompass two of the four provinces, [Chinchasuyu](#) (NW), [Antisuyu](#) (NE), [Kuntisuyu](#) (SW) and [Qullasuyu](#) (SE). A road led from each of these quarters to the corresponding quarter of the empire.

Each local leader was required to build a house in the city and live part of the year in Cusco, restricted to the quarter that corresponded to the quarter of the empire in which he had territory. After the rule of [Pachacuti](#), when an Inca died, his title went to one son and his property was given to a corporation controlled by his other relatives (the process was called [split inheritance](#)). Each title holder had to build a new house and add new lands to the empire, in order to own the land his family needed to maintain after his death.

According to Inca legend, the city was rebuilt by [Sapa Inca Pachacuti](#), the man who transformed the Kingdom of Cuzco from a sleepy city-state into the vast empire of [Tawantinsuyu](#).<sup>[14]:66-69</sup> Archaeological evidence, however, points to a slower, more organic growth of the city beginning before [Pachacuti](#). The city was constructed according to a definite plan, and two rivers were channeled around the city. Archaeologists such as [Larry Coben](#) have suggested that this city plan was replicated at other sites throughout the empire.

The city fell to the sphere of [Huáscar](#) in the division of the empire after the death of [Wayna Qhapaq](#) in 1527. It was captured by the generals of [Atahualpa](#) in April 1532 in the [Battle of Quipaipan](#). Nineteen months later, Spanish explorers invaded the city (see [battle of Cuzco](#)) and gained control because of their arms and horses, comprising a superior military technology.

## 2.3 Cusco after the Spanish invasion

The first three Spaniards arrived in the city in May 1533, after the [Battle of Cajamarca](#), collecting for [Atahualpa's Ransom Room](#). On 15 November 1533. [Francisco](#)



*The first image of Cuzco in Europe. Pedro Cieza de León. Cronica del Peru, 1553.*

[Pizarro](#) officially arrived in Cusco. “The capital of the Incas...astonished the Spaniards by the beauty of its edifices, the length and regularity of its streets” The great square was surrounded by several palaces, since “each sovereign built a new palace for himself.” “The delicacy of the stone work excelled” that of the Spaniards’. The fortress had three parapets, and was composed of “heavy masses of rock.” “Through the heart of the capital ran a river...faced with stone.” “The most sumptuous edifice in Cuzco...was undoubtedly the great temple dedicated to the Sun...studded with gold plates...surrounded by convents and dormitories for the priests.” “The palaces were numerous, and the troops lost no time in plundering them of their contents, as well as despoiling the religious edifices,” including the royal mummies in the [Coricancha](#).<sup>[15]:186-187,192-193,216-219</sup>

[Pizarro](#) ceremoniously gave [Manco Inca](#) the Incan fringe as the new Peruvian leader.<sup>[15]:221</sup> [Francisco Pizarro](#) encouraged some of his men to stay and settle in the city, giving out [repartimientos](#) to do so.<sup>[16]:46</sup> [Alcaldes](#) were established and [regidores](#) on 24 March 1534, which included his brothers [Gonzalo Pizarro](#) and [Juan Pizarro](#). [Pizarro](#) left a garrison of ninety men and then departed for [Jauja](#) with [Manco Inca](#).<sup>[15]:222,227</sup>

[Pizarro](#) renamed it the “Very noble and great city of Cuzco”. The many buildings constructed after the Spanish invasion have a mixture of Spanish influence with Inca indigenous architecture, including the [Santa Clara](#) and [San Blas](#) neighborhoods. The Spanish destroyed many Inca buildings, temples and palaces. They used the remaining walls as bases for the construction of a new city.

[Father Vicente de Valverde](#) became the Bishop of Cusco, and built his cathedral facing the plaza, placed a [St. Dominic](#) monastery on the ruins of the House of the Sun,

and a nunnery where the House of the Virgins of the Sun was stood.<sup>[15]:222</sup>

The city was retaken from the Spanish during the Siege of Cuzco of 1536 by Manco Inca Yupanqui, a leader of the Sapa Inca. Although the siege lasted ten months, it was ultimately unsuccessful. Manco's forces were able to reclaim the city for only a few days. Throughout the conflict and years of the Spanish colonization of the Americas many of Inca citizens and warriors succumbed to small-pox and died.

Cusco stands on layers of cultures, with the Tawantinsuyu (old Inca Empire) built on Killke structures, and the Spanish having replaced indigenous temples with Catholic churches, and palaces with mansions for the invaders.

Cusco was the center for the Spanish colonization and spread of Christianity in the Andean world. It became very prosperous thanks to agriculture, cattle raising, and mining, as well as its trade with Spain. The Spanish colonists constructed many churches and convents, as well as a cathedral, university and Archbishopric. Just as the Inca built on top of Killke structures, Spanish buildings were based on the massive stone walls built by the Inca.

A major earthquake on 21 May 1950 caused severe localised damage in Cusco. The Dominican Priory and Church of Santo Domingo, which were built on top of the impressive *Qurikancha* (Temple of the Sun), were among the colonial era buildings affected. The city's Inca architecture, however, withstood the earthquake. Many of the old Inca walls were at first thought to have been lost after the earthquake, but the granite retaining walls of the *Qurikancha* were exposed, as well as those of other ancient structures throughout the city. Restoration work at the Santo Domingo complex was conducted in such a way as to expose the Inca masonry formerly obscured by the super-structure without compromising the integrity of the colonial heritage.<sup>[17]</sup> Cusco had also been the center of a major earthquake in 1650, and many of the buildings damaged in 1950 had been impacted by an earthquake only nine years previously.<sup>[18]</sup>



Cristo Blanco in the surrounding mountains of Cusco



Night view of Plaza Regocijo, Cusco



Night view of the Qurikancha and Convent of St. Dominic

## 2.4 Republican era

After Peru declared its independence in 1821, Cusco maintained its importance within the administrative structure of the country. Upon independence, the government created the Department of Cuzco, maintaining authority over territory extending to the Brazilian border. Cusco was made capital of the department; subsequently it became the most important city in the south-eastern Andean region.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the city's urban sprawl spread to the neighboring districts of Santiago and Wanchaq.

In 1911, explorer Hiram Bingham used the city as a base for the expedition in which he rediscovered the ruins of Machu Picchu.



### 2.4.1 Honors

- In 1933, the Congress of Americanists met in **La Plata**, Argentina and declared the city as the Archeological Capital of the Americas.
- In 1978, the 7th Convention of Mayors of Great World Cities met in **Milan**, Italy and declared Cusco a Cultural Heritage of the World.
- In 1983, **UNESCO**, in Paris, France declared the city a **World Heritage Site**. The **Peruvian government** declared it the **Tourism Capital of Peru** and **Cultural Heritage of the Nation**.
- In 2007, the **New7Wonders Foundation** designated **Machu Picchu** one of the **New Seven Wonders of the World**, following a worldwide poll.<sup>[19]</sup>

## 2.5 Present

A 1950 earthquake shook the city, causing the destruction of more than one third of the city's structures. Later, the city began to establish itself as a focal point for tourism and began to receive a greater number of tourists.

Since the 1990s, tourism has increased. Currently, Cusco is the most important tourist destination in Peru. Under the administration of mayor Daniel Estrada Pérez, a staunch supporter of the *Academia Mayor de la Lengua Quechua*, between 1983 and 1995 the **Quechua** name *Qosqo* was officially adopted for the city.

## 3 Geography

The city of Cusco extends throughout the Watanay river valley. Located on the eastern end of the Knot of Cuzco, its elevation is around 3,300 m (10,800 ft). North is the **Willkapampa** mountain range with 4,000 m – 6,000 m high mountains. The highest peak is **Sallqantay** (6,271 m) about 60 km (37.28 mi) northwest of Cusco.<sup>[20]</sup>

### 3.1 Climate

Cusco has a **subtropical highland climate** (Köppen *Cwb*). Its climate is generally dry and temperate, with two defined seasons. The dry season lasts from April to October, with abundant sunshine, and occasional nighttime freezes: July is the coolest month with an average of 9.6 °C (49.3 °F). The wet season lasts from November to March, with night frost less common: November averages 13.4 °C (56.1 °F). Although frost and hail are common, snow is virtually unheard of. The only snowfall ever recorded was in June 1911.

Cusco was found in 2006 to be the spot on Earth with the highest ultraviolet light level.<sup>[21]</sup>

## 4 Main sights



Ruins of Saksaywaman

Although the original Inca city was said to have been founded in the 11th century, more recently scholars have established that Inca did not occupy the area until after 1200 AD. Before them the **indigenous** people of the **Killke culture** built the walled complex of **Saksaywaman** about 1100. In November 2008, archaeological researchers found that the Killke also built a major temple near Saksaywaman, as well as an **aqueduct** (**Pukyus**) and roadway connecting prehistoric structures. Saksaywaman was expanded by the Inca.

The Spanish explorer Pizarro sacked much of the Inca city in 1535. Remains of the palace of the Incas, **Qurikancha** (the Temple of the Sun), and the Temple of the Virgins of the Sun still stand. In addition, Inca buildings and foundations in some cases have proved to be stronger than the foundations built in present-day Peru. Among the most noteworthy Spanish colonial buildings of the city is the **Cathedral of Santo Domingo, Cusco**.

The major nearby Inca sites are Pachacuti's presumed winter home, **Machu Picchu**, which can be reached on foot by the **Inca Trail to Machu Picchu** or by train; and the "fortress" at **Ullantaytampu**.



*Qurikancha, Convent of Santo Domingo, and Intipanpa*

Less-visited ruins include: **Inka Wasi**, the highest of all Inca sites at 3,980 m (13,060 ft); **Willkapampa** the capital of the Inca after the capture of Cusco; the **sculpture garden** at **Ñusta Hisp'ana** (aka **Chuqip'allta**, **Yuraq Rumi**); **Tipón** with working water channels in wide terraces; as well as **Willkaraqay**, **Patallaqta**, **Chuqik'iraw**, **Moray**, **Vitcos**, and many others.

The surrounding area, located in the Watanay Valley, is

strong in gold mining and agriculture, including corn, barley, quinoa, tea, and coffee.

Cusco's main stadium Estadio Garcilaso de la Vega was the site of South America's continental soccer championship, the *Copa América 2004* held in Peru. The stadium is home to one of the country's most successful soccer clubs, *Cienciano*.

The city is served by Alejandro Velasco Astete International Airport.



*Arc of Barrio de Santa Ana, Cusco*

## 4.1 Architectural heritage



*View of the city from Saksaywaman. Roofs of Colonial architecture.*

Because of its antiquity and importance, the city center retains many buildings, plazas, streets and churches of

pre-Columbian times and colonial buildings, which led to his being declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1983. Among the main sights of the city are:

### 4.1.1 Barrio de San Blas

This neighborhood housing artisans, workshops and craft shops, is one of the most picturesque sites in the city. Its streets are steep and narrow with old houses built by the Spanish over important Inca foundations. It has an attractive square and the oldest parish church in Cusco, built in 1563, which has a carved wooden pulpit considered the epitome of Colonial era woodwork in Cusco.

The Quechua name of this neighborhood is *Tuq'ukachi* which means the opening of the salt

### 4.1.2 Hatun Rumiyuq

This street is the most visited by tourists. On the street *Hatun Rumiyuq* ("the one with the big stone") was the palace of Inca Roca, which was converted to the Archbishop's residence.

Along this street that runs from the *Plaza de Armas* to the *Barrio de San Blas*, one can see the Stone of Twelve Angles, which is viewed as marvel of ancient stonework and has become emblematic of the city's history.

### 4.1.3 Convent and Church of la Merced



*Calle Mantas to the right is the belltower of the Church and Convent of La Merced*



Its foundation dates from 1536. The first complex was destroyed by the earthquake of 1650 and the rebuilding of the church and convent was completed in 1675.

Its cloisters of Baroque Renaissance style, choir stalls, colonial paintings and wood carvings are highlights of a visit to this church, now a popular museum and tourist attraction.

Also on view is an elaborate monstrance made of gold and gemstones that weighs 22 kg (49 lb) and is 130 cm (51.18 in) in height.

#### 4.1.4 Cathedral

Main article: Cathedral of Santo Domingo, Cusco

The first cathedral built in Cusco is the *Iglesia del Trunfo*, built in 1539 on the foundations of the Palace of Viracocha Inca. Today, this church is an auxiliary chapel of the Cathedral.

The main basilica cathedral of the city was built between 1560 and 1664. Stone was used as the main material, which was extracted from nearby quarries, although some blocks of red granite were taken from the fortress of Saksaywaman.

This great cathedral presents late-Gothic, Baroque, and plateresque interiors and has one of the most outstanding examples of colonial goldwork. Its carved wooden altars are also important.

The city developed a distinctive style of painting known as the "Cuzco School", and the cathedral houses a major collection of local artists of the time. The cathedral is known for a Cuzco School painting of the Last Supper depicting Jesus and the twelve apostles feasting on guinea pig, a traditional Andean delicacy.

The cathedral is the seat of the Archdiocese of Cuzco.

#### 4.1.5 Plaza de Armas



Plaza de Armas of the city of Cuzco, Peru, at night



Plaza de Armas of Cusco

Known as the "Square of the warrior" in the Inca era, this plaza has been the scene of several important events in the history of this city, such as the proclamation by Francisco Pizarro in the conquest of Cuzco.

Similarly, the Plaza de Armas was the scene of the death of Túpac Amaru II, considered the indigenous leader of the resistance.

The Spanish built stone arcades around the plaza which endure to this day. The main cathedral and the Church of La Compañía both open directly onto the plaza.

#### 4.1.6 Iglesia de la Compañía de Jesus



Church of la Compañía de Jesus

This church (Church of the Society of Jesus), whose construction was initiated by the Jesuits in 1576 on the foundations of the *Amrahanata* or the palace of the Inca ruler *Waman Qhapaq*, is considered one of the best examples of colonial baroque style in the Americas.

Its façade is carved in stone and its main altar is made

of carved wood covered with gold leaf. It was built over an underground chapel and has a valuable collection of colonial paintings of the Cusco School.

#### 4.1.7 Qurikancha and Convent of Santo Domingo

Main article: [Qurikancha](#)

The Qurikancha (“golden place”) was the most important sanctuary dedicated to the Sun God (Inti) at the time of the Inca Empire. According to ancient chronicles written by Garcilaso de la Vega (chronicler), Qurikancha was said to have featured a large solid golden disc that was studded with precious stones and represented the Inca Sun God - Inti. Spanish chroniclers describe the Sacred Garden in front of the temple as a garden of golden plants with leaves of beaten gold, stems of silver, solid gold corn-cobs and 20 life-size llamas and their herders all in solid gold.<sup>[26]</sup>

The temple was destroyed by its Spanish invaders who, as they plundered, were determined to rid the city of its wealth, idolaters and shrines. Nowadays, only a curved outer wall and partial ruins of the inner temple remain at the site.

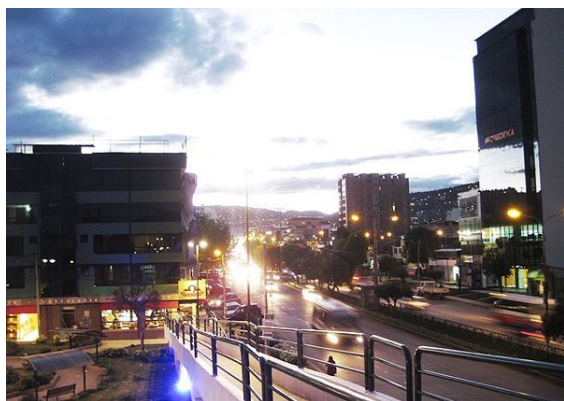
With this structure as a foundation, colonists built the Convent of Santo Domingo (St. Dominic) in the Renaissance style. The building, with one baroque tower, exceeds the height of many other buildings in this city.

Inside is a large collection of paintings from the Cuzco School.

## 5 Population

Until the late 18th century Cusco was the most populous city in the continent, even more than Lima.

The city has a population of about 390,000 people in 2007 and 435,114 people on 30 June 2013 according to INEI.



*Financial Center of the City, Av. de la Cultura, Cusco*

## 6 Food

As capital to the Inca Empire, Cusco was an important agricultural region. It was a natural reserve for thousands of native Peruvian species, including around 3,000 varieties of potato cultivated by the people.<sup>[28]</sup> Recently many fusion and neo-Andean restaurants have developed in Cusco, in which the cuisine is prepared with modern techniques and incorporates a blend of traditional Andean and international ingredients.<sup>[29]</sup>

## 7 Industry

- [Cusqueña brewery](#)

## 8 International relations

See also: [List of twin towns and sister cities in Peru](#)

### 8.1 Twin towns and sister cities

Cusco is twinned with:<sup>[30]</sup>

### 8.2 Partnerships

- █ [Kraków in Poland](#)<sup>[32]</sup>

## 9 Gallery

- 12-sided stone
- Chapel of the Holy Family / *Capilla de la Sagrada Familia*
- Old streets in the city center
- Panorama
- *Cristo Blanco* (White Christ)
- Statue to Pachacuti, Sapa Inca
- Street in old city

## 10 In modern culture

- In the film *The Emperor's New Groove* and its spin-off animated television series *The Emperor's New School*, the main protagonist is "Kuzco", the young, often immature fictional emperor of the Incas.

- “Cuzco” was the name of a song on E.S. Posthumus' 2001 album *Unearthed*. Each song on the album was named after an ancient city.
- The Anthony Horowitz novel *Evil Star* takes place partly in Cusco.
- The BBC radio 1 DJ John Peel died in Cusco on a working holiday in 2004.

## 11 See also

- Governorate of New Castile
- Inca religion in Cusco
- Inca road system
- Iperu, tourist information and assistance
- List of archaeoastronomical sites sorted by country
- PeruRail
- Pikillaqta
- Santurantikuy
- Tampukancha, Inca religious site
- Tourism in Peru
- Wanakawri

## 12 References

### Notes

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## 13 External links

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- [www.municusco.gob.pe](http://www.municusco.gob.pe)

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