

KRAIG ADAMS

Santa Cruz Trek Hiking Guide

3 days alone over Punta Unión in Peru's Cordillera Blanca

2027 season edition · updated September 2026

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Welcome

In November 2019 I flew to Peru and hiked the Santa Cruz Trek alone: three days and about 30 miles through the Cordillera Blanca, from Vaquería over the Punta Unión pass to Cashapampa, with a tent and no stove. It's the trip from my film Hiking 30 miles on the Santa Cruz Trek in Peru.

The reason to come is the pass. Coming over Punta Unión, you look down on a turquoise glacier lake with white snowy mountains all around you. It's an amazing, once-in-a-lifetime view. Stay up there as long as you can, and pray for good weather like I had.

What's inside

- Straight answers to the questions people ask about this trek
- When to go, the park's 2026 tickets and rules, and the question of hiking it without an agency
- Getting from Lima to Huaraz, Yungay and the trailhead, the way I did it
- Altitude: every camp height from my GPS and how to acclimatize
- All three days: my notes, the trail, where to get off, a map with an elevation profile, and links to that day in my film
- A four-day plan, the campsites on the way, what I paid and gear for this route
- Weather and safety, one page of things to check before you go, and a printable trip sheet

How to use it offline

Save this PDF to your phone's Files or Books app before you leave home. Load the GPX files and download offline maps while you still have Wi-Fi in Huaraz: don't count on a phone signal once you leave the road. Each day starts on a new page. The film links need a connection; everything else works in airplane mode.

When I say "I," it's my own trip. Tickets, rules and bus fares change, so they're dated, and the checks are collected on one page: Before you go, check these.

At a glance

QUICK FACTS	
Distance	31.0 miles (49.9 km) over 3 days, one way
Climbing	about 5,500 ft (1,680 m) up and 7,870 ft (2,400 m) down
Days	3 walking days, 2 nights in my tent. The park calls it 3 to 4 days
Start	Vaquería, on the road from Yungay to Yanama, 12,060 ft (3,676 m)
Finish	Cashapampa, at the end of the road from Caraz, 9,630 ft (2,935 m)
High point	Punta Unión, usually given as 15,580 ft (4,750 m); my GPS read 15,535 ft (4,735 m), Day 2
When	The dry season, May to October. I walked November 12 to 14, 2019
Difficulty	A clear path, but high: two nights above 12,000 ft and a pass near 15,600 ft
Base	Huaraz, about 10,000 ft (3,050 m), 7 to 8 hours by bus from Lima
Ticket (2026)	S/60 valid 2 to 3 days, S/150 valid 4 to 30 days (general rate)
Trip	Solo, no guide, no mules, no stove

DAY	ROUTE	MILES (KM)	UP / DOWN (FT)	SLEEP
1	Vaquería to Huaripampa	4.4 (7.0)	909 / 861	Campsite above the Huaripampa control post, 12,070 ft
2	Huaripampa over Punta Unión to Taullipampa	11.2 (18.0)	3,606 / 1,956	Taullipampa, 13,730 ft
3	Taullipampa to Cashapampa	15.5 (24.9)	990 / 5,057	Huaraz

The numbers come from my own GPS recordings, smoothed the same way for every day. In the film and its description I called it 30 miles, with 5 miles on Day 1 and 16 on Day 3; my GPS says 31.0 miles in all. Apps count climbing differently: AllTrails shows about 6,500 ft for my three days.





My three days: from Vaquería up the Huaripampa valley, over Punta Unión and down the Santa Cruz valley to Cashapampa. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Straight answers

How many days do I need? I did it in three: a short first afternoon, the pass on Day 2 and a long walk out on Day 3. In the film I even called it "a two-day hike," because I started late on the first day and finished early on the last. The park calls it 3 to 4 days, and four is the easier plan. Add at least two days in Huaraz before it to acclimatize. See Other ways to do it.

How hard is it? The path is clear and the climbing isn't huge: about 3,600 ft on the pass day. What makes it hard is the altitude: for me it was the biggest thing that was difficult on this hike. You're at 14,000 and 15,000 ft for long stretches, and I think that's going to affect anyone. See Altitude.

Do I need a guide or an agency? I didn't use one in 2019. In September 2026 the park's own visitor page says visits must use tour operators authorized by SERNANP, the park service, while its January 2026 notice kept direct ticket sales at the control posts on every route except Laguna 69 and Nevado Pisco. Ask the park office in Huaraz before you plan it on your own. See The park.

What does the ticket cost? In 2026, S/60 valid for 2 to 3 days, or S/150 for 4 to 30 days (the general rate for foreign visitors). They'll ask you to pay for a ticket to enter the national park, and if you don't buy it at the start, they'll ask you for it at the end of the trail.

Which way should I walk it? I went from Vaquería to Cashapampa, so my long last day was mostly downhill. The other way starts with a climb of about 5,000 ft from Cashapampa.

Will I see other people? A few. I met a couple of other hikers at the pass. Once you're up in the mountains, you're kind of alone. Not too many people up there, and you definitely have some privacy.

Can I buy food on the trail? Plan on carrying all of it. In 2019 Vaquería had a hostel, a restaurant and supplies, and Cashapampa a hostel and a restaurant; I carried everything in between. I had no stove: snacks, bars and fruit from the market in Yungay.

Is there phone signal? Don't count on it. Download everything before you leave Huaraz, and consider a satellite messenger.



A minibus in Yungay on Day 1, where I caught the ride up to Vaquería.

When to go

The dry season. The park recommends May to October; October to April is the rainy season. Early November, when I went, is the start of the rains.

What I got. I did this hike in early November, and the weather was great. It didn't get too cold at night: I was more than happy wearing my clothes and being in my 45-degree sleeping bag. It did rain a bit and hail a little, especially at night. Afternoon thunder showers are just what it does. The morning of Day 2 was cold in the shade, and hot as soon as I was in the sun, hiking uphill. On Day 3 I woke up at Taullipampa in thick fog.

Cold. Punta Unión is near 15,600 ft and Taullipampa, where I slept the second night, is 13,730 ft. The park gives temperatures of -2 to 15 °C (28 to 59 °F), so nights up there can go below freezing. A 45-degree bag was enough for me in November, but I was sleeping in my clothes. Bring warm layers for the pass and the nights, and rain gear for the afternoons.



Clouds over the peaks from my tent at Taullipampa, the afternoon of Day 2.

The park: tickets and rules

The whole trek is in Huascarán National Park (Parque Nacional Huascarán), run by SERNANP, Peru's national parks service. The park calls this route the Santa Cruz to Huaripampa circuit.

Tickets (2026). For foreign visitors (the general rate): S/30 valid 1 day, S/60 valid 2 to 3 days, S/150 valid 4 to 30 days. Peruvian adults S/12, S/30 and S/75. Children under 5 enter free. A three-day trip like mine needs the 2 to 3 day ticket; four days needs the 4 to 30 day one. Bring cash in soles. The park's site also has an online ticket page; I couldn't check whether it sells this route.

Where you pay. At the trailhead in Vaquería they'll ask you to pay for the ticket, and if you don't buy it there, they'll ask at the end of the trail. The park's control post on this side is at Huaripampa, 3.6 miles into Day 1, where I passed the park sign that evening. SERNANP asks every visitor to register at a control post or at the park office.

Guides and agencies (2026). I walked it alone with no agency in 2019. In September 2026 SERNANP's visitor page for the park says that visits must use tour operators authorized by SERNANP. In January 2026 the park moved Laguna 69 (from February 9) and Nevado Pisco (from April 1) to authorized agencies only, and said that entry to its other routes would continue by direct sale to visitors, at the control posts or the park office. I found no rule that names the Santa Cruz trek either way, and trekking sites still describe people walking it on their own in 2026. Ask at the park office in Huaraz, or email pnhuascaran@sernanp.gob.pe, before you plan it without an operator.

Is it open? In March 2026 the Santa Cruz route through the Huaripampa and Cashapampa valleys was on the list of the park's open routes for 2026. I found no 2026 closure of it. Several peaks and Laguna Parón were restricted that year.

The rules (SERNANP, 2026, and the park sign at Huaripampa):

- Stay on the marked trails.

- Carry out all your rubbish. No single-use plastic.
- Don't cut trees or light open fires.
- Respect the plants, animals and landscape.
- Climbing the peaks needs a certified mountain guide.



The park sign at the Huaripampa control post, Day 1.

Getting there

What I did. I flew from New York to Lima. One thing to know: you may need a confirmed return. Before I could board, the airline asked for that information. I'd booked a one-way to Peru, so right before I got to the check-in desk, I bought a refundable one-way ticket from Lima to somewhere. I arrived in Lima super late and took a taxi to a hostel I'd stayed at before.

I woke up early and headed north to Huaraz, a 7-hour bus ride. I think I paid about $10 for a luxury bus seat that reclines, with hot food, right up in the front. That side of Peru is very desert-like, which is interesting.



Huaraz from the hills above town, the day before I left for the trek.

Huaraz is known as the trekking capital of Peru. I spent a couple of days there getting used to the altitude: food, tea, coffee, a walk on the hills above town, and groceries at the market, where everything is super cheap. Then I took a colectivo, pretty much a bus with a bunch of people smooshed into it, about an hour and a half to Yungay. It was very cheap. Yungay is a very small town, but it had hostels, restaurants and a market for groceries. I stopped at a hostel there because I had an extra bag with clothes, my laptop and things I didn't want on the hike. I tipped them a couple of dollars and they were happy to store it for me.

From the bus terminal in Yungay, two shuttles went up to the trailhead each day. Again very cheap, though I think I paid a little extra because they knew I was a tourist. It was a 2-hour ride, packed, with stuff on my lap from the people next to me, zigzagging up and around tiny mountain roads. A bit scary and a bit chaotic. Eventually I made it to the trailhead at Vaquería. It's very small, but it had a hostel, a restaurant and supplies if you want to buy groceries right there.



Lunch in Yungay before the ride up to Vaquería.

The route today.

1. **Lima to Huaraz.** Cruz del Sur, for one, runs 8 buses a day in 7.5 to 8.5 hours, from S/87 (2026 timetable).
2. **Huaraz to Yungay.** Colectivos up the valley, about an hour and a half.
3. **Yungay to Vaquería.** Minibuses toward Yanama pass Vaquería. They aren't timetabled like the Lima buses; ask in Huaraz or Yungay the day before, and go early. My ride took 2 hours. The road climbs over the Portachuelo de Llanganuco, about 4,770 m (15,640 ft) in OpenStreetMap, before it drops to Vaquería, so you briefly go higher than Punta Unión on the ride in.

Bus companies and fares for the last two legs weren't on any official site I could check; what's above for them is what I did in 2019. If you go with an agency, it will drive you to Vaquería.

Entering Peru. In 2026 the US State Department says your passport must be valid for at least six months from the day you enter. It doesn't mention an onward ticket, but my airline asked for one: check with yours.

Altitude

This is the part to take seriously. Huaraz is at about 10,000 ft (3,050 m). My camps were at 12,070 ft and 13,730 ft, and the pass is near 15,600 ft.

The altitude definitely made me go slower and get out of breath going uphill. You get the altitude headache, you feel dehydrated even if you're not, and you just feel lousy: it's tougher to use your muscles and to get your breath. At least for me. I was struggling a little bit. You do need to acclimatize if you're coming from sea level, which is what I did. I had a couple of days in Huaraz: I was feeling it a little the first evening, but I felt great.

WHERE	HEIGHT (MY GPS)
Huaraz	about 10,000 ft (3,050 m)
Vaquería, the start	12,060 ft (3,676 m)
Huaripampa village, the low point of Day 1	11,178 ft (3,407 m)
My Day 1 camp, above the Huaripampa control post	12,070 ft (3,680 m)
Paria campsite	12,490 ft (3,807 m)
Punta Unión	15,535 ft (4,735 m); usually given as 4,750 m
Taullipampa, my Day 2 camp	13,730 ft (4,185 m)
Llamacorral campsite	12,420 ft (3,786 m)
Cashapampa, the finish	9,630 ft (2,935 m)

The rules of thumb. The US CDC's current guidance (Yellow Book, April 2025): once above 3,000 m (9,850 ft), don't raise your sleeping height by more than 500 m (1,650 ft) a night, and allow an extra night for every 1,000 m (3,300 ft) you gain. From Huaraz to my first camp is about 630 m, a little over that, and from there to Taullipampa about 505 m. That's why two or three nights in Huaraz, with a day hike up high, come before the trek.

Acclimatization hikes. People do Laguna Churup, Laguna Llaca or Laguna 69 from Huaraz. Since February 9, 2026, Laguna 69 can only be visited with an authorized agency.

Going down helps. If you feel really unwell, the best treatment is to go lower. On Day 1 and early Day 2 that means back to Vaquería; after the pass, down the valley toward Cashapampa.



First light in the Huaripampa valley at my Day 1 camp, the next morning.

DAY 1

Vaquería to Huaripampa

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME I TOOK
4.4 mi (7.0 km)	**909 ft** (277 m)	**861 ft** (263 m)	**2.3 hours** (4:42 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.)

HIGH POINT

12,116 ft (3,693 m), just before my camp

LOW POINT

11,178 ft (3,407 m), at Huaripampa village, mile 1.4

ON THE WAY

Collo (mile 0.9), Huaripampa village (mile 1.4), the Huaripampa control post and campsite (mile 3.6)

SLEEP

A campsite 0.8 mi above the control post, 12,070 ft (3,680 m)

FOOD AND WATER

Vaquería had a hostel, a restaurant and supplies in 2019. The valley has streams; treat or filter

My day

It was about 5 p.m. when I started. This was only going to be half a day, so I just had to rush down and get to camp, and hope it wasn't raining the next day. I passed the park's sign for the Huaripampa to Santa Cruz circuit at the control post at a quarter past six, and I was at my camp at 7.

The trail

From Vaquería the path drops off the road and goes down through the hamlet of Collo (mile 0.9) to Huaripampa village (mile 1.4), the lowest point of the day at 3,407 m. From there it turns up the Huaripampa valley, a gentle climb on the valley floor. The park's Huaripampa control post and a campsite are at mile 3.6. I kept going 0.8 mile to another campsite at 3,680 m.

Where to stop. If you start as late as I did, the Huaripampa campsite by the control post is the natural first night. With a whole day, you can go on to Paria, 2.9 miles past my camp. See Other ways to do it.

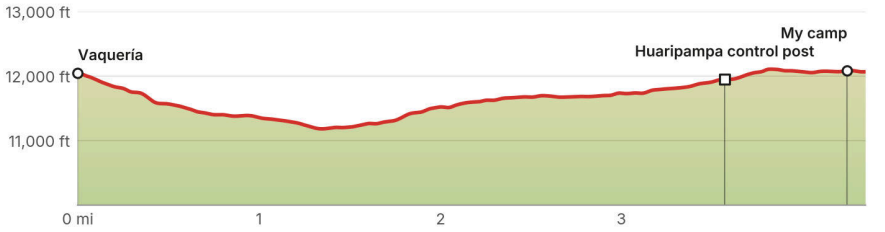
If you need to get off

Walk back down the valley to Huaripampa village and up to the road at Vaquería. The park's control post is on the way, at mile 3.6.

Watch this day

Film, Day 1 · The trailhead and the ticket





Day 1 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.



Taullliraju and the Taullicocha lake, just west of Punta Unión, Day 2.

DAY 2

Contents

Huaripampa over Punta Unión to Taullipampa

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME I TOOK
11.2 mi (18.0 km)	**3,606 ft** (1,099 m)	**1,956 ft** (596 m)	**8.4 hours** (6:35 a.m. to 3:01 p.m.)

HIGH POINT

15,535 ft (4,735 m) on my GPS just past Punta Unión (the notch is at mile 8.1), usually given as 4,750 m

ON THE WAY

Paria campsite (mile 2.9), lakes below the path, Punta Unión (mile 8.1), the Taullicocha lake below the west side of the pass

SLEEP

Taullipampa campsite, 13,730 ft (4,185 m)

FOOD AND WATER

Streams in the valley to about mile 7 on my map; fill up before the last climb to the pass

My day

It was cold in the morning, just because I was in the shade, but I knew it was going to be hot as soon as I was in direct sunlight, hiking uphill. I was going to be sweating. And walking back to get the camera a million times. This is my life.



The Huaripampa valley just after I set off on Day 2.

The altitude made me go slower and get out of breath on the way up. I reached Punta Unión, the highest point of my hike, a little after noon. I was up there with a couple of other hikers, and a cute little dog just showed up. So we hung out, ate snacks and chilled there for a little bit. This is why you come on this hike: you come over the pass and there's a turquoise glacier lake below you, with white snowy mountains all around. By the time I got to Taullipampa at 3 p.m., the clouds had come in over the peaks.

The trail

The path follows the Huaripampa valley north, with the river beside it, past the Paria campsite at mile 2.9 (3,807 m). From about mile 4 it climbs more steadily, past small lakes below the path (Laguna Tucto, Laguna Huiscash and, near the top, Laguna Morococha), and the snow peaks come into view ahead.



Snow peaks ahead, mid-morning on Day 2.

The last mile to Punta Unión is the steepest part of the day, about 900 ft of climbing over rock slabs to a notch in the ridge at mile 8.1. My GPS read 4,720 m at the notch and 4,735 m at its highest; the usual figure is 4,750 m (15,580 ft). On the west side the Taullicocha lake sits just north of the path, under Taulliraju. From the pass it's about 3 miles and 1,750 ft down to the grassy valley floor at Taullipampa (mile 11.2) and its campsite.



High grassland on the climb to Punta Unión, Day 2.



The Taullicocha lake from above, just west of Punta Unión, Day 2.



The valley below Punta Unión, near the top of the climb on Day 2.

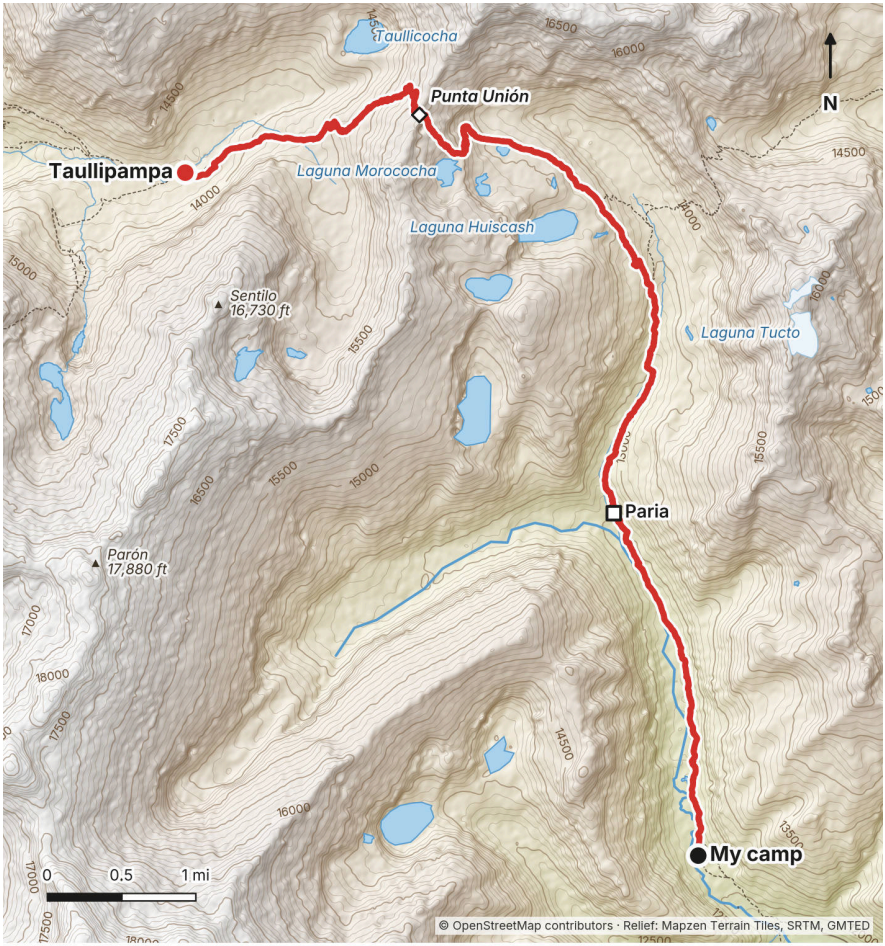
Start early. Clouds and afternoon showers come in over the pass. I left at 6:35 and was over it by early afternoon.

If you need to get off

Before the pass, go back down the Huaripampa valley to the control post and Vaquería. After the pass, keep going down: Taullipampa, then the Santa Cruz valley to Cashapampa. If you feel really unwell with the altitude, go down, whichever side is closer.

Watch this day

Film, Day 2 · The pass and the dog





Day 2 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.



The Santa Cruz gorge above Cashapampa, near the end of Day 3.

DAY 3

Contents

Taullipampa to Cashapampa

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME I TOOK
15.5 mi (24.9 km)	**990 ft** (302 m)	**5,057 ft** (1,541 m)	**8.0 hours** (6:31 a.m. to 2:29 p.m.)

HIGH POINT

13,737 ft (4,187 m), at Taullipampa

LOW POINT

9,629 ft (2,935 m), at Cashapampa

ON THE WAY

Laguna Jatuncocha (mile 4.9), Laguna Ichiccocha (mile 6.6), Llamacorral campsite (mile 8.6), the park sign above Cashapampa (mile 15.1)

SLEEP

Huaraz, by taxi and colectivo

FOOD AND WATER

The river and streams all the way down; treat or filter. Cashapampa had a restaurant in 2019

My day

I woke up to thick fog at Taullipampa, with horses grazing near camp. I made it all the way to the end on this day. It was a long 15-mile stretch, but mostly downhill. At Llamacorral there were dogs to say hi to.



Horses in the fog at Taullipampa, the morning of Day 3.

At the end of the trail there was a campsite, a hostel, a restaurant and taxis waiting. I had a cold Coke, hopped in a taxi and went back to Yungay for my bag.



A dog at the Llamacorral campsite, Day 3.

The trail

From Taullipampa the path heads west down the Santa Cruz valley. The valley floor is long and gently downhill: past Laguna Jatuncocha (mile 4.9) and Laguna Ichiccocha (mile 6.6), the two big lakes in the valley, and on to the Llamacorral campsite at mile 8.6 (3,786 m). Big rock walls stand on both sides.



The rock walls of the Santa Cruz valley, Day 3.

Below Llamacorral the valley narrows into a gorge, and the path drops steadily beside the river: about 850 m (2,790 ft) in the last 6.9 miles, the steepest part in the last 2 miles. The park sign at mile 15.1 is just above Cashapampa, where the road starts.

The Alpamayo viewpoint. OpenStreetMap shows the Mirador Alpamayo about 600 m off the path near mile 1.7, and the Arhuaycocha lake and Alpamayo base camp up a side valley to the north. I didn't go.

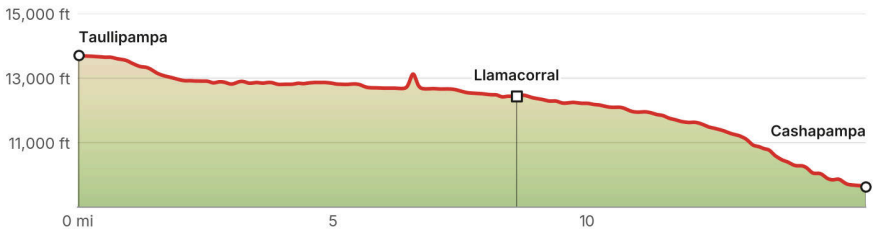
If you need to get off

Keep going down: Cashapampa and the road are the way out. Llamacorral is the last big campsite if you need to stop.

Watch this day

Film, Day 3 · The dogs





Day 3 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Getting home

What I did. At Cashapampa there were taxis waiting. I hopped in one and made the hour-and-15-minute drive back to Yungay, grabbed my bag, and made it back to Huaraz that evening. So, a lot of bus riding on this trip. Two days later I took the bus back to Lima.



The road down from Cashapampa, after the trek.

The way back today. From Cashapampa, cars and colectivos go down to Caraz, and colectivos run from Caraz up the valley through Yungay to Huaraz. None of this is timetabled on an official site; ask at Cashapampa. Leave a spare day before your bus to Lima: Cruz del Sur, for one, runs Huaraz to Lima from 11 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. (2026).

Other ways to do it

I walked the three days in this guide. These are other ways to use it, and I didn't do them.

Four days

The park calls it 3 to 4 days, and four is the easier way to do it. Using the campsites on my line (distances from my GPS):

1. Vaquería to Paria (7.2 mi). Sleep at 12,490 ft (3,807 m)
2. Paria over Punta Unión to Taullipampa (8.3 mi, about 3,000 ft up). Sleep at 13,730 ft
3. Taullipampa to Llamacorral (8.6 mi, mostly downhill). Time for the Alpamayo viewpoint on the way. Sleep at 12,420 ft
4. Llamacorral to Cashapampa (6.9 mi, about 2,790 ft down), and the ride to Huaraz

Paria is about 760 m above Huaraz, more than the CDC's 500 m a night, so the days in Huaraz before it matter.

The other way

You can start at Cashapampa and finish at Vaquería. Then my Day 3 becomes a long climb, about 1,540 m (5,060 ft) from Cashapampa to Taullipampa, and the pass comes on Day 3 or 4. Ask how you'll get a ride out of Vaquería before you set off: it's a small place on a quiet road.

With an agency

Many people do it with a Huaraz agency: transport to Vaquería and back from Cashapampa, a guide, a cook, and donkeys or mules for the gear. If the park's operator rule applies to you, it's the way to go. See The park.

Campsites, food and water

Where I slept

NIGHT	WHERE
Nov 10 and 11	Huaraz
Nov 12	My tent at a campsite 0.8 mi above the Huaripampa control post, 12,070 ft (3,680 m)
Nov 13	My tent at Taullipampa, 13,730 ft (4,185 m)
Nov 14 and 15	Huaraz

Campsites on the route

From OpenStreetMap, each within 20 m of my track. Heights are from my GPS.

CAMPSITE	DAY, MILE	HEIGHT
Huaripampa (by the control post)	Day 1, 3.6	11,950 ft (3,643 m)
The one I used	Day 1, 4.4	12,070 ft (3,680 m)
Paria	Day 2, 2.9	12,490 ft (3,807 m)
Taullipampa	Day 2, 11.2	13,730 ft (4,185 m)
Llamacorral	Day 3, 8.6	12,420 ft (3,786 m)
Cashapampa (village)	Day 3, 15.5	9,630 ft (2,935 m)

OpenStreetMap also shows smaller campsites between these. The park doesn't publish a list of campsites or their fees, so what's there can change.

Water

The trail follows a river or stream almost all the way, except the last climb to the pass and the first mile down from it. I carried a bottle and a water filter. There are villages, cattle and horses in the valleys: filter or treat everything.

Food

Carry all your food from Huaraz or Yungay. I didn't bring a stove, to save space. It would have been nice to have hot tea and coffee, but it was a quick hike, and I was fine with snacks and cold food: Epic bars, snacks, and a couple of bananas, oranges and apples from the market right before the trailhead. The park doesn't allow open fires.



A cold drink at Cashapampa, the end of Day 3.

What I paid

My records for this trip are what I said in the film. I have no receipts.

ITEM	WHAT I PAID IN 2019
Bus, Lima to Huaraz (about 7 hours)	About $10
Colectivo, Huaraz to Yungay	Very cheap; the amount isn't in my records
Bag storage at a hostel in Yungay	A tip of a couple of dollars
Shuttle, Yungay to Vaquería (2 hours)	Very cheap, a little more for a tourist
Park ticket	In the film I remembered it as "65 US"; the park's prices are in soles
Taxi, Cashapampa to Yungay (1 hour 15 minutes)	Not in my records
Food	Groceries in Huaraz and fruit in Yungay; super cheap

For your budget (2026). The park ticket: S/60 for 2 to 3 days, S/150 for 4 to 30 days. Lima to Huaraz by bus from S/87 (Cruz del Sur). Colectivos, taxis and campsites are cash in soles; I couldn't check 2026 prices for them on any official site. An agency trip costs more and includes transport, food and pack animals.

Gear for this route

What this trek needs

- Warm layers, a hat and gloves for the pass and the nights above 12,000 ft
- Rain gear: afternoon showers and hail are normal, even in the dry season
- Sun protection: the sun is strong at this height
- A filter or tablets for the streams
- Food for every day on the trail (and a stove if you want hot meals)
- Cash in soles in small notes, for the ticket and transport
- Offline maps with the GPX files, a headlamp, and a way to call for help

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I carried everything myself, with no mule, in November 2019. Here's my kit from the film's gear list, what I'd take now, and what I filmed with. I left an extra bag with clothes and my laptop at a hostel in Yungay.

What I carried in 2019

From my film's original gear list.

- **Pack:** Hyperlite Mountain Gear Southwest (Hyperlite)
- **Tent:** ALPS Mountaineering Lynx 1 tent (Amazon)
- **Sleeping bag:** NEMO Siren 45 sleeping bag (Amazon). A 45-degree bag, with a liner.
- **Liner:** Outdoor Vitals Sleeping Bag Liner (Amazon)
- **Sleeping pad:** OutdoorsmanLab Ultralight Sleeping Pad (Amazon)
- **Pillow:** Klymit Pillow X (Amazon)
- **Water:** Platypus Platy 2L bottle (Amazon)
- **Filter:** Sawyer Squeeze filter (Amazon). There are villages, cattle and horses in the valleys: filter or treat everything.
- **Headlamp:** SLONIK rechargeable headlamp (Amazon). I set up my tent in the dark on Day 1.

- **Hat:** ZOWYA running cap (Amazon)
- **Sunglasses:** Warby Parker Barkley sunglasses. Similar: Goodr OG Sunglasses (Amazon).
- **Sweater:** Amazon Essentials crewneck fleece sweatshirt (Amazon)
- **Shirt:** Amazon Essentials Quick-Dry Tech Hoodie (Amazon)
- **Gloves:** Unigear Touchscreen Liner Gloves (Amazon)
- **Pants:** Columbia Silver Ridge Convertible Pants (Amazon)
- **Socks:** DG Hill merino wool hiking socks (Amazon)
- **Shoes:** Brooks Cascadia 13 (Amazon), now the Cascadia 20
- **Food:** no stove: bars, snacks and fruit. From the market in Yungay.

What I'd take now

What I'd add for this trek from my current kit.

- **Rain shell:** Arc'teryx Beta AR Jacket (Arc'teryx). Afternoon showers and hail are normal, even in the dry season.
- **Puffy:** Arc'teryx Cerium Hoody (Arc'teryx). For the pass and the nights above 12,000 ft.
- **Beanie:** PATH Projects Hoyt Merino Beanie (PATH Projects). Cold mornings in the shade.
- **Sun hoodie:** PATH Projects Pyrenees T19 Hoodie (PATH Projects). The sun is strong at this height.
- **Stove:** Jetboil Stash (Amazon). If you want hot meals. I went without.
- **Poles:** Black Diamond Alpine Carbon Z Poles (Amazon). For the climb to Punta Unión: 3,606 ft up on Day 2.
- **Navigation:** AllTrails+ (AllTrails, 30% off). Load my GPX files and download offline maps before you leave Huaraz. Offline maps need the paid plan.
- **Phone data:** Airalo eSIM (Airalo, $3 off). Data in Lima, Huaraz and Yungay. Don't count on a signal on the trail.

Filming kit

What I filmed this trip with in 2019. My setup is much smaller now (below). If you want to fly a drone, ask the park office first: see Before you go, check these.

- **Camera:** Sony A7 III (Amazon). Most of my hiking video was shot on it.
- **Lens:** Sony FE 16-35mm f/2.8 GM (Amazon). The 16-35mm wide-angle.
- **Mic:** Rode VideoMic Pro+ (Amazon). On top of the camera for audio.
- **Tripod:** Peak Design Carbon Fiber Travel Tripod. I slung it on my hip. Similar: SmallRig Carbon Fiber Tripod (Amazon).
- **Wrist strap:** Peak Design Cuff Wrist Strap (Amazon)
- **Batteries:** five Sony NP-FZ100 batteries. Instead of a USB power bank I bought two extra and had five in all. I didn't even use them all, and I shot star time-lapses overnight, which can use a whole battery in a night. I liked not having to charge anything.
- **Drone:** DJI Mavic 2 Pro. Similar: DJI Mini 5 Pro (Amazon).

What I film with now

Since September 2026 I film with a smaller setup: the Pocket 4 and the Mic 3 on the trail, and the Mini 5 Pro in the air.

- **Camera:** DJI Osmo Pocket 4 (Amazon)
- **Mic:** DJI Mic 3 · 1 TX + 1 RX (Amazon). It pairs with the Pocket 4.
- **Drone:** DJI Mini 5 Pro (Amazon)
- **Tripod:** SmallRig Carbon Fiber Tripod (Amazon)

Weather and safety

Emergency numbers (2026). Police 105, fire service 116, SAMU ambulance 106 (listed for Ancash). Mountain rescue (police), from the park's visitor page: 966 831 206 or 984 382 234. The Casa de Guías in Huaraz (the mountain guides' association): 043-427545 or 043-421811. Don't count on phone signal on the trail; a satellite messenger is the real backup.

Rescue. In September 2026 a trekker with hypothermia in the nearby Huayhuash range was carried out overland to Huaraz by Socorro Andino Peruano and the police high-mountain unit, after a helicopter couldn't land in cloud and wind. That month rescuers were also searching Huayhuash for a hiker who had set off alone. Plan to walk out, and get travel insurance that covers trekking at this height, rescue and medical evacuation: the US State Department says first responders can't reach areas outside the big cities.

Leave a plan with someone at home and at your hostel in Huaraz, with your dates.

The US advisory (2026). The US State Department rates Peru Level 2 (exercise increased caution). Its Level 4 areas are far from the Cordillera Blanca. It warns that demonstrations can shut roads without warning, which is one more reason for a spare day.

Where to be careful:

- Altitude: go slow, drink, and turn around or go down if you feel really unwell (see Altitude)
- The pass: cold, wind, afternoon storms and sometimes snow; cross it early
- The rock slabs below the pass: slippery when wet or icy
- Pack animals on the trail: step to the uphill side and let them pass
- The gorge below Llamacorral: steep and rocky, on tired legs

Going solo. I hiked alone and saw only a few people. If you go alone, leave a plan, carry a way to call for help, and don't cross the pass in bad weather.

Using the GPX files

My own GPS recordings from November 12 to 14, 2019, with all timestamps removed.

FILE	WHAT IT IS
santa-cruz-trek-day-1.gpx	Day 1: Vaquería to Huaripampa
santa-cruz-trek-day-2.gpx	Day 2: Huaripampa over Punta Unión to Taullipampa
santa-cruz-trek-day-3.gpx	Day 3: Taullipampa to Cashapampa
santa-cruz-trek-full-route.gpx	All three days, with waypoints for the start and finish, the control post, the campsites and the pass

AllTrails. On a computer, sign in at alltrails.com, create a new map and use Import. It then shows up in the app on your phone. Offline maps need a paid plan.

Gaia GPS. Open the file from Files, email or AirDrop and choose Gaia GPS, or use Import on gaiagps.com. Download the map area offline.

Garmin. In Garmin Connect on the web, go to Training, Courses, Import. Save it as a course and send it to your watch.

Organic Maps (free). Download the offline map for Peru, then open the GPX file and choose Organic Maps. It works fully offline.

Before you leave, download offline maps for the whole area, turn on airplane mode, and check that each day and your location show up.

Before you go, check these

These change every year. Everything else in this guide stays the same.

The park

- Whether you can walk it without an authorized operator: ask the park office in Huaraz or email pnhuascaran@sernanp.gob.pe
- The ticket price and where it's sold (in 2026: S/60 for 2 to 3 days, S/150 for 4 to 30 days)
- That the Santa Cruz route is open, and any new rules
- If you want to fly a drone: ask the park office first (its visitor page doesn't say)

Getting there

- Colectivos from Huaraz to Yungay and minibuses from Yungay to Vaquería: ask the day before
- A ride back from Cashapampa, and a spare day before your bus to Lima
- Whether your airline wants an onward ticket, and a passport valid six months

Conditions and your stuff

- The forecast for the pass, and whether the rains have started
- Days in Huaraz to acclimatize
- Cash in soles, food for every day, a filter, warm and rain layers
- Offline maps and GPX files on your phone

One-page trip sheet

DAY	MI (KM)	FROM, TO	SLEEP	NOTES
0		Huaraz, colectivo to Yungay, minibus to Vaquería	Huaraz	2 or 3 nights in Huaraz first
1	4.4 (7.0)	Vaquería to above the Huaripampa control post	12,070 ft	Ticket at Vaquería or the control post
2	11.2 (18.0)	Over Punta Unión to Taullipampa	13,730 ft	Pass at mile 8.1, near 15,600 ft. Start early
3	15.5 (24.9)	Taullipampa to Cashapampa	Huaraz	Jatuncocha, Llamacorral, the gorge. Taxi out
Total	**31.0 (49.9)**			**About 5,500 ft up, 7,870 ft down**

Four-day plan: Paria, Taullipampa, Llamacorral, then out to Cashapampa.

Campsites: Huaripampa · Paria · Taullipampa · Llamacorral · Cashapampa

Ticket (2026): S/60 for 2 to 3 days, S/150 for 4 to 30 days. Register at a control post.

Rules: stay on the trail · carry out all rubbish · no open fires · climbing needs a certified guide

Emergency: police 105 · fire 116 · SAMU 106 · mountain rescue 966 831 206

About this guide

Santa Cruz Trek Hiking Guide: 3 days alone over Punta Unión in Peru's Cordillera Blanca, by Kraig Adams. 2027 season edition, updated September 2026.

I hiked the Santa Cruz Trek alone from November 12 to 14, 2019, and made a film about it: Hiking 30 miles on the Santa Cruz Trek in Peru. Everything in first person comes from that trip, the film and its original description, my GPS recordings and my photos. Park, ticket, transport and safety facts were checked in September 2026, and anything that changes yearly is dated.

Updates and contact. If something has changed, or you spot a mistake, email me at kraig@kraigadams.com.

Paid links, no sponsors. The gear links in this guide are paid links: I earn a commission if you buy through them, at no extra cost to you. Nobody paid for a mention in this guide, and it isn't sponsored.

Safety. The Santa Cruz Trek has real risks: altitude, cold, storms on the pass, rivers, and no road or reliable signal far from help. This guide describes my trip and what I found, not current conditions. Trails, rules, prices and timetables change. Check with the park and the weather, and turn back when conditions aren't right. You're responsible for your own safety.

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