

PREMIERE ISSUE

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YOUR GUIDE TO HEAVEN ON EARTH

LONDON

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ON THE
AMAZON

10
AMAZING
OUTDOOR
ADVENTURES



SUMMER'S SEXIEST ESCAPE

MALLORCA



Aqua Expeditions' M/V Aria keeps guests close to the river with suites on the first and second decks

ANCIENT AMAZON

PERU BY RIVERBOAT BRINGS A NEW
PERSPECTIVE TO THIS MAGICAL
SOUTH AMERICAN DESTINATION.

By Gail Harrington





Clockwise from top: M/V Aria's suites put a premium on comfort and great views; the enclosed lounge and bar; observation walkways; the upper deck features a hot tub and outdoor bar/lounge under a canopy at the front of the ship.



Silence on the Amazon never lasts. Those moments of quiet are just a pause as you wait for the next welcome intrusion, such as the black-headed parrot in flight projecting its smoke-alarm call, the deep-throated whistle of an undulated tinamou, the splash of a black caiman (the Amazon's largest predator) plunging off the riverbank, the thundering roar of the male howler monkeys (loudest animal on earth), or, if you're very lucky, the nocturnal roar of a black jaguar.

But, on Aqua Expeditions' newest riverboat, the 32-passenger M/V Aria, there's a blissful tranquility that's never broken. The 147-foot boat has the intimate feel of a private yacht with a staff of 24. An air-conditioned upper deck's glassed-in observation lounge mixes planked Brazilian Jatoba hardwood flooring and ceiling with cream-colored linen sofas, a bar at one end and a library on the other. Sixteen temperature-controlled guest suites feature a king-size bed (or two twins), a couch and swiveling captain chairs, rain showers and a floor-to-ceiling glass wall to take in every stretch of the Amazon River laid out in front of you.

Who needs privacy on the Amazon? I left my curtains wide open and, from the comfort of my white down comforter, felt as though I was part of the rainforest I looked out upon. On the other side of the window, every morning was a new scene: Aria anchored close to the lush river's edge, sunrise about to

announce a new day, and minutes ticking until the change of shift for Amazonian wildlife. Soon we'd board low-emission motorized skiffs for the day's first excursion, guided by tuned-in naturalists who spot the things we'd all miss, recognize birds and animals by sounds, and explain their unique behaviors.

On these wildlife outings and village visits, I couldn't help but think about my first sight of this wondrous river—an aerial view of Amazon River offshoots looping through rainforest so thick it seemed to lead to another time and place. With that short glimpse I grasped the magnificent scope of the world's largest rainforest and second-longest river (only 50-some miles shorter than the Nile), made up of nine main tributaries and hundreds of smaller ones, winding east toward the Atlantic.

"Monkey followers, monkey followers...have a look," yelled one of our guides, Ricardo. "As they fly through the trees, monkeys stir up insects the birds like to eat, and the birds alert the monkeys to the presence of predators, like anacondas and boa constrictors." After explaining this co-dependent relationship in the wild, our exuberant guide excitedly pointed out what looked like a mass of vegetation on a tall, narrow-trunked *Cecropia* tree, which was actually a three-toed sloth—the slowest creature on the planet. Without Ricardo, we'd have missed the sloth for the same reason its primary predator—the harpy eagle—might fly right by: Sloths spend so much time sleeping in trees that their fur collects algae, providing camouflage.

Back on Aria, we're greeted with cold washcloths and refreshing tall glasses of juice from the *Camu camu*, an antioxidant-rich Amazonian berry that contains more vitamin C than

AQUA EXPEDITIONS

Aqua Expeditions reaches out to 14 communities and supports several preservation initiatives in the Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve. Choose from seven-, four- and three-night cruises on the M/V Aria and the smaller M/V Aqua, with pick up in Iquitos (a one-hour-and-25-minute flight from Lima).

COURTESY OF AQUA EXPEDITIONS



"I STOOD IN AWE AT THE WALLED SUN GATE ENTRANCE, A TRAPEZOIDAL OPENING THAT PERFECTLY FRAMED MY FIRST SIGHT OF MACHU PICCHU."

any fruit in the world. Chef Pedro Miguel Schiaffino (whose Malabar restaurant is one of Lima's best) was busy preparing lunch culled from local Amazonian ingredients: grilled *paiche*, a firm, white-meat fish that can grow up to 500 pounds; spicy river snails cooked in the shell; and jungle pasta, actually hearts of palm cut into fettuccine-like strips. Most of the dishes are flavored with *sofrito*, which is onions, garlic, *sacha culantro*, tumeric and *achiote*, cooked slowly.

While catching a glimpse of that elusive jaguar wasn't to be, I hooked the largest piranha of the week, paddled a dugout canoe without capsizing, marveled at giant water lilies the size of tractor tires, and watched pink dolphins play near the birthplace of the Amazon, where the Ucayali and Marañon rivers meet.

Soon enough I was off to explore some man-made wonders, the beautiful crafts, Spanish Colonial architecture and Incan ruins around Cusco and the Sacred Valley, and then a trip to Peru's most famous spectacle, Machu Picchu. Ancient capital of the Incan Empire, Cusco is the starting place for appreciating the engineering genius of this short-lived civilization that thrived for fewer than 100 years when Francisco Pizarro and his army showed up, conquered the city and built their own town on top of Incan foundations. In the heart of Cusco, you'll see how the Spaniards repurposed smooth stones precision-cut by the Incas, as well as wooden beams and surviving walls into their mansions and public buildings, such as Santo Domingo church, built over the remains of the emperor's Sun Palace. Imposing Incan walls of irregular-shaped stones, including one with 14 angles, still line cobbled Hatunrumiyoc Street, the path uphill to the artsy San Blas district. Not to be missed are the impressive ruins just outside Cusco—Tambomachay with waterfalls and canals still running through its terraced walls, the fortress Puka Pukara and the stunning zig-zagging walls of Sacsayhuamán.

While anticipation of Machu Picchu can be overwhelming, make sure to linger a few days in the Sacred Valley, an area that's great for kayaking, river rafting, fishing and mountain biking, as well as plan for visits to the ruins and artisanal markets in the villages of Pisac and Chinchero.

While staying in peaceful Urubamba beneath snowcapped Andean peaks, I explored, (without another soul in sight), the concentric terraces of Moray, a clever



agricultural laboratory where the Incas experimented with growing crops at different elevations. I also hiked along the Incan-built Moray salt terraces, glistening crystallized pools fed by salty hot springs and still harvesting salt today. After the three-hour train ride from Urubamba to Machu Picchu town and a 20-minute bus ride up a dirt road of switchbacks, I stood in awe at the walled Sun Gate entrance, a trapezoidal opening that perfectly framed my first sight of Machu Picchu. The steep mountain peak of Huayna Picchu was the backdrop for a mysterious complex of dwellings, temples, palaces and storehouses, all well preserved but without their original thatched roofs, more than 100 different stone stairways, ingenious irrigation canals and llamas grazing on the grassy central plaza and terraces.

The Incas didn't need engineering degrees to build those earthquake-proof, multi-story buildings out of tight-fitting stone blocks held together without mortar in a remote spot between two steep mountains. How did they do it? Some of their architectural secrets are visible, such as trapezoidal doorways and windows, walls fatter at the base and leaning inward a few degrees, and agricultural terraces that provide stability for the aqueducts still bringing water to Machu Picchu. That the Incas accomplished this without modern tools and did it in a remote spot between two very steep mountains with cliffs on both sides boggles the mind.

What a blessing the Spaniards never found Machu Picchu, that it's still a place promising inspiration and peace. With my legs dangling over the edge of a terrace, I watched the heavy morning mist lift from the ruins, marveled at Incan ingenuity, and did some creative wondering of my own.

[To book your Amazon adventure, contact your travel agent today.]

CHECKING IN

CUSCO AND THE SACRED VALLEY

HOTELS

A restored 17th-century mansion built over an Incan settlement, **Casa Cartagena Hotel** charms the fashion/design crowd with contemporary Italian furnishings, preserved Colonial frescoes, walls of Incan stone and a location in Cusco's artsy San Blas district. Cozy up by the fire in the lobby bar, soothe tired muscles in the spa, and dine in the same space where Pablo Neruda famously wrote his poetry.

Like many colonial buildings in Cusco, the 16th-century manor house now known as **Inkaterra La Casona** combines an Incan layout with Spanish style. Carved wooden doors, rustic beams, Baroque and Renaissance balconies, and restored frescoes are matched by carbon-neutral practices and comforts those conquistadors would have envied: heated floors, wood-burning fireplaces and Roman tubs, plus a kitchen team that's happy to cook off the menu. Step outside onto cobbled Plaza Nazarenas and visit the Museum of Pre-Columbian Art, right next door.

Tambo del Inka Resort & Spa does everything bigger, from its cavernous lobby and massive open fireplace to grand Andean views, plus something no other hotel can claim—an on-site train station for getting guests to Machu Picchu. A LEED-certified temple of style in rich woods, glass and impressive stonework, Tambo makes sure guests are always sitting pretty, whether sipping pisco sours in the Kiri Bar or swimming laps in the indoor/outdoor pool. After visiting Machu Picchu, return to Tambo's spa for a massage and quinoa facial.

Hidden in the cloud forest on 12 acres at the base of Machu Picchu Mountain, **Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel** puts nature lovers in the heart of paradise with cushy casitas facing an orchid garden or the rushing Urubamba/Vilcanota River. Explore three miles of ecological paths through a lush habitat boasting 372 species of orchids, including the world's largest, plus 111 types of butterflies. Take a guided walk with a biologist in search of rare bird sightings, visit Inkaterra's tea plantation and save time for the spa.



Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel's Uno Spa blends a mix of traditional and Andean remedies; a view from one of the property's nature paths.

MAKE SURE TO LINGER A FEW DAYS IN THE SACRED VALLEY, AN AREA THAT'S GREAT FOR KAYAKING, RIVER RAFTING, FISHING AND MOUNTAIN BIKING.



COURTESY OF INKATERRA