



HOTEL OF THE MONTH

INKATERRA LA CASONA

Luxury, warmth and history. In Peru, Cusco's most charming hotel is full of surprises, says MALA BARUA



HIGH LIFE

Clockwise from top left: A Cusco local; the Machu Picchu ruins, outside Cusco; La Casona and its interiors



The Inkaterra La Casona, an 11-suite luxury boutique hotel, is a manor that was one of the first Spanish constructions in Cusco, Peru.

Located on a former Inca settlement, it has been home to a series of illustrious characters, including Don Diego de Almagro (the Spanish conquistador said to be the first European to discover Chile), Juan Alvarez de Maldonado (who conquered the Amazon jungle) and Peru's national hero, Simón Bolívar. The distinguished past has clearly seeped into the walls, because in its avatar as a hotel—charmingly restored to pay homage to its Spanish colonial and Inca past—the place makes history come alive. Here are just some of its many unexpected wonders.

- The hotel is so discreet that it has neither a sign outside nor a bell. New visi-

tors usually grab the large iron ring and knock, hoping that's the right way to do it. It is!

- Cusco is 11,200ft above sea level, and many guests have trouble acclimatising. Fortunately, the hotel has heated wooden floors so you can walk around barefoot, hot herbal-and-rose-petal baths, and coca tea available around the clock.

- The food is not just local—it's a lesson in geography and diversity. There are several types of potato (Peru grows about 4,000 varieties), fresh pink trout fished from the nearby River Urubamba, and corn that comes in yellow, black, brown and even purple.

- The spa is small, but packs a punch. Only the local coca plant is used for the Inca purification treatment (a lymphatic drainage massage with coca oil and cream, a 20-minute body mask of coca leaf, and a coca cream massage after the

shower). Andeans attribute almost mystical qualities to the plant. Its leaves are a natural stimulant, help detoxify the body and improve circulation.

- The suites are a delightful blend of the ancient and the modern. While there are iPod docks in all the rooms, the lovely frieze in the main suite is part of a painting that's almost 400 years old.

- It isn't just the old manor that has housed the famous—the hotel has had Mick Jagger and Richard Gere check in.

Still looking for more? Ask your butler. Each room comes with its own. ■

Inkaterra.com; Mysticasia.com