



## Travel articles

### Stylebible's Pick of Peru

*"Peru is a traveller's dream; a country of contrasts, it combines arid desert, lush jungle, snow-capped Andes and ancient archaeological ruins. A country with this much versatility most certainly deserves a visit. So with this in mind, here is Stylebible's pick of some of the best hotels that Peru has to offer"*

by Annabel Zammit

#### Cusco

Cusco could very possibly qualify as the prettiest city in Peru and situated in the heart of the old quarter is a beautiful white-washed 16th century mansion, home to Inkaterra's La Casona; a luxury boutique hotel which should most definitely qualify as the prettiest hotel in Cuzco. To say that La Casona oozes charm and luxury is an understatement. All of the 11 rooms, which are set around the magnificently manicured courtyard are opulent suites that feature state-of-the-art 21st century mod-cons such as underfloor heating, surround sound entertainment system, wireless internet (and laptop if you haven't brought your own). And while the owners of this exclusive retreat have thought of everything in terms of modern technology they have also struck the right balance of old versus new; perfectly integrating contemporary amenities with traditional colors, Andean soft furnishings and antiques.



Stylebible had the pleasure of staying in a patio suite, which featured an over-sized bed, dining area with hallway leading through to a grand marble bathroom with a divine freestanding bath as its focal point. In short the kind of room that you never want to leave. La Casona (The House) has been open for a year and the aim was to create a private, relaxed and understated atmosphere that felt like home, albeit, an 'in your dreams' one. La Casona achieves this by having no hotel signs outside the building and no generic reception, just a charming host to meet you at the front door. The restaurant, which serves fresh, locally produced food is known simply as the dining room, further sealing the intimate nature of this boutique retreat. If you would rather enjoy a romantic meal in the privacy of your suite, the staff will happily serve you the a la carte menu at your dining table in your room instead. The staff at La Casona can also arrange private spa treatments for guests to enjoy in the comfort of their suite. So, you see, you really don't have to leave the room if you wish.

Stays at Inkaterra La Casona start from US\$720 per suite per night (based on two sharing) staying in a Patio Suite on a bed & breakfast basis. It is a 100% carbon neutral stay. To book, contact Inkaterra direct on freephone 0800 458 7506 or online [www.inkaterra.com](http://www.inkaterra.com)

#### The Sacred Valley

The Sacred Valley is a vital stop on any trip to Peru. This picturesque valley in the Andes has some spectacular attractions, such as the Maras Salt Pans and the terraces of Moray as well as many un-missable Inca ruins.

Set in a secluded location between the towns of Urubamba and Ollantaytambo is the Casa Andina Private Collection - Ville Sagrado. This 85 room mountain-chalet style-retreat, set within eight acres of land, is the perfect oasis in which to relax. The hotel rooms are large, ultra-comfortable and all have either a private balcony or a sunny sitting area so that guests can fully benefit from the panoramic Andes views.

Stylebible stayed in a first-floor room which had a vaulted ceiling with wood beams, elegant rustic decor and inviting balcony. The hotel's restaurant, Alma - Cochina Viva is well worth a visit. The floor-to-ceiling windows draw in light and showcase the amazing mountain range and all the ingredients are harvested from the Sacred Valley. If you ask in advance the kitchen will prepare "pachamanca", an Andean country speciality in which meats, potatoes and other vegetables are buried and roasted in a rustic, underground "oven" in the hotel's garden and slow-cooked for hours, a must try Andean dish.

The hotel is also home to a planetarium and an observatory where guests have the unique opportunity to learn about the solar system during one of the three nightly shows from the Astronomy-trained guides. We spent hours stargazing in this amazing setting - trust us, the stars viewed from here are like nothing you've ever seen before!

Also located on the grounds is the Sacred Spa, an extremely popular retreat with stone floors, bamboo walls & waterfalls. Its main feature is a heavenly, candlelit natural stone hot tub and jacuzzi area. The treatments available at this intimate spa focus on Andean therapies including a Quinoa Facial and a Añallaw massage (an Andean energy massage using hot semi-precious stones). Try this energising hour-long massage and you'll be set for any of the walking trails on offer in this magnificent area.

The starting rate at the Casa Andina Private Collection - Valle Sagrado is \$185 (including 10% service and buffet breakfast) [www.casa-andina.com](http://www.casa-andina.com)

## **Machu Picchu**

To walk through the Sun Gate at Machu Picchu and see the Inca Ruins for the first time is a breathtaking experience. Walking around this world-renowned archaeological site will leave you awestruck. If you want to make this trip of a lifetime even more special then a stay at the Sumaq Machu Picchu is a must. This 5-star hotel is situated in an impressive location at the base of Machu Picchu Mountain in the town of Aguas Calientes. In the native language Quechua, Sumaq means, 'pleasant, lovely' and this hotel more than surpasses its translation. The 60-room luxury hotel is elegantly designed in keeping with the Andean culture; local artwork adorns the walls and alpaca blankets cover the beds.

At the Sumaq gastronomy is of paramount importance. The Unuq restaurant can be found on the second floor of the hotel with spectacular views overlooking the Urubamba River. This relaxed and friendly restaurant is the perfect place to while away a few hours enjoying the most divine food one could wish for. The aim of prestigious Peruvian chef, Rafael Piqueras was to fuse local flavours of traditional Andean and Peruvian cuisine with techniques used in international haute cuisine and let Stylebible be the one to tell you, boy does it work. We started with the alpaca carpaccio, a Peruvian staple meat that was simply divine. For main course, the traditional dish, lomo saltado (beef tenderloin sautéed with onions, tomatoes and chili) was also cooked to perfection. It is imperative, however, to leave enough room for dessert as you simply won't want to miss the delicious Brazil nut praline.

The hotel lays on several activities for their guests including trips to the surrounding mountains, bird watching, cocktail making and cookery lessons. We tried our hand at concocting the Peruvian pre-dinner drink, the Pisco Sour and we also donned chef whites and became sous-chef, helping create the mouth-watering local speciality, Trout Ceviche. This makes for a great evening and is a lovely way to wind down after a day's trekking. You also get to eat and drink your creations! Of course if total relaxation is what you're after then head to the Sumaq's Aqlla Spa where the inviting sauna, Jacuzzi and a long list of Andean therapies awaits, bliss!

Sumaq Machu Picchu ([www.sumaqhotelperu.com](http://www.sumaqhotelperu.com)) starts from \$450 USD per room per night (sleeps two) and have some great offers here: [www.sumaqhotelperu.com/sumaq-offers/promotion4d-2n.html](http://www.sumaqhotelperu.com/sumaq-offers/promotion4d-2n.html)

## **Arequipa**

High on the list of must-see destinations in Peru is the beautiful city of Arequipa. The city is situated in the South of the country and lies within the Andes. In the heart of the picturesque historic quarter is the Casa Andina Private Collection - Arequipa Hotel. This elegant colonial mansion was built in the 18th century as a place to make coins and was known locally as the Mint House. In 2008 after a century of neglect the building was restored to exacting standards and is now a charming 36-room hotel, commonly thought of as the best place in the city to lay your head.

The hotel is centred around two beautiful courtyards and is full of colonial charm, including a small but perfectly formed chapel. If you want to blow the budget then a stay in the impressive Imperial Suite could be for you. This vast suite has outstanding views across the city towards the snow-capped El Misti volcano and also benefits from its own grand private entrance, a large living room, a Jacuzzi and some exquisite antiques. However for those with a more modest wallet, one of the 30 standard rooms is more than satisfactory; all of which are bright, spacious and simply yet stylishly decorated.

Breakfast at the Casa Andina Private Collection - Arequipa Hotel is a sumptuous buffet, which is served outdoors in one of the hotel's courtyards. Stylebible relished drinking our morning cappuccino with the sun shining down into the impressive and elegant courtyard. In the evening a cocktail at the hotel bar which opens out on to the second courtyard followed by dinner at the hotel's restaurant, Alma - Cocina Viva is a must. The dining area is housed in part of the mansion that has high-vaulted ceilings, dark wood floors and thick pillar walls opening out onto a patio. This is the perfect place to enjoy regional delicacies such as spicy Crayfish with yellow potato or the sea bass with Peruvian beans. Then head back out onto the courtyard for a few espressos by moonlight.

For more information go to: [www.casa-andina.com](http://www.casa-andina.com)

For information on travel to Peru visit PromPeru (Peru Tourist Board) website at [www.peru.info](http://www.peru.info)

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