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## Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel, Aguas Calientes

**Best for...** five-star eco warriors.

There is no better place to stay when visiting Machu Picchu than Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel. Nestled in the cloud forest of Machu Picchu Historical Sanctuary, Inkaterra plays host to hummingbirds, spectacled bears and orchids as well as celebrities, including Cameron Diaz and Demi Moore. Whilst the guests receive five-star service, it's nature that takes centre stage here.



### Eco

At the heart of Inkaterra is a strong eco ethic that dominates the hotel, from the five kilometres of ecological paths that wind through its private five-hectare mountainside refuge to the 85 rustic rooms made from stone, adobe, stucco and eucalyptus beams. Even Inkaterra's toiletries are handcrafted, free from preservatives and artificial ingredients, and presented in glass bottles which are recycled when guests leave.

### credentials

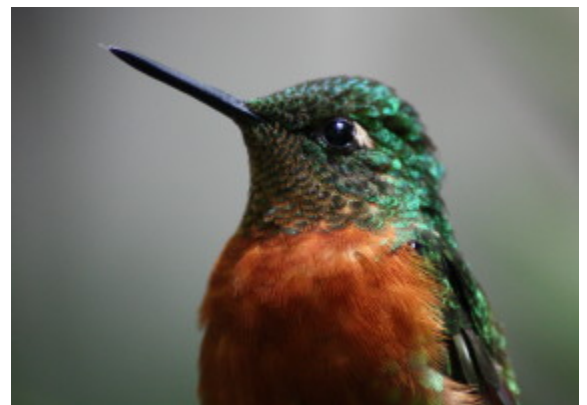


People come here to luxuriate in nature, free of worries about their impact on the local environment (each guest's stay is carbon neutral). The hotel, set up by Jose Koechlin, is a pioneer of eco tourism in Peru. Koechlin also established the Inkaterra Association (ITA), a non-profit institution created to promote the conservation of Peru's natural environment and its cultural and archaeological resources. Aguas Calientes, the small town Inkaterra borders (also known as Machu Picchu Pueblo), is under fire from UNESCO for the pollution it brings to Machu Picchu Historical Sanctuary's delicate eco system. As well as uncontrolled expansion, the town's sewage treatment plant fails to clean waste as effectively as required; the Vilcanota-Urubamba river, which runs though the sanctuary, is suffering as a result. Inkaterra not only cleans all its own waste

water but prevents expansion of Aguas Calientes to the east simply by blocking the way with its sizeable grounds.

### Nature

Inkaterra's grounds are what make a stay here unlike any other hotel in the world. Located in one of the world's few Live Zones, Inkaterra seethes with wildlife. It's a birder's paradise with 162 bird species, including 18 species of hummingbirds. As Victor Enmauel noted: "This is one of the few hotels in the world, actually the only one, in which from your window you can see the cock-of-the-rock, the highland motmot and the golden headed quetzal." There are also 108 butterfly species and, the hotel's pride and joy, 372 native orchid species. All this, right on the doorstep of your room; hummingbirds flit between orchids lining the paths that link the rooms to the reception, lobby and restaurant. I've never experienced anything like it, and expect I never shall again, much as I'd love to.



### Activities

Once you've settled in, head to the Ecomedia Centre, the hub of all things Inkaterra. Here you'll find on-site tour guides offering information on excursions and Inkaterra conservation programmes (in an effort to conserve paper the hotel no longer places all this information in the rooms, preferring the human touch instead) as well as family-friendly books, magazines, games, DVDs, binoculars and a book exchange.



The best way to explore Inkaterra's grounds is to join one of the daily guided tours, many of which, like breakfast and dinner, are included in the price of the room. I stayed for two nights and joined as many tours as possible.

I got up early to join the guided two-hour bird-watching tour. The grounds have one of the world's highest concentrations of hummingbird species and sightings are guaranteed. In fact, they become rather everyday! Other species commonly sighted are the Torrent Duck, White-capped Dipper and a number of different tanagers. I was unlucky – the birds seemed to be hiding from us, but that's the exception, not the rule. I got my hummingbird fill later on, simply sitting on a bench next to a feeder.

In the afternoon I joined the Orchid tour, a two-hour guided walk along the hotel's dedicated Orchid Trail that showcases over 372 native orchid species in their natural habitat, including six new-to-science species discovered in the hotel grounds. The orchids are in bloom throughout the year, but the best time to observe them is from November to March.

The evening tempted me with the Twilight Walk, a guided trek through the hotel's property that begins with a talk on Andean spirituality and ends with a ritualistic offering of coca leaves to Pachamam (Mother Earth) beneath the 'Sacred Rock', a large outcrop adorned with pre-Inca petroglyphs.



The next morning I took the time to visit Inkaterra's Spectacled Bears. The hotel works with the Spectacled Andean Bear Project which rescues bears from private homes and attempts to gradually reintroduce them into their natural habitat. The hotel currently hosts three bears, from a cub to a permanently resident fully-grown adult that is, sadly, so heavily assimilated into human ways that it no longer retains its natural instincts. The project focuses instead on bettering its quality of life. A donation of US\$10 is required for this tour. Kids would love it – Paddington was a Peruvian Spectacled Bear.

Other tours on offer include a Nature Walk highlighting Inkaterra's botanical gardens of bromeliads and more than 90 species of ferns, the medicinal plant groves, avocado orchard and tea plantation. On the Tea Tour, you can visit the Tea House, participate in the tea process, taste the fresh tea and learn about millenary tea-crafting techniques. Needless to say, all tea served in Inkaterra is organic and grown within the hotel grounds. Orchid and bird enthusiasts can join specialised guided half-day bird and orchid walks led by the resident biologist. These give detailed observations and explanations of the birds and plants in the hotel grounds for US\$64 (US\$19 for children).

The hotel also offers a number of excursions beyond the hotel grounds, including Machu Picchu, Waynu Picchu, Mandor Valley trek and a visit to the local museum and market.

## Facilities

When you're not luxuriating in nature's bounty, you'll likely be luxuriating in your room or the restaurant. Each room is different; some overlook the orchid gardens, others the Vilcanota-Urubamba river. I stayed in a Junior Deluxe and, had the outdoors not been so very tempting, I would never have left it through choice. Two double beds with crisp white sheets and sink-in pillows were turned down and warmed with hot water bottles every evening. There was a fireplace with a ready fuel supply, plenty of seating, a glorious shower and, best of all, no television (a TV and DVD player are available on request).



The spa offers a range of pampering options, including an Andean sauna – an igloo made from indigenous bamboo and fresh eucalyptus leaves. Everything you see used in the hotel, from the toiletries to the room decorations, as well as a selection of wildlife books is on sale in the hotel's gift shop.

In the main building a reading room lined with old books and warmed by a crackling fire is the ideal place to take the free evening Pisco Sour, whilst the sofas and bigger fire in the lobby make the perfect place for afternoon tea (also provided free of charge). The main dining room serves up a mouth-watering array of fusion

Andean food, such as Smoked Highland trout with avocado salad and citrus broad bean medley, followed by grilled brochettes of beef and quinoa risotto. Across the railway line, Café Inkaterra serves snacks next to the free computers. There's also 24-hour room service and a private dining option with butler service, candles and champagne in your favourite spot of the hotel.

Choosing your favourite spot may well be the hardest part of your stay here. I don't feel that I'm exaggerating when I echo the sentiments of film director Werner Herzog, who stayed here in February 2009: "I tell you I have felt at home, staying at the Inkaterra hotel, here in Machu Picchu, which is without doubt the most wonderful place in the world."

### **Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel**

Aguas Calientes, Peru

[www.inkaterra.com](http://www.inkaterra.com)

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