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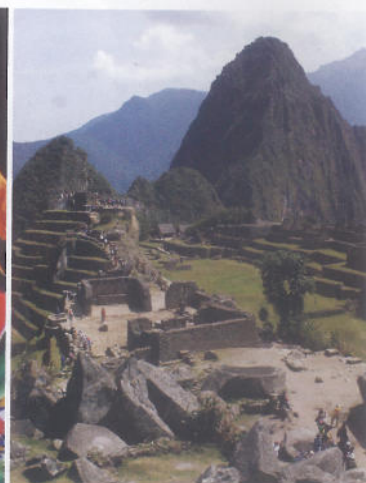
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# Cusco & the Sacred Valley

# SOUTHERN STAR

*In the year that marks the 100th anniversary of the discovery of Machu Picchu, Andy Hoskins profiles travel to the famous Inca citadel and its homeland in southern Peru*



Ask someone to name a historic attraction in South America and the likelihood is they'll say Machu Picchu, and not without good reason. The majestic 15th-century Inca citadel is Peru's number one tourist attraction, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and was voted one of the New Seven Wonders (N7W) of the world in 2007. What's more, July 24 marks the 100th anniversary of its discovery by American explorer Hiram Bingham.

A series of celebrations is being held to mark the occasion including, reportedly, a concert from Sting or Paul McCartney, and a lavish ceremony attended by delegates from Machu Picchu's fellow New Seven Wonders.

The anniversary is also being used by Peruvian authorities to put pressure on the University of Yale to return archaeological artefacts it took from the site in the days of its discovery.

Whether the campaign is successful or not, the 100th anniversary has at least pushed Peru and Machu Picchu to the forefront of many people's minds. Already featured in virtually all Peru itineraries, many tour operators have this year added themed anniversary itineraries featuring guest speakers and guides or incorporating special events.

And while Machu Picchu more or less sells itself, agents need to be in the know when it comes to the ins and outs of trekking the Inca Trail – and the

alternatives available – and arriving by train, as well as getting familiar with the impressive accommodation portfolio in the Sacred Valley region.

Although the Peruvian government and tourist board, **PromPeru**, are making efforts to attract visitors to the north of the country, the fact is most people arrive in the capital city Lima, mid-way along Peru's Pacific coast, stay a couple of days, and then head south with Machu Picchu the ultimate goal.

## Cusco

Capital of the ancient Inca heartland and later subject to 300 years of Spanish rule, beautiful Cusco is the gateway to the Sacred Valley which

stretches away northwest amid the towering peaks of the Andes mountain range to Machu Picchu.

While backpackers might brave a long-distance bus ride from Lima to Cusco (taking anything from 20 to 24 hours), most visitors will opt for a considerably more comfortable 60-minute flight up into the Andes.

At an elevation of over 3,000metres, many visitors will spend a few days in Cusco not just to acclimatise before embarking on the Inca Trail, but to explore its many historic sites, soak

Clockwise from main image: native Quechua people are descendants of the Incas; Machu Picchu; llamas thrive in the Andean highlands



## Selling Tip

Don't forget there are plenty of quieter alternative treks to the popular Inca Trail!

up its colonial charms and to sample the buzzing nightlife.

Spanish colonial buildings sit atop impressive Inca stonework foundations, while Quechua people dressed in their traditional bright garments wander the narrow cobbled streets. Visitors are drawn to the central Plaza de Armas, flanked on two sides by colonnaded shops and cafes, and on the other two sides by the Cathedral and La Compania de Jesus church – both well worth a visit.

Beyond the busy main square, highlights of a long list of Inca and Spanish colonial buildings and monuments include the Qoricancha temple complex and Las Nazarenas Convent, churches such as Santa Catalina, San Francisco and La Merced church and convent. The Museo Inka is among the best of a host of museums for getting an understanding of the region's history and culture.

No visit to Cusco is complete without visiting the impressive Inca ceremonial site of Sacsayhuaman, a challenging 30-minute walk up the hillside from the city Plaza de Armas – or a short taxi ride away.

Cusco Tourist Cards (Boleto Turistico del Cusco) give the holder entry to 16 of the top historic sites and museums in Cusco and the local area and can be bought from any of the locations it covers.

Agents should appreciate that Cusco is one of South America's greatest tourism hubs and, as such, its tourism infrastructure is impressive. There are hostels aplenty, plus an ever-expanding choice of boutique hotels in carefully converted colonial buildings – see Room Report for more details – and cafes, bars and restaurants can be found on nearly every street. The trendy San Blas area, in particular, is worth directing clients to.

The city is also teeming with local operators eager to set up independent travellers with all manner of adventure activities in the local area such as

mountain biking, rafting, horse-riding and, of course, trekking.

With such an impressive array of attractions and activities on offer, as well as accommodation at both ends of the spectrum, Cusco and the Sacred Valley should prove an easy sell.

## Machu Picchu and the Sacred Valley

The classic four-day Inca Trail arriving at Machu Picchu's Sun Gate at dawn is now carefully managed, with permits limited to 500 people per day and the route closed entirely every February for maintenance. It is imperative, therefore, that clients book as far in advance as possible through a UK-based operator.

The alternative is to opt for one of several other routes that can be combined with a visit to Machu Picchu, such as the Lares or Salkantay treks, or to set forth on a visit to the lesser-visited Inca citadel of Choquequirao, west of Cusco.

**Intrepid Travel** announced in June that it was to become the first global operator to offer a guarantee on Inca Trail permits despite the fact no tour operator can pre-purchase or bulk purchase them. In the event it can't keep its promise it will offer a £50 discount on itineraries featuring its alternative Inca Quarry Trail trek.

Because there is no road access to Aguas Calientes, the town at the foot of Machu Picchu – and increasingly referred to as Machu Picchu Pueblo – catching the train is the principal means of travelling along the Sacred Valley.

In its most luxurious form, the **Orient Express**-operated **Hiram Bingham** train departs from just outside Cusco to Aguas Calientes, taking around 3.5 hours in each direction. **PeruRail** operates several other options on the scenic route, including Vistadome, Expedition and Andean Explorer trains – all bookable online. Peak months are May to September, when booking tickets several weeks in advance is advised, particularly ▶

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CLAUDIA ZAKRZEWSKI  
UK market specialist,  
PromPeru

get to our target: tourists looking for authentic experiences!

What does winning this award mean to you? It was a great honour to receive the Best Long Haul Destination for Soft Adventure award at *Selling Long Haul's* Travel Agents Choice Awards, mainly because travel agents, the ones in charge of selling our destination, agree that Peru has a lot to offer for their adventurous clients.

How important are travel agents to your business? Travel agents are key! We think of them as our partners in the competitive travel industry. Travel agents are for sure, the best way to

Do you have any training, workshops or other initiatives planned for agents in 2011/12? As every year, PromPeru will be attending WTM with 40 companies to share with visitors all information about Peru. We will also be holding on-site training sessions on specific topics to help agents sell.

Please tell us about anything new that you would like to highlight to our readers? We have news indeed! This October, PromPeru will launch an online training programme for the British trade. Agents will be able to learn about traditional destinations, unspoiled areas and new products. This information will give them a competitive advantage versus the rest. Join us and become a Peru Specialist!

## Contact information

PROMPERU  
E: czakrzewski@promperu.gob.pe  
W: www.peru.travel



## TRAVEL AGENTS CHOICE AWARDS

Look out for details of the 2011 Travel Agents Choice Awards (TACA) in the September issue of *Selling Long Haul* [www.sellinglonghaul.com](http://www.sellinglonghaul.com)





► if clients are on a tight schedule.

From Aguas Calientes it's a 20-minute bus ride up a winding road to the entrance to Machu Picchu. Independent travellers must purchase entrance and bus tickets in Aguas Calientes, currently totalling around \$50.

Although a day trip from Cusco to Machu Picchu is possible, many itineraries will incorporate an overnight stay in Aguas Calientes, or in Urubamba or Ollantaytambo in the Sacred Valley.

There is a good choice of high-end accommodation around Urubamba, while Ollantaytambo offers several small hotels and plenty of hostels. What it has over Urubamba, though, is a fine set of Inca ruins, pretty streets, a cobbled Plaza

de Armas and homes and shops built on ancient Inca stonework. What's more, because the road and railway part company here, there is a greater choice of train departures from Ollantaytambo's station than there are from Cusco.

Other Sacred Valley side-trips worth recommending to clients include a trip to Pisac for its famous Sunday morning market and its Inca ruins, or to the unusual terraced salt pans at Salineras.

### Room Report

As the country's tourism hotbed, much of Peru's best-quality hotel accommodation is located in the Cusco and Sacred Valley region. Cookie-cutter chain hotels are few and far between and instead it's boutique properties and sensitive conversions from colonial buildings that dominate.

As well as operating the Hiram

**"As the country's tourism hotbed, much of Peru's best-quality hotel accommodation is in Cusco and the Sacred Valley"**

Bingham train between Cusco and Machu Picchu, Orient Express has four luxury hotels in the region. The **Machu Picchu Sanctuary Lodge** stands immediately next to the site of the Inca ruins – and is the only one to do so – while the **Rio Sagrado** is located four kilometres from Urubamba. In Cusco it has the **Hotel El Monasterio** built on

Inca foundations and, due to open in 2012, the all-suite **Palacio Nazarenas** located between the Plaza de Armas and the trendy San Blas area.

Peruvian hotel group **Libertador** opened the luxury **Tambo del Inka** hotel last summer in Urubamba. Located by the river of the same name, it was built using local stone and wood and has 128-rooms, a restaurant, bar, gym, spa, pool and private gardens. Significantly, it even has its very own station where hotel guests can board trains travelling between Cusco and Machu Picchu. The group also has a property in Cusco, the **Palacio del Inka**. It is set in a historic building with a colonnaded courtyard and is close to the central Plaza de Armas.

The small, eco-conscious **Inkaterra** group operates three hotels in the region, the **Machu Picchu Pueblo** ►

Above left: the iconic Inca citadel of Machu Picchu. Above right: Inkaterre's La Casona Hotel in Cusco

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► **Hotel** (set in 'an Andean Garden of Eden') and **El Mapi** in Aguas Calientes, plus **La Casona** in Cusco, a 16th-century manor house converted into an 11-suite hotel.

A similar operation, **Aranwa**, runs the **Sacred Valley Hotel & Wellness** centre near Huayllabamba and the **Aranwa Cusco Boutique Hotel**, a converted colonial mansion.

The **Casa Andina** group operates around 20 properties across Peru, including an upmarket '**Private Collection**' hotel in the Sacred Valley (on a three hectare estate between Urubamba and Ollantaytambo) and one in Cusco, a colonial conversion three blocks from the Plaza de Armas. It also runs four mid-market '**Classic**' hotels around the city.

Other upmarket accommodation options in the region include the **Sumaq Hotel**, the only five-star property in Aguas Calientes; the **Sol y Luna** hotel, one kilometre from Urubamba; and the boutique **Andean Wings** and **Casa Cartagena** hotels in Cusco.



**Mountain Lodges of Peru**, meanwhile, operates four hotels that can be linked together as part of a five-day trek along the Salkantay trail.

### Tourism Talk



**ELISABETH HAKIM**  
Senior UK markets  
coordinator, PromPeru

"There has been a lot of new top-end product in the Sacred Valley in recent years – not just hotels, but experiences too. The majority of new

tourism developments have been in the south of Peru, but we're taking steps in the north too. Over 50 per cent of UK visitors use a travel agent, so agents need to be confident when selling Peru."

### From The Front Line



**SIMON FORSTER**  
Latin America specialist,  
Western & Oriental

"Machu Picchu is one of the defining images of Latin America as well as one of the most iconic images

in the world. It never fails to amaze travellers, regardless of whether they have trekked the Inca Trail or simply visited for the day.

"Cusco and the Sacred Valley have always been popular destinations, however it is only recently that a range of fantastic accommodation has become available, now making it possible to discover both of these destinations in luxury.

"Unlike some other destinations in Latin America, there is no average type of client that we send to Peru. Now that there is such an array of accommodation, Peru really can cater for every type of traveller."



**HIEDI HUTCHINSON**  
Brand manager,  
Imaginative Traveller

"The Inca Trail remains high on people's 'tick-list' and few travellers would consider visiting Peru without at least a day visit to Machu Picchu. If customers are keen to do the classic four-day trek then it really is vital to encourage them to book early. With



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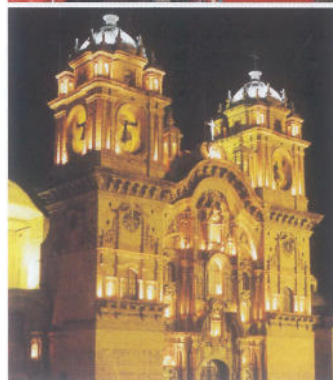
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**"If customers are keen to do the classic four-day Inca Trail trek then it really is vital to encourage them to book permits early"**

two in the Sacred Valley, one at Machu Picchu, two in Cusco, one in Puno and three in Arequipa and the Colca Canyon. The cost is from £3,949pp for departures this November.

TUCANO PERU  
welcome@tucanoperu.com  
www.tucanoperu.travel

The Peru-based tour operator works with agents and operators in the UK to put together personalised tailor-made itineraries. It can also assist with educational trips for agents that register with the operator.

#### How To Get There

**Air France** launched a five-times weekly service from Paris to Lima in June, complementing partner airline **KLM's** daily service from Amsterdam. **Iberia** operates ten flights a week from Madrid to Lima; **Air Europa** has a four-times-weekly service also from Madrid; and **LAN** flies daily from Madrid to Lima. •

Clockwise from top left: Quechua girl; Orient Express Hotels' Machu Picchu Sanctuary Lodge; Cusco's La Compañia de Jesus church. Opposite: Libertador's Tambo del Inka hotel

permits limited to 500 people per day including porters and guides, they need to be applied for several months in advance, especially during peak periods.

"However, it is still possible to trek to Machu Picchu along alternative ancient Incan pathways once these permits run out. Equally beautiful, the advantage is they are far less trekked and take travellers through remote rural villages. This summer our late bookers will be travelling along the Lares Trek to reach Machu Picchu, the main difference being that this route does not take you via the Sun Gate.

"With no limit on the number of visitors allowed into Machu Picchu itself, the less actively-minded can visit by catching the train. Our trips cater for both types of traveller."



**DIANA HENDERSON**  
Head of product,  
Journey Latin America

"To cope with the huge demand for the classic Inca Trail trek, there are now strict regulations limiting numbers. For busy times of the year it must be booked well in advance. The views, flora and fauna and, above all, the Inca sites along the way, still make this trek unique, however, and continue to justify its popularity."

**Where To Book It**  
THE ADVENTURE COMPANY  
0845 287 1198  
www.adventurecompany.co.uk

The Footsteps of the Incas trip is new for 2011 and includes the classic three-day Inca Trail trek, as well as visits to

Cusco, Arequipa and Lima. The 15-day trip starts from £3,119pp including an experienced local group leader.

METROPOLITAN TOURING  
020 7960 6255  
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Offers an eight-day specialised trekking programme in Cusco and the Sacred Valley, plus a visit to Machu Picchu; a six-day essential Peru itinerary visiting Cusco, Machu Picchu, Puno and Lake Titicaca; plus tailor-made options.

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