

SMART TRAVEL

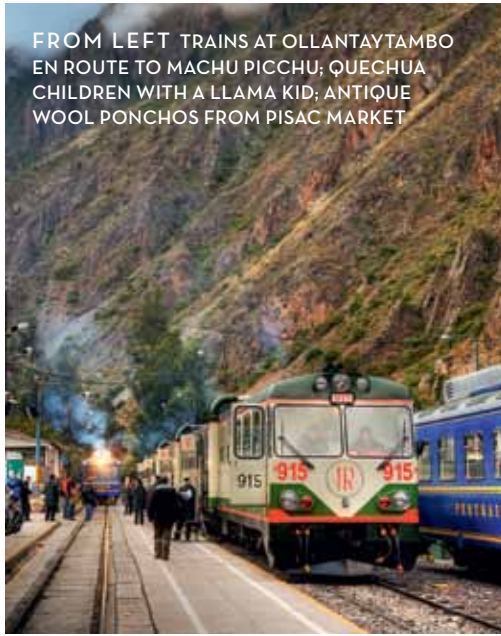
DESTINATION | TRAVEL NEWS | MOTORING

WHAT PERU IS FAMOUS FOR MACHU PICCHU, THE LOST CITY OF THE INCAS, DATING BACK TO THE 14TH-CENTURY. ABANDONED DURING THE SPANISH CONQUEST IN 1532, IT WAS REDISCOVERED IN 1911 BY AMERICAN HIRAM BINGHAM.

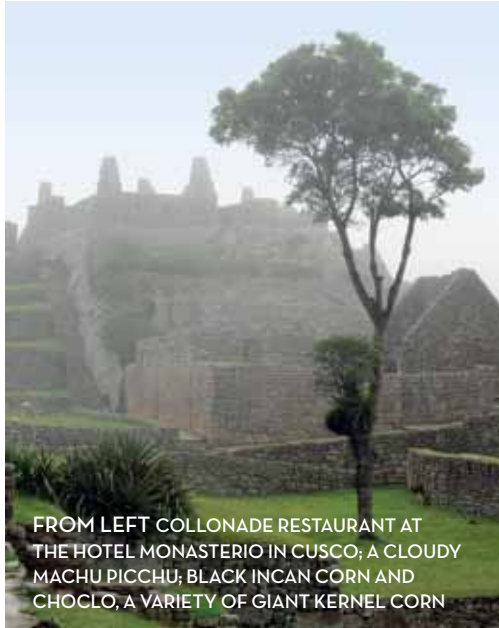


All time high

They say that Peru is the land of old things but the country is experiencing a boom that's turned the global spotlight firmly on it as a destination of new discovery. Liz Morris samples its sights



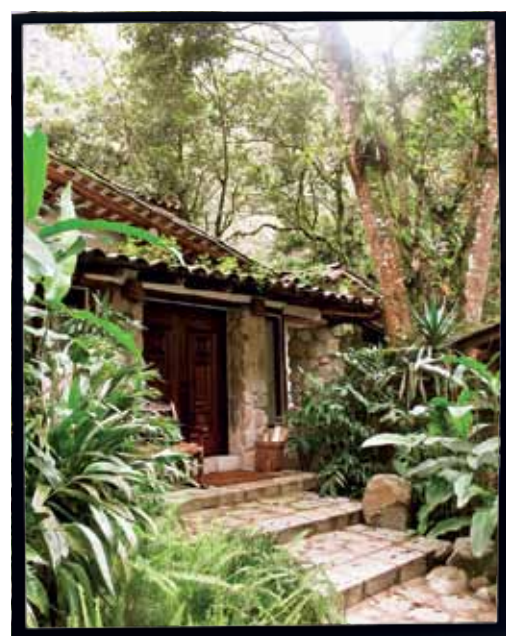
FROM LEFT TRAINS AT OLLANTAYTAMBO EN ROUTE TO MACHU PICCHU; QUECHUA CHILDREN WITH A LLAMA KID; ANTIQUE WOOL PONCHOS FROM PISAC MARKET



FROM LEFT COLLONADE RESTAURANT AT THE HOTEL MONASTERIO IN CUSCO; A CLOUDY MACHU PICCHU; BLACK INCAN CORN AND CHOCLO, A VARIETY OF GIANT KERNEL CORN



FROM LEFT A CATHEDRAL IN CUSCO'S CENTRAL SQUARE; VEGETABLE DYES AT PISAC MARKET; A CASSITA NESTED INTO THE LUSH GARDENS OF INKATERRA MACHU PICCHU PUEBLO HOTEL



South America's go-to destinations, Brazil and Argentina, have such touristic traction, it's hard to look beyond them. But if you press on across the continent to its Pacific shore and Peru, you'll find a country that promises not only escape but arrival too. If you're after natural wonder, beguiling culture, dramatic history, sexy cuisine, two weeks in Peru's Andes and Alto Plano will deliver big time.

Everyone lands in the capital, Lima. But, it's a heady brew so save it for last, by which time you'll be seasoned and more in sync. Start rather in Cusco – after all, that's where, on instruction from the sun god Inti, the 12th-century Incan leader Manco Cápac thrust his golden sword into the earth and declared Cusco the navel of the universe. It's been a strategic centre ever since, and is still the gateway to the Sacred Valley, Machu Picchu and the Incan legacy – basically picture-book Peru.

The city is all cobbled streets, red clay tile roofs, cloisters, priories, archbishoprics and, next to them (in some cases beneath them) are Incan stone walls, ruins and sacred sites. Not quite the Florence of the Andes, but charming still and the perfect starter city as the ardent Catholic-Indian hybrid raises, in a concentrated dose here, the very crux of the Peruvian cultural cocktail. Add to that an earthiness, a grounding sense of terroir, which is the fabric of the hyper fecund Andes and you'll start to sense the intense character of the country.

At 3 200-metres above sea level, Cusco's altitude can make you feel braindead and nauseous initially, but the antidote, cocoa leaf tea, jollies things along considerably. Stroll around (the streets are made for it) to the San Blas neighbourhood, which feels boho and cool like Marrakech or Udaipur. Other musts are Qorikancha and MAP to view the sophisticated genius of Pre-Columbian art The Hotel Monasterio, a grand legend and its brand-new more contemporary annexe Palacio Nazarenas, with a stupendous spa, are right across the square, discreetly contained within a restored convent. Breathing new life into the old is a win-win practice that Peruvians have embraced and they're doing it stylishly.

Incan sites abound around Cusco, but pace yourself: the fortresses at Sacsayhuamán and Ollantaytambo are ample as curtain raisers for the incomparable big reveal of Machu Picchu. The Sacred Valley, however, is a regional



FROM TOP THE RESTAURANT AT TITILAKA, AN EXCLUSIVE EXPERIENCE LODGE ON LAKE TITICACA; DAZZLING ROLLS OF PATTERNED AND COLOURFUL WOVEN WOOL BRAIDS AT PISAC MARKET

speciality of bucolic scenery, with dramatic razor-back peaks, cleaved valleys with villages snuggled in their laps and patchwork fields. Take day trips. Take several – it's a wonderfully cinematic route, meandering through eye-high corn and Eucalyptus groves, past grazing llamas and cavorting camelids, haciendas and houses with clay bull fertility figurines on the roof. Plus, there is shopping, the Pisac Market, best on Sunday for the local spectacle, is a good place to get your eye in for the motherload of exotic interestingness that is Peruvian produce – natural and man-made. Ogle the strange fruits of the Andean larder (3 000 species of potato for starters), the root of a gastronomic renaissance influencing global cuisine as indigenous ingredients are rebooted to suit gourmet tastes. Negotiate for dazzling David Hicksian geometric woven textiles, which the Quechua ▶



TRAIN PHOTOGRAPH: FÉLIX LORENZO; PHOTOGRAPHS: KINO

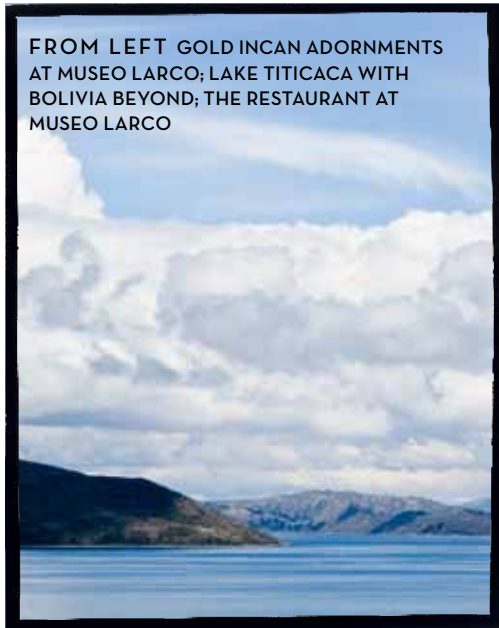
PHOTOGRAPHS: KINO



FROM LEFT BRIGHT PAINTED STREET FAÇADE IN BARRANCO; DESSERT FROM RESTAURANT HUACA PUCLLANA; LAS PALLAS, A TRADITIONAL ARTISAN CRAFT STORE IN LIMA



FROM LEFT GOLD INCAN ADORNMENTS AT MUSEO LARCO; LAKE TITICACA WITH BOLIVIA BEYOND; THE RESTAURANT AT MUSEO LARCO



FROM LEFT AN UROS ISLANDER ON LAKE TITICACA; MIRAFLORES PIER AND LA ROSA NAUTICA RESTAURANT ARE A DISTINCTIVE LANDMARK IN LIMA



FROM TOP A VIEW OF THE THE GOVERNMENT PALACE IN LIMA FROM THE PLAZA DE ARMAS – A FRENCH-INSPIRED MANSION BUILT IN THE 1930S, WHICH SERVES AS THE OFFICIAL RESIDENCE AND OFFICE OF PERU'S PRESIDENT; GALERIA LUCIA DE LA PUENTE IN LIMA

women vendors (who, in their distinctive black bowler hats, swirly dirndl skirts and clashing cardis, cut a jaunty swathe, but don't assume they are lighthearted about bargaining) call blankets but which are more like thin kelims. Also look out for lumo and pastel patterned braid, bags, pouches, ponchos and boho embroideries. Muse on massive shamanic chunks of turquoise – Kelly Wearstler, we know where you were last summer! Peruvians are accomplished colourists with an innate skill and appreciation for pattern that the design world is paying rapt attention to, as is evident from the New York fashion teams I see snapping up sample material.

Nothing prepares you for Machu Picchu, and the getting there – even to the base – is entirely under-hyped. The journey from Ollantaytambo Station begins in a glass-roofed train, which chugs, toots and hisses its way along a single track flanking the banks of the volatile Urubamba River. As the track inclines gradually, and gradually, the climate becomes cloud forest, best described as a high-altitude hothouse, minus the vein-popping humidity. Clouds waft past the windows. Suspense builds. Wonder prevails and then Aguas Calientes, the town where the train stops, brings you back down to earth. It's not a looker. Thankfully, across the river on an eco-estate stands the extremely stylish Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel. Inkaterra is a new breed of sustainable tourism company. ▶

TOP SEVEN TO-DOS IN LIMA

CHECK IN AT Miraflores Park Hotel www.miraflorespark.com, which offers great views, location and a sense of welcoming five-star service non pareil in the great Orient-Express Hotel tradition.
SEE Museo Larco www.museolarco.org and turn yourself on to the simple, modern beauty of Pre-Columbian art.
VISIT Huaca Pucllana for beautiful elegant Pre-Hispanic ruins and a really good old-school colonial restaurant www.resthuacapucllana.com.
STROLL downtown old Lima for its religious and royal architecture.
SHOP Get to know the arty Barranco neighbourhood – you can easily spend a few hours in the stores and galleries here, such as Galería Lucía De La Puente www.gluciadela puente.com, Mario Testino's Art Foundation www.mariotestino.com and Fundación Museo Amano www.fundacionmuseoamano.org.pe. Also Dédalo www.dedalomarket.com and Las Pallas www.laspallasperu.com for the best homeware finds.

EAT Without a doubt, Lima is the best place to indulge your palate, so eat adventurously. Try Astrid & Gastón www.astridygaston.com, Cebichería La Mar www.lamarcebicheria.com, Mesa 18 Restaurant www.mesa18restaurant.com, Central Restaurante centralrestaurante.com.pe, Pachacamac Restaurant www.pachacamacrestaurant.com, Restaurant Chala www.chala.com.pe and Rafael rafaelosterling.com.
EXPERIENCE the unique food market, Mercado de Surquillo to witness the extent of Peru's astonishing seafood bounty. Tricky to find but a must for curious foodies.



PHOTOGRAPHS: KINO

PHOTOGRAPHS: KINO

GETAWAY

It's pioneered by Jose Koechlin and is focused on finding Peruvian assets and converting them into world-class products: in this case native culture and local environment. Set in a landscape of stone villas – some with thermal pools – they are cossetingly sensual Edens scented with Eucalyptus wood fires, swathes of alpaca blankets. The food here is organic and extraordinarily good, important when you're climbing mountains all day.

Interestingly, the citadel itself was, in its time, the country retreat of Incan royalty and their entourages who would decamp here from Cusco for the atmosphere, literally. Incan social and civic structure was complex, so the ruins are endlessly intriguing to discover close up, but also worth viewing from Huayna Picchu, the peak behind, to see the complexity and engineering of the footprint. You get there on foot – many, many stone steps later, but every one worth it for the challenge, the view, the experience of being on top of the world.

Where this is green and embracing, Lake Titicaca, a short flight from Cusco, is blue and exposing. This is the Alto Plano. To gaze across mirror-finish waters to Bolivia's snow-capped peaks from the deck of Titilaka, an experience lodge on a private peninsula, feels closer to heaven than to earth, it's so celestial. The Andean Experience Co, which owns and operates Titilaka, is the vision of new Peru flag bearer Ignacio Macias, who has made design-forward strides to guide guests past the now-generic classic luxury vacation.

Great excursions by boat to Taquile and Uros Islands take a day – but the great suites and clever public spaces full of thoughtful finesse and knowing chic are a delicious refuge from the elements. The designers, Sandra Masias and Denise Guislain, have taken the traditional luxury textiles on their doorstep – like vicuña, so in demand from Italian luxury brand Loro Piana – and pollinated them with fresh-design focus to create modern lifestyle must-haves like cloud-soft throws and wraps. Think alpaca upholstery, chunky wool rugs, and cushions with rustic sophistication. In many ways, in this faraway pocket of Peru where artisanal is everyday, this brings the point of it all home and shows how a resource can become a commodity when injected with contemporary vision and application.

■ *The Andean Experience Co.* 📍 www.andean-experience.com; *Titilaka* 📍 www.titilaka.com; *Orient-Express* 📍 www.orient-express.com; *Hotel Monasterio* 📍 www.monasteriohotel.com; *Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel* 📍 www.inkaterra.com



FROM TOP THE GLORIOUS GROUNDS AND RESTAURANT UNDER THE BOUGAINVILLEAS AT THE MUSEO LARCO; BARRANCO, A NEIGHBOURHOOD KNOWN FOR ITS BOHO-COOL CHARACTER AND FLAIR



+

TRAVEL DESK

Plan your tailor-made trip with Anderson Expeditions. Richard Anderson is an accomplished Andes and Amazon travel expert who specialises in both the adventure and luxury market. He will create the ideal trip to suit your interests, tastes, budget, fitness level and time. ■ Anderson Expeditions 📍 www.andersonexpeditions.com

On SAA, fly to Sao Paulo or Buenos Aires, from there fly LAN to Lima. Within Peru LAN is the recommended domestic airline. ■ LAN 📍 www.lan.com

Go between November and April, as it's not unbearably dry in the Andes, nor over-crowded with tourists.

