

ELLE DECOR GOES TO...



Machu Picchu, the ruins of a 15th-century Incan settlement in the mountains of Peru.

PERU

*The attractions of this South American country range from the stunning ruins of a lost civilization to the latest culinary innovations.*

BY INGRID ABRAMOVITCH

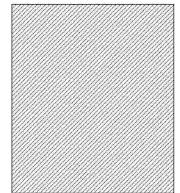
They were the original starchitects, constructing an earthly utopia with some of the world's most celestial views. And if real estate is all about location, location, location, the creators of this former Incan retreat took on an epic challenge: Positioned almost 8,000 feet above sea level in the Peruvian jungle, Machu Picchu hovers just below the clouds on an Andean ridge surrounded by a series of colossal peaks.

Ever since Hiram Bingham III—the fedora- and safari-jacket-wearing Yale archaeologist who is said to have inspired the character of Indiana Jones—described his 1911 discovery of the “lost city of the Incas,” Machu Picchu has earned its status as the adventurous traveler’s ultimate bucket-list prize. But while the age-old citadel remains as popular a

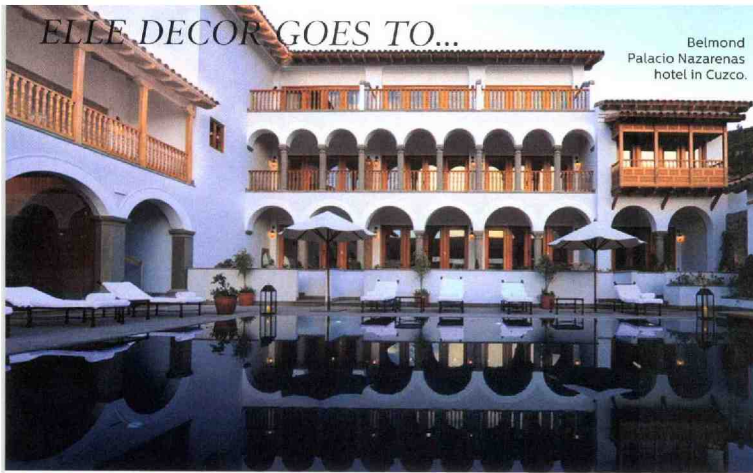
draw as ever, it is far from the only reason to visit this endlessly fascinating South American nation.

From its Pacific beaches to the Amazonian rain forest to the floating islands of Lake Titicaca, Peru is one of the most biodiverse countries on earth. Meanwhile, its capital, Lima, has emerged as the epicenter of South American haute cuisine, as well as an exciting cultural destination. “The city is booming in every area: food, fashion, the arts,” says Lucía de la Puente, whose art gallery specializes in contemporary Latin American art. “Many important museum curators are coming to Peru from around the world. People are very interested in what’s going on here.”

De la Puente’s eponymous gallery is situated in a contemporary white-walled casita in Lima’s ▷



JENNIE ROSS/GALLERYSTOCK.COM



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Belmond  
Palacio Nazarenas  
hotel in Cuzco.



Jaime Liebrana's  
home and gallery  
in Lima's Barranco  
neighborhood.



Baroque  
churches in  
Cuzco.



Central  
restaurant  
in Lima.

Barranco neighborhood, a seaside enclave that is home to numerous writers and artists. Nearby, the fashion photographer Mario Testino—a native Limeño—has restored a 19th-century mansion and transformed it into an art foundation known as MATE, where he exhibits his own work as well as that of cutting-edge local artists. “For a long time, Peruvians looked overseas for inspiration,” Testino says. “But more recently, there is a whole generation of intelligent, talented, and politically aware young people here who are looking to their own culture and heritage.”

Many locals credit Gastón Acurio, the pioneering chef whose restaurant Astrid y Gastón fuses classical French technique with Peru’s native culinary traditions, with putting Lima on the map. “He is the best ambassador our country has,” says the interior designer Ondine Schwartzman, who decorated the dining room at Casa Moreyra, a 300-year-old hacienda that Acurio refurbished to serve as his epicurean headquarters. “It started with his restaurants, but Gastón has had an impact across the board. There is an interest in design. Gastón has given Peruvians a sense of pride.”

At sleekly minimalist Central, another award-winning chef, Virgilio Martínez, is further pushing the boundaries. His unlikely yet delicious tasting menu is filled with exotic ingredients—from tree tomato to amaranth to roots and bark—forged from many of Peru’s 84 microclimates.

Outside of Lima, the former hippie trail has gotten a lot more luxe. What was once a 26-hour bus trip from Lima is now a quick one-hour flight to Cuzco, the historic capital of the Incan Empire (and later the seat of a brutal Spanish conquest). With its mix of pre-Columbian architecture and Baroque churches, this scenic city, ringed by mountains, is as picturesque as it is bustling. There are several atmospheric hotels here, including the Belmond Palacio Nazarenas, located in a restored 16th-century convent, where oxygen is pumped into the rooms—the ultimate creature comfort when you are acclimatizing to Cuzco’s vertiginous altitude of 11,200 feet.

The Sacred Valley of the Incas, about an hour’s drive from Cuzco, is one of Peru’s most charming locales. In this bucolic region, Quechua, the ancient language used by the Incas, is still the lingua franca, and llama sightings are common. The area boasts several stylish resorts, including the Tambo del Inka Resort & Spa, where interior designer Roberto Caparra’s lobby features a soaring stone fireplace and massive weavings made by local artisans. The hotel’s welcome drink is a cup of tea made with coca leaves, the local remedy for altitude sickness. ▷

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: COURTESY OF BELMOND PALACIO NAZARENAS; YADID LEVY; CHRISTOPHER TESTANI; JAVIER PIERINI

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To limit the environmental impact, reservations are now required far in advance for the Inca Trail, the iconic four- or five-day trek that leads to Machu Picchu. But if you really want to get there in style, book a ticket on the Hiram Bingham. The deluxe train, operated by the same firm that owns the Venice Simplon-Orient Express, is a throwback to classic luxury train travel, with wood-paneled walls, brass luggage racks, white tablecloths, and gourmet meals served on gold-rimmed china.

On a recent excursion, as the Hiram Bingham chugged its way through the Andes, a group of strangers—including a handsome European couple, a judge from New Jersey and her husband, and a group of Japanese travelers—was holding an impromptu dance party in the bar car, stoked by live music and multiple glasses of Peru's signature cocktail, the frothy pisco sour. The train's namesake, who traveled to Machu Picchu by foot and mule, might well have raised an eyebrow at this spectacle, but the ancient Incas, whose sun and moon festivals featured plenty of drinking and dancing, would likely have approved. ■



FROM TOP: ELLE GARDNER; JAVIER PIERINI

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW NOW

ESSENTIAL PERU

The country code is 51.

**Dry skies.** In *Moby-Dick*, Herman Melville described Peru's capital as "tearless Lima." The unusual desert climate means it almost never rains in the city. To avoid *la garúa*—the city's notorious fog—visit during the warmer months, November to March.

**Raw truth.** Ceviche—fresh raw fish marinated and cured in citrus juices—is a traditional lunchtime dish in Peru. Lima's top *cevicherías* include El Mercado (Hipólito Unanue 203, Miraflores; 1-221-1322) and La Mar (Avenida La Mar 770, Miraflores; 1-421-3365).

**Knit wits.** Wool from Peruvian alpacas is soft and silky. For the best quality, look for baby alpaca—wool shorn from the first clip of the fleece—at chain stores like Kuna and Sol Alpaca. (Caveat emptor: Peruvians joke that the cheaper knits sold at souvenir shops are "maybe alpaca.")

**Market shares.** Peru's open-air food and crafts markets are as fun for what they sell—from shamanic charms to handmade sweaters to hundreds of types of potatoes—as for the chance to interact with the sellers, who are largely indigenous women in colorful native dress. Among the best: Mercado Central de San Pedro in Cuzco and Mercado de Artesanía in Pisac.

WHAT TO SEE

**Cuzco.** The gateway to the Andes, this ancient city has several important sites. The Qorikancha, a Dominican

monastery built atop the ruins of a former Incan temple, is a spectacular mashup of indigenous and colonial religious architecture. The Baroque 17th-century La Catedral is home to several works of colonial art, including Marcos Zapata's *Last Supper*, which portrays Christ and his disciples dining on local cuisine—guinea pig and papayas.

**Lima's Centro Histórico.** The capital's historical core has grand architecture, impressive plazas, and wonderful street life. Arrive at noon to see the changing of the guard at the neo-Baroque Palacio de Gobierno, then visit the bright yellow Monasterio de San Francisco, where the library contains 25,000 texts and the catacombs are lined with skulls and bones.

**Machu Picchu.** The Peruvian government limits visitors to this archaeological site, so make sure to secure a reservation well in advance. A hotel or tour operator can do this for you, or reserve via machupicchu.gob.pe. The nearby town of Machu Picchu Pueblo (formerly Aguas Calientes) is accessible only on foot or via train. Train reservations (including Belmond's Hiram Bingham) can be made at perurail.com.

**MATE (Museo Mario Testino),** Avenida Pedro de Osma 409, Barranco, Lima, 1-251-7755; *mate.pe*: Mario Testino's museum features a permanent collection of his photo works, from celebrity portraits (entire rooms are devoted to Kate Moss and the late

Princess Diana) to his "Alta Moda" series on Peruvians in native dress.

**Museo Larco, Avenida Bolívar 1515, Pueblo Libre, Lima, 1-461-1312;** *museolarco.org*: The museum, in an 18th-century viceroy's mansion, is best known for its gallery of erotic pre-Columbian pottery. But don't shortchange the amazing collection of jewelry and textiles spanning 5,000 years of Peruvian history.

WHERE TO STAY

**Belmond Palacio Nazarenas, Plaza Nazarenas 144, Cuzco, 84-582-222;** *belmond.com*: Dating from the 16th century, this former convent is now a luxe hotel with 55 suites, the city's first outdoor heated swimming pool, lush terraces, and free lessons on making pisco sour cocktails.

**Hotel B, Avenida Sáenz Peña 204, Barranco, Lima, 1-206-0800;** *hotelb.pe*: Architect David Mutal and interior designer Jordi Puig transformed a belle époque mansion into a 17-room boutique hotel, with displays of contemporary art from the Galería Lucía de la Puente next door.

**Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel, Machu Picchu, 1-610-0400;** *inkaterra.com*: Located next to the ruins, this magical retreat features 85 casitas and two villas—many with wood-burning fireplaces—plus 12 private acres of cloud forest filled with hummingbirds and orchids.

**Tambo del Inka Resort & Spa, Avenida Ferrocarril S/N, Sacred Valley,**

*Urubamba, 84-581-777;* *starwoodhotels.com*: This 128-room resort in the Sacred Valley has a lobby with soaring ceilings, an indoor-outdoor heated pool, and its own private train station for the ride to Machu Picchu. The restaurant uses vegetables and herbs from its organic garden.

**Westin Lima Hotel & Convention Center, Calle Las Begonias 450, San Isidro, Lima, 1-201-5000;** *starwoodhotels.com*: In a 30-story glass-and-steel tower designed by Arquitectonica's Bernardo Fort-Brescia, this luxurious hotel in Lima's business district has 301 rooms with contemporary design, great city views, and wonderful service.

WHERE TO EAT

**Astrid y Gastón, Avenida Paz Soldán 290, San Isidro, Lima, 1-442-2775;** *astridygaston.com*: The flagship restaurant at Casa Moreyra, chef Gastón Acurio's temple of haute Peruvian cuisine. The three-hour tasting menu features dishes like mackerel escabèche and *anticuchos* (cow's heart).

**Central, Calle Santa Isabel 376, Miraflores, Lima, 1-242-8515;** *centralrestaurante.com.pe*: Book far in advance for a table at Virgilio Martínez's buzzworthy restaurant, where he serves a 17-course tasting menu as artful as it is adventurous.

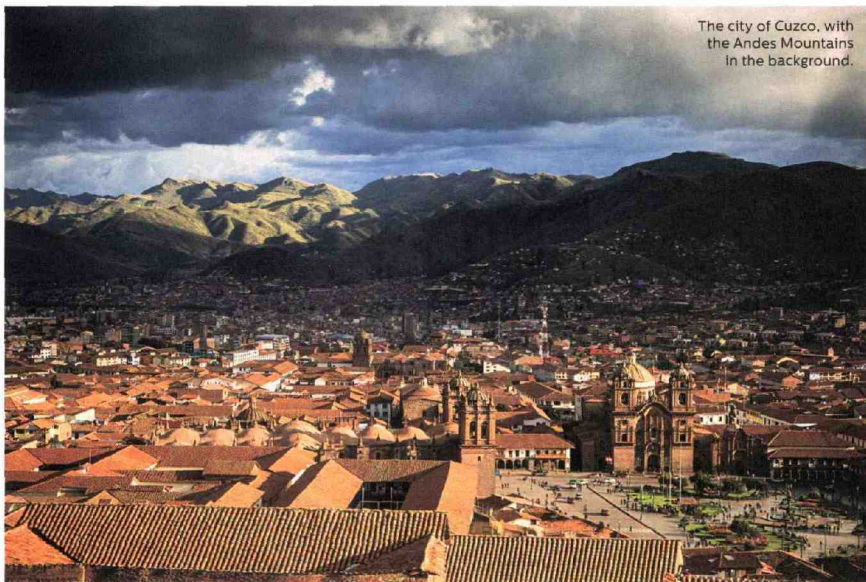
**MAP Café, Plazoleta Las Nazarenas 231, Cuzco, 84-242-476;** *cuscorestaurants.com*: Set in a modern glass-and-steel box in the courtyard of the colonial building that houses the Museo de Arte Precolombino del Cusco, this restaurant has a unique menu that features such local delicacies as alpaca and guinea pig.

WHERE TO SHOP

**Artesanías Las Pallas, Cajamarca 212, Barranco, Lima, 1-477-4629;** Mari Solari's folk-art store—which is also her home—is a wonderland of Peruvian crafts, from finger puppets to museum-caliber textiles and Amazonian clay pots.

**Jaime Liébana, Domeyer 109 Esq. Bajada de Baños, Barranco, Lima, 1-477-3125;** *jaimeliEbana2012@gmail.com*: Make an appointment to visit this furniture artisan and antiquarian in his home in Barranco, which is packed with unique finds including gilded mirrors and 18th-century Andean furniture.

**Pedazo de Arte, Plateros 334B, Cuzco, 84-242-967;** *pedazodearte.com*: The owner of this charming boutique, Miki Suzuki, has an eye for the best in local handicrafts, which she sells for bargain prices along with her own inventive knitwear.



The city of Cuzco, with the Andes Mountains in the background.

YADID LEVY