



Visiting Machu Picchu in Luxurious Style

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Is Machu Picchu on your boomer bucket list? Photo credit: Debi Lander.

Do you have a [boomer bucket list](#)? Alan and I keep one. And a visit to the [UNESCO World Heritage site of Machu Picchu](#) is very near the top of our "want to do's." Today, My Itchy Travel Feet guest writer, Debi Lander, of [ByLanderSea](#), whets our appetite for visiting this remarkable site sooner rather than later.

The traditional choice for arriving at Machu Picchu in [Peru](#) is via a four-day pilgrimage along the Inca Trail; an arduous hike made more difficult by high altitude. Once upon a time I would have craved this approach, but now realize less strenuous becomes the better mode for us Boomers. My adventure to Machu Picchu was grand and glorious and in no way decreased the experience, many might argue, the method improved the outcome.



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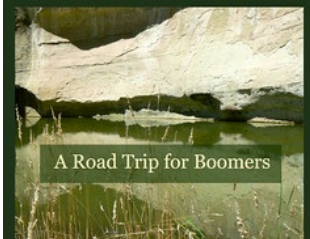
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The flight to Cusco is worth the window seat. Photo credit: Debi Lander



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I started with a two-day stopover in Lima (one day is enough) then caught an early morning flight to Cusco. If possible, book a window seat: the view out the airplane as you approach Cusco brings shivers of excitement. A heavy dusting of snow covers mountain tops that breakthrough the thick cloud cover.

Cusco bustles with tourists and Peruvians on the lookout for tourist dollars. The ancient Inca capital rests at an elevation of 11,150 feet, so plans to diminish the effects of altitude change included a drive through the Sacred Valley. The road descends as you head toward Machu Picchu, resting at 8,000 feet.



Tapas on the train. Photo credit: Debi Lander

The bus winds through the Sacred Valley, every turn begging for a photo op, but train schedules demand timeliness. The [Inca Rail](#) journey snakes around the Urubamba valley renowned for precipitous inclines, fields of gold, tiny hamlets and a furiously roaring river. I relaxed aboard this rather posh train and snacked on tapas, drank Pisco Sours, Peru's famous cocktail, because they are delicious—and lots of water because proper hydration helps ward off altitude sickness. Experts say you cannot predict who will be hit, but it does happen. Most of my group felt only slight dizziness and shortness of breath.

Aguas Calientes/Machu Picchu Pueblo

Two hours later, the train pulled into the small station at Aguas Calientes, which is now called Machu Picchu Pueblo. This village sits in a valley ringed by the Putucusi Mountains. Staff from the [Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel](#), a five-star lodging choice, transferred the luggage a few short blocks and my group took a hands-free walk.

Stepping onto the exquisite hotel's multi-tiered property felt like entering a lush humid rainforest, but in Peru it's called a cloud forest. Cooler temperatures and higher elevations cause low lying clouds. Sounds from the thundering river nearby acted as background white noise.



Luxury casitas at Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel. Photo credit: Debi Lander

The Andean style hotel offers 85 luxury stucco casitas or cottages and other tile-roofed buildings scattered across a 12-acre hilly property. Miracle-Grow sized ferns flourish in the moist air and colorful flowering plants, including bromeliads and a large variety of orchids, break up the vibrant green landscape.

Inkaterra hotels focus on preserving and rescuing Peru's geography, nature, customs and culture while sharing them with the world. They grandly succeed. Guided nature tours, included with a stay at the hotel, point out scarlet, sapphire and rainbow-hued birds. We saw tiny hummingbirds hover at the bird feeder, but missed spying the Cock of the Rock, a bird found only in Machu Picchu. I did locate him the next day.

The group continued along stone pathways until reaching the bear sanctuary. Inkaterra participates in rescuing and rehabilitating Andean Spectacled Bears. The Peruvian bears are quite different from American Grizzly's, brown and black bears. I would tell my grandkids I saw Paddington Bear, the storybook character who comes from the jungles in deepest, darkest Peru.

No time for the Inkaterra Spa, but I managed to squeeze in a bit of touristy shopping downtown. The marketplace proved a good venue for bartering over local wares. The hotel's lovely gift shop, however, is the place for quality, authentic Peruvian goods such as alpaca sweaters and scarves.

Peruvian cuisine shines and the resort's glass-walled restaurant offers a bountiful menu: seafood, including fresh ceviche, numerous varieties of potatoes, traditional corn and organic chocolate. Some of the group tried guinea pig, a traditional dish, but I couldn't digest the thought.

Exhausted from a long travel day, I fell asleep under a warm alpaca blanket after prepping my camera bag for the morning excursion to the archeological site. Sadly, I awoke at 5:00 a.m. to a hideous downpour. However, I knew I only had half a day to tour Machu Picchu, so pulled on my Gore-Tex jacket.

Machu Picchu Archeological Site

A fellow photographer and I scurried a few blocks to the location where everyone hops the bus to the citadel (unless they choose to hike). The buses are the only vehicles allowed on the road, a wise decision because the gravel path makes 19 switchbacks as it rises up the steep incline.

We passed through the ticket booth and attempted to stay dry, but once I turned the corner and entered the sacred grounds, the rain didn't matter. I was engulfed by swirling clouds amidst tall mountain peaks and crinkled valleys. Ancient stone walls and buildings assembled by some of the best structural engineers of all time surrounded me. These inexplicable ruins have withstood earthquakes and storms since the fifteenth-century. I pinched myself because I was standing in the fabled lost city of the Incas, Machu Picchu.

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This view is well worth the time, money and effort to visit Machu Picchu. Photo credit: Debi Lander

Sometimes I worry that I will be disappointed by an iconic shrine, but not so. I was overwhelmed and humbled to be present at one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Sure I'd seen thousands of photos but, nothing beats the grandeur and romance of a personal visit. Machu Picchu does not disappoint.

The ruins, so overrun by jungle growth even the Spanish Conquistadores failed to find, were re-discovered in 1911 by Hiram Bingham. The mysterious site is believed to have been used for religious ceremonies, astronomical observations, a place to grow corn on terraces, and as a home for royals and workers.

The altitude and the weight of my heavy camera backpack forced breathlessness, but slow and steady progress rewards the climber. To gain a new perspective and another magical view you must mount more stone steps. Pause and shoot; every angle brings stunning postcard-worthy panoramas and the wind changes the scene almost by the second.

At the summit, I marveled at the carved steps in the Royal Mausoleum "Pachamama" and listened to the guide. Then, carefully descended the slippery stairs (no handrails) and scrambled up another portion of the temples. We stopped at religious and spiritual centers, living areas, the farming terraces, and the storerooms. Llamas roam the grounds and everyone seemed to enjoy taking a selfie with the animals.

As I was touring, the sun miraculously broke through the clouds. Now I needed to retrace my steps to take clearer photos. Exhausted but exhilarated, I reached an overhang and sat down to rest. I savored the moment to the fullest, but wished I had longer to bask in the glow of this glorious archeological wonder. Tip: Allow more than one day to visit.



Inkaterra La Casona Hotel reflects a romantic ambiance. Photo credit: Debi Lander

I returned to Cusco via train and bus in the late afternoon and spent the night at the opulent [Inkaterra La Casona Hotel](#). I had only the next morning to explore since I was moving on to the Amazon Basin. In

retrospect, I wished I had chosen to stay and take a more in-depth look at the Inca culture. As with so many things in life, once is not enough but even a half a day at Machu Picchu brings unforgettable memories worthy of the complicated trip.