

george clooney slept here
Travel Astronomy Or Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous

Inkaterra: Where You Can Feel Noble About Your Travel Dollars

Sometimes I have to pinch myself. Is this a dream or am I really taking a bubble bath in the same 16th century manor house where Simon Bolivar once lived? Am I really gazing out over Peru's Sacred Valley from a five-star hotel, drinking medicinal tea from leaves grown right on the grounds?



On a recent trip to Peru, my arms were practically black and blue from all the pinching. Is all this magic really happening to me, a kid from Kansas?

It all started at a hacienda in Urubamba. With knee-buckling vistas of the Andes from every window, Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba is the latest offering in the Inkaterra lineup.

Like all Inkaterra projects, it plows profits back into the local community, buys produce from the Andean Farm project and offers guests a window into the real story behind the region. In this case, the constellations that guided the Incas in the building of their mysterious stone cities.

I suppose a person could go to Peru and NOT stay at an Inkaterra property. But it would be akin to going to Egypt and forgoing the pyramids.

Inkaterra is a celebration of all things Peru. All things that are good about traveling. Preserving cultures. Forging relationships with real people. Making sure the flora and fauna that makes the region so compelling in the first place will still be there tomorrow.

That Inkaterra happens to have a handful of pedigreed boutique hotels is almost beside the point.

It's one thing to book a hotel for night-time snoozing. But to book a hotel that has the sole purpose of bettering the world, now that's what I call a vacation.

Of course, hotel might be the wrong word. Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica is actually a field research station. It regularly sponsors scientific inventories and expeditions. With the help of National Geographic and several prestigious American universities, it has catalogued thousands of rainforest species and identified 21 new species including orchids, amphibians and butterflies.

I love the idea of my vacation dollars going to preserve rainforest (42,000 acres so far), fund scientific expeditions and build schools for the local Quechuas people. You won't be surprised to hear that Inkaterra was the first in Peru to go carbon neutral.



E.O. Wilson, the famous Pulitzer-prize winning Harvard scientist found more ant species during his stay at Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica than anywhere else in the world. The orchid garden at Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo hotel has the world's largest orchid collection.

The fact that Inkaterra's five properties also happen to have high-count sheets, Peruvian antiques, custom-made crafts and quinoa pancakes only adds to the mystique.

When Jose Koechlin, the enigmatic owner of Inkaterra, first bought property in Aguas Caliente, the tiny town at the base of Machu Picchu, he donated 11 acres to build a school, a train station, a market and homes for locals. He made sure the cloud forest was preserved.

Only then, 15 years later, did he open the hotel that today has an organic farm, a tea plantation and a preserved cloud forest with the 372 species of orchids and 111 species of butterflies. Oh and did I mention there's also an Andean Spectacled Bear Rescue on site.

So, yes, gather all the hotel points you want, but, as for me, I want my travel dollars to help make the world a better place.

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