

THE INDEPENDENT TRAVELLER

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ALAMY

A sacred space in the valley of the Incas

Reviewed by Patrick Welch

Fancy hotels are 10 a centimo in Peru. Tourism is now the nation's third-biggest sector. The backpackers are still here, of course, but so too are discerning travellers more interested in pima cotton sheets than pisco sour happy hours.

Peruvian mini-chain Inkaterra has made a name for itself by catering to the latter crowd, successfully attracting guests who 20 years ago might not have considered a holiday in Peru. It has hotels in Cusco, the Amazon and Machu Picchu Pueblo (which has been cunningly rebranded from the rather more commonplace Aguas Calientes). The opening in spring of its fourth property, in the increasingly popular Sacred Valley near Machu Picchu, was the obvious next step.

Hacienda Urubamba is a mix of grand colonial private house and country club. There are just a dozen rooms in the main house with 24 smaller double-room *casas* at the rear, the first 10 of which opened this autumn. The rest will open, along with a spa, next year, complete with golf buggies to whizz guests around. It's luxurious, but with a conscience. Lights are dimmed at night, rubbish is recycled, and grey water irrigates the *chancra* (organic garden) that provides much of the hotel's fresh produce. If you're keen to discover your inner quinoa producer, the staff offer classes on Andean farming.

Location

Tucked above the village of Urubamba, the Hacienda sits in Andean foothills that are home to pumas, wild cats and deer, plus numerous birdlife that can be spotted on the free birding walks. More adventurous excursions, including horse-riding and rafting (at extra cost), will be



Estate visit: spacious bedrooms and (below) the magnificent hall



offered next year. It's a 90-minute drive from Cusco (the nearest airport), and a convenient stop-off on the way to Machu Picchu, particularly if you're interested in the Sacred Valley's lesser-known attractions: the Maras salt mines, the handcraft market at Pisac and Inca sights at Ollantaytambo and Moray.

Comfort

The hotel has country-house features such as a terracotta roof-tiled central courtyard and contemporary details including a huge glass façade. Interiors, as with other Inkaterra properties, have been overseen by designer Denise Guislain, the wife of the company's owner. She has filled the Hacienda with local art, crafts and

TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

Hacienda Urubamba
Huayocari, Huayllabamba district, Urubamba, Peru
(00 51 1 610 0400; inkaterra.com).

Rooms ●●●●●
Value ●●●●●
Service ●●●●●

Rainbow Tours (020 7666 1260; rainbowtours.co.uk) offers a 13-day tour of Peru (peru.travel), including Machu Picchu, the Sacred Valley, Cusco, Lima and the Amazon rainforest, from £3,685pp. It includes flights from London, accommodation (including Hacienda Urubamba) and transfers.

vintage bric-a-brac, adding personality and colour to a space that could otherwise feel cavernous. The floor is carved granita stone and the columns are of andesite, both sourced in the Sacred Valley, while the beams are from local eucalyptus trees, which also burn in the fires, emitting a lovely, sweet smell that's now ubiquitous in the Andes.

The smallest rooms still feel big and come with a free mini-bar stocked with soft drinks and snacks. Bathrooms are large too but don't have tubs, which would be welcome after a day's activity and given the chilly nights. That said, the under-floor heating is lovely, as are the enormous beds. If you're looking to splurge, junior suites come with sofabeds and fireplaces.

During my visit earlier this year, rooms at the back of the main house were subject to some light daytime construction noise and the in-room wi-fi, like most hotels in these parts, wasn't particularly fast or reliable – but the Hacienda says it is working to rectify this. Lastly, while service is super-friendly, it's overly fussy. Forgivable, perhaps, given these were early days.

The highlight was breakfast. On a continent that loves to fry food, yet seems incapable of a good fry-up, the bacon, eggs and beans here, offered alongside colossal platters of fresh tropical fruit, yogurt, cereals and great coffee, was outstanding: the best I've had in South America.

MAKE ME AN OFFER A 'TWIXMAS' BREAK

One holiday three ways.

Each week, we invite travel companies to offer us their best deal for a specific trip. Today, a "Twixmas" break (between Christmas and New Year): one in Britain, one in Europe, and another to a long-haul destination. Prices are per person, based on two adults travelling together.



UK
£172
Yorkshire Cottages

Includes four nights' self-catering at Hazel Towers from 26 December. The five-star apartment in Saltburn-by-the-Sea, between Redcar and Whitby, has an en-suite Jacuzzi and bay windows overlooking the beach. It sleeps two (01228 406701; yorkshire-cottages.info).



Europe
£225
Jet2 City Breaks

Includes flights from East Midlands on 27 December, plus three nights' B&B at the three-star Ibis Budapest Centrum. It's a 15-minute walk from the Hungarian National Museum and the Gellert Thermal Baths and Pool (0800 408 0778; jet2holidays.com/city-breaks).



Long haul
£949
Hayes & Jarvis

Includes United Airlines from Heathrow to Newark on Boxing Day, returning from Toronto. Plus three nights at the Lexington New York and two at the four-star Courtyard by Marriott in Toronto, both room-only; connecting flight included (01293 735 831; hayesandjarvis.co.uk).