

WORLD

A Perfect Weekend in Inkaterra Machu Picchu



Photo by [Shubh ka Bharathwaj](#)

A stroll through a nature reserve accompanied by a hummingbird, a lazy afternoon beside a fireplace, a cloud forest, a tea plantation, the Inca Empire: If any of these make you want to pack and head to the Andes, you should seriously consider spending a weekend at [Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel](#). It's not all about ruins (although walking through the Inca citadel will surely be part of your schedule). It's also about having a sublime encounter with nature and culture and seeing that sustainable tourism is possible. Come along and find out for yourself.

Friday

Inca Rail

It all begins here



It had been some years since I took the train to Machu Picchu, and this was my first time on a first-class train. While heading to the station through the streets of Ollantaytambo, I was trying to recall when, exactly, I'd last been there. Luckily I was caught up in a bunch of young students who were dressed colorfully and laughing cheerfully in the absence of their teacher. I was happy to leave my thoughts behind and rush to the station. The [Inca Train](#) would soon arrive, and as it did I stared at the railway, eager to board and follow the Vilcanota River downstream. In no time I was reclining in a comfortable white leather seat next to the window, where two waiters greeted me with a cold towel and friendly smiles. Drinks and lunch were about to come, but I was fixated on the wild green scenery of the Andes, the thought of trekkers trying to conquer the Inca Trail and the sound of the rushing river. The cloud forest was ever closer, and so was Machu Picchu, one of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites.

Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel

Paradise does exist



Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel via [Website](#)

Across from the train station you will find the entrance to [Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel](#), situated on 12 secluded acres of natural land. Thanks to Jofred, an especially cordial member of Inkaterra's team, I was soon crossing the wooden bridge to the lobby. Known for its hospitality, sustainable tourism, conservation and research projects (it's also on [National Geographic's Unique Lodges of the World](#) list), Inkaterra is the perfect place for eco lovers: Your stay is 100 percent carbon neutral. On my way to Casita number 39, a whitewashed adobe house, I couldn't help pausing to see the rapid flipping of a hummingbird passing by and the nature reserve that surrounded me. Just the beginning of a very special journey....

Toll-free from the U.S.: 1-866-242-2889 or 1-800-442-5042; local, 511 610 0400 or 511 610 0404; inkaterra.com

Lunch

From Andean cuisine to fusion flavors



Lunch at nkaterra via [webs te](#)

If you're an avid traveler, you know resting time will eventually come. I lingered to see if I could spot the green-tailed trainbearer hummingbird before I headed to the hotel's glass-walled restaurant. Discovering the flavors that make up a place's culinary identity is part of the journey; despite being from Peru, I still have a lot to taste and discover in my own country. A fresh salad opened my appetite and I was glad to see all ingredients came from the hotel's organic garden: mild and bold baby greens, avocado, tomatoes and Brazil nut praline with passion fruit vinaigrette, followed by a paper-wrapped trout with lemongrass aroma. If this is your first time in Cusco, don't be shy: Try the confit guinea pig in orange sauce. It's a favorite in rural Peru

Learning the art of tea making



Tea plantation, photo by Susana Lay

After an hour of rest beside the room's fireplace, I was ready to join the tea-making excursion. Along with a group, I met Carmen, an Inkaterra expert guide, in the Eco Media Center. She gave us a brief lesson in tea history. We learned about *Camellia sinensis*, the evergreen shrub from which black, green, oolong, white and pu'erh teas are made. I might be an enthusiastic tea drinker, but I knew nothing about tea before listening to Carmen — including the legend of the Chinese emperor Shennong, which details the birth of tea. After our lesson, we were ready to walk to the plantation and experience the first three steps of the process: plucking, withering and rolling. Meanwhile, a pleasing light rain began to fall while clouds whirled around the sky. Umbrellas opened and teatime was announced inside the cozy reception lounge. Perfect timing for warming up.

Saturday

Spectacled Bear

The real Paddington



PHOTO COURTESY OF NKATERRA MACHU PICCHU PUEBLO HOTEL VIA WEBSITE

Maybe he was named after the London railway station he was found in, but it is said that the real Paddington bear comes from the deep Andes. A 10-minute walk along the railway takes you to the [Inkaterra Machu Picchu Spectacled Bear Project](#). This conservation program recovers bears that have been hurt by human impact and eventually reintroduces them to their natural habitat in the Andean mountains. As Braulio Puma, an experienced bird watcher and head explorer guide in Cusco, escorted me to the Andean Bear Sanctuary, I learned how the cloud forest and the spectacled bear have a symbiotic relationship that helps conserve the life of the trees and plants in these beautiful ecosystems. I was also lucky enough to spot a couple of torrent ducks diving playfully in the Vilcanota River. Soon we were marching through an organic plantation of fresh tomatoes, which took us to the bears' green habitat. I couldn't wait to meet Coco and Josi and see the semicircular white markings around their eyes, the trait responsible for their charming name.

The Bear Keeper

Hermitaño Quispe



bear keeper of Andean bear sanctuary, photo by Susana Ilay

Not all who visit the spectacled bears get to see them; sometimes they are camouflaged by their own private forest. But bear keeper Hermitaño Quispe knows how to detect them. Hermitaño has been working in Inkaterra for more than 15 years and has taken close and loving care of Coco since he first arrived on the Inkaterra property. Thanks to him, we

found Coco munching on a shiny bromeliad plant. Every now and then he lifted his head and we caught a glimpse of the light markings that distinguished his face from the rest of his black fur. We all stared at the solitary bear for a while; from where we were he seemed defenseless and extremely shy, but Braulio was quick to remind us of Coco's wild nature. Then it was time to meet Josi, but it was not easy to find her. As we followed Hermitaño around the bear's territory, he finally spotted her (we did not). Hermitaño made unusual sounds and agitated a stick to call her attention; he knows Josi better than anybody else. A few minutes later, the small female bear appeared under the shadow of a tree. Hermitaño's face lit up. His smile made me want to take a picture (not of the bear, but of him).

The Orchid Garden

Follow the smells



[The Orchid Trail](#) is one of Inkaterra's included excursions. Blooming season occurs in January and February, but any time of the year you are welcome to discover the 372 species of native

orchids in their cloud-forest habitat. Braulio's passion and enthusiasm for birds and plants is contagious, so while I followed him with a bunch of questions, I had a chance to see and learn every detail of the minuscule [Lepanthes](#), [Trichosalpinx](#) and [Stelis](#) and smell the fragrant [Ida locusta](#) (which stands among my favorites). The Inkaterra guides encouraged us to learn about our wonderful surroundings, and while I took note of the orchid's sepal, petals and pouch, my eyes diverted to silver-beaked and saffron-crowned tanagers cheerfully darting by.

Unu Spa

Relaxation time



INKATERRA MACHU PICCHU PUEBLO HOTEL VIA WEBSITE

In Quechua, *unu* means "water," an element that is always present in the cloud forest. Finishing any day at the spa is always a wise decision, especially if you have aching knees from a multi-day trek. My advice is to start with the De-stress Massage and enjoy the mint, eucalyptus, mountain lemon, orchids and other local, natural fragrances. And, of course, to experience the smooth heated stones from the Urubamba River, each coated in lemon oil. You'll be lost in pleasure and utterly immersed in this singular moment.

Sunday

Machu Picchu Citadel

On top of the world



INKATERRA MACHU PICCHU PUEBLO HOTEL VIA WEBSITE

After these dreamy past few days, you may have forgotten all about the ruins. (Okay, so that's a stretch.) When the explorer Hiram Bingham III encountered Machu Picchu in 1911, he brought the Peruvian Andes to the world's attention. The classic journey to the Inca citadel is a challenging multiday hike along the Inca Trail, but if you already made it all the way to Aguas Calientes, you can contact an Inkaterra [private guide](#) and discover the archaeological site within minutes. No matter how you arrive to the "Old Peak" (its name in the native Quechua language), the result is astounding: You'll feel a sublime combination of reverence, wonder and appreciation. A sense of mystery, that invites you to go beyond what you already know.