

# PERUSING PERU

**MAGICAL**  
Inca citadel of  
Machu Picchu

## Ben Rankin travels on the new British Airways route to Lima

**I**t's just gone 11am on a wet Friday morning high in the Andean cloud forest and I'm stopped in my tracks.

Bears, llamas and large spiders are common sights in this remote corner of Peru, but not this kind of species – and we're face to face.

At the end of a stone path snaking through thick vegetation and teeming with exotic birds, ex-footballer Tomas Brodin is on his mobile.

This is the former Sweden star whose Euro 92 goal famously helped dump Graham "do I not like that?" Taylor's England side out of the tournament.

Looking for two

friends to go for a pizza, he's the last creature I expected to see at an altitude of 6,692ft.

But Tomas and I turn out to be in reverse-Taylor style agreement over our visit to the Inca wonder Machu Picchu: Do we both like that!

Brodin-sized surprises crop up as often as roasted guinea pig on a restaurant menu in this wonderful Latin American country.

Take the capital Lima, home to a third of the country's 30 million population, and

now a direct British Airways flight away from Gatwick.

Overcrowded, uncomfortably humid (it never rains here) and permanently shrouded in mist, first impressions aren't great. Then there's the traffic. If you think your commute to work is bad, you haven't seen anything. There are two million cars crammed on to the city's congested roads and, with next to no public transport, getting anywhere fast is nigh on impossible.

But this is a city going places, albeit very slowly, and Lima is undergoing a cultural revolution.

It has a thriving food scene, largely located in the hip seaside Miraflores district, and the city attracts big-name

rock 'n roll acts such as the Rolling Stones and Coldplay.

Drive down the Pacific Ocean coastal road and you'll find surfers riding big waves, tennis courts packed and beachside restaurants teeming – on a Wednesday afternoon.

Bohemian Barranco, a bit further along the coast, is the place to go for night owls, with its bar and club scene. And the old colonial centre – an oasis in a metropolis of half-built concrete buildings – is a must-see for its architecture and museums.

If it's ancient ruins you're after, you don't need to travel far. There's the pre-Inca Huaca Pucllana pyramid in Miraflores or the sprawling Pachacamac temple archaeological site on the outskirts.

Most visitors to Lima spend a day (at most) here before going home or fleeing to the hills – it deserves longer.

And there's no need to rush to the mountains because it's just a one-hour flight to the Andean capital, Cusco.

In fact, travellers are urged to rest after a long flight so their bodies are

ready for the stresses of altitude. Going from sea level to 11,154ft in just 60 minutes can be a shock to the system and there's no knowing if you will be affected. Being short of breath and having a slight headache isn't uncommon as you walk off the plane.

But when you do catch your breath you'll soon have it taken away again by the incredible scenery.

With a golden sun setting behind majestic snow-capped mountains, we drove past grazing alpacas and fields of an unusual source of Peruvian pride – potatoes, of which the country boasts 4,000 varieties – on our way to Urubamba in the Sacred Valley.

A bit further on at Ollantaytambo, a delightful little town where the Inca Trail starts, we caught a train for the short journey to Machu Picchu town.

You can only take a small bag on the train, but make sure it's not as tiny as mine was – I had to wear the same clothes for two days because I didn't

have space for more. We stayed at the rustic Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel, a favourite with superstars such as Mick Jagger and dance DJ David Guetta as well as, er, Tomas Brodin.

A world away from the hustle and bustle of Lima, we dropped in on the hotel's bear sanctuary, toured the orchid garden and picked tea leaves for an afternoon cuppa. And when you really needed to escape from it all, there was a steaming Andean sauna to soothe away those stresses.

At sunrise the next day we followed the trail to Machu Picchu's Inca citadel and two hours later – with a bottle of bubbly in hand – we were looking out over it. I've seen it in so many pictures over the years I thought I'd be disappointed, but I wasn't. A magical surprise. We spent several hours on the site but it could have been days there was so much to

take in. Beware the strong sun – a child and a colleague fell victim to sunstroke. Back down the valley we caught the train back to Ollantaytambo, this time in daylight, and were treated to an impromptu fashion show in the carriage by the delightful staff.

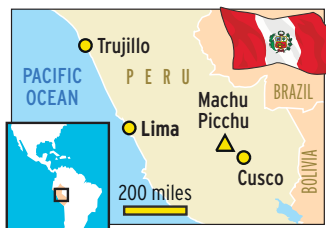
Everywhere we went in Peru people had big smiles and were a pleasure to meet, even if they were keen to make money from us.

Later we checked in to Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba and the following morning went mountain biking – with our support van carrying an oxygen tank just in case.

Our last stop was in Cusco and I was expecting the ancient Inca capital to be a low-key affair. But it was party time, as I found out when I crawled home at 3am, slightly Inca-pacitated.

*When you  
catch your  
breath, the  
scenery  
will take it  
away again*

# Get there



■ British Airways flies from Gatwick to Lima from £650 return. [ba.com](http://ba.com)

■ oneworld member LATAM Airlines Peru flies up to 23 times a day from Lima to Cusco from £66 return. [latam.com](http://latam.com)

■ Rooms at the Westin Lima Hotel & Convention Center in Lima start at \$310pn B&B. [starwoodhotels.com](http://starwoodhotels.com)

■ Rooms at the Palacio del Inka hotel in Cusco start at \$235pn B&B. [starwoodhotels.com](http://starwoodhotels.com)

■ Rooms at the Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba hotel start at \$420pn B&B. [inkaterra.com](http://inkaterra.com)

■ Rooms at the Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel start at \$249pn h/b. [inkaterra.com](http://inkaterra.com)

■ Half-day Machu Picchu guided tours with Inkaterra cost \$150pp. [inkaterra.com](http://inkaterra.com)

■ Machu Picchu return by train from Ollantaytambo starts at \$106pp. [perurail.com](http://perurail.com)

■ Audley Travel has tailored 10-day itineraries to Peru - to Lima, Cusco, and Machu Picchu from £4,750pp inc flights with BA, internal flights, private transfers, private excursions and B&B accommodation. [audleytravel.com](http://audleytravel.com), 01993 838620

■ Tourist info: [visitperu.com](http://visitperu.com)

**TIME ZONE** UK -6hrs

**CURRENCY** Sol £1 = 4.9

**BEST TIME TO GO** Inca-credible bucket list trip any time

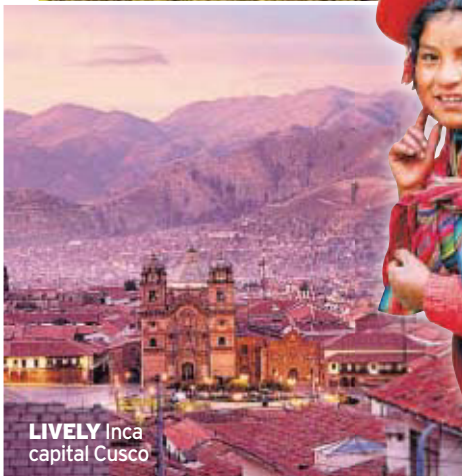


## LIFE IS SWEDE

With star Tomas.  
Above: Our cosy hotel



**MUST SEE**  
Delights of  
Miraflores and  
Ollantaytambo



**LIVELY** Inca  
capital Cusco



**COLOURFUL**  
Smiling locals