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### Lorraine Pascale

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# BLAIR'S SECRET WHITE HOUSE SUMMIT

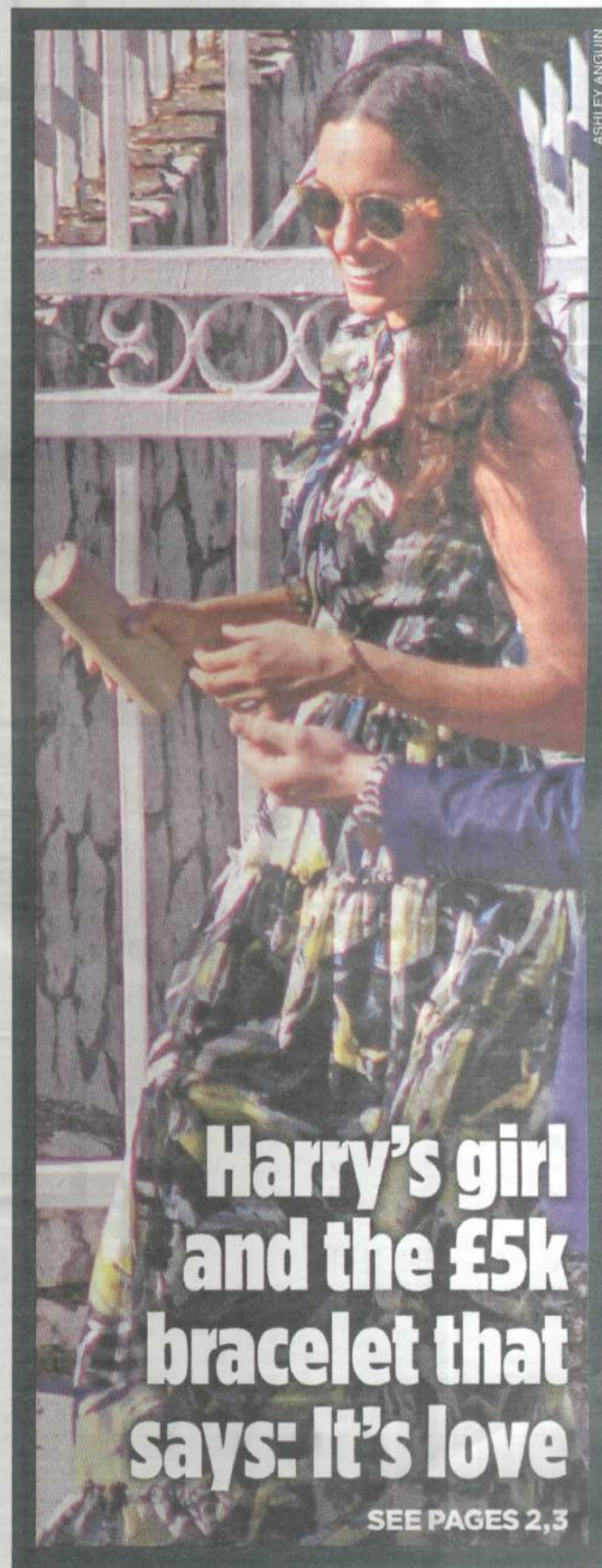
Ex-PM's astonishing bid  
to work for Trump... as his  
Middle East peace envoy

By **Simon Walters** POLITICAL EDITOR

TONY BLAIR has attended a secret meeting at the White House to discuss working for Donald Trump, The Mail on Sunday can reveal.

The former Prime Minister held talks with Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner on Wednesday with a view to becoming a

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ASHLEY ANGUIN

Harry's girl  
and the £5k  
bracelet that  
says: It's love

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# Travel

## Roll up for the Machu mystery tour...

Philippa Gregory is overawed by Peru's incredible enigma – and under fire from piranhas

**M**ACHU Picchu in Peru has been named as one of the new seven wonders of the world, and it does not disappoint. What is wondrous about it must be different for every hiker who makes the trek up the long Inca trail, or every tourist who comes more comfortably by train. But few people can resist the sense of awe at this amazing site.

Even today it still challenges with unanswered questions. Why was it abandoned only eight years after it was completed in about 1572? Why did the Spanish conquistadors never discover it as they hunted for the gold of the Inca? Why was it built in the first place? And how was it that people working without a written literature and cutting stone without iron tools could plan and construct such an extraordinary site, nearly 8,000ft above sea level, putting together terraces, palaces and temples without mortar? The enormous shaped boulders fit together like a 3D jigsaw puzzle of the gods.

I reached it the easy way – by the scenic train ride, the narrow track winding through gorges and across clean mountain rivers, to the town of Agua Caliente. I can assure you that there is nothing very wondrous about Agua Caliente – it exists as a starting point for the buses up the mountain and it is all market and no mystery, a lot of plastic and no archaeology.

**T**HE first thing that strikes the visitor about Machu Picchu is the scale – the whole site covers nearly 80,000 acres. The mystery city

was probably built for an educated elite. Some of the religious buildings are aligned for sunrise and sunset, others are precisely placed to catch the rising moon.

I was shown around by a local guide who spoke of the American explorer who came upon the ruins while looking for somewhere else, of the extraordinary archaeological work that continues today, and the eccentric theories that only another civilisation could have created such a miracle of engineering. Ancient Egyptians? Aliens? Both?

However sceptical one might be, the ruins, their relationship to other sites in the 'sacred valley' nearby, and their inspiration from astron-

omy, makes you long to solve the mysteries yourself.

I came back down to earth at Cusco, capital of the Inca empire. It's a hauntingly pretty town where a perfectly shaped Inca wall runs on one side of the street and exquisite medieval Spanish townhouses fill the other.

You can walk past the famous 'angle stone' on your way to the Coricancha palace, where the Inca temple forms the core and base of the later Spanish monastery built by the conquistadors to celebrate their victory.

When an earthquake hit Cusco in 1550, it destroyed the cathedral but the Inca temple remained standing

– the guides say that the Inca stones were so perfectly fitted together that they could move apart and then rejoin without falling.

Inca culture is inspiring, but in Cusco the modern world is beautiful too. I stayed at Inkaterra La Casona, a 16th Century house now superbly restored with 11 suites, each with a super-sized bath and open fireplace.

The final part of my holiday was to the Peruvian Amazon. To reach the Amazon by plane, you have to go through Lima. Actually, to

**INCA TRAIL:** Locals – and a llama – in their traditional costume in the city of Cusco



## Discover a new world

By Sian Lloyd

AS A weather presenter, I've spent most of my career looking up to the skies, but I've never really spent much time exploring what lies far beyond.

But that changed when I was given the opportunity to visit the 45,000-acre Elan Valley Estate in Mid Wales. In 2015, it became the first privately owned land to be granted International Dark Sky Park status, which means it is protected against light pollution. Showing me around was Richard Poole, of the site's owners Dwr Cymru (Welsh Water), and Nick Busby, chairman of the Usk Astronomical Society, who is a lifelong astro-photographer.

Even in big cities, the moon, planets and brighter constellations

are all often visible to the naked eye. But move to more rural and darker skies and you open up new worlds of possibilities.

In a place such as Elan Valley, you can see much of the Milky Way, and on clear nights you can even make out bright nebulae – gas and dust clouds. Come armed with even basic binoculars and you'll spot the rings of Saturn, the moons of Jupiter and the Milky Way in stunning detail.

Clearly, though, these things are best explored with a telescope. We used a £400 Skywatcher 250P DS telescope, mounted on a £1,000 Skywatcher NEQ6 Synscan. With



this equipment, we were able to see the heavens in all their glory.

Our first stop was the Great Orion Nebula, right in the middle of Orion's Sword. The detail was truly exquisite.

We also saw the Perseus cluster,

**SKY'S THE LIMIT:** Sian at Elan Valley Estate. Right: Nick Busby's photos of Jupiter and the Rosette Nebula





**PUZZLE OF THE GODS:** The extraordinary Machu Picchu. Right: Philippa and a friend on their fishing trip. Below: The Aria Amazon riverboat



## GETTING THERE

Cox & Kings ([coxandkings.co.uk](http://coxandkings.co.uk), 0203 642 0861) offers an eight-day private tour from £2,495pp, staying at Inkterra Hotels. This includes direct BA flights to Lima, internal flights, transfers, private guided tours and breakfast daily. A three-night cruise on Aria Amazon is priced from £2,995pp, including flights to Iquitos and full board throughout.

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# How to live the dream in French style

By Helen Atkinson Wood

**PREHISTORIC** man selected the Dordogne valley as his destination of choice. Today this region is still a favourite playground of Britons. An easy 80-minute flight from Stansted brings you to the very best of France.

Just ten minutes from tiny Bergerac airport is La Tour des Vents restaurant, which offers a panoramic view of the town and a first reminder of the calibre of French cuisine.

I dived into succulent, crisp-coated langoustines, washed down with a Bergerac Monbazillac with a nose big enough to put Cyrano's own in the shade.

Full of bonhomie, we drove to Tremolat, a Cotswold-coloured village where the sleepy square gave clues as to the marque of its clientele. Restaurants, a hair salon and estate agents – essentials for when you come and live here, as you will surely want to.

Author Henry Miller came for a week in 1958 and stayed a month, making the handsome country house hotel Le Vieux Logis his home.

Our cosy suite of rooms, nestled in the eaves, was up a creaking staircase past Room 4 where Miller wrote in the deep peace of this region.

We were treated to Michelin-starred chef Vincent Arnould's seasonal menu, eating in the hotel's beautiful high-ceilinged dining room that was once a tobacco-drying barn.

The flavour of a working farm lingered on. After picking Crimson Delight apples from the hotel's orchard, we crunched our way through golden oak woodlands and up to a rocky outcrop with breathtaking views of the Dordogne river snaking through the valley below.

If you visit only one market in this area, it has to be Sarlat. Bursting with regional produce,



**TASTY:** The market at Sarlat

## GETTING THERE

Chateau de la Treyne ([chateaudelatreyne.com](http://chateaudelatreyne.com)) offers double rooms from €200 (£172) a night. It reopens on March 25.

Ryanair ([ryanair.com](http://ryanair.com)) offers flights from Stansted to Brive, the nearest airport. Brittany Ferries ([brittanyferries.com](http://brittanyferries.com)) offers crossings to St Malo and Caen.

the seasonal star during our visit was the walnut, made into spreads, jams and cakes.

An hour's drive east brought us to Chateau de la Treyne – a fairytale castle set in extensive grounds, and the suite we stayed in was indeed fit for a princess.

Henry Miller concluded that the Dordogne will live on just as dreams will live on. And here, after a Michelin-starred dinner in the hotel's sumptuous Louis XIII dining room, and a restful night in a sumptuous bed, I couldn't agree more.

**ELEGANT:** Chateau de la Treyne



GETTY IMAGES

# – from darkest Wales



which shone like perfectly shaped diamonds in the sky. But my highlight was the Beehive cluster or Praesepe, in the constellation of Cancer. Through the telescope, it was magical to see how each star's gases and age

altered their appearance and brightness. What intrigued me most was when Nick explained that if I came back a few months later, I'd have a completely different viewing experience.

The seasons all have different constellations in the evening because of the Earth moving around the Sun. In winter months, you tend to see brighter constellations such as Orion, Taurus and Gemini, while in summer the Milky Way is much more pronounced and we can see the centre of the galaxy in Sagittarius as well as magnificent constellations such as Cygnus.

Perhaps understandably, I also overestimated the impact of weather. Periods of high pressure

when the jet stream moves away from the UK bring out the clearest nights, but Nick explained that rain need not dampen the experience – he has even shown audiences storms on Jupiter in wet weather before.

All told, stargazing was truly magnificent. Not only was I able to admire parts of space that were a mystery to me, but I came to realise the experience is also much more accessible. It was an absolute treat – and I cannot imagine a better place to enjoy it than in rugged Mid Wales.

● Elan Valley visitor centre ([elanvalley.org.uk](http://elanvalley.org.uk)) offers information on stargazing and activities throughout the region.