

WHERE TO STAY

Inkaterra La Casona: Historic Charms Meet Modern Comforts in Cusco

Live like a Spanish lord in this 16th century hotel right in the city centre. With its peaceful courtyard, it's the perfect place to relax in beautiful Cusco.

Like almost everyone who likes to travel, we knew that one day we would end up at Machu Picchu. There are so many reasons why people come from all over the world to see it, but for us it was the architecture. You can see it in that famous photo – it's such a picturesque, romantic, but also illogical place to build a village. Why was it built in such a seemingly uninhabitable location? How did they do it? These were just two of the questions we wanted to answer as we set off to explore and photograph it.

Machu Picchu was built by the Incas and this (as well as the location) adds to the mystery of the place – its architecture is uniquely South American making it look and feel even more alien. What we didn't realize was that there was another Incan city nearby (their ancient capital none the less), and that we would have to pass through it anyway.

Cusco is home to the closest airport to Machu Picchu and is a major attraction in its own right. The more we read about it, the more sure we were, that we should spend a few days there. We wanted to stay in the city's historic centre and happened to come across the hotel, [Inkaterra La Casona](#). Having already booked a room at their sister property, [Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo](#), we chose their Cusco hotel for our city stay.



Cusco is still a major city and is located in a slightly more normal (easy to get to) place than Machu Picchu. Of course this makes it very different (and less dramatic), but those interested in history might even find it of more interesting thanks to its importance throughout the ages. There are still remnants of the Inca city dotted about the place including some impressive huge stone walls. The Spanish built their city right on top of the Inca one, and it is one of the finest examples of colonial architecture in the Americas.

The two cultures combined to create an exceedingly colorful place, full of beautiful old buildings and exotic indigenous faces, sights, and smells. It is the perfect place to get acclimated to both the culture and the altitude. There is another town – Ollantaytambo – which is another stopping off point for the trip to Machu Picchu, but we decided that Cusco had more to offer.

Since the Spanish arrived, the centre of the city has been the Plaza de Armas and the hotel is located just a couple of blocks away from it. We exited our taxi in a small square and we're immediately greeted by the sight of brightly dressed local women complete with baby alpacas. What a warm and Peruvian welcome! Our hotel was just across the cobblestoned plaza behind a large wooden door. From the outside, all you can see are the white walls of the building and the occasional green shuttered window. The door is closed and you have to knock in order to be let in. Once inside though, the charm of this historic place is revealed.



This was once a rich Spaniard's family home, and it is almost 500 years old. It is laid out like most houses of the time with the entrance lobby leading out onto a courtyard, around which the rooms can be found. Every available space is used, with the lobby especially being packed full of Incan textiles and statues, as well as Spanish antique furniture and wood-beamed ceilings. It is not just nice to look at though, the furniture is also seriously comfortable and it is a great place to relax. Everywhere you look you see calming and subdued terra-cotta colors, whites, blues, and reds.

//

From the handwritten note in our room, to the candles, teacups, and tableware. Everything felt like we were being given an extra special experience and not just staying in a hotel.



What I loved most about the hotel was the attention to detail. From the handwritten note in our room, to the candles, teacups, and tableware. Everything felt like we were being given an extra special experience and not just staying in a hotel. It is a lovely place to be, and all these features and stylistic choices have grown out of the history of the city, the country, and the hotel itself. This spot was an Incan training ground, and the conquistador Diego de Almagro stayed here, as did the famous Simon Bolivar – the man who won independence for South America.

With only 11 rooms, this really is a boutique hotel. Our room – a patio suite – was on the first level and felt spacious thanks to the high ceilings (complete with more exposed wooden beams). It was decorated with intricate native textiles and had a grand fireplace in the corner. The bathroom was huge and had a beautiful bath in the centre. I am not much of a bath taker but it was enough to make me seriously consider having the staff run me one – a service they offer free of charge.



There were plenty of other nice little touches as well, such as the candles, chocolates, hot water bottles (left under the sheets every day), and the bath products. These are made especially for the hotel and I took advantage of them to do my hair. These aren't your typical overly smelly soaps, they are organic and made my hair silky smooth.

Breakfast was a simple but wholesome affair with a buffet of granola, fruits, and charcuterie alongside the usual bread and eggs cooked to your liking. You can get lunch and dinner in the restaurant which serves a selection of local dishes. Unfortunately we were both getting over the Peruvian version of 'Bali belly' so we weren't feeling up to the more adventurous options but we were told that the guinea pig and alpaca meat is excellent. We mainly stuck to quinoa salads and more traditional meats. The restaurant, like the rest of the hotel, was beautifully decorated whether you choose to sit inside or outside.



Inkaterra La Casona offers other services including a hairdresser and a therapy room with an impressive list of treatments. They also have a little shop selling souvenirs so you can take home something similar to the pieces which decorate the hotel. Finally, they can also organize a variety of half and full day excursions. There are several possible routes for walking tours around the city, but for the more adventurous there is horse riding and mountain biking.

If you decide to go it alone, the hotel's central location makes it easy to get out and explore. You could easily fill a day or two just walking around the historic centre admiring the buildings and observing the colorful local people. There are plenty of good restaurants nearby where you can people watch while enjoying food or a Pisco sour.

The interesting San Blas neighborhood is just round the corner, and there is also the San Pedro market, which is a definite must. Here you can find all sorts of native goods and there is an abundance of street food. Women will line up there and serve their food from large pots which they had been carrying on their backs. We weren't feeling strong enough to try anything at that point, but in hindsight I wish I had. Those with more time can get out of the city and explore the Sacred Valley – home to more Inca ruins.

//

The interesting San Blas neighborhood is just round the corner, and there is also the San Pedro market, which is a definite must. Here you can find all sorts of native goods and there is an abundance of street food.



Cusco deserves to be more than just a stopping point on the way to Machu Picchu. It is a fascinating place with a long history, and it's the perfect location to rest before heading off on a trek. I would like to visit again and next time I think we will allow ourselves enough time to get out to the Sacred Valley. Staying at Inkaterra feels like staying in a part of that history. It actually reminded me of the hotels in Marrakech, from the outside it is unassuming but once you step inside you enter a quiet paradise that you might not have guessed existed. Just like those hotels, Inkaterra La Casona is full of charm and character, but the things which give this are uniquely Peruvian.

//

Inkaterra La Casona is full of charm and character, but the things which give this are uniquely Peruvian.

