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ADVENTURE

TRAVEL

INKATERRA: DOING MACHU PICCHU IN SUSTAINABLE STYLE



By Chere Di Boscio

[Machu Picchu](#) is a bucket list destination for many, but arriving to the famous site is also something of a mission: you have to land in Lima, then take another plane to Cusco, then drive almost three hours to the train station and

finally, after a two hour train ride, take a bus up a mountain. I wasn't sure seeing a bunch of ruins would be worth the effort, especially for a European like myself who's essentially surrounded my even older sites.

But then I found a fabulous eco hotel chain in the region that allows for a slower, more luxurious approach. Owned and operated by Jose Koechlin Von Stein, a passionate conservationist, businessman and environmentalist, the [Inkaterra chain](#) has properties conveniently located along the route to Machu Picchu. The hotels ensure they're all as green as can be by working with local artisans and construction materials, growing their own organic produce, and supporting various environmental causes.



Upon arriving at Inkaterra Casona in [Cusco](#), it became immediately apparent to me that this [UNESCO heritage site](#) of a city was well worth exploring on its own. Like most tourists here, I immediately went to the main square, the Plaza de Armas, where I discovered wonderful examples of 14th century Spanish architecture, a pretty park, loads of restaurants (including a few vegan ones like Organika and Green Point) and a plethora of shops selling high quality alpaca and vicuña clothing, silver jewellery and other artisanal items. Returning back to my hotel in the vibrant [San Blas](#) region, I explored hilly streets packed with artists, cafes, outdoor markets and plenty of charm.



After two days in this wonderful city, it was time to move on to the verdant Sacred Valley. En route, I stopped off at a few of the ruins including the incredible Sacsayhuaman. Many believe this site far pre-dates the Inca civilisation, and the mortar free masonry is absolutely astounding – it's so precisely done that a sheet of paper cannot fit between any of the massive, perfectly cut boulders that comprise the site.

My next destination was another Inkaterra property; this one perched on a mountain top in Urubamba. The hotel aims to show guests the beauty of the surrounding valley by offering hiking tours of the area. Unfortunately, I didn't have time to do this, but I did enjoy staying in my own bungalow, complete with a vast, warming fireplace and a bathroom well stocked with organic amenities.





Finally, it was time to head to Aguas Calientes, or Machu Picchu Pueblo, the bustling little town at the foot of the famous site. I took a taxi to the train station in Ollytantambo and boarded a surprisingly comfortable train, complete with snack service. I enjoyed listening to the excited chatter of tourists whilst watching the landscape gradually change from the dry scrub of the valley to a richer greenery. When we arrived, I was delighted to see that my hotel, Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo, was literally right beside the station – and there was someone there to meet me to take my bag!



Walking up the steep stone stairway to the property, I was greeted by a gurgling river, flitting hummingbirds and lush greenery. This hotel is a veritable mini Eden within the cloud forest; the epitome of eco-friendly – rooms are spacious and comfortable, featuring colourful locally made, artisanal blankets, pillows and decorations. There's even an 'Eco Centre,' where friendly, accommodating and above all knowledgeable staff encouraged me to make time to take tours of their organic farm, orchid garden and bear sanctuary. I'm glad they did – learning about permaculture, spotting a few of the hundreds of orchid varieties here, and feeding spectacled bears were some of the highlights of my Peruvian journey.



But perhaps what made the biggest impact was how my Inkaterra guide to Machu Picchu helped make the site truly come alive.

If you go on your own, you are likely to have no insight into what you're seeing – sure, viewing Incan archaeology atop 7,900 metres of cloud forest is impressive, but what's the story behind it? Miguelangelo told me all about that, and pointed out things I never would have recognised: an en-suite bedroom for travellers, mirrored pools to use for astronomical readings; displaced shards of broken pottery; sacrificial rocks and much more. He also recommended we start our tour at 1.30pm, when the site is less busy, and stay until closing time.





It was a wonderful idea: by the time the sun began to set behind the majestic citadel, it was only me, Miguel and a small American film crew that remained to say farewell to the end of a dream come true for many. It may have taken five days, substantial funds and a lot of physical energy to get here, but it was definitely more than worth it.

Note: The Peruvian government recently announced that from July 1 2017, entrance tickets will be split into two times (from 6am-12pm and 12pm – 5.30pm), with three clearly defined circuits for seeing the site available. From that date on, all visitors must be accompanied by a guide.

For more information or bookings, contact www.inkaterra.com

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