

From Smart Luxury

Machu Picchu: See It In Style With This Value-Packed Itinerary

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Planning a trip to Machu Picchu, the ancient citadel of the Incas in Peru, can be overwhelming. From where to stay to how to prepare for the altitude, this bucket-list journey requires a lot of planning. If you plan it yourself—rather than through a travel agent or booking a guided tour—overlooking any of the trip's many details can cost you lots of money. But if done right, it can be incredibly rewarding—not to mention incredibly affordable. Here's how to do Peru in style and comfort.

A High-End, High-Value Trip

One major factor to consider when booking your trip to Machu Picchu is accommodations. A backpacker's paradise, there are endless hostels and budget-friendly options in the towns along the way. But if bare-bones accommodations and transportation don't fit your travel style, and you're looking for something higher-end and more inclusive, the **options are slim**.

On a recent trip to Peru, we stayed at three Inkaterra properties and highly recommend each one. Why? Sticking with a single hotel brand in multiple locations allows you to coordinate logistics, reservations, and even luggage transfers seamlessly from one hotel to the next—a feat when you're visiting multiple destinations in a short period of time. Also, the properties embody the spirit of the Incas but certainly don't lack in creature comforts. Finally, these properties give you a lot of bang for your buck. Inkaterra offers an excellent breakfast, activities, lovely turndown service, afternoon tea, cocktails, and, in one case, a three course dinner—and it's all included.

Most likely, you'll start your journey in Lima, Peru's underrated capital, sampling the city's incredible food and art scene. Here, you can easily save money on accommodations, between the dozens of affordable hotels and even better short-term home rentals. It's wise to save your money here, so you can save your splurge for the trip at Machu Picchu. We recommend a couple of days in Lima for dining and sightseeing before you make your way to Cusco, where you'll begin your Machu Picchu itinerary.

First Stop: Cusco

Getting There:

To reach Cusco from Lima, most travelers opt for a one-hour domestic flight. Flights on budget airlines like **LC Peru** can be found for hundreds of dollars less than on international carriers. We traveled round-trip from Lima to Cusco for less than \$100 USD.

Where to Stay: **Inkaterra La Casona**

Cusco is an ancient city that sits 11,152 feet above sea level. It's beautiful, historic, and easy to navigate. But the altitude can be killer. For this reason, you'll want a home base that's not only comfortable, but centrally located. The Inkaterra La Casona is the first boutique hotel to open in Cusco and is located in the traditional Plaza de las Nazarenas, where you'll spend most of your time in the town. Set in a historic sixteenth-century manor, it stands on what was once the training grounds for the Incan army. The property has been restored to include just 11 suites—each with a fireplace, heated floors, big bathtubs, and colonial furnishings. Cusco is cold—especially in the most-visited month of June—and each evening, turndown service includes a hot water bottle placed under the duvet.

What's included in the rate: A welcome gift, pisco sours (one per person), afternoon tea with desserts, wifi, nightly turndown service, a hearty breakfast, and oxygen. Rates for a patio suite start at \$380 per night.

Next Stop: Machu Picchu

Getting There:

The best way to get from Cusco to Machu Picchu is by train, which allows you to experience the gorgeous scenery along the way. There are a handful of options that range from budget to super-luxe, but **Inca Rail** offers the most value for your dollar. We took the first-class service from Peroy to Machu Picchu—which we recommend for arriving in the afternoon on a day that you're not hiking—and then took the more basic 360 service on the return journey. (More on this below.) First-class service (\$199 for a 3.5-hour ride) includes live music upon arrival, plus a welcome glass of Champagne, a variety of beverages, breakfast, a three-course lunch with wine, and live music and cocktails onboard. Once you arrive, there are loads of options for touring the citadel itself, from easy day hikes to multi-day treks.

Where to Stay: **Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel**

This property is situated in the town of Aguas Calientes, which lies at the base of Machu Picchu. An employee from the hotel will be there to meet you when you arrive at the train station and help carry your bags. This convenience—and many more—will go a long way in making your trip memorable and enjoyable. Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel, a member of National Geographic Unique Lodges of the World, is set on 12 acres in a cloud forest where you'll find more than 200 bird species and 300 kinds of **native orchids**. The casitas are both cozy and luxurious, and many have sitting areas and fireplaces. There are hot and cold pools for relaxing post-hike and a spa. But it's the included activities that set the resort apart. Guests are invited to participate in everything from nature walks to orchid trail excursions to a tea-making activity to a twilight walk—and so much more—and it's all included in the price of the stay. Rates for a superior room start at \$498 per night.

What's included in the rate: breakfast, an a la carte dinner, welcome gift, pisco sour (one per person), turndown service, afternoon tea with cookies, wifi, excursions, and luggage portage to and from the train station.

Next Stop: The Sacred Valley

Getting There:

After exploring Machu Picchu, you'd be remiss not to take a day or two to relax and enjoy the stunning atmosphere of the Sacred Valley. If you do an early day hike, then book an afternoon train ride on Inca Rail to arrive in the evening. Our recommendation: Splurge on the way to Machu Picchu and save a few bucks on the way back by booking the 360 train. You'll be in dirty hiking clothes and exhausted from the trek—most people on our train were napping. The 360 train costs \$99 each way and includes a sandwich and drinks, and has wide panoramic windows for viewing the Andean landscape. At the end of the trip, guests onboard were gifted a full-size bottle of Inca Rail's Pisco Sour. Tip: You can have Inkaterra pre-arrange transport to the hotel once you arrive at the station.

Where to Stay: **Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba**

Congratulations! You've hiked Machu Picchu and will be rewarded by staying at this luxurious property. Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba is situated on 100 acres of remote countryside in the Sacred Valley and that's exactly what you'll want after a few days of non-stop activity. Here, the stand-alone casitas have beautiful beds, fireplaces, colonial furniture, and porches that provide stunning views. While it's far from the nearest town, there's still plenty to do; this property offers lots of included excursions. You can choose a hike along the Huasi Chala, a Chica de Jora beer-making class, an ecological farm tour, and —our favorite—a twilight mountain walk where you can see tons of stars, including the Southern Cross. In addition, the property has just built a stunning spa with an outdoor soaking tub and treatments that start at a very reasonable \$70 for a one-hour massage. Rates for a Superior Deluxe suite start at \$420 per night.

What's included in the rate: breakfast, a welcome gift and drink, pisco sours (one per person), turndown service, afternoon tea with cookies, wifi, shoe cleaning, and in-house excursions.

Heading Home: To Cusco and Lima

Getting There:

If you're heading back to Cusco (en route to Lima) for your flight home, have the hotel arrange a taxi service, as opposed to a private car. A 1.5-hour taxi ride for three passengers costs about \$100 USD, while a private car can cost almost twice as much.

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