

The Leaders Putting Peru And Paddington Bear On The Ecotourism Map



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Leadership Strategy

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With its spectacular mountain and rainforests, ancient cultural heritage and growing reputation for culinary superfoods, Peru is continuing to experience an eco-tourism boom.

The nation expects 4.4 million tourists to bring \$5 billion into its economy this year - 10% up on last year's 4 million visitors - according to the PromPeru exports and tourism promotion board.

Yet widespread ecological destruction, economic hardship and guerrilla wars in the latter part of the 20th century mean this is a comparatively recent phenomenon that required vision and leadership.

“In the early 1970s, ecology was not much talked about in Peru,” says Jose Koechlin von Stein, who co-produced Werner Herzog’s classic films *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* and *Fitzcarraldo* in Peru in 1972 and 1982.



Eco-warrior: José Koechlin INKATERRA

In 1975, Koechlin set up Inkaterra, a company devoted to pioneering ecotourism and sustainable development in Peru.

Starting with the Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica luxury lodge in the Peruvian rainforest, the company now also operates the Inkaterra Hacienda Concepcion and Inkaterra Guides Field Station.

It has the Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel and luxury eco-hotels in Cusco and Urubamba in Peru’s Sacred Valley, as well as El MaPi by Inkaterra in Machu Picchu under the mid-priced “By Inkaterra” brand.

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Together, these employ 600 people and host 200,000 to 240,000 travelers a year.



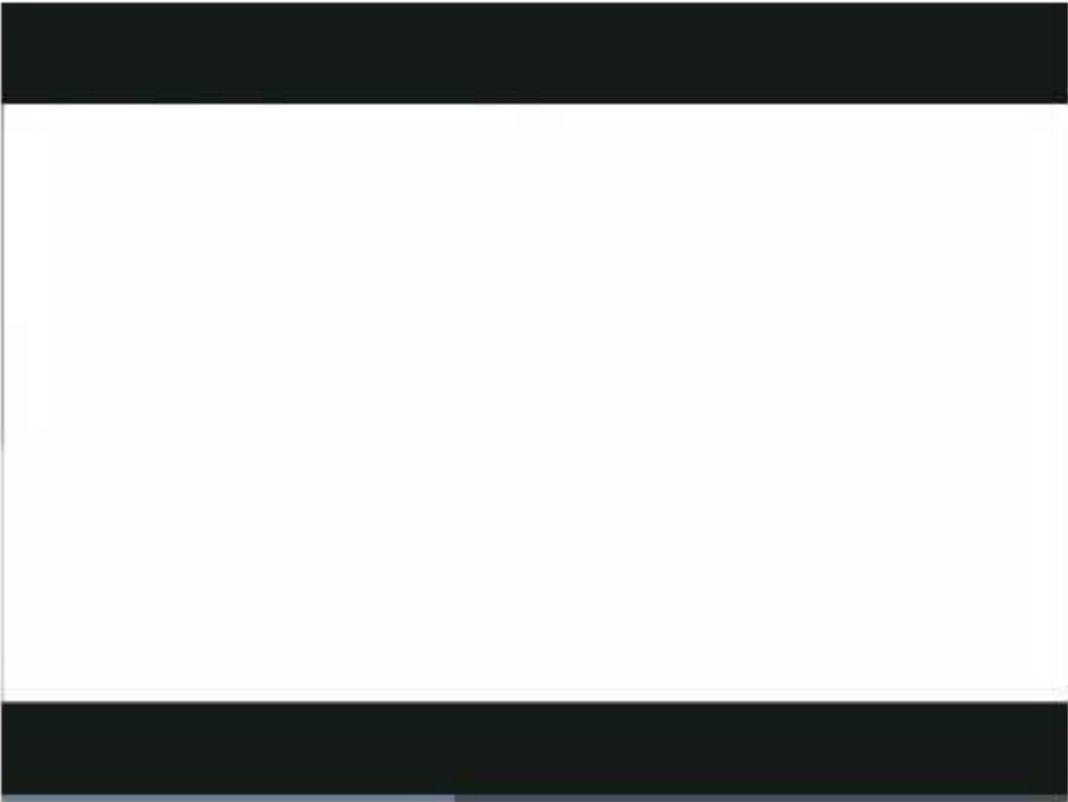
Amazon life: Inkaterra's Superior Rio room INKATERRA

However, Inkaterra prefers to use other metrics to chart its success - species spotted, nurtured and preserved for mankind.

In its 43 years, a total of 814 species of bird, 365 types of spider, 313 kinds of butterfly and more than 100 mammals have been painstakingly logged within its grounds.

The discoveries have included 28 species new to science including 19 orchids, five amphibians, two bromeliads and a butterfly and tropical vine.

The Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel also hosts 372 species of orchid, its own organic farm and a rescue center for the spectacled bears made famous by the *Paddington* books and films.



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The Meaning Of Sustainability

“Everything is based on inventories,” says Koechlin. “Most hotels have them for beds, chairs and the tubes of shampoo in the shower. Ours are for flora, fauna and wildlife.

“The first thing we do is learn about where the hotel is, undertaking environmental and cultural assessments so that we know what to compare ourselves against in the future and measure how our presence has improved the area.

“People talk about sustainability but you have to know what it is that you want to sustain.

“We never had any idea of how big ecotourism could become. The world has changed so much in the past 40 years that it would have been impossible to imagine the revolution that has happened.

“But Peru is changing rapidly. There are now 30 to 40 lodges in the Peruvian rainforest. The challenge is to preserve as much as we can.”

Tourism Revolution

“Everything is different now,” agrees Marisol Mosquera, founder and president of Aracari, a Peru-based travel agency group which offers eight-day trips from London to Lima’s artistic Hotel B, the ancient city of Cusco, Sacred Valley, Urubamba and the 15th-century Inca citadel of Machu Picchu.

The trips are not cheap, at £3,245 (\$4,260) per person but Mosquera says she has remained true to her original vision of pioneering high-quality experiential travel in Peru.

In 1996, when she set up the business on returning to Peru from ten years working in financial services in New York and London, she says Peru was starting to recover from ten years of intense guerrilla warfare but was attracting few visitors outside the backpacker community.

“Compounded by the economic crisis of the '70s, this meant there were no public investments in infrastructure for nearly three decades,” she recalls. A diaspora of talent in the 1970s and 1980s made matters even worse.

From the mid-1990s, a recovery got underway, however. A new airport opened in Lima in the late 1990s; infrastructure has been vastly improved and a plethora of new hotels have opened.

A culinary revolution promoting Peruvian cuisine began around ten years ago, airline connectivity has improved and hotel standards have been revolutionized, according to Mosquera..

“When I scouted new locations in Peru between 1996 and 1999, I discarded 90% of the product I visited and checked,” she says.

“Now it’s the opposite. There is so much product out there and a lot of it is very good quality.”

Mosquera is now planning expansion to offer tourism services in Bolivia. Sheremains optimistic about the prospects for Peru’s ecotourism but wants more government and private sector investment in wildlife and flora preservation, prevention of logging and involvement of local communities.

Koechlin believes this is vitally important too. Inkaterra’s latest project in development at Cabo Blanco on the Northern Peruvian coastline aims to protect marine and bird life and provide work for impoverished fishermen.

It has located, acquired and refurbished a boat that Ernest Hemingway used for sport fishing and wants to use the location to promote and protect the local environment.

“Whatever we may do for birdwatching in the area will be a means to growing our ecological research and understanding and providing jobs in conservation,” he says. “That is always our objective.”

I have been a business journalist for 27 years, working for The Daily Telegraph in New York as US Business Editor and in London as Associate City Editor. Specializing in interviews with chief executives and other major business figures, I am the author of "The Secrets of CEO... MORE



Peruvian pioneer: Marisol Mosquera ARACARI

