





 I'D ALWAYS WANTED TO SEE MACHU PICCHU,

to feel the clouds drifting through its jagged peaks and take in its enormity and the physicality of those crazy Inca stairs in person. My architect husband had long been enthralled with the Inca citadel too. We take a trip every fall, and when it came time to plan our most recent adventure, a classic Peru itinerary – Lima, the Sacred Valley, Machu Picchu, then Cuzco – topped our list.

Lima, our first stop, serves up big, modern-city energy with surfing culture and a side of seriously legit ceviche. I loved exploring the Barranco neighborhood and shopping for local jewelry and accessories in its stylish boutiques. Cuzco greeted us with its typically cooler, sunnier climate, colonial buildings, and laid-back vibe. You can sit on its Plaza de Armas and people-watch for hours. One evening, a large group of schoolchildren paraded through with the

Machu Picchu, with Huayna Picchu right behind it. Opposite (left to right, from top): A Pisac market vendor, ceviche at Cala in Lima, the entrance to Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel, Belmond Hotel Monasterio's courtyard in Cuzco, Inca stonework at Machu Picchu, Lima's Barranco district in bloom, blocking the trail at Machu Picchu, dawn at Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba, and Peruvian weaving.

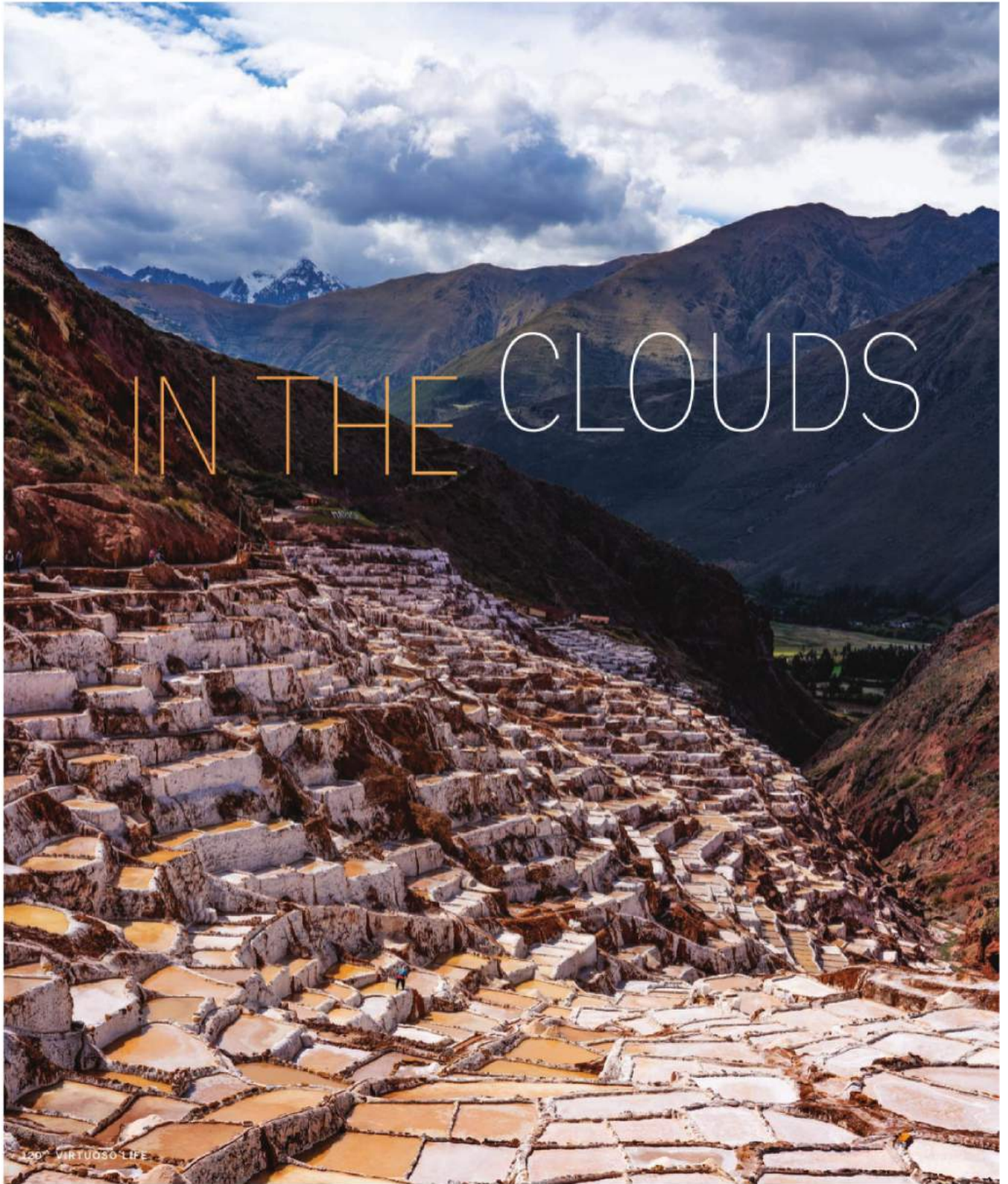



CITY STYLE, VIBRANT NATURE, AND PERHAPS
THE WORLD'S TASTIEST POTATOES MARK THE TRAIL
TO A HIGHER CALLING IN PERU.



STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY KORENA BOLDING SINNETT

Our guide explained how locals have
mined salt in Maras since the days
of the Inca. Opposite: Thousands of
salt pans dot a hillside outside of town.





We spent an afternoon with Christian Puklla's family in the Sacred Valley; after lunch, his mother and grandmother showed us how they weave traditional patterns.

become more
indulgent

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**You have to present your
passport to enter Machu
Picchu; for a great memento,
look for the self-serve (and
unofficial) passport stamp on
a table near the entrance.**

police band; the next day, we watched a wedding party celebrate at one of the square's beautiful churches.

Roughly an hour northwest of Cuzco, the Sacred Valley is a must-see spot en route to Machu Picchu. Its landscapes are like nothing I've ever experienced: The Andes rise up to form a masterpiece backdrop for the color palettes of the salt pans and terraced crop circles at Maras and Moray. Also like nothing I've experienced: the creamy, buttery, *super-delicious* potatoes from Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba's organic farm in the valley. Peruvians grow more than 3,000 varieties of potatoes – I'm convinced they keep all the good ones. Everything about that hotel feels steeped in a sense of place. My favorite memory is of sitting on our patio under a heavy Peruvian blanket at dawn and watching the fog move across the mountains.

Machu Picchu blew my expectations out of the water: The scale is truly unbelievable. And those stairs are no joke for someone who's five-one – some were waist high on me! I worried about crowds, but our guide reserved an afternoon time slot, which typically yields better weather and fewer tourists (most rush to get in first thing). We stayed until closing and had the place almost to ourselves. The next day, we hiked Huayna Picchu, the sheer peak in the background of many Machu Picchu photos. It was one of the most physically demanding things I've ever done – it's so steep that, at times, you have to bear-crawl up the trail – but I don't believe I've ever heard a silence as pure as we did at its top.

Peru's colors, textures, and flora are a photographer's dream. I think about the women's outfits a lot. And their braids. And I'm still in awe of the civilization that once thrived here.



PLANS FOR PERU

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR ADVENTURES
IN THE LAND OF THE INCA.

01 Virtuoso travel advisors can work with **Peru Empire Co.** to create custom tours throughout the country. The eight-day trip featured in this story included privately guided outings in Machu Picchu and to the Pisac market and Maras salt pans in the Sacred Valley, as well as an afternoon with Andean weavers to create a personal pattern. Departures: Any day through 2019; from \$7,105.

Explore Machu Picchu with private guides and visit Pisac's market and Ollantaytambo's ruins in the Sacred Valley with **Ladateco Tours**. A ten-day itinerary features city tours of Cuzco and Lima, as well as three days in the Amazon's Tambopata National Reserve for nocturnal wildlife-spotting and other rain-forest adventures. Departures: Any day through 2019; from \$7,500.

STAY In an upscale suburban district of Lima, **Belmond Miraflores Park** offers peerless city and Pacific coastline views from its 89 suites and the rooftop's pool and Observatory



Clockwise from top left:
A bright start to the day at
Belmond Hotel Monasterio,
Palacio del Inka's lobby,
and natural paint pigments
at Pisac's market.

restaurant. Guests can check out complimentary bikes to explore adjacent Domeoosola Park and the six-mile-long Malecón. Doubles from \$475, including breakfast daily and a \$100 spa credit.

Set on 100 lush acres, **Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba**'s 36 casitas provide a welcoming home base for exploring the Maras salt pans and other Sacred Valley sites. Guests can harvest giant corn, red and black quinoa, and several varieties of potatoes from the on-site organic farm for chef-prepared meals. Doubles from \$420, including breakfast daily and a 25-minute massage for two.

Discover a jungle hideaway of 83 adobe cottages and gurgling waterfalls at **Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel**, just outside the UNESCO World Heritage site. More than 370 orchid species and 200 bird species thrive on its 12-acre grounds. Doubles from \$249, including an aromatherapy welcome kit, breakfast daily, and a 25-minute massage for two.

Inca mysticism extends beyond Machu Picchu at the 62-room **Sumaq Machu Picchu Hotel**. After shaman-led tours through the citadel, guests can return to the family-run property overlooking the Urubamba River for a traditional pachamanca lunch, cooked in an underground oven. Doubles from \$608, including breakfast daily and a 50-minute massage for two.

Housed in a sixteenth-century former monastery, Cuzco's 122-room **Belmond Hotel Monasterio** features one of the city's best independent art collections. Take a private tour led by an expert in religious art and Peruvian history or relax by the courtyard's 300-year-old cedar tree with a pisco sour. Doubles from \$485, including breakfast daily and a \$100 spa credit.

In Cuzco's historic city center, the 203-room **Palacio del Inka** channels its previous life as a Spanish conquistador's mansion through colonial-era artworks and bold Peruvian textiles. Complimentary oxygen treatments at its Andes Spirit Spa help guests adjust to the altitude. Doubles from \$227, including breakfast daily and a \$100 spa credit. VI



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