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LUXURY AND ECO-TOURISM IN PERU: INKATERRA LA CASONA



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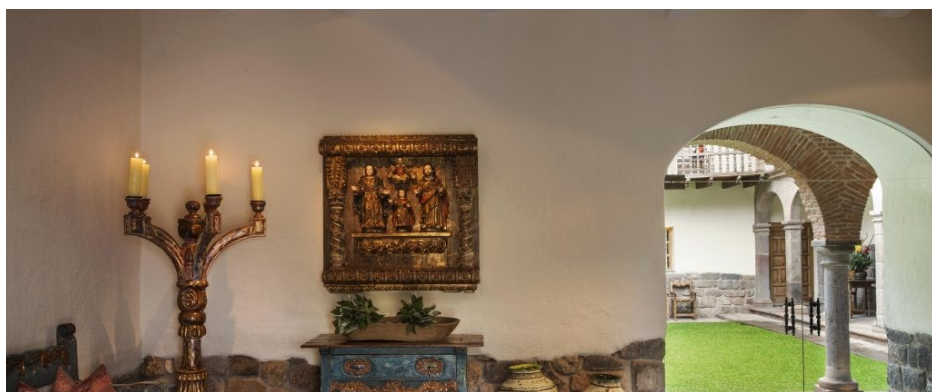
LUXURY IN IRELAND –
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“If we do not give new answers to old questions we may run the risk of remaining stuck in the past, tied to an absent time.” From *Vista Andina: A Photographic Perspective on Contemporary Life in the Andes* by Adam L. Weintraub.

First impressions

Peace, tranquility and privacy – not words you might usually associate with Cusco. After all, this is the traveller hub of Peru, where backpack-toting tourists congregate before and after their sojourn to Machu Picchu. Whether hiking the Inca Trail or taking a more sedate route to Peru’s Wonder of the World, sightseers of all ages, from every corner of the world, descend on Cusco for twelve months of the year. It’s as easy to get a Guinness in an Irish pub as it is to find an authentic Pisco Sour, and the streets bustle with local restaurateurs, artists and masseuses competing for attention.





Yet everything about Inkaterra La Casona has been designed to give guests the sensation of being caught in an idyllic bubble, where time stands still. Whereas many hotels flaunt their 'boutique' status, few can truly claim to be as intimate and exclusive as this residence. With only eleven suites (no 'rooms' here – you can either book a Plaza, Balcony or Patio Suite) you can be guaranteed of the highest level of service.

This sense of privacy is further maintained by the fact Inkaterra La Casona doesn't even *appear* to be a hotel from the exterior – you won't find an ostentatious, expansive foyer or liveried doorman waiting outside – and instead, there's a wooden door that guests knock on when they'd like to gain entry. Stepping over the threshold into this exquisitely refurbished 16th Century manor house confirms its status as a hidden gem.



The hotel

Once tucked inside, it's impossible not to feel the essence of Cusco's history ebb and flow around you. Traditional artwork, framed fabrics that are centuries old, and historical artifacts are dotted throughout the rooms. The lounge is dominated by a stone fireplace that flickers with warmth in the chillier evenings, flanked by two carved pillars. Statues of horses stand on the mantelpiece, their forms larger than the people riding to them to signify how these animals were perceived as being so important years ago. Beautiful, faded textiles are encased in brushed gold frames, and there are fresh flowers and piles of glossy photography books everywhere. It's like being in the private parlour of a historian with impeccable taste.

It's this lounge we're led into first, sinking into the squishy comfort of the sofa and feeling the exhaustion of travel evaporate into the palo santo scented air. Cusco, at 3,399 meters above sea level, is notoriously tricky on the constitution, and even habitual travellers can be struck down with altitude sickness. One remedy for the unpleasant symptoms of this affliction is coca leaf tea, and guests are kindly presented with a cup upon arrival. To be honest, the pure beauty of our situation was enough to banish any dizziness or vague feelings of nausea, anyway.



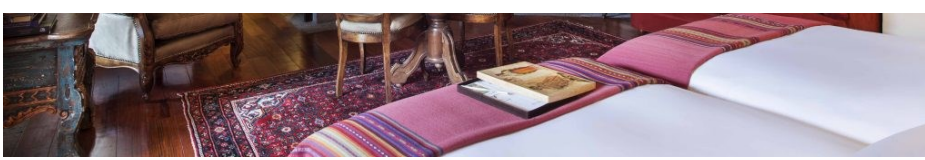
Describing the hotel as being akin to staying in someone's home is not an exaggeration – this was once the private residence of don Diego de Almagro, in 1534, the Spanish conquistador who participated in the conquest of Peru. The house surrounds the main patio, with a mix of stonework that's original, then various additions that were made after the famous earthquakes. It's restored in exceptional fashion, and the Colonial furniture, authentic artifacts, murals, and historic textiles lend it the sensation of a richly collated museum.

Rooms

After arriving, most likely slightly grubby from the humidity of Puerto Maldonado or the Inka trail, entering a suite is like taking a breath of fresh air. The shower is especially welcome with its powerful rainforest blast of steaming water – the feeling was so wonderful that I washed myself twice, reluctant to get out. However, for a more leisurely ablution, the staff will happily fill the bathtub so you can take a bubbly soak and ease your muscles (incidentally, The Yacu therapy room offers bespoke treatments and, like the manor's dining room, uses products derived from local sources. So if you fancy a de-stress massage or an Andean hot-stone treatment, this is the place to come).

Afterwards, slathered in the heady-scented palo santo body moisturiser and wrapped in a dressing gown, it was pure joy to lean back on the comfort of the bed and take in the luxurious yet homely surroundings. There's also a welcome drink of a Pisco Sour included, so for the ultimate treat I recommend you sip on this citrusy, frothy cocktail and ease into your Cusco stay in style.





A couple of extra things I loved which are worth mentioning – there are fireplaces in every room, so if your room gets chilly in the evenings (and at this altitude, it can happen) then just ask and soon a flicking fire will bring a glowing cheer. There is a TV, but it's hidden behind an ornately carved screen – a little addition which made such a difference. There's even a bar of sumptuous dark chocolate (we saved ours for when we were on the Lares Trek, and nibbled it when we felt a lull in our energy). Our room also had a balcony looking out onto the shady, secluded Plaza de las Nazarenas, where musicians will sometimes play, or you can simply people-watch from your window.

Dining

The restaurant is a cosy, restful room tucked into the main house, with impeccably laid tables and more plump couches for if you fancy getting comfortable. Breakfast here is the best way to start the day – there's a buffet table of flaky pastries, cereals and exotic fruits, and a menu bursting with inventive dishes that you can order fresh from your waiter. This ranges from sweet treats such as French brioche toast with dulce de leche, and quinoa pancakes with maple syrup and fruit coulis, to savoury specialities such as an Andean omelette (made with spinach from Cusco, Yucay paria cheese and Andean potatoes) and the Inkaterra Casona special of 'Huevos Benedictinos' – a sumptuous dish of Eggs Benedict with lacquered pork bacon. Breakfast is also served from 5am – essential if you want a hot meal before embarking on one of the many expeditions that require a super early start. Before leaving for our four-day trek in the mountains, I enjoyed a delicious plate of fresh corn tamales with yellow pepper, cheese and Creole sauce, washed down with hot coffee and a warm croissant to finish.

There's also an amazing afternoon tea that should not be missed – make sure that between 4-6pm you allocate at least half an hour to indulge in freshly baked cakes and cookies, alongside the most velvety, rich hot chocolate I've ever tasted.





Sustainable tourism and local love

After a stay at Inkaterra La Casona, guests will be left in no doubt as to the dedication of the Inkaerra group when it comes to preserving the rich history of Peru. The property has been meticulously and beautifully maintained to ensure this element of the country's culture lives on. Their commitment to eco-tourism can equally be seen in the completely single-use plastic-free status of the hotel – all water is in glass bottles, there are no straws, and you won't find little throwaway toiletries in the bathrooms. However, this is just the beginning of a deep-rooted passion for sustainability that is what drives the Inkaterra group and makes you feel that, by staying in one of these hotels, you're actually helping the environment.

For one thing, Inkaterra have determined to be a truly Carbon-Neutral organisation, meaning every guest at Inkaterra La Casona has a 100% Carbon Neutral. This is achieved through their protection more than 17,000 hectares of original Amazon forest, 3,315,000 tons of carbon with stock*.



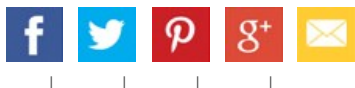
Then there is the Inkaterra Asociación. This is a non-profit organization that's funded through eco-tourism generated by the hotels, and it's committed to scientific research that supports biodiversity conservation, education and the wellbeing of local communities. Conservation initiatives include the Inkaterra Canopy Walkway (for observing wildlife in the Amazon canopy); the Andean Bear Rescue Center in benefit of the only bear species native to South America; and the technical proposal for the creation of Peru's first marine reserve in Cabo Blanco, where 70% of the country's oceanic diversity can be found. You can learn more about Inkaterra Asociación's fantastic work here: <https://www.inkaterra.com/inkaterra-asociacion-org/en/about-us/history/>

Peru is a country of vibrant hues and mystical energy, where myth and legend seem to seep from its ancient stones. Since the early 1980s when Machu Picchu became a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the influx of tourism has been major. This of course comes with its negative sides as well as its positive elements, but it's so heartening to see somewhere like Inkaterra La Casona preserving the magic that makes Cusco a must-visit on any traveller's bucket list.

Find out more about a stay here: <https://www.inkaterra.com/inkaterra/inkaterra-la-casona/the-experience/>

**This measurement was initiated nineteen years ago by England University of Leeds (RAINFOREST Amazon Forest Inventory Network) and Institute for Earth and Biosphere, professor-specialists Dr. Oliver Philips and Dr. Timothy R. Baker at the Inkaterra Reserva*

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