

Hotels hire scientists on staff

They conduct research and lead tours, classes and workshops for guests

BY ABBY ELLIN

Carmen Soto is a research scientist, with a master's degree in ecology and natural resources from the National University of Saint Anthony the Abbot in Cuzco, Peru.

In 1999, she met José Koechlin, the founder and chief executive of Inkatererra Hotels in Peru. He wanted to learn how to control the wood weevil and moth, both of which had been attacking the eucalyptus beams and other wood used in building Inkatererra's Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel. He offered Ms. Soto a full-time job to help him, which she accepted.

Within a year, Ms. Soto, was the resident biologist and orchid specialist at that hotel and at Inkatererra Asociación, the company's nonprofit organization. Since then, she and her team have helped identify 372 orchid species. While continuing to identify new species of birds, butterflies and flora, she also organizes specialized excursions for guests and educational workshops for area schoolchildren.

Eco-tourism has been a buzzword in



MASHPI LODGE

Carlos Morochz, the wildlife research director at Mashpi Lodge in Peru.

the travel industry for some time now. But some hotels, lodges and resorts, like Inkatererra, have hired scientists to conduct serious academic inquiry while offering nature tours, workshops and classes for guests.

Two years ago, Mashpi Lodge, about a three-and-a-half-hour drive from Quito, Ecuador, opened a research lab on its

premises. The laboratory is accessible to guests as well as international students working on their dissertations.

The lab was started by Carlos Morochz, who was hired two years before the lodge opened. Today, Mashpi has 12 biologists on staff, and seven studies have been published about the frogs, flowers, butterflies and birds found there.

For Mr. Morochz, 32, who works as the lodge's exploration manager and wildlife research director, taking a job at a hotel was a no-brainer. "You learn half in books in comparison to what you can learn in the field," he said.

In many instances, guests can help conservation efforts.

In 2016, the Maldives had an El Niño event that raised ocean temperatures so high that about 60 percent of the surrounding coral reefs were damaged.

The Soneva Jani resort is inviting guests to help restore the coral under the tutelage of Eleanor Butler, the resort's resident biologist.

"I have the opportunity to meet and share my knowledge with young children with a passion to learn, who may grow up to become conservationists and game changers, to figures who already have an influence in politics and legislation," she said. "I would not be able to see these positive changes from a position inside a laboratory."