

Journey the Inca Trail, admire orchids from Machu Picchu at Gardens by the Bay



At the centre of the orquidario will be a miniature model of the iconic Machu Picchu citadel. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH

Wong Man Shun

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SINGAPORE – Prepare for an expedition through Peru’s Inca Trail, with breathtaking sights of Andean cloud forest orchids and replicas of pre-Incan relics.

More than 30 rare orchid species and hybrids found in Machu Picchu, a 15th-century Unesco World Heritage site, will be on display at Gardens by the Bay’s Cloud Forest for the Orchids Of Machu Picchu exhibition from Friday (Aug 18) to Feb 18, 2024.

Live Peruvian orchid specimens will be laid out in a circle measuring 5m in diameter in the form of an orquidario, the Spanish word for orchid garden. Each species will be represented by a cluster of two or three plants.

At the centre of the orquidario will be a miniature model of the iconic Machu Picchu citadel.

Some 80 Peruvian orchids preserved in acrylic will be on display along with the live specimens. They are on loan from Mr Jose Koechlin, chief executive of Inkaterra, a Peruvian eco-tourism company, and this is the first time they are being seen outside of Peru.

Gardens by the Bay's senior researcher and horticulturalist Shawn Tay, who designed the set-up with his team, says: "We chose to display the orchids with an orquidario because it would be the best way for visitors to get up close and personal with the plants.

"The 80 species which are presented in acrylic flower quite infrequently. To obtain live specimens of those orchid species is almost impossible."

One of the most spectacular orchids on display is the vibrant orange Waqanki (meaning "you will cry" in the Quechuan language), which can grow up to 20cm.

Its unusual name comes from a Quechuan legend of an Incan princess, whose forbidden love for a common soldier led to his death because of her disapproving father, the king. It is said that the Waqanki orchid bloomed wherever the princess' tears landed.



The *masdevallia veitchiana*, also known as the "Waqanki" orchid. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH

Another eye-catching orchid to admire is the *phragmipedium caudatum*, also known as the lady's slipper orchid because of its pouch-like shape, which resembles the front covers of a slipper.

Dr Tay says: "Phragmipediums are very critically endangered. They are near extinct in their native environment and do not flower frequently."

There are about 430 species of orchids in Machu Picchu itself, he adds. But any slight change in climate could lead to species extinction, especially in the cloud forests to which the orchids are native.

Rising temperatures would lead to lower humidity and more sunlight, threatening the delicate micro-climates found in the cloud forests.

The layout of the exhibition, which is a collaboration between Gardens by the Bay and the Embassy of Peru, draws inspiration from Incan culture.

Beyond the orquidario and through Intipunku – the Sun Gate – is a walkway that recreates the Inca Trail.



Dr Shawn Tay, senior researcher at Gardens by the Bay, chose to display the orchids in an orquidario for visitors to get up close and personal with the flowers. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH

The trail was the route of pilgrimage to Machu Picchu used by emperors hundreds of years ago. It spans 26km from Cusco, the former capital of the Incan Empire, to Machu Picchu.

Those visiting the display will make the expedition in reverse, as Dr Tay says: “We wanted to start the display with the orquidario and the model of the citadel to showcase their beauty and then explain the historical significance.”

There will be 100 to 200 plants from various species of orchid hybrids – with genetic lineage tracing back to Peruvian orchids – along the 5m-long trail.

Look out for replicas of pre-Incan relics such as aribalos – spherical vases used to store and carry food and drinks – and life-sized models of animals like the vicuna and llama, which were central to Incan civilisation.

Dr Tay says: “We wanted to show how the Incas revered the orchids in their natural environment and their beauty. They did not cultivate orchids, nor did they collect them.

“We hope this collaboration with the Embassy of Peru educates visitors on the need to conserve orchid species throughout the world and especially in cloud forests.”

Book It/Orchids Of Machu Picchu

Where: Cloud Forest, Gardens by the Bay, 18 Marina Gardens Drive

When: From Friday (Aug 18) to Feb 18, 2024; 9am to 9pm daily

Admission: From \$27

Info: str.sg/i5Lt

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