

## PERU IS GAGA OVER LUXURY

Peruvian hotel companies are at the head of the pack in new luxury lodgings in this South American country.

By Carla Hunt, Recommend, February 2011

Peru is a many-splendored place, long famous as the guardian of South America's most important pre-Columbian heritage, matched by the grandeur of its natural diversity from the Amazon to the Andes to the Pacific coast. Nowadays, leisure and business travelers are discovering other treasures, such as the glories of Peruvian cuisine – South America's finest – and an ever expanding roster of stylish and luxurious accommodations that are guaranteeing new comfort levels, particularly in Lima, around Puno on Lake Titicaca, Cusco and the nearby Sacred Valley of the Incas.



While international chains, such as **Hilton**, **Marriott** (with a grand hotel in Lima, and spending \$45 million in opening another soon in Cusco) and **Sonesta** are well established in Peru, it is the Peruvian hotel companies – **Libertador**, **Casa Andina** and **Inkaterra** – which are leading the way in luxury lodgings. Traveling south to north during a recent 2-week stay, for instance, this writer began to lose count on the new inventory of spas that are now part of the national hospitality craze. The other signature change in the last few years is the dining scene, starring a whole new cast of deliciously terrific restaurants with talented chefs in command.

Lima, once called the City of Kings, now has hotel infrastructure fit for royalty, or at least the most discerning of leisure and business travelers. The elegant **Miraflores Park Hotel**, whose 81 units are all suites, sits atop the luxury accommodations ladder in the capital, although a new bif for room at the top of the deluxe hospitality niche will be coming from the \$100 million **Westin Libertador Lima**. It is due to debut in May in San Isidro with 301 rooms and suites, a restaurant under the baton of celebrity chef Rafael Piqueras, and a 20,000 sq. ft. spa that will be the



largest in Lima. The Westin is the largest project under development since Libertador officially joined hands with **Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide**, an alliance that has also produced new luxury Libertador hotels in Paracas and the Sacred Valley, with a third entry in Cusco opening in June. This deluxe hotel trio is now at home under Starwood's **Luxury Collection** brand.

“The new Hotel Paracas is a winner”, declared my traveling companion Pam Walker, Southern Hemisphere travel expert...”The rooms, the views, the restaurants, are all fantastically done – really, really lovely. This is a great place for couples wanting a romantic getaway, although the kid’s club with its own pool works separately and well.” Paracas, once home to the master weavers of the pre-Columbian Paracas culture and today a neighbor of a bird-filled national

nature preserve, is a 3-hour drive south of Lima, and this sophisticated Luxury Collection member is airy and beachy, modern in a seaside resort manner. Guestrooms priced from \$365 for a superior room and suites from \$435, include such amenities as a 37-inch flat screen TV, iPod docking station, and private balcony, private butler services are included for guests booking suites. Guests have access to the 5,000 sq. ft. Spa at Paracas, an extraordinary infinity pool, and two restaurants, as well as a host of excursions including the wildlife packed Ballestas Islands aboard the hotel's yacht and a private plane flight over the "drawings" that decorate the nearby Nazca plain. A 12-passenger plane is also part of the Luxury Collection brand portfolio, offering guests private transfers between all Libertador hotel locations: Cusco, Puno, Arequipa, Lima, Trujillo and Paracas. The 128-room **Libertador Tambo del Inka** opened in the Sacred Valley outside Cusco last April as the second Peruvian member of Starwood's Luxury Collection. Sitting tranquilly on the Urubamba River in the shadow of the Andes, the hotel has the looks and feel of a grand modern stone lodge, handsomely furnished with those colorful and rustic fabrics and ceramics that the Valley is famous for. The 128 large rooms and suites all have floor to ceiling windows opening natural vistas, as well as amenities such as 400 thread count linens, 32 inch LCD TV, and complimentary WIFI and high-speed internet connectivity. The hotel's Hawa restaurant wows its diners with perfectly executed Novo Andina cuisine. Tambo del Inka offers a luxury base for the active traveler, arranging on request mountain biking, kayaking, hiking to the Inca ruins and community villages, white-water river rafting, horseback riding, and escorted excursions to Machu Picchu. For more leisurely guest activities, the 5,905 sq. ft. spa features 12 treatment rooms with panoramic views of the Andes. Treatments here use ancestral Inca ingredients, from coca leaves and volcanic mud to quinoa grains and fresh fruit. Tambo del Inca rates start at \$455 dbl, suites at \$545. In June 2011, the **Palacio del Inka**, Libertador's third Luxury Collection hotel, will debut in Cusco.

Like the more established Libertador group, relative newcomer Casa Andina did not start its hospitality life at the five-star deluxe level. Rather, the company placed hotels in the less-traveled areas (with the exception of Cusco, which now hosts five of the company's 18 Peruvian properties), introducing smart, well run, and similarly decorated hotels that were imaginative in design, well suited to their environments and well priced. Its up-market brand, **Private Collection**, is a welcome addition. **Casa Andina Private Collection Miraflores**, is the chain's swankiest urban hotel yet; colonial **Casa Andina Private Collection Arequipa**, meanwhile, occupies a National Monument building, the former House of the Mint, and the **Casa Andina Private Collection Puno** has style and excellent service to go along with its stupendous views of Lake Titicaca.

The **Casa Andina Private Collection Cusco**, inhabiting an 18<sup>th</sup> century mansion and built around three interior patios, was the company's first upscale hotel in the Inca land capital, and most recently in the Sacred Valley – exploding with upscale accommodations – the **Casa Andina Private Collection Valle Sagrado** turns out to be one of the best. It resembles a large mountain chalet style hotel with a lovely setting, great mountain views, and glorious gardens. Among its most special features is the full service Sacred Spa offering natural treatments and a domed planetarium and observatory from which to scan the vast South Hemisphere skies. Respectively, room prices start at \$207 and \$185.



Inkaterra is another and major Peru hotel success story. The conservation-minded company's lodging interests now span from the 34-cabana **Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica** on the banks of

the Madre de Dios River and newly offering its guests a *Canopy Tree House*, to award winning 85-room **Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel**, which yearly runs away with all international awards (Conde Nast Traveler, the most recent) for its property located at the base of the Machu Picchu mountain. Among other features, the Pueblo Hotel is known for its orchid gardens (400 species) and its *UNU Spa's Inca Purification* treatment, using the stimulating effects of coca leaves – in creams, oils and masks. Plunge pools were recently added.

The newest in luxury to join the Inkaterra hotel family is **La Casona**, Peru's first member of the **Relais & Chateaux** group. Located on Cusco's historic Plaza de las Nazarenas, the 11-suite La Casona occupies a 16<sup>th</sup> century mansion once owned by a Spanish conquistador. Its 11 suites have views of the plaza and the lovely interior courtyard, and have open fireplaces, down duvets on the beds, heated floor, grand marble and stone bathrooms, and such modern appointments as iPod speakers, and good read in bed lights – still hard to find in Latin America. Amenities include really comfy sitting and dining rooms, the private spa with two massage rooms, reading lounge and outdoor terraces, and under services one finds a concierge, private butlers and room service three times daily. Suites are booked individually, but this is a handsome manse to book as a villa for a family and friends, a wedding, a business retreat, or an incentive group. All can enjoy catered touring arrangements with a fleet of Land Rovers, as well as drivers and private guides. Suites are priced from \$720.

In the Sacred Valley, one has to salute the first upscale lodge, **Sol y Luna**, which just gets more wonderful over the years. Now officially called **Sol y Luna Lodge & Spa**, its 28 casitas (called *nuyas*) with private terraces and gorgeous mountain views, offer widely spectacularly landscaped gardens. Opened last year were five super-luxe and beautifully furnished bungalow suites, with fireplaces, private gardens and Jacuzzis on the terraces. All guests enjoy Nuevo Andean cuisine, tastings in the wine cellar and valley rides astride a Peruvian Paso horse from the lodge's stables. The new *Casitas de Lujo* (luxury casitas) are priced from \$530.