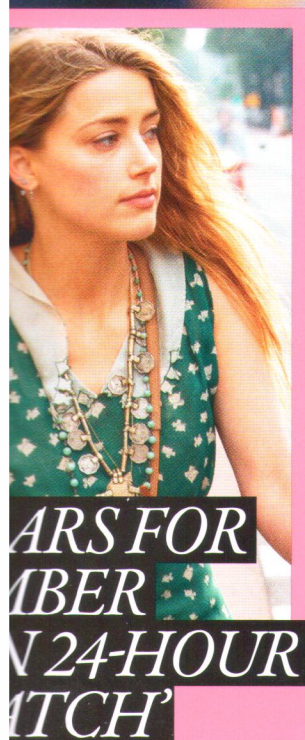


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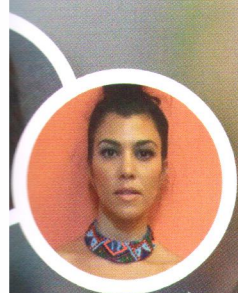
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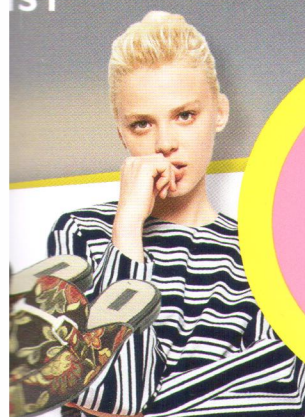
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THE BIG HIGH STREET DROP





UNTIL RECENTLY, Peru was known for one thing: the amazing world heritage site of Machu Picchu. But then came the food revolution that saw Peruvian restaurants opening in cities around the world, including London, winning Michelin stars and introducing everyone to ceviche: fresh fish marinated in citrus, chilli, black pepper and onions.

Since then, the capital Lima has become gastro heaven for its restaurants serving dishes that mix super-healthy ingredients from the Andes mountains (amaranth and maca root) with those from around the world, all in a cool designer setting.

British Airways responded to Lima's new destination status by launching a direct flight from Gatwick (so no more pesky stopovers in Madrid), meaning that, in a little over 12 hours, you can be feasting on the best food the city has to offer. But once you've eaten yourself silly, there's so much more to see in this small country bordered by the Pacific Ocean and the towering Andean mountains – Machu Picchu (natch), but also the beautiful architecture and charming backstreets in Cusco, Incan ruins in the Sacred Valley, and the incredible Amazon rainforest over to the east. Here are the five ways to discover Peru...

LET'S POP TO PERU!

With a new direct flight from London to Lima, Peru is now super-easy to get to. Alice Tate discovers the stunning architecture and fabulous food of this fascinating South American country

1.

LIMA

Peru's capital is a city of two halves: Lima Centro is chaotic, but has some of the most impressive historical architecture, while Barranco is the bohemian heart of the city – back in the 1920s, wealthy Peruvians built their summer homes here; now it's home to Lima's musicians, photographers and creatives. Miraflores is equally vibrant, with a mix of green parks, cliff-walks, bars, cinemas and more. As for eating, El Mercado (rafaelosterling.pe) is the best place for ceviche, while true foodies must visit Central (centralrestaurante.com.pe/en). It's the fourth best restaurant in the world, and only uses ingredients foraged from the Andes. Later, head to Ayahuasca (ayahuasca-restobar.com) in Barranco – it's the place to be come nightfall.



From far left: an aerial view of Lima; Barranco by night; El Mercado serves up delicious ceviche



EAT, EAT, EAT – AND DRINK PISCO!

Peruvian cuisine is a real mix of global influences – from Spain, to Asia and Africa – and native superfoods, with ceviche (most commonly trout), quinoa, avocado, corn and cassava as staples. Alpaca is a popular meat worth trying, while more adventurous visitors might choose to sample the local delicacy, cuy (that's guinea pig!). Pisco is the local spirit, most commonly served as a pisco sour – with lemon juice, sugar, egg white and Angostura bitters. Or try Cusqueña, the local beer, though it's also worth sampling Chicha Morada, a sweet, non-alcoholic drink made of purple corn.

2.

CUSCO

A bold contrast to Lima, Cusco is a picturesque city, once the capital of the Incan Empire. Set high in the Andes, 3,400m above sea level, it can take time to acclimatise to the altitude, but it's worth it. From the grand cathedral on the Plaza de Armas to the hilly, winding backstreets, colourful textiles in the markets, and local eateries, it all feels very laid-back and authentic here. Local women wear traditional Peruvian dress and walk the web of streets cradling baby llamas. When you get thirsty, head to Limbus, a bar set up in the mountainside where you can savour a cocktail, admiring the views across the city. ▶



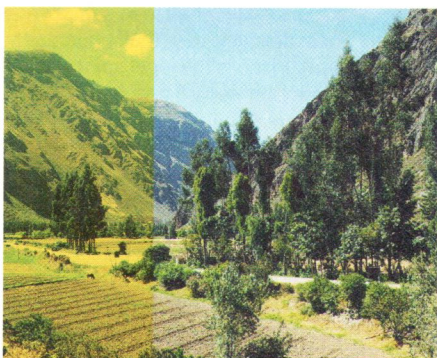
It's not unusual to see llamas carrying trekking gear near Cusco

3. MACHU PICCHU

Machu Picchu, the 15th-century Inca citadel, may be a well-trodden tourist spot, but it's a damn impressive one and certainly lives up to the hype. The Inca Trail to the citadel is a taxing multi-day trek, but there are also half-day trips that are very popular, and visiting with a guide will really allow you to leave with an understanding of the place. Get off the main tourist track by hiking up one of the surrounding peaks – Machu Picchu Montana is a three-hour hike from the citadel to a nearby mountain and involves scaling an endless flight of steep, ancient stone stairs. It's hard work but the breathtaking views from the summit make it worth every single step. The majority of those visiting Machu Picchu stay at least one night in Aguas Calientes, the nearest town to the citadel, located up in the cloud forest. There's plenty of accommodation, from luxury hotels to budget hostels, allowing you to get a good night's kip before your early hike, or simply explore the town, with its pisco sour happy hours and market full of local handicrafts.



Clockwise from left: Urubamba Valley; Machu Picchu ruins; women weaving at The Center for Traditional Textiles



4.

URUBAMBA VALLEY

A lot of visitors miss the Urubamba (or Sacred) Valley in favour of racing through to Machu Picchu – don't! Home to some of South America's most impressive archaeological sites, it's also full of beautiful landscapes, as well as fields of native crops and sleepy rural towns. It's here where you'll feel the most in tune with traditional Peruvian culture, thanks to the friendly locals and their pet llamas dressed in bright, hand-crafted accessories. The Center for Traditional Textiles in Chinchero is a must-see: it's an active community of women who spend their time crafting the most beautiful weavings.



From left: trekking and canoeing in the Amazon Basin; the Inkaterra Hacienda Concepcion and Hacienda Urubamba hotels

5.

PUERTO MALDONADO

The Amazon Basin intersects Brazil, Bolivia and Peru, and is a must-visit for any traveller. Regular flights run from Lima and Cusco to the city of Puerto Maldonado, which has a tiny airport, and is very much the gateway to the tropics. Accommodation options are plentiful, but don't go expecting roll-top baths and unlimited Wi-Fi. Even the most top-end of options have restricted electricity and tepid showers complete with the odd creepy-crawly – but it's all part of the once-in-a-lifetime experience. Excursions include a rainforest canopy walk and floating around Lake Sandoval on a canoe, spotting monkeys and caimans.



THE LOWDOWN

HOW TO GET AROUND: flying is by far the easiest way to get around. Flights run regularly from Lima to all the regional airports. Buses are a reliable, cheap way to get around, but expect long journeys.

HOW TO GET THERE: BA's newly launched direct route to Lima from London Gatwick costs from £539 per person (britishairways.com).

A local tour operator can be the best way to get the most out of your trip. Aracari Travel is a luxury operator that specialises in Peru. It offers a 10-day itinerary from £3,752 per person, which includes stays at Hotel B, Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba, Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo, Inkaterra La Casona and Inkaterra Hacienda Concepcion on a double-occupancy basis, guides, entrance to Machu Picchu, all other entrance tickets and domestic and international flights from London (aracari.com; 00511 651 2424).

DON'T FORGET: health risks include yellow fever, malaria and the Zika virus (so if you're pregnant do not travel there). Check all your jabs are up to date before you fly and take plenty of mosquito repellent. ■



WHERE TO STAY:

Backpacker-style accommodation has been joined by luxury hotels such as the Inkaterra group (inkaterra.com), where *Grazia* stayed, and Airbnb; there's something for every budget. **Lima: Hotel B** (hotelb.pe) is a new boutique hotel in Barranco. Full of modern art, its rooms (from £200 per night) are fresh and modern, with sky-high ceilings and balconies. **Lima Dazzler** (rooms from £110) is well-located in central Miraflores. It's got a bit of a corporate feel to it, though the rooms are a decent size, plus there's a gym and a rooftop pool.

Cusco: Inkaterra La Casona is a sumptuous hotel in a 16th-century mansion, located just behind the Plaza de Armas. It has 11 grand suites (£400 a night) that wrap around a central

courtyard. Alternatively, there are plenty of hostels and even Airbnbs scattered around Cusco and its outskirts that make good, less expensive options.

Urubamba: Inkaterra Hacienda is a one-of-a-kind luxury hotel, set in the heart of the valley. Comfy sofas, a roaring fire, and floor-to-ceiling windows in the grand lounge make for a perfect spot to watch the sun set behind the mountains. Savour a pisco sour and admire the view, before heading to the farm-to-plate restaurant for your dinner.

Puerto Maldonado: Inkaterra Hacienda Concepcion is considered one of the best luxury options in the area, with excursions included as part of the experience.