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TAMBO DEL INKA: A TRANQUIL RETREAT IN THE VALLEY OF THE INCAS

SANDY & IRA BORNSTEIN APRIL 4, 2019

HOTELS & SPAS

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Nestled in the Peruvian region of Cusco, the [Sacred Valley](#) of the Incas stands as a reminder of the Inca Empire, the largest empire that ever existed in the Americas. This fertile basin with ancient farming terraces runs adjacent to the Urubamba River and is a frequent stopping point for people touring Machu Picchu, Pisac, Ollantaytambo and the city of Cusco. Other less known [Inca Empire](#) sites dot this region that includes part of the snowcapped Andean mountain range.



Peru's Sacred Valley (Credit: Pixabay)

To acclimate to Cusco's altitude of more than 11,100 feet above sea level, visitors sometimes head to the less crowded, lower altitude (7,000 to 9,000 feet above sea level) Sacred Valley to explore the region's culture and history, outdoor activities, and to indulge in luxury accommodations.

A stay at Tambo del Inka: A 5-star resort

Our travel itinerary adhered to a similar game plan. After flying from Lima to Cusco, our tour group drove to a Sacred Valley overlook for photos and then visited two sites before checking into the Tambo del Inka, a Luxury Collection Resort & Spa, a 5-star property with 128 guest rooms.

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Lobby of Tambo del Inka


Each of the more than one hundred hotels and resorts in Marriott’s Luxury Collection is singled out for its extraordinary “architecture, art, furniture, amenities, cuisine, and distinctive heritage.” Travel & Leisure rated this property number four in its 2018 list of Top 10 Resort Hotels in South America.

Unlike our fellow travelers who rested in their rooms before our scheduled dinner, Ira and I were eager to explore the manicured grounds that abut the Urubamba River. December rains were imminent so we grabbed our raincoats before heading out. A dense cloud cover lingered over the neighboring mountain peaks of the Peruvian Sierra Mountains. We were prepared.



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A guestroom at Tambo del Inka

Brightly colored native flowers popped out from the dark green layers of mature vegetation that lined the resort's heavily wooded paths. Occasionally, we heard water flowing from the nearby river and the manmade fountains. A vibrant yellow sign reminded pedestrians to keep their distance from the adjacent river. We passed several outdoor sitting areas saturated by earlier rains. When the drizzle turned into a steady downpour, we retreated inside to the cavernous lobby with floor-to-ceiling windows decorated in purple, orange, green, and beige tapestries covered with geometric designs. A multi-story, stone two-sided fireplace was the focal point for people congregating in this public space.

Even though our free time was going to be limited during our two-day stay, we wandered through the public areas until we located the pool, spa, and fitness center. The long rectangular pool offered outdoor and indoor seating. A glass partition hovering over the water divided the two parts. With a limited number of lounge chairs on the wooden deck, I realized that my chance of getting a seat might be limited. The use of a hot tub located at a lower level required a fee.

Tasting Novoandina cuisine

From an abbreviated menu that showcased Novoandina cuisine, we ordered a three-course meal paired with wine. Before placing our orders,



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the waiter told us that the produce was organically grown either in the hotel's own garden or at a nearby farm.

Ira tasted a trout ceviche appetizer; since arriving in South America days ago, ceviche had been a staple on every menu. This version was presented with corn and glazed sweet potatoes. I favored the quinoa salad with vegetables from the resort's local garden topped with an aioli and muna vinaigrette.

We both chose the grilled trout from Arapa-Puno with two grilled shrimp, polenta, and grilled mushrooms and vegetables marinated with fish sauce and lemon. While sharing the highlights of the day with some of our fellow travelers, we sipped glasses of Blanco de Blancos produced by Tabernero, a local winery.

To complete our first meal in the Sacred Valley, we shared two desserts—a semifreddo (passion fruit on a thin chocolate base with lines of dark chocolate sauce) and a lacuma mousse drizzled with a toffee sauce and sprinkled with caramelized pecans as we sipped a coca tea. The locals recommend this indigenous tea, a derivative of cocaine, to combat the ill effects of high altitude. As Coloradoans, we are usually not concerned with being in a mountainous region, so our curiosity was our driving force for sampling this Peruvian tea. Like others in our group, the coca tea put our digestion in hyper-speed. Before departing the dining room, our guide suggested that we avoid bringing samples back to the United States because it is an illegal substance.

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Semifreddo dessert

During the remaining evening hours, we rebooted in our spacious, earth-toned room facing the river. A large seating area with a couple of lounge chairs, a small sofa, and a desk and chair offered ample space to both relax and catch up on emails. Almost all of the television stations were in Spanish.

The next morning, the immense number of healthy and not so healthy choices at the breakfast buffet overwhelmed us. Each station had useful signs in English and Spanish. Healthy juices included a red juice with carrots, oranges and beetroot, and a green juice that was a mixture of apple, cucumber, ginger, spinach, and lime. Containers showcased different types of cereals along with seeds, nuts, and bowls filled with locally sourced fruits. Freshly made baked goods ran the gamut from cookies and croissants to gluten-free items filled with quinoa and chia seeds. I was surprised to find lox and bagels. However, the bagel's texture resembled an English muffin. An assortment of sliced meat and cheeses were another option. Knowing that we would be stopping for a hearty lunch, we limited our intake.

Our last days at the resort

After another full day of touring, including a memorable visit to the ruins at Ollantaytambo, we returned to the hotel for a short break before dinner.

Disappointingly, there wasn't sufficient time to indulge in any of the natural spa treatments. Instead, I went swimming in the heated pool while Ira worked out in the fitness center.

Noteworthy highlights from our last dinner at the resort included an organic lettuce salad covered with an assortment of sliced vegetables and gooseberry vinaigrette, a main course of oriental noodles and vegetables in a Sichuan pepper soy sauce, and a decadent chocolate mousse with red berries compote. No one at our table left a morsel of food behind from our three-course feast.



Oriental Noodle entree



Chocolate mousse with red berries

Across the room from our dinner table, two musicians performed a sampling of Peruvian melodies using close to a dozen different instruments. The soothing background music was an added bonus to an exemplary day.

Before taking the Vistadome train to Machu Picchu, we grazed at the breakfast buffet. From the previous day's experience, we scurried over to our favorite foods and indulged while enjoying the lovely views of the hotel's manicured grounds through the nearby windows.

On the train heading to Machu Picchu, I jotted a down a few words into my notebook: *an extraordinary place to stay in the Sacred Valley*.

All photo credits: Sandy and Ira Bornstein, unless otherwise noted.

What's appealing to the over-50 luxury traveler?

- As part of Marriott's luxury collection of resorts and spas, the hotel offers exemplary service in a beautiful setting with topnotch amenities—a full-service spa, an indoor/outdoor swimming pool, a fitness center, and scenic walking trails.

- Tambo del Inka is the only hotel in Urubamba with a private train station. The public stop in Ollantaytambo is a short distance away.
- The main dining room offers exceptional buffet breakfasts and gourmet dining experiences with healthy options.

Take note

- The prime tourist season is from June to August.
- The rainy season is usually between November and April, with January and February being the wettest, while the dry season runs between May and October.
- Physically fit travelers can consider booking a sanctioned 4-day/3-night Inca Trail hike.
- Most visitors arrive and leave by train. Since tickets sell out quickly, make reservations for the train and Machu Picchu well in advance of one's travel dates.

IF YOU GO

For more information, see: [Peru Travel](#)

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A tranquil resort in Peru's
Sacred Valley

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SANDY & IRA BORNSTEIN

Sandy and Ira split their time between skiing and trekking in the Colorado Rockies and traveling. They have visited more than 40 countries. Sandy lived as an international teacher in India and wrote an award-winning book, "May This Be the Best Year of Your Life," as a resource for people contemplating an expat lifestyle and living outside their comfort zone. Their travel stories focus on active midlife and intergenerational adventures, food, historical places, and Jewish cultural sites. Ira assists with photos and edits Sandy's stories before publication.

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