

Escape



EXPERIENTIAL PERU

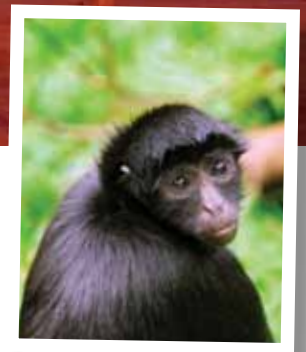
BY PAUL RUBIO

Machu Picchu and its mystic surroundings are on nearly every luxury traveler's bucket list. Here, we present three of Peru's other profound experiences—and how to explore them in style.

AMAZONIA

The Amazon rainforest may seem like an odd place for a five-star vacation, but luxury travelers can now access Amazonia's wild and biodiverse expanses in ultra comfort thanks to Aqua Expeditions (aquaexpeditions.com). Each week, sumptuous sister ships *Aqua Amazon* and *Aria Amazon* transport 24 and 32 inquisitive adventurers, respectively, along the waterways of the Peruvian Amazon on three-, four- and seven-day sojourns.

As with the world's most exclusive small cruises, these three-story vessels offer top-of-the-line creature comforts, immaculate accommodations, stellar service and the cuisine of a celebrity chef (Peru's Pedro Miguel Schiaffino). And similar to the concept of a top-notch African safari, twice-daily excursions focus on priceless, interactive wildlife and community experiences.

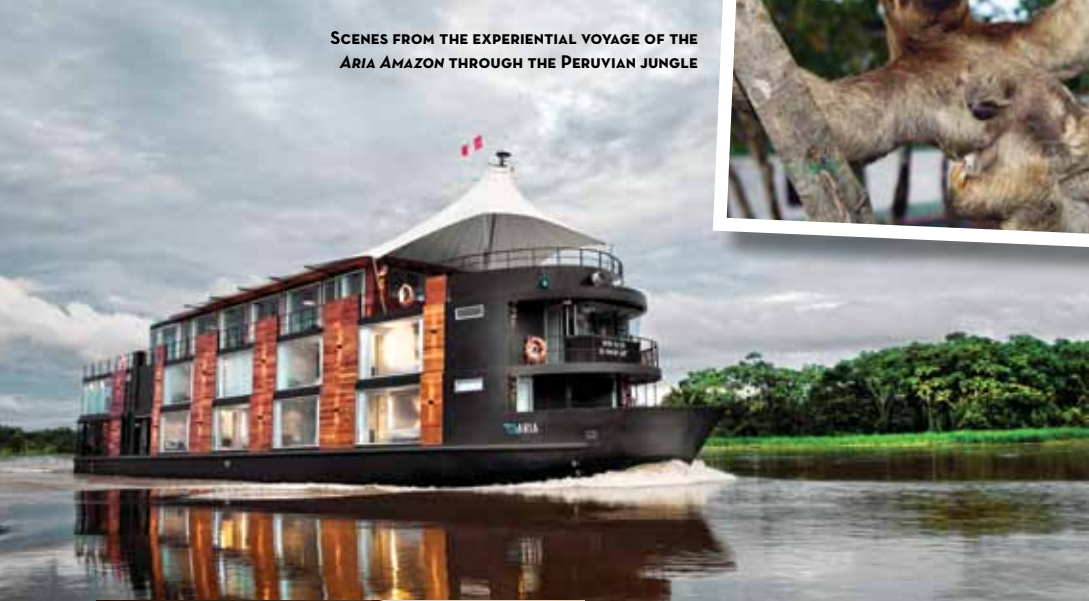


CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A VILLAGE IN THE AMAZON; DINNER UNDER THE DESERT STARS NEAR HOTEL PARACAS; A SPIDER MONKEY IN THE AMAZON.

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SCENES FROM THE EXPERIENTIAL VOYAGE OF THE *ARIA* AMAZON THROUGH THE PERUVIAN JUNGLE



Onboard, glass and steel exteriors mix with hard woods to create an eye-catching vessel as envisioned by Peruvian architect Jordi Puig. Each cabin flaunts a floor-to-ceiling panoramic glass wall offering a front-row seat to real-life Discovery Channel scenes (in the comfort of high thread counts and heavenly beds, of course). The communal rooftop level with a library lounge, a stylish bar and a sundeck (as well as a plunge pool on the *Aria*), surfaces as the social hub, where fellow jet-setters gather for lectures, quiet reads, libations or conversation, depending on the time of day.

Shortly after setting sail from the jungle city of Iquitos or Nauta, the sights and sounds of the Amazon ambush the senses, fostering a palpable excitement that lasts throughout the peregrination. Sloths and squirrel monkeys ham it up for the camera atop Cecropia trees, scarlet macaws light up the sky and sacred pink river dolphins splash around the tannin-rich waters. Exploration via small skiffs permits intimate interaction with the rainforests' more elusive creatures. The



ships' expert guides escort guests through local villages for enlightening afternoons of cultural interaction. Later, they impart the age-old ways of piranha fishing—often a highlight for the men, who long for a photo with a large, toothy catch.

LIMA

In the growing world of “foodies,” a handful of international cities have emerged as undisputed gastronomy capitals, warranting long-distance travel anchored solely by the prospect of incredible eats. Case in point: Lima, Peru.

To say Lima's food scene is great wouldn't do it justice; it's downright phenomenal. Given the diverse topographies and cultures of Peru—from the Andes to the desert to the Amazon—the cuisine is rife with unfamiliar, intriguing items such as *paiche* (the largest freshwater fish in South America), *choclo* (an extra-large kernel corn), *camu camu* (a small citrus fruit) and *cocóna* (Amazon tomato), prepared as many ways as the rules of statistics allow. Lima chefs have capitalized on Peru's natural bounties to create mind-blowing gastronomy, landing top global accolades for a number of the city's kitchens.

A handful of restaurants are requisite on any foodie pilgrimage to Lima. At Central (centralrestaurante.com.pe/en), Chef Virgilio Martínez has transformed his childhood abode into an open-kitchen restaurant where indigenous ingredients merge on the plate as edible art. At Maido (maido.pe/en), Chef Mitsuharu Tsumura taps into Peru's Japanese heritage, delivering the apex of *Nikkei* cuisine (a Peruvian-Japanese fusion). Maido's 15-course degustation menu, called the “Nikkei Experience,” is pure foodie nirvana with dishes like Nikkei seabass ceviche and Nikkei thick ribs (slow cooked for two days with yellow pepper, soy and sake).



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: THE POOL AT THE WESTIN LIMA; THE PYRAMID-SIDE DINING ROOM AND CUISINE AT RESTAURANT HUACA PUCCLANA; LIMA'S COASTLINE; HOTEL PARACAS; AN ARTIFACT AT MUSEO LARCO; LIMA'S HOTEL B.



Discover haute Chiclayo cuisine at Fiesta (restaurantfiestagourmet.com), where celebrity chef Hector Solis doles out hearty portions of reinvented delicacies from his hometown, including a hot and cold charcoal-grilled ceviche and *arroz con pato a la chilclayana* (rice with savory duck). At Restaurant Huaca Pucclana (resthuacapuclana.com/en), nibble first on yucca spirals and corn tamales before feasting on artichoke pasta and organic pork chops—all while facing the archaeological remains of a 1,500-year-old adobe pyramid.



Between meals, stroll through Barranco, a picturesque Bohemian neighborhood. Peruse the 45,000-piece pre-Columbian art collection at Museo Larco (museolarco.org/en), the pre-Inca gold at Museo Oro del Perú (museoperu.com.pe) and celebrity photographs at Museo Mario Testino (mate.pe).

Sandwich your days at either the 17-suite Hotel B (hotelb.pe), a converted century-old mansion in the heart of Barranco, or the sky-scraping, modernist Westin Lima Hotel (libertador.com.pe/en), which defies the brand's business-centric approach with a vibe and style of St. Regis meets W. Much like the exalted kitchens of Lima, the Hotel B and the Westin Lima Hotel are all about expecting the unexpected.

PARACAS

As far back as the 1940s, Paracas was branded the “Hamptons of Peru.” An earthquake devastated the region in 2007, but the legendary Hotel Paracas, A Luxury Collection Resort (libertador.com.pe/en) has since been rebuilt and reestablished its role in Peru high society.

Along Peru's desert-like southern coast, Hotel Paracas is a self-contained world of sunshine, picture-perfect sunsets, seductive infinity pools and unadulterated pampering. Peruvians fly here via private jet on weekends for sun-kissed standing, posing and socializing.

The mysterious Nazca Lines are a Cessna flight away, while the Islas Ballestas—a miniature version of the Galápagos Islands—beckon

opposite the resort's oceanfront, teeming with tens of thousands of seabirds, penguins and sea lions. The proximate sand dunes of the Peruvian desert form the backdrop for private dinners under the stars, arranged by the hotel's principal tour operator, Tikary (tikariy.com.pe/en).

Slightly further afield, Peru's wine-country equivalent, Ica, offers wine trails off the beaten path. Scattered throughout the valleys of Ica, *bodegas*—wineries—offer immersion into the world of pisco, which has taken the artisanal cocktail world by storm in recent years (more on page 86).

To learn more about experiential travel in Peru, visit the Trade Commission of Peru website at peru.travel/en-us. ◀◀