

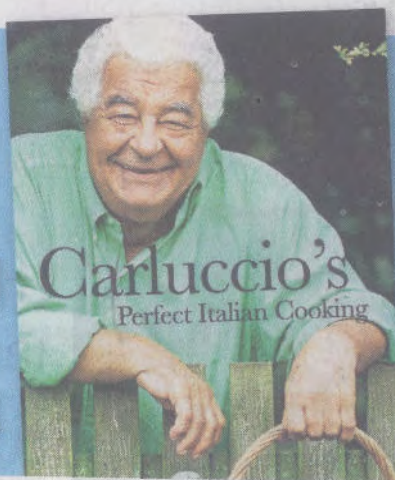
THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO PRIVATE GARDENS YOU CAN VISIT THIS WEEKEND

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The real bears of deepest, darkest Peru

Christopher Heaney heads into the mountains in search of the cousin of Paddington, whose latest adventure is published next week

For many children, former and present, the name Paddington Bear conjures up a happy and very English mental picture of Wellington boots and cocoa. But as readers of Michael Bond's latest Paddington adventure, *Paddington Races Ahead* (published this week), should remember, the bear is – not to put too fine a point on it – “not from around here”. Paddington Bear may have been found at a London railway station, but he is, of course, from “deepest, darkest Peru”.

In Bond's wonderful new book, Paddington shows more South American pride than ever: he attempts to pay his bus fare with a Peruvian *centavo*, and gets into the Olympic spirit by running (under) hurdles for a “Hometown bear makes good!” documentary for his family and friends in Lima. So charming is Bond's take on Paddington's background that on finishing the book families might themselves be hungry for more than a marmalade sandwich. To wit: did Paddington really eat llama pâté when he lived in Peru? Just how good can the *alfajor* cookies that he remembers be? And – the most pressing question of all – do bears really come from Peru?

Yes, there is a Peruvian bear. In Spanish, its name is the *oso andino*, or Andean bear, but in English the light markings that distinguish its face from the rest of its black fur have earned it the colourful name of spectacled bear.

Spectacled bears inhabit South America from Venezuela down to the north of Chile, mostly on the humid eastern



slopes of the Andes mountains. They're one of the world's oldest bears, but on the smaller side, weighing only up to 440lb. They spend a good part of their lives at a 45-degree angle, eating insects, rodents, deer, berries, birds, bamboo hearts, palm frond petioles, bromeliads, cactus and figs. They also occasionally eat cattle and corn, which doesn't endear

them to farmers. The spectacled bear is not yet endangered, but it is threatened by the expansion of agriculture, drug production, poaching and fear. Fortunately, Paddington's relatives are mostly shy and solitary creatures, hiding from humans in nests that they build in high trees. Their expressive mouths and agile

The slopes around Machu Picchu, above, are home to the spectacled bear, right, cousin of our beloved Paddington, left

paws, though, make them seem more intelligent and human than your average bear.

A family that wants to see spectacled bears in their home country can do so easily, beginning in Lima, Peru's capital. Lima's Home for Retired Bears, where Paddington's Aunt Lucy lives, is a Bond invention, but travellers can meet Paddington's real relatives at both of the city's two excellent zoos.

The Parque de las Leyendas is the city's oldest, and devotes three sections to animals from Peru's coast, jungle and mountains. The spectacled bear enjoys pride of place, but the park's more ancient offerings also make it worth a visit: the Maranga Archaeological Zone, which features crumbling temples, burial grounds, and a museum filled with mummies.

Lima's other zoo, the Parque Zoológico Huachipa, is home to spectacled bears and other animals, as well as a pirate-ship play area for the younger tykes. And the *alfajor* cookies served in cafés throughout

Lima's Miraflores district are as good as Paddington remembers.

Next up is Cusco – the gateway to the empire of the Incas, who once ranged nearly as widely as the spectacled bear itself. There aren't any bears within the city limits, but llamas patrol its pre-Columbian and colonial streets, which some say the Incas laid out in the shape of a puma. Children can buy masks like those worn by Cusco's famous *ukukus*, or bear dancers, young men who make mischief during the June festivals. Tired families can graze at child-friendly and puppet-filled Aldea Yanapay, a restaurant where the profits support a wonderful alternative school in Cusco.

No bear-seeking tour of Peru is complete without a visit to the Inca site of Machu Picchu, where the crumbling temples, baths and palaces thrilled the American explorer Hiram Bingham when locals led him there in 1911. Like Bingham, a few lucky modern visitors have glimpsed wild



Peru basics

Wild Frontiers (020 7736 3968; wildfrontiers.co.uk) has a Peru Family Adventure package, which can include visits to Lima, the Amazon jungle, the Inca temples of Cusco, and, of course, the spectacled bear country of Machu Picchu. A 14-day trip costs from £1,350 adult, £1,200 child, land only, including accommodation and some meals; or from £1,990/£1,840 including flights.

If you are travelling independently, be sure to book the popular Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel well in advance (inkaterra.com/en/machu-picchu).

Those with a particular interest in wildlife should investigate NatureTrek's “Northern Peru” tour, which includes the spectacled bears of the Chaparri Reserve, along with countless other species in the north and less visited ruins; 18 days from £3,195 per person, land only, or £3,895 including flights (01962 733051; naturetrek.co.uk).

And in Lima, the Parque de las Leyendas (leyendas.gob.pe) is easy to find, as is the Parque Zoológico Huachipa (zoohuachipa.com.pe).

Of course, the spectacled bear is no cuddly Paddington, and if encountered should be given the respectful distance it deserves as a wild bear. With a little care and curiosity, though, travellers who

spectacled bears trundling about the site's south-western slopes, on their way to the jungle. The rest of us, however, can guarantee a face-to-face encounter by visiting the Inkaterra Machu Picchu Spectacled Bear Project at the luxurious Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel in the riverside town below.

The project aims to rehabilitate spectacled bears rescued from captivity and reintroduce them to the wild, as does the Chaparri Reserve and Bear Rescue Centre. Accessible from the coastal city of Chiclayo, the Chaparri Reserve is able to take a more holistic approach to increasing the bears' numbers in the surrounding dry forests and protective enclosures.

seek them out will walk away thrilled and charmed.

And what the bears lack in duffel-coat appeal, they more than make up for with their affectionate, if rude, habit of an occasional tongue stuck in our general direction.

Paddington

 • *Paddington Races Ahead* by Michael Bond will be available in bookshops from April 26 (HarperCollins Children's Books, £10.99). Paddington's latest adventure can be ordered from Telegraph Books (0844 871 1515; books.telegraph.co.uk) at £10.99 (hbk) or £4.95 (pbk).



The *alfajor* cookies in Lima are as good as Paddington remembers

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