

Playing Jungle Jane in comfort at Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica Lodge, Peru



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My Cabana at Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica Lodge Photo credit: jrn.jpg

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The adventure began when we were delivered to the Reserva Amazonica main office, just minutes from the nearby Puerto Maldonado airport. It's not often that check-in includes a chilled towel, a welcome passion fruit drink and a tour of the Inkaterra Butterfly House while your papers are being filled out.

Next we boarded a very stable, motorized canoe (our main mode of transportation for the next few days) for the 45 minute journey up the Madre de Dios River, passing lush farms and sugarcane groves until we reached the Inkaterra lodge in the heart of the Tambopata National Reserve.

View slideshow: [Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica Lodge](#)

Any worries about roughing it were quickly eliminated after I saw my Amazon/chic thatched-roof cabana, complete with a romantic "Out of Africa" mosquito net draping my comfy bed and cedar-wood floors. The colorful hammock in my private screened porch was perfect for siestas or just taking in the beauty of the lush garden filled with colorful exotic plants and trees. I'm sure there was a woman decorator involved because all of my creature comfort needs were addressed, including a bathrobe, Andean rubber slippers, thick towels, flashlight, plenty of gas lanterns strewn about, reusable aluminum water bottle, organic-eco friendly toiletries, and even a small bottle of citronella. There isn't any air-con (there is an overhead fan) but I was happy just opening both screen covered windows for a little cross breeze and the most delightful nighttime lullaby performed by a local choral group of tropical birds, animals and insects.

As I walked to the main lodge, I passed a water cooler for refilling my water bottle as well as a huge basket filled with Brazil nuts (from a nearby tree) and a nutcracker. After I had my fill, I cracked a few extra to feed some of the local animals, such as the friendly capybaras (the world's largest rodents) that were milling about. The airy lodge, built around the trunk of a humongous strangler fig, is the premier gathering place for meals, drinks (a complimentary happy hour Pisco Sour is offered daily...more about this later) spa treatments, reading in the cozy upstairs lounge or shopping at the well-stocked boutique, so no worries if you've forgotten hats, scarves, or even a full-on jungle exploring outfit.

A full menu of tempting excursions

With the exception of a few private tours, over a dozen different excursions are included in the daily price. All of the guides are exceedingly well trained and most are multilingual.

Since the Amazon is the largest and most biodiverse rainforest on earth (home to two-thirds of the world's plant and animal species with millions more yet to be discovered) chances are pretty darn good that you'll see some amazing sights. Over 480 different bird species, including toucans, tanagers, flycatchers, and colorful macaws, have been sighted around the reserve as well as fascinating tropical insects and reptiles.

Excursions choices range from challenging jungle treks, canopy walks where you'll climb towers crossing a network of treetop-high bridges to vigorous paddles. More leisure pursuits are also offered such as a walk through the botanical garden with over 200 different species of rainforest plants, including many which are used in native medicine or a stroll though the Gamitana model farm, a family-owned farm which supplies the lodge with most of its wonderful produce.

I thoroughly enjoyed all the tours but my favorite was the "Rain forest by Night" safari. Our excellent guide, Jackson, grew up nearby on his father's Brazil nut farm and later went to the University where he majored in reptiles, made a perfect tour leader for this creepy-crawler tour. He also had a wicked sense of humor that kept cracking us up. (When one of the more timid members on our jungle walk hesitantly asked, "What happens if a poisonous snake or spider bites us?" Jackson blithely replied, "Don't worry. I have my machete so I'll just chop off your limb.")

At night fall a whole new mysterious side of the jungle comes to life. On my own, I wouldn't have seen much but since this is Jackson's backyard, the jungle came alive as he pointed out all sorts of evening delights such as pink-toed tarantulas, scorpions, baby praying mantis, snail-eating snakes, a golden-silk spider that weaves a web so strong that it can hold a humming bird. It took 5 minutes before I could make out the most incredibly camouflaged "stick insects" blending perfectly into the tree limb. Jackson made us keep quiet for a moment and then deciphered all the cacophony of noises we heard.

The Canopy Walkway offers a totally different vantage point of the jungle. There's even an Inkaterra Canopy Tree House 90-ft above, where you can even spend the night for a real Tarzan experience watching animals that are not usually visible from the ground as you enjoy a romantic tree house dinner for two. (A few weeks ago, Jackson surprised his girlfriend with a candlelit dinner in the tree house followed by a proposal.)

Foodies will enjoy a visit to the rainforest Gamitana farm where Mr. Walter, and his two brothers, grow an amazing selection of papaya, avocado, corn, coffee, rice, yucca, pineapple, chocolate, sugar cane, etc. This is a model Amazon farm is one of the community projects of ITA - Inkaterra Asociación (NGO) which purchases part of the harvests for use in the kitchen of their lodge. Inkaterra Reserva Amazónica lodge. Any leftovers from the dining room are returned to the farm and used to feed the pigs.

Amazonian food is not only tasty but quite healthy

Breakfast is a do it yourself buffet. While it was not very exciting, there was always plenty of fresh fruit. Like so many places in Peru they seem to export all the good coffee and leave you with only a local version of Nescafe! (Thankfully, I always carry a few emergency packets of SBUX instant coffee for just such an occasion) The dinner menu changes nightly with a couple of different choice and there is always a vegetarian selection.

The kitchen has been run for the last five years by a 30 year old culinary school graduate, Chef Raul Camayo Luya. He grew up in a restaurant family and always knew that this was his calling. He feels very lucky being able to cook surrounded by such natural beauty. He specializes in Peruvian/Amazonian cuisine, updated with a lighter touch and sophisticated presentations. Everything, from bread to ice cream, is made in-house.

A typical (delicious) dinner might consist of a carrot, orange and ginger soup, followed by Gamitan ribs with Amazon ratatouille and fried yellow potatoes and perhaps a Brazil nut tart (be sure and ask for some homemade ice-cream to top it off). We enjoyed every local fish dish we tried and the steaks are excellent. For lunch there is a variety of soups (the flavorful gazpacho was wonderful) salads, pasta, burgers, etc. My fave was the spicy poached fish with ginger, leeks and basil.

Note: Ask to sit at Roberto's station. Not only is he professionally trained but he could not be more gracious and helpful. He never steered me wrong in my choices, plus he has the most infectious smile.

Never met a Pisco Sour I didn't like

As mentioned above, your first Pisco Sour is complimentary. But you won't want to stop there. I'd suggest you make (best) friends with Ysmael, bartender extraordinaire, and ask him about the jewel-like liquor bottles lining the counter, which turned out to be his pisco infusions with flavors such as passion fruit , ginger, coca leaf, and starfruit . You might also ask him to show you some of his Tom Cruise "Cocktail" moves. No one else in the jungle can juggle Pisco bottles like Ysmael. We totally bonded so every night he would whisk me up a surprise Pisco Sour concoction, and they were all scrumptious. My fave was a chili pepper brew, which really packed a wallop. He later divulged that when Mick Jagger visited last year his favorite was a Champagne and Pisco Sour. He graciously gave me the recipe for an easy Pisco cocktail to make at home:

Pisco Tonic

2 parts Pisco (Ocucaje Pisco Acholado is a good brand)

1 part tonic

Lots of lemon

Shake with ice and serve

Nothing like kicking back in a jungle spa

After a long day filled with jungle adventures treat yourself to a nurturing treatment utilizing exotic, healing jungle plants, leaves and bark. The picturesque, jungle-green, setting-sun views from the ENA SPA windows offered a calming backdrop while waiting for a "Reserva Amazonica Body Exfoliation" which uses locally grown cocoa plants, rich in anti-oxidants, as an exfoliant followed by rehydrating cocoa milk, which nourishes and protects the skin.

Recommendations:

*Reserve a superior cabin facing the river as they are more private and have awesome views.

*Read the tour descriptions before traveling. They have some really interesting all day tours at additional costs that you might want to pre-book.

*After reading about the mosquitoes, I decided to try some insect repellent fabric treatment on one "jungle" outfit which worked so well that I never got a single bite.

If you go:

Getting there:

Puerto Maldonado Airport is only a 20 minute flight from Cuzco.

For more information:

These three days were just part of a magical Peruvian luxury tour superbly organized by [Indus Travels](#).

For more info on Inkaterra Authentic Nature Travel visit [their site](#).

See [Peru Tourism](#) for more info on the whole country.