

Why Peru has won the ‘world’s leading culinary destination’ title for six years running

Paul Ewart

July 21, 2024 – 5.00am

This story is part of the July 21 edition of Sunday Life. [See all 13 stories.](#)



Escucha este artículo

5 min

“She makes it look so easy!” I say, gesturing to the colourfully dressed Indigenous woman ahead of me on the steep mountainside.

Clad in sandals made from recycled rubber tyres, she effortlessly traverses the terrain, nonchalantly spinning alpaca wool as she walks. Meanwhile, I audibly huff and puff as the effects of the high altitude incapacitate my usually fit body. But, if anything is going to put you in your place and make you feel small, then the Peruvian Andes are it.



Lima is one of the world's foodie hotspots ISTOCK

I'm two days into an Upper Sacred Valley and Lares Adventure to Machu Picchu journey with [Mountain Lodges of Peru](#). While the famous Inca Trail to the archaeological site gets all the limelight (and all the tourist traffic), the neighbouring Lares Trek is for travellers like me who want to experience the dramatic and unspoiled Peruvian Andes without jostling for elbow space.

Reaching soaring heights of between 3800 and 4300 metres, the altitude on this journey can affect even the most athletic of visitor which is why, before departure, my fellow hikers and I spend a few days acclimatising in the town of Cusco.

Nestled among dramatic Andean panoramas, the UNESCO-listed destination is one of the country's most popular spots — and for good reason. The medley of ancient Inca temples and monuments, colonial architecture and modern buildings easily sates the sightseeing appetite.

[Inkaterra La Casona](#) — a 16th-century, former colonial manor turned five-star hotel — offers the perfect base from which to explore. Replete with antique furniture, pre-Columbian textiles and original murals, each of its 11 suites feature plush freestanding bathtubs, and an in-house restaurant serves up tasty, traditional meals.

It was good food that kick-started my Peruvian adventure. An adventure that began — as it does for almost all visitors to the country — in the capital city of Lima.

After winning the “world's leading culinary destination” title for six years running, Peru (specifically Lima) is one of the world's foodie hotspots. In fact, the World's 50 Best Restaurants guide puts it in the same league as New York and London.

To see this evidence firsthand, book the tasting menu at [Kjolle](#). The first solo restaurant from celebrity chef Pía León, who rose to fame as the head chef of Central (named the world's best restaurant last year), a meal here is a great overview of Peruvian produce and its culinary history.

For a luxury double whammy of haute hotel and haute cuisine, base yourself at the prestigious [Hotel B](#). Easily the coolest check-in in town (and Lima's only Relais & Châteaux property) this restored colonial mansion turned 20-suite boutique hotel is set in the bohemian, artsy district of Barranco. True to its location, the hotel houses its own art collection, with over 300 original works and a lauded in-house eatery that serves regional delicacies, including guinea pig.

But back to the trek. From the get-go, the ever-changing scenery leaves me awestruck. We hop across streams, traverse narrow valleys, take in vertiginous Incan terraces, scale precarious trails and gasp at the vistas of jagged, snow-capped peaks. It's striking, untamed and otherworldly. And, all the while, expert guides regale us with historic and cultural insights.

At the end of each action-packed day we arrive at one of the Mountain Lodges eco properties that sit at different points along the route. Here, your luggage awaits you, along with a delectable dinner specially prepared using fresh, local ingredients – and then, for afters, a soak in a private, outdoor hot tub, from which you can view the sunset painting the Andean sky.

Our last day represents what for many is the pinnacle of the trip: Machu Picchu. And, though our early morning arrival at “the Sanctuary” was undeniably magical, for me it was also anti-climactic. As the most-visited site in all of South America, the lines of tourists wielding selfie sticks add an air of Disneyland to the World Wonder and somewhat detract from the experience.

For some of my fellow trekkers this was the “money shot” of their journey, whereas I took infinitely more pleasure by engaging with the tight-knit Indigenous communities we met during our trip. Living time capsules, these descendants of the Incas still practise the ancient rituals of their forefathers.

Indeed, as our journey neared its end, we have the chance to participate in one such ritual, revering “Pachamama” (Mother Earth). Practising a rite observed since time immemorial, I feel the primal pulse of the mountainous landscape, along with the realisation that the Incan gods of yesterday are still very much alive here.

The writer travelled as a guest of Mountain Lodges Peru, Hotel B and Inkaterra La Casona.

Get the best of *Sunday Life* magazine delivered to your inbox every Sunday morning. Sign up here for our [free newsletter](#).