



BELMOND
HIRAM BINGHAM
MACHU PICCHU



PRESS KIT

Belmond Hiram Bingham introduced by Sanjay Surana

OVERVIEW

Peru's Belmond Hiram Bingham train is far more than just a mode of transport, but a great travel experience in its own right. Named for the explorer who rediscovered Machu Picchu in 1911—the American academic Hiram Bingham III—it is an Andean adventure combining fine cuisine, a live band, terrific company and sublime scenery. Shuttling between Cusco and Machu Picchu daily, it carries some 84 passengers in 1920s-style Pullman carriages that include two beautiful dining cars. Interiors are furnished in varnished wood and brass with large armchairs inviting guests to sit and linger, while the bar car beckons with the promise of cocktails and the lively soundtrack of the resident band. The stunning Andean landscape, the outstanding star of an outstanding show, is best appreciated from the cushioned seats of the open air observation deck.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The genesis of this train can be traced to the 19th century when railway lines began to transfer agricultural commodities such as sugar cane and minerals across this ecologically diverse country. In 1851, during the tenure of President Ramón Castilla, the first Peruvian railway was built, linking Lima to the port of Callao, 14 kilometres away. Eventually more than 5,000 km of tracks were laid in Peru, though many routes have since been abandoned. Remarkably, Peru holds the record for having the highest railway in the world, running from Callao to the mining hub of Cerro de Pasco in the interior, and South America's oldest operating railway, which runs through the desert between Tacna in the south to Arica in the north.

Belmond Hiram Bingham, launched in 2003, is one of many trains in Peru to run through exceptionally challenging terrain. It displays all the hallmarks of 1920s Pullman train travel, with brass, buffed wood, plush fabrics in Peruvian reds, greens and golds and a lovingly outfitted open air observatory carriage. The carriages were decked out by the French-based logistics firm Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits, on a chassis built in South Africa. The old-world feel of the trains adds to the sense of adventure and discovery, amplifying the feel of escaping everyday life.

FEATURES

Each morning the train departs from Poroy, 18 km northwest of Cusco at 3,486 metres above sea level. According to legend, its name comes from the early Spanish who, en route to Cusco, would stop over, saying 'For today (por hoy in Spanish), we rest here.'

This thrilling train journey begins as soon as travellers arrive at the station, and are graciously ushered on board and welcomed with a Peruvian cocktail, a glass of sparkling wine or freshly squeezed orange juice. They settle into seats at linen-topped tables laid with crystal and gleaming cutlery in wooden booths lit by brass lamps. Large picture windows ensure the scenery is always proudly displayed during the three-and-a-half-hour journey. Multi-lingual guides reveal points of interest along the way, such as Inca ruins and delightful churches.

The scenery is devastatingly beautiful—agricultural plains and terraces, steep valleys, the swirling Urubamba river and snow-capped mountains. There are tiny villages where young children wave joyously at the passing train, remnants of Inca bridges and red tile-roofed farmhouses. Brunch, served on this sector, uses ingredients that celebrate the richness of Andean produce, including the native potato, which comes in thousands of varieties. There is a traditional appetiser, a main course, dessert and coffee accompanied by a wide selection of Peruvian wines. The three-piece band also plays in the bar car for an hour.

The train travels through a number of important sites and towns—history pulses all along the way. After 25 minutes it passes by Izcuchaca and the large plain of Anta—the breadbasket of Cusco—land rich in livestock and crops of grain and corn. Next comes Huarcocondo, an ancient town known as Peru's capital of lechón (festive roast pork) which boasts a church with beautiful 17th-century murals. From here the Belmond Hiram Bingham enters the narrow Pomatales Gorge, descending about 400 metres over the space of five kilometres, and exits at Pachar, a small community that dates to the colonial era, with some of the Sacred Valley's oldest farms. The train soon arrives at one of the main destinations: Ollantaytambo, 2,797 metres above sea level and 43 kilometres from Machu Picchu. Some passengers leave the train to explore this pretty town's elegant colonial buildings, narrow cobbled streets and Inca stone walls, built in the Pachacuti era for Inca nobility.

Shortly after passing through Chilka, the snowcapped, pyramidal peak of Veronica appears on the right. Reaching 5,900 metres, it is the most important mountain of the Cordillera Urubamba—one of its other names is Willka Weqe, Quechua for holy tear. At kilometre 82 is Piscacucho, where some passengers disembark to begin the arduous Inca Trail hiking track that passes through cloud forest and alpine tundra. The ecosystem swiftly changes at kilometre 94, suddenly transforming from Andean highland to lush cloud forest and jungle, which continues on to the final destination at kilometre 111, Machu Picchu Pueblo or Aguas Calientes, the jumping-off point for the citadel. Here, guests board buses for the winding journey to Machu Picchu, which they explore in the company of expert guides.

The tone for the evening trip back to Cusco is set at Machu Picchu Pueblo, where guests in the train's waiting lounge enjoy a drink and music by the three-man band. Of all the musicians, everyone gravitates towards the cajonero—the player of the cajón, the Peruvian percussion instrument. The musician sits on this wooden box while he or she plays, driving the beat of the song and getting listeners to tap their hands and leap to their feet. Flute, bass and guitar add to the rhythm of tunes ranging from Andean favourites to Latin American cumbia. While the morning trip is all about the scenery, the evening trip, taken mostly in darkness, turns the focus to what's happening on board. Guests mingle in the bar carriage over a pisco sour or Juvé & Camps bubbly before the band shuffles through a medley of tunes and the globally diverse clan of passengers—Brazilian and Japanese families, British and Australian couples—sing along, dance and unite in a way that would make the United Nations General Assembly proud. The energy is truly infectious—a physical release of the joy that welled up throughout the day (and just good old-fashioned fun). Once the music winds down, an elegant four-course meal is served on Villeroy & Boch plates by waiters in waistcoats and starched shirts—an opportunity to cement bonds with newly made friends. Produce featured on the menus comes from numerous communities in the Sacred Valley, grown on small, organic family farms, reflecting the rich variety of maize, tubers and Andean grains produced in the bountiful valley.

The train journey is part of a complete service which also includes transportation and entrance to Machu Picchu and afternoon tea at Belmond Sanctuary Lodge next to the citadel. Many guests are surprised that in such a remote part of the world this calibre of experience exists, but rather than rest on its laurels, Belmond keeps upping its game. The bar car has just been renovated, with fresh furnishings in brighter colours. In the second half of 2017, the train will add a Presidential Car. This private carriage for eight travellers will offer clients a personal space, with furnishings of sustainably harvested local wood and hand-woven

Peruvian textiles in turquoise blues and yellows. The carriage will feature its own private bar, cocktail tables, seating area with sofas and armchairs, and a dining section that can be transformed to accommodate meetings.

PEOPLE

Javier Carlavilla Lindo, General Manager

Born and raised in Lima, Javier Carlavilla Lindo cut his teeth in the hospitality industry, working for four years as a waiter, sommelier and maître d'hotel at Belmond Hotel Monasterio in Cusco. In 2003 he moved to Mallorca to work as an assistant sommelier at Belmond La Residencia. Two years later he took a one-year posting at a resort in French Polynesia as an assistant restaurant manager, before returning to Belmond La Residencia in 2006. In 2011 he came back to Peru, beginning at Belmond Hotel Rio Sagrado in the Sacred Valley and then moving on to Belmond Palacio Nazarenas in Cusco. He joined Belmond Hiram Bingham in 2012 as Train Manager before being appointed General Manager for Luxury Trains for PeruRail, a joint venture between Belmond and the Peruvian rail-operating company. A soft-spoken man with an assured sense of command, Lindo studied hotel management and has taken courses in bartending, oenology and customer service. He is comfortable conversing in English, is working on his French and Italian and confesses to the guilty pleasure of being a fan of the American TV show Friends.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY & ENVIRONMENT

PeruRail prides itself on its active involvement with the local community and environmental and educational initiatives. Each month, 90 children from different communities of Cusco are invited to travel to Machu Picchu on board one of the PeruRail trains. In addition, the company's freight and luggage social services allow residents of the communities along the railway and around Machu Picchu to transport food, fuel, building materials and other necessities at a non-commercial rate.

As part of its CSR evolution, PeruRail transfers solid waste from Machu Picchu Pueblo free of charge. The company also collects and removes waste plastic along the Sacred Valley for recycling.

Another PeruRail initiative has helped a group of local women to develop weaving techniques using artisanal looms and to supply textiles to the company's trains. Another group have received training in health, hygiene and business skills, enabling them to supply the trains with local delicacies. Funding is also provided to local farmers to build sheds to house their alpacas during the colder winter months.

A documentary workshop, run by PeruRail, aims to develop new skills in youngsters in the local community, helping them to build and narrate stories through audio-visual media. The final product is screened in front of all members of the community in a mobile cinema, fostering a strong sense of pride in their local culture.