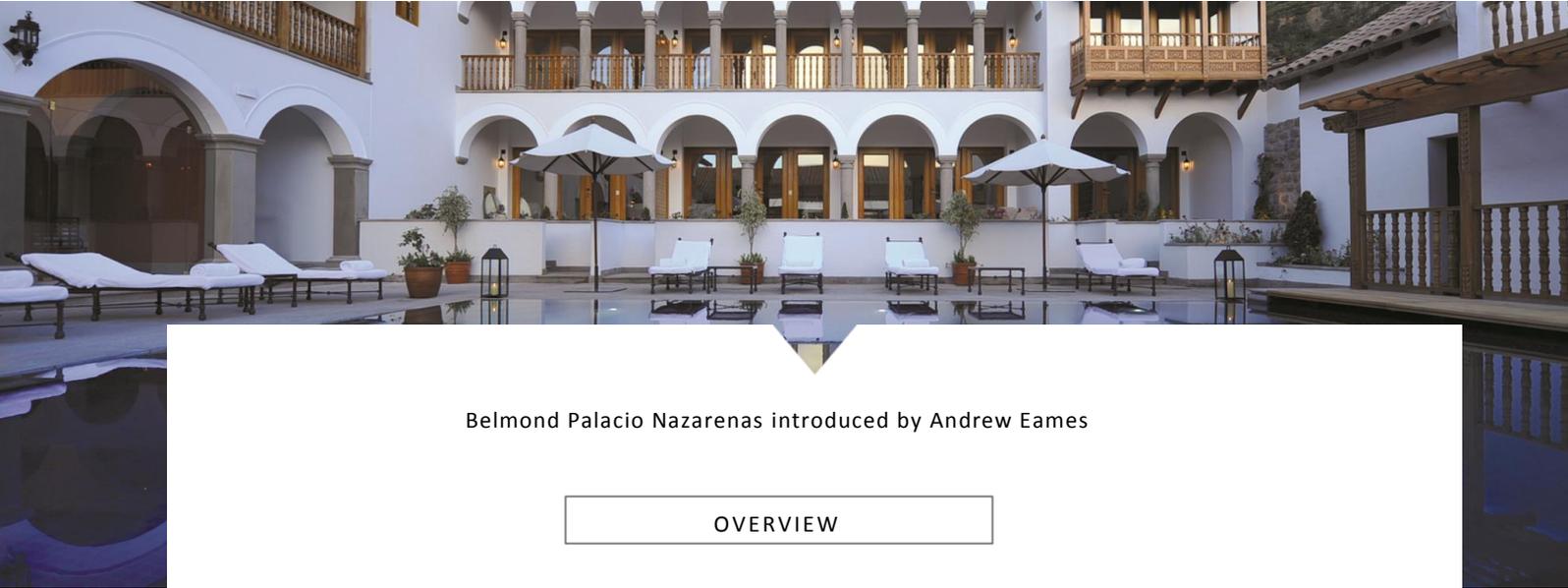




BELMOND
PALACIO NAZARENAS
CUSCO



Belmond Palacio Nazarenas introduced by Andrew Eames

OVERVIEW

So here's a conundrum for the well-travelled: how to turn a glorious slice of 16th-century Spanish colonial architecture into a full-service hotel—but without disturbing any of the characteristics that made the original property so appealing? The answer, it can be revealed, lies high up in the Peruvian Andes, in the vibrant UNESCO-registered city of Cusco, once the capital of the Inca empire.

The hotel in question is the Belmond Palacio Nazarenas, a synthesis of ancient and modern, with a distant past as an Inca temple, a conquistador's mansion and a convent, but now re-fashioned into a contemporary hotel, complete with spa, yoga terrace, games room and swimming pool, none of which ruffle the serenity of the original property.

This all-suite hotel sits in a superb location on its namesake cobbled square, the delicate Plazoleta Nazarenas, just uphill from its sister property, Belmond Hotel Monasterio, and directly across the square from the colonial Casa Cabrera which now houses the Museum of Pre-Columbian Art. The Plazoleta is just two blocks away from Cusco's central Plaza de Armas, and only a 10-minute drive from the airport.

Cusco itself, the hub of most of Peru's tourism, is an exuberant place. A cascade of rouged roof tiles surrounded by mountains, its ochre walls intricately woven with paved lanes, it has one foot in the present and the other still deeply immersed in the traditions of the mountain empire which ruled from here in the 15th and 16th centuries.

In Plaza de Armas, the city's front room, Quechua mountain people, Inca-descended and extremely colourfully dressed in woollen chalecos, stand with their llamas, ready to be photographed. And up in the cafes of the picturesque San Blas district, behind the hotel, young travellers eat cake and update their Facebook pages, waiting for their bodies to adjust to the altitude in advance of hitting the Inca Trail. It is a place of excitement and anticipation.

Like the city, Belmond Palacio Nazarenas straddles all these worlds, with one foot in the past and one foot in the present. First impressions are of its colonial history, dating back to when it was a conquistador's mansion called the House of the Serpents, a name derived from the slender snakes carved into some of its Inca stonework and the intricate, Romanesque-style sculpture above its main entrance. This main belfry-topped entrance still has the huge old hinged doors of the mansion, whilst the foyer inside retains the turntable hatch installed by the

nuns who set up a convent and orphanage here from the second half of the 18th century. They used to help support themselves by selling marzipan delicacies, and the hatch enabled them to do so without coming into contact with the outside world.

Penetrating through into the first courtyard is to enter the nuns' domain: the colonnaded, galleried square, with its simple whitewashed adobe walls and its central octagonal fountain with Inca-style running water channels. To the left of the entrance is the mostly 19th-century chapel, with a neo-classical main altarpiece and its walls covered with some 21 gold-framed paintings, part of a huge collection of art accumulated by the nuns. The chapel is under the protection of the Señor de la Exaltación. His statue, on the main altar, used to lead a procession through the Plazoleta de Las Nazarenas every 14th September.

It all looks very traditional and perhaps austere, but don't be deceived. For in most of the rest of the property the art, for example, is cutting-edge contemporary, from the Art Lima collection. Moreover this is the hotel that has the world's first soap butler, the first outdoor heated pool in Cusco, and suites with the complete kit for making your very own pisco sour, the Peruvian cocktail par excellence. No austerity here.

Much of the more contemporary side of the Nazarenas is sequestered around the second, smaller, courtyard, hidden away down flagstoned walkways, with the musical sound of water from those Inca channels tinkling beneath. Much of this part of the hotel is newly built, but its colonnaded and arched galleries blend in seamlessly with the rest.

The centrepiece of the second courtyard is the heated pool itself, surrounded by sun loungers. To one side is the hotel's Senzo restaurant, a destination bistro where innovative Peruvian fusion cuisine is served, with a strict food-miles policy. This is the place to try a creamy corn soup, duck confit with avocado, and maybe even guinea pig. Breakfast is served here, too.

Diagonally across from the restaurant is the lounge and bar, where guests settle into sofas for cocktails and to discuss the day's adventures. They can also choose to eat here, if the less formal setting feels more relaxing. Salsa lessons take place in the lounge on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and there's surprisingly-compelling live electronic Andean music on Friday evenings.

Off the courtyard is the Hypnôze Spa, inspired by Inca and Andean culture, with its own brand of organic products using indigenous Peruvian ingredients, such as herbs, Andean salts and coca leaves. The Spa – the only fully oxygenated spa in the world – has five single treatment rooms and one double room with a private hot tub. Some rooms feature glass floors, exposing the original Inca walls underneath. Outside, by the pool, there are free yoga sessions three times a week.

There are seven courtyards in total embedded into the property – one has the herb garden, for example – and each has its own distinctive flavour, with flowers, birds and a deep sense of peace.

The 55 spacious suites, which come in eight different categories, are a study in artistry. Four-poster beds are sheathed in hand-embroidered silk coverlets, and hand-painted frescos hover above the bathtubs. Wooden floors are adorned with thick Persian carpets. Some suites have Inca stonework, and some have balconies with a magnificent view down over Cusco's tumbling rooftops to distant mist-wrapped mountains.

All suites have the services of a soap butler, who offers two locally-produced soap options to guests on check-in; one fragranced with rosemary and the other perfumed with the Palacio's own flowers. There are other choices to make, too, with the option of a special herbal pillow and special herbal bath, both of which are designed to help guests acclimatise to the altitude.

All suites are equipped with coffee and tea making facilities, snacks, and a pisco sour making station. There's WiFi, satellite TV and sound system, and air-conditioning that can be enriched with oxygen on request. The bathrooms all have underfloor heating, bathtubs and separate showers.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The House of the Serpents, aka Belmond Palacio Nazarenas, has a long and complex history. The first constructions on the site were from Inca and pre-Inca times, with trademark Inca fine-cut stones still clearly visible in the current building's walls. Then the Spanish conquistadors arrived in the mid-16th century and the colonial city started to be built on Inca foundations.

The site of the Nazarenas was chosen by Spanish warrior Mancio Serra de Leguizamón for a mansion he called the House of the Serpents after the snakes on his shield, which were also carved into the building's façade.

Between the 16th and 17th centuries the mansion had several different owners, until it was bought by the priests of the Company of Jesus, who set up a college here for the children of local nobles. An earthquake halted that project and it was sold on in a very bad state to the local bishop, who decided to give the house to the Beatas (nuns) of Jesús Nazareno as a retreat. However, major repairs were needed first.

In 1745, part of the façade was taken down to build a church and an entrance hall for the retreat, while the decorative snakes, which had been removed, were put back up. In 1747, 45 Beatas walked here from their former home in the San Blas neighbourhood, bearing crowns of thorns and with crosses over their shoulders and veils covering their faces.

When Peru became a republic in the 19th century, the women were able to support themselves: they owned good quality land and were celebrated for their expert sewing, baking, weaving and spinning. They started a school for young and impoverished women in the building in 1876, but by the mid-20th century the order had entered a slow decline and eventually the numbers were insufficient to keep the property going.

For many years it remained empty until Peru Hotels, Belmond's local shareholder, obtained the concession from the nuns back in 1998, and plans were set in motion to transform it into the unique hotel that stands on the site today.

FEATURES

Belmond Hiram Bingham Journey

Travelling through the Peruvian Andes to the lost city of Machu Picchu on an elegant train modelled on the Pullman cars of the 1920s sounds like the stuff of dreams. Belmond Hiram Bingham not only makes this possible, but turns a magical journey into an unforgettable experience, with personalized service that takes care of every last detail.

The exclusive and luxurious Belmond Hiram Bingham, named after the explorer who first discovered the Inca city, comprises dining cars, a bar car, and an open-decked observation car at the rear, where travellers can take in the unmatched scenery in the open air while sipping on a traditional Peruvian cocktail and listening—or even dancing—to live local music.

The experience starts with a welcome cocktail in Poroy station, where traditional dancers whirl to the beat of the Peruvian cajón and tambourines. Once on board, uniformed staff invite guests to their table where they are served a delicious brunch. There's plenty of time to savour the scenery, because the journey itself takes three and a half hours, down through the dramatic Pomatales river gorge and then along the sinuous Urubamba river to Aguas Calientes, from where shuttle buses take guests up to the famous hilltop citadel.

The return trip, after dusk, includes a gourmet dinner back in the dining cars. For both journeys, guests have a choice of beverages and an excellent wine selection. Live music throughout sets the tone for an unforgettable trip.

Cooking classes

Learn how to prepare great local specialties with the hotel's head chef. After enjoying a tour of Cusco's vibrant San Pedro market in his company, guests will be taken to the hotel's Secret Garden patio to learn about fragrant Peruvian herbs and other fresh produce. Afterwards, in the hotel's kitchen, chef will help them cook up a delicious traditional Peruvian meal.

Pisco Sour Lessons

The pisco sour is Peru's national drink, so to learn how to make it is a cultural experience. Butlers at Belmond Palacio Nazarenas are equipped with all the ingredients and the

knowledge to give private in-room lessons in how to prepare the classic version of this delicious drink.

PEOPLE

Arturo Schwarz, General Manager

Arturo Schwarz recently joined Belmond in Cusco as General Manager of both Belmond Hotel Monasterio and Belmond Palacio Nazarenas. Lima-born Arturo has extensive experience of the hospitality industry in Peru, having previously overseen the development and operation of a cluster of Casa Andina hotels in the Cusco region and before that having worked as General Manager of Libertador Hotels' Palacio del Inca in Cusco.

Arturo says: "I feel really privileged to lead two of the best hotels in South America. Each has its own personality but both share the same values—especially excellence of service through their teams."

He adds: "Cusco is such a special place because of its culture and people. I feel a great affinity for the Andean world and its great heritage. Its traditions have been handed down from generation to generation and have much to teach us today."

Wiliam Palomino Gamarra, Art Restorer

Wiliam Palomino Gamarra is in charge of the restoration of all the colonial murals and paintings which are such a key feature of Belmond Palacio Nazarenas. Although he was born in Cusco, his devotion to art has taken him far from home. He received his first grounding in the Escuela de Bellas Artes (UNSA) in Cusco before moving on to attend the fine arts faculty in State University in Lima. From there he went to work in Mexico's Gonzales Camarena workshop of mural painting, before returning to Cusco to continue studying in UNSA to become a specialist in the preservation and restoration of Cultural Goods.

In this capacity he has worked for various international and local institutions, such as Telefonica del Peru, the National Peruvian Culture Institute and the World Monuments Fund. He started working for Belmond Palacio Nazarenas a year and a half ago.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY & ENVIRONMENT

Huilloc experience: Belmond supports programmes run by Cusco communities that enable travellers to experience life in the Andean community of Huilloc, near Ollantaytambo. Guests stay in private homes, learn to cook local recipes and help with chores. The families thereby increase their income and share their indigenous culture. The hotel offers training to community members in skills like food and beverage, housekeeping, gardening, guest relations and leadership so they may offer their guests the best possible experience.

Reforestation at Paruro community: The aim of this project is to increase forest cover protection at Paruro, a community located six hours from Cusco, and thereby reduce soil erosion. The long term plan is to improve the socio-economic and environmental development of rural populations living here.

Livitaca province: The hotel is providing support for school supplies to communities in this province and in the Qocha Qochayoq Community, which is located in Paucartambo, a province six hours from Cusco.