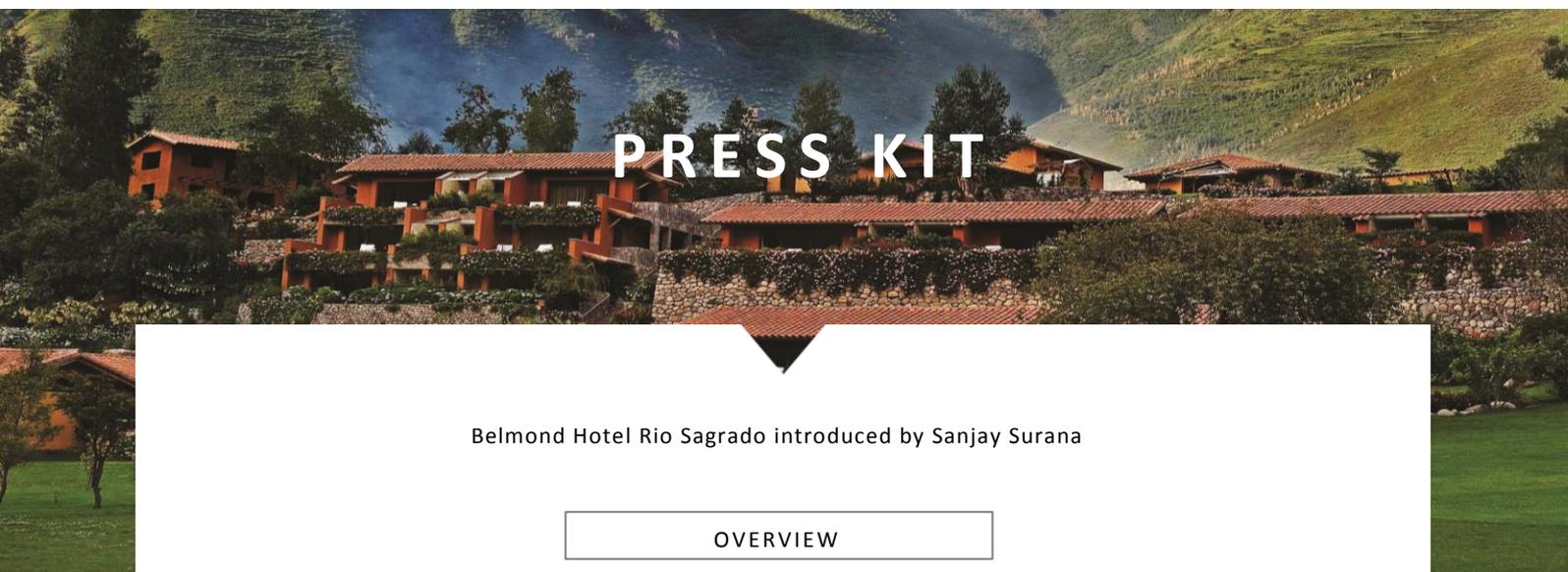




BELMOND
HOTEL RIO SAGRADO
SACRED VALLEY



PRESS KIT

Belmond Hotel Rio Sagrado introduced by Sanjay Surana

OVERVIEW

Set on the banks of the rushing Urubamba River, in the enchanting Sacred Valley of the Incas, this polished property of natural, endemic materials resembles an Andean village. Built on land that was once used for the cultivation of corn, squash and beans, it is surrounded by fields and stands of eucalyptus trees. Positioned at a lower altitude than Cusco, 60 kilometres away, it is an ideal base for acclimatisation before exploring the valley and Machu Picchu.

The 90-minute drive from Cusco leads through the Andean countryside, passing dramatic mountains and vast agricultural plains, Inca ruins and dusty villages. Visitors enter the hotel to a huge garden with streams overhung by a profusion of flowers and trees. The Rio Sagrado (or Urubamba in the local Quechua language), the Sacred River for which the resort is named, runs along its edge. Guest rooms, dining areas and the spa are dotted among the greenery.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The Sacred Valley is a little slice of nirvana, a landscape of rolling plains, roiling rivers, steep mountains, agrarian villages, Inca ruins and blue, clear skies. Named for its unique geography and benign climate, it is held in especially high regard by the indigenous peoples. According to Andean legend the Urubamba is also the earthly representation of the Milky Way. Belmond Hotel Rio Sagrado is a microcosm of the entire Sacred Valley, with its natural setting on a hillside that spills down to the river. Rooms are set on terraces, cascading down towards two large villas by the water's edge. A large millstone in front of the villas creates a link to the history and people of the valley.

Rooms are semi-detached houses, each with a terrace or balcony that offers heart-melting views of the river and mountains. Interiors are generously proportioned, with minimalist décor using natural stone and wood. Exteriors are rendered with a combination of clay, sand, straw and an organic material made from cactus juice, using a method dating back 2,000 years that helps the plaster to last. The décor makes extensive use of Andean fabrics: bright, embroidered cushions and runners, vibrant alpaca blankets, and pompoms of alpaca wool used as Do Not Disturb signs. Handwritten notes from staff are written on recycled paper produced by women from local communities. The large bathrooms have slanted windows, allowing natural light to filter in, while showers have a window with views out onto the gardens. Rooms deliberately lack one amenity found in most hotel rooms—a television—but, the staff rightly argue, with such stunning mountain scenery, why would anyone look at anything else?

Staff pay special attention to the purpose of guests' visits: some might return to their room to find rose petals arranged on the bed in the shape of a heart while others might discover a

birthday cake. Turn-down treats include hot water bottles inside a sheep-shaped pouch and freshly brewed muña tea (from the mint-like South American herb grown in the hotel's organic garden).

Enjoying the great outdoors is an important facet of a visit here. There's the rushing water, the chattering birds, the rustling wind and the kaleidoscope of colours from the deep green trees to the rich blue sky.

Close by the river are the restaurants El Huerto and El Jardin. A fire glows on the terrace of the former in the evening, while at the latter, meats and vegetables are prepared on a barbecue in front of the water or as an Inca-style pachamanca (in earth-covered pits). Guests can sit at two large tables right by the river, shaded by straw umbrellas, or in the gardens among fragrant flowers. There is also the option of visiting Urubamba's lively morning market, or collecting herbs and vegetables from the resort's organic garden with the chef, to prepare dishes during a cookery lesson. The El Huerto Bar is a serene spot for an early-evening cocktail or the barman's daily Pisco tasting. The scene hots up on Friday nights: El Huerto's garden terrace sizzles with a barbecue and live local music—the soaring sounds of traditional instruments like the charango, flutes and pan pipes in melodies ranging from contemporary to classic Quechua.

At the north end of the gardens is an outdoor pool. Surrounded by loungers, and close to the gurgling river, it is heated by solar panels to a constant 29 degrees celsius year-round. The Spa Mayu Willka offers additional places to relax—notably the two whirlpools, half indoors, half outdoors. It also features a sauna, steam room, Inca shower, and three treatment rooms. Facials and wraps use the finest local products, such as quinoa, coca leaves and salt from the local Maras mines.

The gardens are a delight in themselves. The head gardener offers complimentary tours, revealing indigenous flora and fauna, there are yoga sessions by the river, or one can simply stretch out in a hammock with a drink made from local fruits and herbs to a soundtrack of birds and the breeze. The river is the resort's most hypnotic feature, rushing between two geological formations—mountains to the right, with red conglomerates and volcanic andesites from the Permian Period, towards the remnants of an ocean bed from the Cretaceous Period to the left. The Andean gull is a common sight—the largest black-headed gull in the Americas, it frequents freshwater lakes, saline marshes, rivers and pastureland above 3,000 metres.

One of the resort's special delights is the chance to feed baby alpacas with a bottle of milk. It is a moment when guests can interact with staff while experiencing Peru's rich natural heritage.

The hotel team have a genuine passion for their work and a real enthusiasm for sharing their little corner of paradise. The general manager tries to meet every guest, a personal touch that helps to make visitors feel that they are staying in a home, not a hotel. This is a unique refuge, a retreat of consummate comfort and uncomplicated luxury, that just happens to reside in a remote valley in the sparsely populated Andean highlands. Everything is geared towards helping guests relax, disconnect and wander through untouched nature

And even when a little manmade entertainment is injected, it is done with the utmost regard to the setting. Take the casual Movie Under the Stars evenings when guests can watch classic family films while reclining al fresco on plump cushions and nibbling fresh popcorn. Later this year, the resort will also debut a small observatory and a telescope for stargazing beneath the clear Andean sky.

PEOPLE

Patricia Pinillos, General Manager

The effervescent Patricia Pinillos began her career in the hospitality industry in 2000, working in sales, followed by six years as a concierge at Lima's Belmond Miraflores Park. Four years ago, Belmond offered her the chance to move to the Sacred Valley, and with her four children all grown up, she jumped at the opportunity, starting as Hotel Manager in charge of rooms before moving up to the position of General Manager. Originally from the north of Peru, she's a lively leader, is passionate about the property and derives immense pleasure from interacting with the guests. That said, she is aware of Belmond Hotel Rio Sagrado's greatest asset—"disconnecting—that's the most important thing."

Gabriel Huahuasonco, Hotel Gardener

The hotel's oldest employee is gardener Gabriel Huahuasonco, best known for his additional role looking after the baby alpacas. A native Quechua speaker, he studied biology at university and has a wealth of knowledge about the ecology of the Andes. With his eyesight now fading, he has started teaching guests Quechua, the indigenous language of the central Andes, as well as recounting poems and folkloric stories. Gabriel is a very special hotel employee and a much-respected member of the team.

EXPERIENCES

The hotel's location promises the best of two worlds. Positioned just outside the small Andean town of Urubamba (population approximately 3,000), it is remote—but on the main train line between Cusco and Machu Picchu. The train station is, in fact, right by the entrance to the hotel, meaning access is effortless—the Vistadome and Belmond Hiram Bingham trains both stop here. The Maras salt mines are a fascinating sight—terraced pools cascading down a hillside, just a 20-minute walk from the hotel along the Inca Trail. The town of Urubamba is only a 30-minute walk away—or five minutes by car—and has a lively food market on Wednesdays and Fridays. Guests can accompany the chef to trawl through stalls laden with meat, fruits, vegetables, and of course the huge array of Andean potatoes.

It's not every day you get to see a baby alpaca, but even rarer is the opportunity to feed one. Domesticated species of camelid, alpacas are prized for their hair, which is used in woven products like blankets, hats and sweaters. Docile creatures, they are generally wary of humans, often scattering when people approach. The resort rears the youngsters until early adulthood, then returns them to local communities, who exchange them for the next generation of youngsters, in a cycle of mutual benefit.

The clean crisp air, clear blue sky and pretty bubbling river are truly mesmerising, but equally appealing is the hotel's warm outdoor pool. Guests can relax on a lounge, order a drink, get their sunglasses buffed by an attendant, and quietly, effortlessly uncouple themselves from the daily grind.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY & ENVIRONMENT

Working with the local government of Maras, the hotel has developed a three-year tree planting project on five hectares of Wayronqoyoc (Bee Killer) hill. The aim is to run conservation projects with Maras's educational institutions, to help preserve the valley's native plants and natural resources affected by deforestation and forest fires. During the first stage of the project, in November 2015, 400 people from the hotel and local community came together to green the area with 4000 native plants.

Together with the local government of Urubamba, and people from two nearby communities, the hotel has taken part in two major clean-up campaigns. Three hundred people from these communities have gathered 1.5 tons of inorganic waste found in the area's streets, farms, homes and streams. As part of a river cleaning campaign, local residents are taught how to care for natural resources, the consequences of throwing rubbish in the water, and the importance of keeping the riverbank clean.

Once a year, Belmond Hotel Rio Sagrado participates in the electronic waste recycling campaign run by the local government of Urubamba at schools and other institutions, and through media campaigns. So far the hotel has gathered more than two tons of electronic waste, to be disposed of through environmentally safe methods. The hotel supports the ReCusco project run by Turismo Cuida, a non-profit association that funds grants, scholarships and volunteer projects to help preserve the environment, by collecting all plastic bottles consumed at the hotel for recycling.

Since 2011, the hotel has been purchasing 21 different types of organic vegetables directly from the Asociación de Hortalizas Agroecológicas Pumahuanca-Urubamba, run by a group of local women. In addition, the hotel has begun to purchase native potatoes grown by a group of women from the nearby Patacancha community, which is helping to boost their family incomes.