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Exploring Peru: From the Andes to the Amazon



FEW COUNTRIES CAN RIVAL the cultural and scenic riches of Peru. Home to numerous pre-Columbian civilizations, it was, of course, the center of the great Incan empire,

which in the late 15th century stretched from Ecuador to northern Argentina. As well as historic remains, Peru offers glorious mountain scenery, with 11 peaks over 20,000 feet high. And the recent debut of several fine hotels, plus the launch of a notable Amazon cruise boat, provide further incentives to American travelers.

Indigenous people still make up 53 percent of Peru's population, with their distinctive clothing and gaily decorated herds of llamas and alpacas bringing a splash

of exotic color to the towns and cities of the Andes. Today, the old Incan capital, Cusco, is a thriving and irresistible mix of old and new. Nearby, the Sacred Valley is filled with charming towns, markets and imposing ruins such as the fortress at Ollantaytambo. Farther south, the region surrounding Lake Titicaca offers a rare glimpse at a society little changed by the modern world. And to the north, the Peruvian Amazon is one of the most biologically diverse areas of the planet.

During the 1990s, Peru experienced a period of terrorist violence perpetrated by the Shining Path Maoist guerrilla movement. Since the capture in 1992 of its leader, Abimael Guzman, and the subsequent arrest of his deputy, Oscar Ramírez, in 1999, the problem has been effectively contained. Politically, the country now seems relatively stable — President Alan García is approaching the end of his second five-year term — and for the past two years, the Peruvian economy has enjoyed GDP growth in excess of 8 percent.

The best time to visit Peru is the dry season from May through September. Early in 2010, the country suffered from serious mudslides close to the major historic sites, which destroyed roads, bridges and railway lines. On the basis of our recent trip, however, it seems that most of the damage has been satisfactorily repaired.

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Cusco

SET IN THE ANDES AT 11,200 FEET, CUSCO IS SUCH A singular place that the throngs of tourists entirely fail to detract from its appeal. Held to be the oldest continually occupied city in the Western Hemisphere, it comprises a harmonious array of sienna-colored buildings grouped around a series of colonial plazas. The Plaza de Armas (or Huacaypata) was the ceremonial center of the Incan empire, and today, an immense 17th-century baroque cathedral dominates the imposing square.

Cusco's most remarkable site is the Koricancha (Inca Temple of the Sun), contained within the Church of Santo Domingo. In the early 16th century, the temple was staffed by 4,000 priests and its walls were covered by 700 gold sheets. Although its massive exterior walls have always been visible, an earthquake in 1986 revealed just how much of the original structure remained, hidden beneath white stucco.

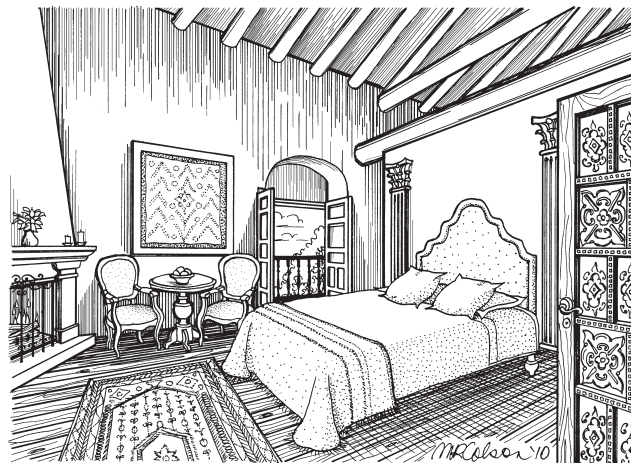
Some people prefer to begin their trips in either the Sacred Valley (9,100 feet) or Machu Picchu (7,950 feet), owing to their lower elevations. But we have always found that if you take the first few hours in Cusco at a relaxed pace, it is relatively easy to adapt. For many years, our favored place to stay has been the **HOTEL MONASTERIO**, an Orient-Express property just a short walk from the Plaza de Armas. (For a reappraisal of the Hotel Monasterio, see *Hideaway Report Online*.) However, three years ago, the well-respected Inkaterra group opened an 11-suite hotel close by.

LA CASONA is housed within one of Cusco's most important early colonial buildings — its first owner in 1585 was the conquistador Captain Francisco Barrientos — but despite its historical grandeur, it has an unassuming exterior and can be quite difficult to find. Fortunately, as we approached the massive dark-green wooden doors, they swung open, thanks to the observant porter within.

We quickly found ourselves surrounded by attractive young staff, one of whom escorted us to a cozy salon with high ceilings, restored frescoes, colorful textiles, handcarved wooden furniture and displays of fresh flowers. Essentially, the atmosphere of La Casona is more like that of a manor house than of a hotel. Hence, there is no front desk, pool or fitness center, and only a small, elegant dining room. Nine suites are arranged around a cloistered courtyard that has graceful stone arches, tiled walkways and a central garden; two Plaza Suites (#5 and #6) offer dramatic city views.

Our accommodations proved to be sophisticated and exceptionally comfortable. A high, timbered ceiling was

illuminated by theatrical lighting and complemented by a working stone fireplace and an exquisite folk tapestry (part of owner José Koechlin's private collection). A large bed flanked by columns with classical cornices was backed by a half-wall, which also served to separate the bedroom from the bath. Amenities included a large flat-screen



A suite at La Casona, Cusco

television (hidden behind carved wooden doors), DVD and iPod players, and free Wi-Fi service. The bath was exquisite, with two vanities, radiant floor heating, a deep ovoid soaking tub and a marble-clad walk-in shower.

La Casona's intimate dining room offers a delicious menu that fuses modern cooking styles with traditional Peruvian ingredients. We especially enjoyed chicken breast wrapped in bacon and served with fava beans, onion, potatoes and soft Andean cheese. Many guests choose to eat out, however, at one of the numerous restaurants within easy walking distance. Although the hotel has no concierge desk, the staff is unfailingly charming and helpful. La Casona is a delightful hideaway, and if you prefer smaller, more intimate properties, then this should be your choice. The Monasterio can suffer from a surfeit of tour groups, whereas this is a place solely for individual travelers. **94** *Patio Suite, \$720; Balcon Suite, \$925; Plaza Suite, \$1,130. Plaza Las Nazarenas 113, Cusco. Tel. (800) 442-5042. www.inkaterra.com*

The Sacred Valley

AFTER THREE INTENSELY ENJOYABLE DAYS STROLLING through the clean cobblestoned streets of Cusco, we headed to the Sacred Valley, 35 minutes' drive to the northwest. Carved out by the surging waters of the Urubamba River and surrounded by towering peaks, the valley runs for about 40 miles from Pisac to the Inca fortress town of Ollantaytambo (starting point for the four-day

hike to Machu Picchu known as the Inca Trail). The valley is lined with fertile terraced fields that once supplied the Incas with the staple foods of maize and potatoes.

In the past couple of years, the Sacred Valley has seen the opening of two high-end properties. The newest is the 65-room **TAMBO DEL INKA**, which debuted in early May on the banks of the Urubamba River. Designed by the lauded Miami firm Arquitectonica, it comprises a series of linked low-rise pavilions with inviting wood-and-glass fronts, given a little vernacular touch with peaked orange and red tile roofs. Nothing about the exterior, however, prepared us for the breathtaking interior, which features high ceilings, stone floors, polished beams and supports, and huge panoramic windows.

We found our spacious room to be just as pleasingly designed with the same striking interplay of wood and stone, plus beautiful Inca-motif fabrics and subtle lighting. Decorated in earth tones with polished wood accents, it provided a large sitting area, plus spellbinding views of the river and mountains. The large bath came with a soaking tub, double granite vanities and a separate shower.

Architecturally, both the bar and *Hawa* fusion restaurant are spectacular, but their grandeur struck us as a little chilly at times. That said, we greatly enjoyed our meals. Chef Rafael Cassin sources much of the produce locally, so you can expect superb vegetables and delicious fish, including excellent grilled trout. Elsewhere in the property, the imposing scale seemed more appropriate, especially in the spa, which houses a dramatic indoor-outdoor pool and a wet area with Jacuzzis.

Tambo del Inka is an exceptional new property. However, insist on a river-view room, otherwise you could find yourself facing the town of Urubamba or, worse, the parking lot. ✈️ **93** Superior Room, \$335; Junior Suite, \$435. Avenida Ferrocarril s/n, Urubamba. Tel. (877) 778-2281 or (51) 84-581-777. www.libertador.com.pe

Our other stop in the Sacred Valley was at **HOTEL RIO SAGRADO**, a 21-room property above a bend in the Urubamba River, privately developed in 2008 and purchased by Orient-Express in late 2009. Smiling staff escorted us to our room along a path that meandered beside stone walls, pebble-lined canals and carefully tended gardens.

Memorably situated on a hillside overlooking the river, the hotel's accommodations are set in several bi-level buildings done in Andean style with stucco walls, tile roofs and stone fronts that echo Inca masonry. Our lovely room came with white walls and leather-wrapped beamed ceilings, wood floors with radiant heat, a small

desk (there is free Wi-Fi) and brightly colored alpaca throws and rugs. There was no television, but all the visual stimulation we required came from our snug private patio with its serene mountain and river views. The marble bath contained a shower with glass half-walls, which was just as good as showering outdoors.

The hotel's delightful bar serves a memorable pisco sour inflected with passion fruit, and the nearby terrace of *El Huerto* restaurant is particularly pleasant at night when flickering torches illuminate the riverbanks. At dinner, we opted for a delicious tenderloin of grilled alpaca, served with an interesting variety of Andean potatoes. Perhaps the most alluring spot on the property is the small spa, which has indoor and outdoor whirlpool tubs and an exceptionally inviting and scenic deck. A full menu of massage options includes hot stone treatments with rocks gathered from the Urubamba.

Rio Sagrado is a charming and romantic hideaway, and it is our suggested address in the Sacred Valley for those who prefer more intimate hotels. We would recommend it unreservedly but for a problem with small insects that locals call mosquitoes, but which are more like no-see-ums. The simple but necessary answer is screens. ✈️ **92** Deluxe Room, \$355; Junior Suite, \$405. Kilometro No. 76, Carretera Cusco-Ollantaytambo. Tel. (800) 237-1236 or (51) 84-201-631. www.riosagrado.com



A Taste of Peruvian Cuisine

WITH ITS DIVERSE GEOGRAPHY, PERU PRODUCES AN unusually rich variety of foods. Peruvian cooking blends native culinary traditions with those of Spain. And there is a heavy Asian influence as well, thanks to the large number of Chinese and Japanese immigrants.

The cold Pacific waters teem with seafood, and ceviche is invariably superb, notably the classic *ceviche de corvina* (sea bass marinated with lime juice and aji peppers and accompanied by yams, corn or the ubiquitous boiled potato — of which Peru boasts more than 3,000 varieties). Mountain rivers are full of trout, while the Amazon provides numerous exotic species such as *paiche*, a large white-fleshed fish. In addition to beef and chicken, menus customarily feature alpaca, plus the traditional delicacy known as *cuy* (guinea pig) that is usually the chief ingredient of a rich and spicy stew.

Aside from Pedro Miguel Schiaffino (who oversees the cuisine on the *M/V Aqua*), the country's best-known chef is Gastón Acurio. In Lima, his flagship is **ASTRID & GASTÓN** (Cantuarias 175, Miraflores). Set in a colonial house, it has high white ceilings and walls adorned with modern art. The menu is "Peruvian International," so dishes will include ceviche three ways, preparations of calamari and octopus, and a variety of local fish, often served in a miso-inflected sauce.

In Cusco, we enjoyed a delightful lunch at Acurio's stylish **CHICHA** (Plaza Regocijo 261, 2nd floor), set in a charming old mansion with a fireplace and open kitchen. The menu is a blend of the contemporary and the classic. We began with a delicious *pastel de choclo al horno de lentildea*, a baked dish topped with cornmeal and filled with savory slivers of meat. We continued with pork adobo, thick slices of boneless pork in a broth seasoned with chilies and peppers.

Another popular spot in Cusco, **CICCIOLINA** (Triunfo 393, 2nd floor), contains echoes of the Spanish countryside, thanks to deep red walls, antique mirrors and a bar decorated with bunches of garlic and fresh flowers. On its tapas bar menu, you will find spicy shellfish dishes, as well as delicious homemade pastas such as squid ink tagliolini, and grilled meats, including beef tenderloin in a sauce of *sauco* (elderberry) and Gorgonzola.

In the Sacred Valley, **HUAYOCCARI HACIENDA** (Carretera Pisac-Ollantaytambo, Kilometro 64) is a charming old farmhouse set on a hillside overlooking the Urubamba. The dish to have here is the Peruvian classic, *lomo saltado*: strips of flavorful beef tenderloin cooked with a spicy mix of onions and peppers and served with crisp fries on the side.

Lake Titicaca

LOCATED AT NEARLY 13,000 FEET ON THE BORDER between Peru and Bolivia, Lake Titicaca is the second-largest in South America, with an area of 3,232 square miles. Today, the thriving city of Puno dominates the northwestern shoreline, while elsewhere, the native people exist much as they have for centuries, harvesting *titora* reeds with which to construct boats, as well as the 42 artificial floating islands on which many of them live. Owing to the altitude, the surface of Lake Titicaca is an astonishing luminous blue, in which are reflected the peaks of Bolivia's majestic Cordillera Real, notably 21,086-foot Mount Ancohuma and 20,867-foot Mount Illampu.

After a two-hour, 50-mile drive from the nearest airport in Juliaca, our hearts sank as we turned down a small road toward the lake and first spotted the **TITILAKA** hotel. "Utilitarian" seemed a generous adjective to apply to its boxy red-brick architecture. But the second we set foot through the door, we realized that we had come to a special place.

Created in 2007 by a scion of the family that owns Peru's distinguished Inkaterre properties, the hotel has 18 loft-like accommodations. Our elegant and sophisticated suite was dominated by a large window, beneath which matching daybeds provided a perfect spot for an afternoon read. A full-length glass wall separated a raised wet area — appointed with a slatted wood floor, double vanities, a separate slate-clad rainfall shower and a deep oval soaking tub — from the sleeping/living area.

The most appealing public room is the open-plan dining room/lounge, a light-washed space with floor-to-ceiling windows, a high timbered ceiling and comfortable sitting area (which at the end of the day provides a venue for a convivial house cocktail party). The food is very light with a Mediterranean cast, and we especially enjoyed a delicious pumpkin soup followed by fettuccine with smoked trout.

Numerous excursions are available, including tours among the indigenous peoples on Taquile Island and the Uros floating islands. This is one of those enchanting, end-of-the-world places where you feel you have succeeded in leaving the humdrum and inessential behind. One night after dinner, we strolled out onto the deck off the dining room and stared up at the blazing night sky. Owing to the altitude and the clarity of the air, we felt as though we were being lifted off our feet into the cosmos. ✈️ **94 Suite, \$417; Corner Suite, \$625. Lake Titicaca, Puno. Tel. (866) 628-1777 or (51) 1-700-5111. www.andean-experience.com/titilaka**

M/V Aqua — A Splendid New Amazon Riverboat

EXPLORING THE PERUVIAN AMAZON, WITH its endless tributaries and dense rain forest, was virtually impossible until the launching of the *M/V Aqua* in 2007. The *Aqua* accommodates 24 passengers and is the first luxury expedition ship to ply these waters. In the course of a typical four-night cruise, she travels about 280 miles.

Currently, the *Aqua* is the only sizeable vessel on the Peruvian Amazon, though a larger sister ship, the *M/V Aria*, is scheduled to launch next April, with room for 32 passengers and additional amenities, including a fitness room and outdoor Jacuzzi.

We boarded the *Aqua* in Nauta, a port town 60 miles south of the regional capital, Iquitos. (Such is the scale of the Amazon — which has an outflow 11 times that of the Mississippi — that Iquitos can be reached from the Atlantic 2,200 miles away by oceangoing vessels of up to 9,000 tons.) The *Aqua* has three decks and is clad in a mix of gray steel and wood, topped by a jaunty white canopy. It looks a little like a floating apartment building, but inside, it is genuinely luxurious. Each of the 12 cabins has a panoramic window, and the jungle passes by like a wide-screen movie. The simple and elegant interiors come with white walls, wood floors and a wall of slate tiles separating the bedroom from the bath. The latter is compact but well-appointed, with a single vanity and rainfall shower. The *Aqua* has its own water processing plant, so there is always plenty of hot water. All of the public areas are air-conditioned, and there is a satellite phone for essential communication, but no television or Internet connectivity.

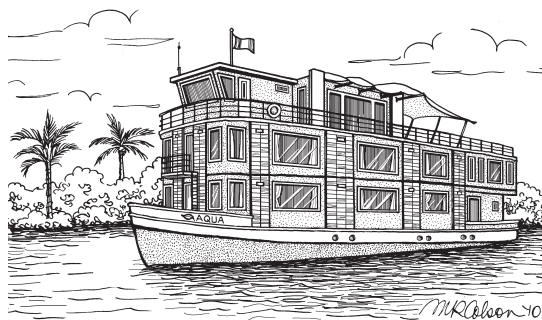
Meals are served in a dining room astern, which has a memorable view of the river. The menu is under the direction of star chef Pedro Miguel Schiaffino, owner of Lima's acclaimed *Malabar* restaurant, whose nouveau Andean fare resulted in an invitation to become a featured chef at the James Beard House in New York. Fresh Peruvian dishes are paired with South American wines, and representative items might include heart of palm soup

with avocado purée, tiger catfish ceviche, and a *tiradito* (a preparation similar to ceviche) of Amazon bass.

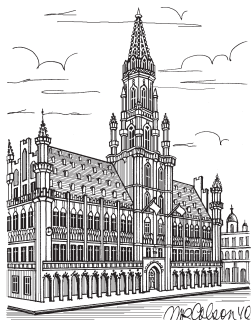
The *Aqua's* principal destination is the Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve, a 5 million-acre tract of jungle that is home to around 30,000 indigenous people and is visited by about 5,000 tourists annually. Each morning and afternoon, expeditions venture into the rain forest. Guests muster on the staging deck and are assigned to 24-foot aluminum skiffs, each manned by a trained pilot and a naturalist guide. These guides are the core of the *Aqua* experience. On our journey, there were three: Two had been raised in small Amazonian villages, and all proved to be amazingly well-informed. Although exotic to us, the rain forest is their backyard, so we were particularly impressed by their consistent enthusiasm as we cruised the waters or hiked along jungle trails.

On such hikes, the guides frequently stopped to point out plants such as curare, notorious for the poison used in native blowguns; fantastically colored butterflies, including the giant blue morpho with its 3-inch wingspan; and birds such as toucans and brilliant blue-and-yellow macaws. On a night expedition along a dark tributary, we saw fishing bats skimming the river for prey and the glowing red eyes of a spectacled caiman — a 6-foot crocodilian reptile — watching us from water's edge. About once a month, favored passengers glimpse a jaguar emerging from the jungle to drink.

The last evening of our cruise was especially memorable. We set out in search of the rare pink Amazon dolphin and soon found ourselves amid a pod of seven or eight animals. Generally, they surface only to breathe, but this group was unusually acrobatic. And they are indeed pink, the result of a diet of crustaceans. As the sun began to set, the pilots brought the skiffs together and broke out bottles of Champagne to mix Amazonian mimosas. As we toasted the guides and the crew, we reflected that the trip had exceeded all our hopes and expectations. *Three-night Amazon Discovery Cruise, \$2,250; four-night Amazon Explorer Cruise, \$3,000; seven-night Amazon Expedition Cruise, \$5,250 (rates are per person based on double occupancy; single supplement is 50 percent).* www.aquaexpeditions.com.



Brussels: Boutique Options in an Engaging City



DESPITE BEING THE CAPITAL of the European Union, Brussels does not emit an aura of power. For the most part, it is a low-key, brick-built metropolis. Visitors flock to the Grand Place, a majestic square lined by gabled houses and guild halls, in search of beer, chocolate and moules frites, but few seem to venture farther afield.

For anyone who makes an effort, however, Brussels is a very appealing city, with some superb museums — our favorite is the art nouveau Horta Museum — plus a constellation of outstanding restaurants.

Our preferred grand hotel is the 174-room **HOTEL AMIGO** right in the heart of the Old Town. On our most recent visit, however, we decided to sample two smaller properties and came across a real gem on our first night. The seven-suite **TENBOSCH HOUSE** opened in April 2010, and in our opinion, it is now the best address in Brussels for anyone who prefers individual hideaways and who also has a taste for modern design.

Located in the stylish Ixelles district just off the chic Avenue Louise, the hotel was created by combining two 19th-century townhouses clad in granite and gray brick. Seen from the street, you might expect brocade curtains and cabinets filled with china figurines. Instead, the soaring white-walled lobby is hung with contemporary art and framed photography, and the public rooms are furnished with '60s-vintage Danish modern furniture. Alongside elm and beech bentwood chairs are bookcases stocked with art books and metal suspension lamps.

The guest accommodations are individually decorated, uncluttered, light and spacious. All come with raw oak parquet floors, beds made up with cotton-covered duvets, plasma-screen televisions and iPod docks. The large tiled baths have sleek Duravit fixtures, separate stall showers, Belgian linens and robes, and British REN organic toiletries. A wonderful third-floor suite (there is no elevator) offers a sitting room, dressing room, bedroom, two baths and a private balcony.

Although there is no restaurant or room service, breakfast is served in the salon, and guests have the use

of a well-stocked honor bar. The bar, lounge and salon all have access to a secluded private garden, where a pavilion contains a sauna and a small indoor swimming pool. Tenbosch House presents an opportunity to discover the real Brussels, a wealthy, cultivated and worldly city that is relatively unknown compared with neighboring capitals such as Amsterdam and Paris. **90 Junior Suite**, \$350; **Master Suite**, \$390. 131-133 rue Washington. Tel. (32) 2-888-9090. www.tenboschhouse.com

Situated close to the Grand Place and the lovely glass-roofed Galeries Royales Saint-Hubert — the location of many of Brussels' most elegant boutiques and one of our favorite bookstores, Tropismes — the 24-room **LE DIXSEPTIEME** occupies a complex of restored and reconfigured 17th-century townhouses, including one that was formerly the residence of the Spanish ambassador. A perfect example of what the French call a *hôtel de charme*, or one with a lot of history, atmosphere and character, the property makes a fine first impression. The welcome is friendly, too, and you immediately have the sense of being in a pleasantly discreet and urbane small hotel.

Le Dixseptième is divided into two parts: The "Antique" wing in the original townhouse is all suites, while the "Contemporary" wing contains studios named after Belgian painters. The Antique wing is preferable. Opening the door to our junior suite, "Brueghel," we found a short flight of wooden stairs leading up to a lounge with massive beams, oak plank floors, a leather-topped captain's desk and a sofa covered in powder-blue floral brocade in front of a (non-working) fireplace. Though nicely furnished — albeit in rather grandmotherly taste — we immediately noticed the worn fabric on one of the upholstered armchairs. This signaled the fact that this otherwise pleasant hotel is in need of some tender loving care. Otherwise, our suite was quiet and comfortable, with a separate bedroom, a small bath with combined tub and shower, and a spacious kitchenette. Amenities included large plasma-screen televisions and complimentary wireless Internet access.

Le Dixseptième is well-located and deeply connected to the history of Brussels. It certainly has the potential to become an excellent small hotel, but its last renovation was in 2003 and serious updating is now overdue. **82 Junior Suite**, \$360; **Superior Suite**, \$575. 25 rue de la Madeleine. Tel. (32) 2-517-1717. www.ledixseptieme.be

A Thriving Capital of European Gastronomy

ALTHOUGH THE BRUXELLOIS ARE FAMOUS FOR their discerning palates, it is the presence of a large community of bureaucrats — with generous expense accounts — that has been chiefly responsible for creating one of the best food scenes in Europe. Long dominated by formal, expensive French restaurants, Brussels now offers inventive cuisine by talented young chefs, as well as homey Belgian bistro cooking.

ALEXANDRE. (164 rue du Midi. Tel. 502-4055) After training with some of the city's top chefs, young talent Alexandre Dionisio has created a sensation among local gourmets with this lively contemporary bistro in the heart of the city. Dishes not to miss include salmon marinated in soy sauce with ginger and crunchy vegetables, white Malines asparagus in season, and roast pigeon with sautéed herbed potatoes and an herb salad.

L'ACHEPOT. (1 place Sainte-Catherine. Tel. 511-6221) This friendly, well-run bistro is a perfect choice for lunch on a sunny terrace overlooking the church of Saint Catherine, or a relaxed dinner in its cozy wood-paneled interior. Choose from the daily specials such as delicious langoustine-stuffed ravioli in a basil-spiked hollandaise sauce, or opt for comfort food like "Steak Americaine," which is what the Belgians call steak tartare, or *boulettes* (meatballs) in tomato and vegetable sauce with excellent frites (which come with mayonnaise, as they always do in Belgium).

CHOU. (4 place de Londres. Tel. 511-9238) Chef Dominique Aubry's good-looking modern bistro has wood-paneled walls and stylish lighting, with one dining room illuminated in yellow, the other in red. You can watch him at work in the open kitchen, where he prepares dishes such as a delicious and original soup of foie gras and oysters, sea bream with grapefruit petals on pea purée, and hot apple tart with caramel sauce. There is a great terrace out front for warm-weather dining.

JALOA. (4 quai aux Barques. Tel. 513-1992) Chef Gaëtan Colin's restaurant occupies a 17th-century townhouse in one of the city's oldest neighborhoods. His menu offers the kind of inventive, internationally inspired cooking that can be found in Brussels these days. The four-, six- or nine-course tasting menus change frequently,

but highlights of a recent meal included sea bass with oyster and cauliflower foam, and loin of wild hare cooked rare and served with leeks, rutabaga, turnips and celery root, plus a side casserole of *civet de lièvre* (stewed hare) with cep mushrooms. Different wines are served with every course — which can be irritating — but we enjoyed a Pouilly-Fuissé with the bass and an excellent Argentine Malbec with the hare.

ORPHYSE CHAUSSETTE. (5 rue Charles Hanssens. Tel. 502-7581) Located in the stylish Sablon neighborhood, this handsome bistro is run by the engaging Philippe Renoux. It specializes in the cooking and wines of southwestern France and is a great choice for a casual but memorable meal. A crystal chandelier casts soft light on a pretty interior with a Belle Epoque tile floor and dark wood chairs and tables. The menu offers dishes such as marinated mackerel with citrus fruit and seaweed, superb foie gras, and veal with orange-and-leek butter and Parmesan risotto.

TAVERNE DU PASSAGE. (30 Galerie de la Reine. Tel. 512-3731) Tucked away inside the elegant Galeries Royales Saint-Hubert, this old-fashioned brasserie is a long-running favorite of the local bourgeoisie — hence the occasionally stuffy waiters. It is one of our preferred places to go on Sunday night when almost everything else is closed. The long, narrow dining room with white tablecloths and banquette seating offers great people-watching, a sense of history and better-than-average Belgian comfort food, such as deep-fried Béchamel-and-shrimp-filled croquettes served with fried parsley and lemon wedges, an excellent steak tartare, and a very good *vol-au-vent de volaille*, (puff pastry filled with shredded chicken and mushrooms in lemony cream sauce). There's an extensive and expensive wine list, but the house wines by the carafe are excellent.

RESTAURANT LE ZINNEKE. (26 place de la Patrie. Tel. 245-0322) It is well worth the cab fare to the outlying location of this friendly bistro to sample well-made and generously served Belgian comfort food. Start with the delicious homemade pâté with sour cherries and onion jam, or the superb crisply fried cheese croquettes, and then opt for moules frites, or *stoemp* (mashed potatoes with leeks) and grilled sausage, steak tartare, pork-and-veal meatballs in tomato sauce, or sole meunière. Desserts are equally homey and appealing, and include Belgian waffles with whipped cream.



THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW

ROSEWOOD SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE *Mexico* — The enchanting highland town of San Miguel, with its fine baroque architecture and vibrant arts scene, will shortly see the debut of a lavish new 67-room Rosewood resort. Located at the heart of the historic district, the property is scheduled to open in “early 2011.” Surrounded by landscaped gardens and terraces, the hotel will have three restaurants, including 1826 for “traditional and innovative” Mexican cuisine, and *Luna*, a rooftop tapas bar. A spa will offer eight treatment rooms, plus a yoga and Pilates studio. www.rosewoodsanmiguel.com

THE SAVOY *London* — Having been closed for nearly three years for a \$150 million restoration, this classic Thames-side grand hotel finally reopened on October 10. Established in 1889, and originally managed by César Ritz with Auguste Escoffier as Maître Chef, The Savoy achieved instant fame, thanks to its revolutionary “ascending rooms” — which we now know as elevators! The property’s art deco interior has been restored by Pierre-Yves Rochon; the *Savoy Grill* is now under the supervision of Gordon Ramsay; and cocktails are once more being shaken at the legendary *American Bar*. www.fairmont.com/savoy

LE PAVILLON DES LETTRES *Paris* — The Right Bank is renowned for its majestic palace hotels, with nearly all of the city’s more intimate properties being located on the opposite side of the Seine. However, this 26-room newcomer will prove an exception, being situated in the 8th arrondissement, close to the Champs-Élysées. Sister hotel to the much-loved Pavillon de la Reine on the Place des Vosges — itself the subject of a recent lavish renovation — the hotel has a literary theme, with accommodations named after famous international writers. In a sign of the times, however, each room will be provided with a complimentary iPad! www.pavillondeslettres.com

PERA PALACE *Istanbul* — In 1934, Agatha Christie published *Murder on the Orient Express*, a book inspired in part by her stays at this peerlessly atmospheric grand hotel. The property reopened on September 1 after a \$30 million restoration. Set in the elevated Pera (Beyoğlu) district, it affords glorious views of Galata and the Golden Horn. Its museum-like interior is now complemented by modern amenities in the 145 rooms. A new spa offers a menu of Turkish bath treatments, plus gym, sauna/steam and a jet-streamed indoor pool. www.perapalace.com

MATAKAURI *New Zealand* — Located on the shore of spectacular Lake Wakatipu, just seven minutes from Queenstown, adventure capital of the South Island, Matakauri is the new sister property of established Harper favorites, Kauri Cliffs and Cape Kidnappers. A hideaway of just 11 lavish suites, the resort reopened on August 1. The kitchen is under the supervision of acclaimed Executive Chef Dale Gartland, who serves refined “modern European” cuisine. Aside from an extensive menu of outdoor activities, the property offers a spa, pool and fitness center. www.matakauri.co.nz

QUEEN ELIZABETH — The 170-year-old Cunard shipping company has now launched three new ocean liners in the past six years. The latest addition to the fleet was named by Queen Elizabeth herself on October 11 in Southampton, England. (The original *Queen Elizabeth* was launched in 1938 when the queen was present as a 12-year-old girl.) The new 92,000-ton, \$634 million liner will accommodate 2,092 passengers. Its interior displays the time-honored Cunard style of art deco decoration and extensive wood-paneling. The Maiden World Voyage sold out in 29 minutes! Other maiden cruises for 2011 include “Fjords & Waterfalls” (Norway), May 19-26; “St. Petersburg & Baltic Explorer,” May 31-June 14; and “Around the British Isles,” September 2-12. www.cunard.com

MAYBOURNE GROUP — We learned with astonishment that the Maybourne Hotel Group — owner of Claridge’s, The Connaught and The Berkeley — has been placed under the control of the Irish government after failing to refinance its loans due, apparently, to declining London property values. Recently, the three iconic hotels have all been expensively (and controversially) modernized. Collectively, they are valued in excess of \$1 billion. We will monitor the ongoing saga and report back when the situation is clarified.

ANDREW HARPER HOTEL AND RESORT RATINGS

Andrew Harper's 500 Favorite Hotels in the World™

- ★★★★ 98-100 A truly great hotel/resort, among the finest of its kind in the world
- ★★★ 95-97 An exceptional hotel/resort of great individuality and distinction
- ★★ 92-94 An outstanding hotel/resort of genuine sophistication
- ★ 90-91 A fine hotel/resort of considerable charm

Also Recommended

- 85-89 A commendable hotel/resort, providing high levels of comfort and service

Not Recommended

- 50-84 A hotel/resort that did not meet the Andrew Harper standard

Rates provided are published nightly room rates and are subject to change. Call the Andrew Harper Travel Office for the best available rates, (800) 375-4685.

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