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Chaski News

Winter 2009-10

New Suites Available at Galápagos Eco Hotel

In November Southwind President and Adventure Travel Specialist, Tom Damon, returned from his fourth site inspection tour of the enchanted Galápagos Islands as part of our ongoing effort to provide clients with the most up-to-date information. Tom vetted day excursions and snorkeling sites while based from the newly-expanded Finch Bay Eco Hotel on the outskirts of Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz Island.



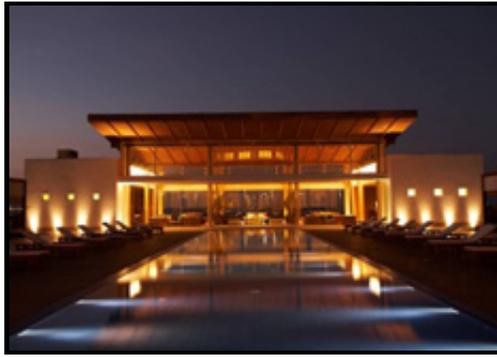
Hotel-based visits to the islands are becoming increasingly popular for those looking for a more comfortable land-based option or those prone to sea sickness. The upscale Finch Bay Eco Hotel has debuted 6 new Ocean View rooms, adding to the existing 21 Premium rooms.



The experience is ideal as either a 4 or 5 day pre- or post-cruise extension or alternative to a cruise. You won't see as many islands or visitor sites compared to a cruise, but a land-based visit does offer day excursions to nearby islands aboard the hotel's yacht to photograph wildlife, hike and snorkel with sea lions, turtles and hundreds of tropical fish. Finch Bay is also the only hotel in Puerto Ayora located on a white sand beach. Take a sea kayak out for a paddle, go diving, hiking, birdwatching or simply relax in a hammock on your veranda. Amenities include a pool, jacuzzi, open air bar, wireless internet, restaurant serving up a blend of seafood and international cuisine and AC in the rooms. For further information please contact Tom at tom@southwindadventures.com.

Travel Fact: The Galápagos are home to many species only found in the archipelago. The Giant tortoise is probably the most well known endemic and also the island's namesake. Where else will you find an iguana adapted to life in the sea! Among the 178 recorded bird species, 56 are endemic and native. In addition to Darwin's famous finches, favorites among photographers include the Galápagos penguin, Waved albatross and Flightless cormorant.

Libertador Hotel Opens in Paracas on Peruvian Coast



The Libertador Luxury Collection of hotels and resorts recently expanded its assortment of fine properties to include Paracas, situated about 3 hours south of Lima in the bay across from Paracas National Reserve. The 5-star resort has been lauded for its superb service, and features 2 swimming pools heated year-round, a luxury spa, lounge, bar and two gourmet restaurants. The 120 ample rooms feature either a garden or ocean view, bamboo-covered walls, an iPod docking station and flatscreen TV, with a number of impressive and unique suites available for upgrade.

The highlight of the Paracas area is the Ballestas Islands, a marine sanctuary that contains wildlife similar to those found in the Galápagos Islands, such as penguins, cormorants, pelicans, sea lions and dolphins. Over time the islands have been eroded to form spectacular arches and caves, providing shelter to over 150 species of birds, occasionally including the elusive condor. The meeting point of two distinct ocean currents, the Humbolt and El Niño, provide an abundance of plankton and other food for marine life to feed this unique ecosystem.

Travel Fact: The pre-Inca Paracas culture flourished in this area between approximately 600 BC to 200 AD, and they had advanced knowledge of water & irrigation, medicine and textiles.



New Paine Towers Lodge Adventure!

The dramatic Paine Towers are the centerpiece to Chile's Paine National Park, celebrated as one of the "50 Places of a Lifetime" by National Geographic Traveler. Granite spires, windswept plains, calving glaciers, crystal-clear waters and unique wildlife make this part of Patagonia one of the most awe-inspiring natural areas in the world.



Recently Southwind's Director of Operations, Luis Felipa, returned to this region for two weeks to not only enjoy breathtaking hikes and vistas, but to meet with owners, managers and guides to finalize details for the launch of our [Paine Towers Lodge Adventure](#), running from November-March. This exquisitely designed non-camping itinerary features moderate and optional hiking distances and relaxing nights at cozy lodges or hosterías. After a day of invigorating activity we return to a gourmet meal, often made with organic ingredients produced on-site at the lodges. We can top off the day with a soothing massage, or a glass of Chilean wine in front of a crackling fireplace.

Travel Fact: At over 9,000 feet, the peaks of the Paine Towers oversee an abundant ecosystem, with 105 species of birds, 25 mammals, and over 200 plant species.



Travel Consultant Kurt Baehmann Explores the Peruvian Amazon



In November Southwind's Kurt Baehmann traveled to northeastern Peru to visit unique Amazonian cultures and see spectacular wildlife. He was able to experience both a luxury riverboat and the most exclusive lodge accommodations this part of the Amazon has to offer. He had the opportunity to hold a three-toed sloth (pictured), feel the weight of a giant anaconda on his shoulders, go fishing for piranha, swim with pink dolphins in a blackwater lagoon at sunset, and sing songs with schoolchildren in a local village.

As part of the cruise experience Kurt and the other passengers visited a manatee rescue center that receives support from the riverboat operator, where they had the unique opportunity to feed recuperating manatees milk from a bottle. "You see the Amazon in National Geographic and documentaries your whole life, and when you actually get there it's one of those experiences where you stand beside yourself and can't believe where you actually are," says Kurt. If you're considering a trip to this breathtaking region, he is available to share his experience, answer any questions or help you design a custom adventure of your own. (kurt@southwindadventures.com)

Travel Fact: The Peruvian Amazon is one of the most biologically diverse areas on earth, with 262 types of amphibians, over 800 kinds of birds, 2,500 different butterflies and over 7,000 species of flowering plants!



A Note on Recent Events at Machu Picchu

As you may have heard, from January 22-24, 2010 heavy rains caused mudslides that took at least five lives in the Cusco region and damaged some of the infrastructure around Machu Picchu, including the rail line leading to the archaeological complex. The Peruvian government safely returned stranded travelers to Cusco by helicopter, and repairs have already begun to restore service. Normal tours are still taking place in Cusco and the Sacred Valley, and Machu Picchu itself



remains undamaged. Alternative means of transportation are being evaluated for travelers to Machu Picchu during February and March, with train service expected to be fully operational by the beginning of the main tourist season.

Southwind is in daily contact with our local office in Cusco, which is providing free transportation to deliver food and supplies needed in the villages affected by the mudslides. Our thoughts are with the families of those whose lives were lost, as well as the hundreds of local families whose homes and business were affected. If you've always dreamed of visiting Machu Picchu, 2010 would be a great year to experience one of the Seven Wonders of the World, as tourism will have a direct positive impact on the local economy. If you would like to help now, contact us and we will coordinate with our local office to pass on any donations.



Travel Opportunities

Small-group departures with openings for 2010:

May 08-21: [Highlands Heritage Tour](#): Start in La Paz, Bolivia and continue to Lake Titicaca, then onto Peru for Cusco and Machu Picchu.

May 14-28 or Oct: [Southern Highlights Tour](#): Explore the southern beaches of Peru, including the Ballestas Islands for a taste of coastal wildlife, a flight over the enigmatic Nazca Lines, the "white city" of Arequipa, Lake Titicaca, Sacred Valley of the Incas, Cusco and Machu Picchu.

May 22-28: [World of the Incas](#): Custom adventure, call for details.

June 18-27: [Peru Amazon Cruise](#): Spend a week aboard the Peruvian Amazon's most luxurious boutique riverboat.

Ways to Save!

Southwind offers travelers a number of ways to save on our adventures, including discounts for Early Signup, Groups and Children.

Also inquire about Galápagos cruise specials.

Please visit our [Travel Discounts](#) page for further details.

What's a Chaski?

"Chaski" refers to the messengers of the Inca who would run along the kingdom's vast network of trails delivering vital information. News, intricate communication, quipus - knotted strings conveying regional statistics or perhaps exotic foods were relayed between Chaskis as they made their way towards the Incan capital of Cusco.

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