

THE EXPERTS... HEALTH

THE FOCUS **LATIN AMERICAN SPA ADVENTURES**

The quest for a feel-good break in South and Central America isn't as simple as hitting a destination spa, Asian-style, and emerging a week later toned and tweaked. Here the real healthy high is earned by getting out into the elements: galloping across the Patagonian Steppe (with the new smooth operator Awasi Patagonia), trekking to ancient Inca cities, traversing tree canopies in the jungle or getting a blast of sea air on the coast. Gabriel O'Rorke checks out two top health trips, an off-radar beach retreat in Belize and a fresh way to see the sights in Peru

EL SECRETO, **BELIZE**

Belize has long been a fly-and-flop destination for those undaunted by the journey (London to Belize City is 11 hours, then it's a further half-hour flight to Ambergris Caye). There's nothing quite as restorative as hearing the wind rustling through palm trees, the sea lapping on sand, and inhaling the smells of sweet coconut and salt water. At El Secreto days are spent either clearing your head beside the infinity pool, with its orange over-water hammocks and billowing white-linen drapes, or exploring beneath the surface of the ocean. Thrill seekers can dive the epic Great Blue Hole or go tubing to see underground Mayan caves. The 13 thatched-roof villas have beach, lake or garden views but for those looking for a serious hideaway, there's only one real option: the spa villa. It has a plunge pool and private steam room, and the bliss of a double treatment room. Therapies include an oxygenating conch facial and a hot-seashell massage. Ask for therapist Elizabeth and the Marine Flush, a tightening and brightening red-algae-and-plankton mask followed by a bracing, circulation-boosting massage. It drains fluids and toxins and afterwards you feel light enough to walk over waves. Beyond this, there are plenty of foodie highs, including lobster ceviche and a phenomenal gazpacho. But this place is also about loosening up, and it's difficult to steer clear of the fish tacos and award-winning key-lime pie. *Journey Latin America (+44 20 8622 8444; www.journeylatinamerica.co.uk) offers a five-night Belize trip from £2,033, including breakfast, flights and transfers*



Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel. Right, the bar at El Secreto

COCA-LEAF OIL, THE SAME LEAVES THAT MAKE THE DRUG, GETS THE BLOOD FLOWING

INKATERRA, **PERU**

Say hiking and Peru in the same breath and most people think of the Inca Trail. But the Inkaterra approach is as far from backpacker-grunge as it gets. Its three hotels are for those seeking both adventure and creature comforts, and are now all strung together on a new Walking to Wellness tour, which spans the Amazon, Machu Picchu and Cusco for 16 days of adrenalin-pumping activities, healthy local food and spa time. At Inkaterra Reserva Amazónica, excursions are twice daily. The



The pool at El Secreto in northern Belize



most hardcore are in the morning (partly due to the 5am wake-up call), taking on knee-knocking canopy walkways, cayman-ridden rivers in a kayak and jungle hikes. Next it's on to the Andes and Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel for treks around the everything-it's-hyped-up-to-be Lost City of Machu Picchu. After scaling the steps of

the 15th-century Inca citadel, it's back to Pueblo for daydreaming in the Andean sauna, a candle-lit eucalyptus hut. There are also hot-stone massages with gems and coca-leaf oil (the same leaves that make the class A drug, so it gets the blood flowing).

The last stop is Cusco. The UNESCO World

Heritage city is 3,400 metres above sea level and Inkaterra La Casona's micro-spa is one of the few in the world where therapists ask if you want extra oxygen with your massage. This trip will leave you hyper-toned from trekking, massaged to knot-free oblivion and wide- and bright-eyed having soaked up all the marvels of the Incas. *Rainbow Tours (+44 20 7666 1260; www.rainbowtours.co.uk) offers the Walking to Wellness trip from £6,135, including flights, transfers, excursions and activities*