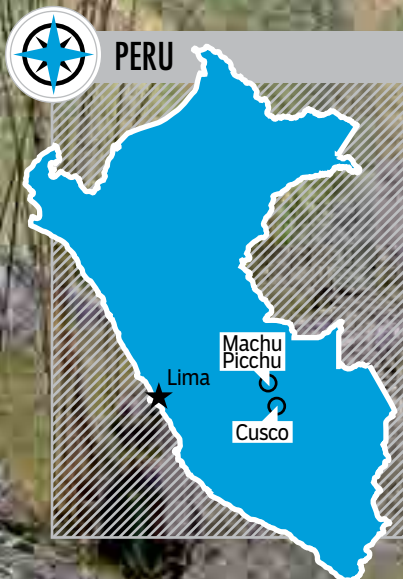


TASTE OF THE INCAS

The latest culinary hot spot has been 5,000 years in the making

BY MARIDEL REYES FOR USA TODAY

FROM THE ANCIENT RUINS OF MACHU PICCHU to the lush Amazonian rainforest to the cobblestone streets of Cusco, Peru has much that has made it a top travel destination. Only recently, however, has the country snagged the spotlight for being a cuisine trendsetter. Ferran Adria of Spain's El Bulli, one of the world's most celebrated chefs, visited Peru for the first time in October to make a documentary about the food scene. "God has spoken: The future of gastronomy is being cooked up in Peru," he says. "I want the world to know what's happening there." >>



The Peruvian currency is the *nuevo sol*. One U.S. dollar is equivalent to about 2.7 *soles*. The flight is the most expensive part of a Peruvian vacation. Once you get to the country, the favorable exchange rate makes your purchases seem cheap.

An American historian brought Machu Picchu, a 15th-century Incan city, to the world's attention in the early 1900s. The world has been captivated ever since.



The red clay tiled roofs of Cusco give the city a distinct look from above.



The Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica has fully screened cabanas inspired by native Amazonian design.



SEA BASS CEVICHE

Look for sushi-grade sea bass at grocery stores or fish markets. Serves 1.

ingredients

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Ceviche | 4 tsp. celery, diced |
| 7 oz. sea bass | 1 tsp. garlic, minced |
| 2 Tbs. lemon juice | 1 Tbs. milk |
| 6 tsp. red onion, sliced | salt |
| salt | Glazed Sweet Potato |
| pepper | 2 oz. sweet potato |
| red pepper | 5 Tbs. orange juice |
| Milk of Tiger | 3 Tbs. sugar |
| 1 oz. marinated sea bass | ¼ ear of white corn |
| 2 Tbs. lemon juice | |

Cut fish into small pieces and marinate in lemon juice, salt, pepper, onion, and red pepper for one minute.

Combine all sweet potato ingredients in a pan and cook until glazed.

Combine all Milk of Tiger ingredients; puree in a food processor. Strain and add to fish. Let marinate for 30 seconds. Serve ceviche with sweet potatoes and corn

SOURCE: INKATERRA

CENTURIES OF FUSION

Two factors fuel Peru's culinary success: diverse climates and diverse people.

The country has three distinct geographic regions, representing 85 of the world's 110 climates. This means almost everything—fruit, fish, coffee, chocolate, corn, quinoa—can grow within the country.

A diverse population flourishes within Peru's borders, too. Over the past 500 years, the country has received an influx of immigrants from almost every continent—and they have all left a mark on the cuisine.

About five percent of Peru's population, including former president Alberto Fujimori, is of Asian descent. Unlike the cuisine of other Latin American countries, Peruvian cooking regularly mixes Spanish and Asian flavors and techniques. You'll notice the Eastern influence in dishes like *lomo saltado*, a beef stir fry; in the sashimi-style cuts in seafood *tiradito*, and the nearly raw fish in *ceviche*.

"Peruvian food is 5,000 years in the making," says Sandra Gamio, co-founder of Pica Peru Culinary Vacations in Lima. "The

traditional Quechua dishes have mingled with 500 years of fusion with Spanish, Arab, African, Chinese, Japanese, and Italian influences. Lima was the capital of the Spanish viceroyalty in Latin America. And every time you are cooking for kings and queens, you have great food."

THE CITY

For the best food in Peru, head to the capital.

You'll find *cebicherias* serving *ceviche*, a popular regional dish made of raw fish marinated in citrus juices. Dig in a little deeper to uncover *chifas* (restaurants specializing in Peruvian-Cantonese food), *criolla* (a fusion of traditional fare with Spanish and African influences), Italian-Peruvian, Japanese, and regional dishes. You can eat at street carts, culinary nooks called *huariques*, and five-star gourmet restaurants.

"Unlike anywhere else in Peru, you can find all different types of restaurants and styles that make up Peruvian cuisine in Lima," says Gamio.

From the Lima airport, cab it to the trendy seaside Miraflores neighborhood. Here *ceviche* is king.



PISCO SOUR

Chef Pedro Miguel Schiaffino serves this cocktail aboard Aqua Expeditions, a luxury Amazonian River Cruise.

ingredients

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 3 parts pisco | ½ an egg white |
| 1 part fresh lime juice | Angostura bitters |
| 1 part simple syrup | |
| 6 ice cubes | |

Place all ingredients except bitters into a shaker; shake well. Strain into a tumbler. Top with a few drops of bitters

SOURCE: FROM THE KITCHENS OF AQUA EXPEDITIONS COOKBOOK

Have lunch at La Mar, an upscale *cebicheria* that serves 10 types of *ceviche* prepared by famed chef Gaston Acuriot. If the line of socialites, VIPs (notice the security guards outside), and hip 20-somethings is too daunting, try the more laid-back La Red in Miraflores. Or head for the beach neighborhood of Chorrillos to dine at Sonia, a restaurant that inspired La Mar.

If *ceviche* is a favorite dish in Peru, the country's favorite cocktail is the pisco sour.

The drink has an interesting history. The Spaniards came to Peru with grapes, but soon banned wine in the New World. So the indigenous people simply brewed grapes into brandy that they named *pisco*. In the early 20th century, the pisco sour was invented in a hotel bar. Inspired by the whisky sour, a pisco sour contains *pisco*, lime juice, sugar, and frothy egg whites.

For a non-boozy beverage, try neon yellow Inca Kola, a soda that tastes like bubblegum and outsells Coke and Pepsi in Peru. Or order herbal coca tea made from coca leaves, the same stuff used to make cocaine. It's said to soothe

stomachaches and altitude sickness and provide an energizing kick. But, no, it won't give you a buzz.

Nosh on Peruvian-Chinese food at a *chifa* like Madam Tusan in Miraflores. Order the Chinese tacos—a riff on the Korean-Mexican fusion taco trend—and dip them in the four bright, surprising salsas on the table that blend Peruvian and Chinese flavors by combining soy, ginger, Chinese onion, and *aji panca* and *rocoto* peppers. Then move on to dim sum and kick back a few Asian-inspired *pisco* cocktails.

THE AMAZON

From Lima, fly to Cusco and then continue to Puerto Maldonado in the southern Amazon, where your plane touches down in the jungle. From there, take a boat on the Madre de Dios River to your lodge.

The Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica offers elegant private cabanas that are fully screened. Wake up to a fresh rainforest breeze and the sound of birds chirping. During the day, walk along a series of swaying suspension bridges above the rainforest canopy to spot monkeys, >>



QUINOA PANCAKES

ingredients

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 8.8 oz. quinoa | 1 tsp. baking soda |
| 1.4 oz. butter | 4 tsp. vanilla |
| 2 oz. flour | 2 tsp. port wine |
| 1 egg | 1 tsp. powdered sugar |
| 2.7 oz. milk | Maple syrup |
| 0.7 oz. granulated sugar | |

Boil quinoa in a pot according to directions on package. Melt butter. Mix flour with boiled quinoa, egg, sugar, milk, and melted butter. Add baking soda, vanilla, and port. Mix well. Pour desired amount of batter into a nonstick frying pan on medium heat. Cook from 60 to 90 seconds per side, according to desired texture. Serve with powder sugar and maple syrup.

SOURCE: INKATERRA



sloths, macaws, and other birds or simply hike along the property's 6 miles of private trails. At night, take a river tour and look for tarantulas and Caymans.

For a more affordable option, check into the recently opened Hacienda Concepcion by Inkaterra, just 20 minutes down the river from Puerto Maldonado. Opt for either cabanas or traditional hotel rooms. In the lobby, sip a pisco sour and munch on *canchas*, large dried corn kernels tossed with oil and toasted in a skillet until crunchy. They taste like popcorn kernels, only crispier.

At restaurants such as El Aguajal and La Patarashca, seek out the Amazon's signature dish of *tacacho con cecina*, roasted plantain fritters and pork.

THE ANDES

From Puerto Maldonado, take a half-hour flight into Cusco. Then drive about an hour and half to Ollantaytambo, the village that marks the start of the Inca Trail. The scenery changes dramatically during the trip, from the Columbian architecture and churches of Cusco to the mountain and river vistas of the Sacred Valley to the foot of Machu Picchu.

If you don't have the time or inclination to hike the traditional Inca Trail, which takes four days, take a two-hour train trip through the Sacred Valley to Aguas Calientes, the town at the base of Machu Picchu.

The Inca Rail has comfortable seats, carefully prepared food, and impeccable service. But don't snooze through your train ride or you'll miss seeing the Sacred Valley's fertile farmlands, icy, angry river, and abrupt mountain peaks rolling past your window.

Once you arrive at Machu Picchu, check into the cozy and rustic Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel, across the street from the train station. For a cheaper stay, venture further into town to El MaPi by Inkaterra, whose modern design, hopping bar, and lower prices draw a younger crowd.

Wake up early to beat the throngs of tourists to Machu Picchu. Leave your hotel at 6 a.m. and catch a bus to the base of the citadel. Then, find a good spot to sit and wait for the ruins to reveal themselves. The thick mist will roll away and the abandoned city and Wayna Picchu mountain will come into view. Spend the rest of the day touring the ruins and snapping photos of the llamas wandering the grounds.

Take the train back to Cusco. The town has an elevation over 11,000 feet, so don't be surprised if you're winded after walking a few blocks.

Adventurous eaters might sample *cuy* (guinea pig) at Cicciolina. In pre-Columbian times, guinea pigs provided protein for people living in the highlands. Today, people raise packs of them at home to eat on special occasions like weddings.

Traditionally, *cuy* is served whole, roasted with garlic and basil. But for newbies, it's less intimidating when prepared as *cuy chactado*—chopped, seared, and pressed until crispy. It tastes like a dark-meat cross between pork and duck.

To cap off your Peruvian adventure, head to Limo, a fusion restaurant steps from Cusco's main square. Order one of the inventive sushi rolls and the alpaca. The hair of the llama-like animal is used in blankets, caps, and sweaters; the meat resembles lamb in flavor. ■

Trip
PLANNER



GET THERE

LAN Airlines offers 23 nonstop flights weekly from the U.S. to Lima, departing from Miami, New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. From Lima, you can connect to other destinations in Peru and throughout South America.



STAY

Eco-friendly and sustainable hotel chain **Inkaterra** has lodging for every price point and traveling style in the Amazon, Machu Picchu, and Cusco. *Inkaterra.com*



PLAN

As with the rest of the Southern Hemisphere, the seasons are reversed. So when it's winter in America, it's summertime in Peru.



DON'T FORGET

A valid passport with an expiration date at least six months beyond your trip, reservations for trekking the Inca Trail and Machu Picchu, bug spray, *soles* coins to pay for public restrooms, toilet paper (nonexistent in most bathrooms), a lightweight rain jacket, umbrella, and bottled water.



LOMO SALTADO (BEEF STIR FRY)

ingredients

- 1 red onion
- 1 garlic glove
- 6 oz. beef tenderloin
- 2 Tbs. soy sauce
- 1/2 Tbs. vinegar
- Salt
- Pepper
- 1/2 Tbs. oyster sauce
- 1 scallion
- 2 Tbs. vegetable oil

Season the meat with salt, pepper, and garlic. Saute with 2 tablespoons of vegetable oil for about a minute, then add oyster sauce, onion, soy sauce, vinegar, cilantro, and scallion. Remove and reserve. Serve with rice and fried potatoes.

SOURCE: INKATERRA

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