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My Amazon appetite: Peruvian chef Martin Morales heads deep into the Amazon



UK-based Peruvian chef Martin Morales heads deep into the Amazon with his family...




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Growing up in Lima, I was always in awe of the Amazon, which I imagined to be an explosion of dazzling colours and exotic flowers, plants, insects and animals from the pages of my favourite childhood story book, *Viaje al Amazonas* ('Trip to the Amazon'). The Tambopata National Reserve in the heart of the Amazon rainforest is only an hour's flight from Lima but, having never been, it seemed a world away to me.

Last winter, I travelled there with my wife Lucy and our two children, partly to research ingredients and recipes for my restaurants in London, partly for the sheer adventure of it all. As the people behind the first Peruvian restaurant in the UK, we've always worked hard to champion Peruvian food and ingredients and to be as sustainable as possible. I've always been inspired by what I had heard about the carbon-neutral Inkaterra Reserva Amazónica, the most luxurious eco-lodge in the Amazon, which has been doing all this for 40 years.



Martin Morales

After the short flight from Lima, we touched down in Puerto Maldonado airport and were transferred to a traditional narrowboat for the 45-minute journey up the Madre de Dios river, a tributary of the Amazon, to the lodge. A highlight was spotting two capybaras – imagine cute, giant guinea pigs – playing on the shore. And then there it was.

Built from natural wood and palm leaves, the lodge blends in beautifully with its

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Lifestyle

My Peruvian foodie pilgrimage in Lima

surroundings. Raised pathways lead to riverside bungalows where guests stay. We were welcomed with a delicious lunch that would be typical of our stay: Brazil nut-encrusted chicken with coriander and sweet pepper alioli, a tasty palm heart salad and, my favourite, paiche (a type of freshwater fish) ceviche. That evening our guide, Josue, took us on our first night-time river safari. With virtually no light pollution, the stars were incredible and the jungle chorus deafening. We searched for caiman (alligators) and soon found them, their eyes shining in Josue's torch light.



Caimito fruit

The next few days were spent enjoying total immersion in this wild, beautiful place. On a hike to Lake Sandoval in the heart of the reserve, blue-headed macaws swooped over our heads. We passed a termite's nest more than three metres high and numerous walking palm trees (they have roots like octopus tentacles and move up to one metre every year looking for sunlight). Later we paused at a 70-metre kapok tree, the tallest in the rainforest, to watch a family of howler monkeys swinging through its branches. At a stream, we clambered into a canoe, which took us out onto the lake where turtles swam past and giant otters frolicked.

We arrived back at our bungalow to see a prehistoric-looking armadillo lumber past. A highlight of our stay was a visit to Inkaterra's botanical gardens and orchards. Here, we gawped at 12 species of banana and tasted wild grapes the size of plums, aguaje fruit – an orange-fleshed fruit the size of a fig with reputed superfood qualities – and a large lychee-type fruit called caimito, which we nicknamed the 'kissing fruit', as its sticky resin can glue your lips together.

We rounded off our Amazon adventure with a night at nearby Inkaterra Hacienda Concepción. From here, we visited Gamitana Creek, home to the biggest array of exotic birds – including a yellow-rumped cacique. That evening, we headed out on a final silent jungle walk, with only torchlight to guide us. Humbled by this total immersion in the surrounding Amazonian wilderness, it re-enforced my resolve to continue championing Peru and its extraordinary natural ingredients as sustainably as possible back in London.

Chef and cookbook author Martin Morales runs five award-winning restaurants and a bakery in London: Casita Andina, Andina, Ceviche Soho, Ceviche Old St, Andina Notting Hill and Andina Bakery; cevichefamily.com.

Getting there

Minimum three days/two nights full-board at the [Inkaterra Reserva Amazónica](#) in a superior double cabaña costs US\$1,082, single US\$673 (including 10% service). Children under 12 sharing room with adults get 50% discount. Includes road and river return transfer from Puerto Maldonado airport, and guided excursions. [British Airways](#) offers return flights from London Gatwick to Lima from £657 return.



About the author

Martin Morales

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