



INDULGENT PERU

A GASTRONOMIC ADVENTURE ACROSS PERU

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If it isn't already, Peru is destined to be the next big thing in the world of food. The rest of the world is now catching on to something the Peruvians have seemingly been keeping to themselves for the past several thousand years. Some 10,000 years ago, the Peruvians domesticated wild potatoes and now there are literally hundreds of varieties that local chefs have access to. Then there's multi-hued corn ranging from black to crimson and white. Finding yellow corn as we know it can be a challenge and is rarely used by the chefs of Peru. There's also aji, a chilli-based concoction pounded in a pestle and mortar, which forms the basis of many dishes.

Quinoa (pronounced keen-wa) is now plated on the trendiest dishes in the world. Like the potato and corn, it too originates in Peru. One of my guides told me that when he grew up his parents used to feed it to the pigs as no one really wanted to eat it but now it's too valuable to do that as it is keenly sought by the best chefs around the world.

Like many other countries, the kitchens of Peru benefit from influences both local and foreign. There are many local influences from

the ancient Inca civilisation to tribes living in the Amazon, and Peruvian food benefits from several periods of global migration.

In 1532, the Spanish arrived and brought with them a variety of European products and crops and so began the slow evolution of Peruvian fusion food (conversely, products from Peru were 'discovered' by the Spanish and exported to the West). Over the centuries, other nationalities came to Peru with the Italian community being one of the best represented. Many tourists are taken to Bar Cordano in downtown Lima for an espresso or Campari while taking in the atmosphere of this iconic Italian outlet.

The Chinese migration to Peru began in the mid 1800s and brought with it traditional spices, herbs and cooking techniques. Today, Chifa refers to the unique fusion of Peruvian and Chinese styles that is available in many parts of the country.

From the 1900s onwards, the Japanese began migrating to Peru and slowly influenced the way food was prepared in the country. The term Nikkei cuisine is now used to refer to the fusion style of Japanese and

Peruvian food. Peru's national dish of ceviche (fresh fish marinated and 'cooked' in lime juice) is as Peruvian as sashimi is Japanese.

One of the world's most acclaimed chefs, Nobuyuki Matsuhisa of Nobu fame, discovered the many attributes of Peruvian ingredients and produce years ago. He co-founded Matsuei which is still considered one of Lima's leading restaurants.

Beverages, including the ever-popular, dazzling golden yellow soft drink called Inca Kola, are also an important ingredient in Peru gastronomy. However, it is Pisco (a spirit distilled from various varieties of grapes) that Peru is taking to the world. The national cocktail is Pisco Sour (Pisco, egg white, lime juice and bitters) and wines are also made including those of Vino De Arenas which are produced from native grapes such as Luna Negra grown in desert sands three-hours south of Lima.



Colourful corn in Peru

CULINARY CAPITAL

Not only is Lima the gateway for most travellers, it is also the culinary capital of Peru. The street food is plentiful and some of Latin America's finest restaurants are found here including Central, El Mercado, Chifa Royal, Rafael, Matsuei, Tragaluz and Astrid and Gastón.

Central just topped the list for the Top 50 Restaurants in Latin America and the waiting list to get a table is as long as Chef Virgilio Martinez's accolades. A restaurant for the city's dining elite, its location appears to be known by only those in the know. There is no signage to the unassuming and unpretentious outlet located in trendy Miraflores close to the Pacific Ocean beachfront. Diners start the evening in the stylish bar where the staff recommendation for a Pisco-based cocktail should always be taken. Dishes featuring Peruvian produce are served including cushuro, a caviar-like bacteria from Peru's high altitude lakes.

Gastón Acurio and his wife Astrid Gutsche have taken Peruvian food to the world and operate some 45 outlets in Peru, throughout South America and most recently, London. Chef Diego Munoz now oversees the culinary direction at the Lima headquarters located in La Casa Moreyra and sources many ingredients from the expansive herb gardens surrounding the restaurant. Dishes could include potato agiaco with stewed tongue or desserts of lemon wafers, strawberry, basil and red chilli yoghurt. Comprehensive 30-course (mostly bite-sized) dégustation menus paired with 11 wines aren't unusual.

One of the best ways to discover what the city has to offer is to join the Bonvivant and Cía Gastronomic Tours (www.bonvivant.pe) which offer several options for enjoying what the trendy suburbs of Miraflores and Barranco have in terms of cafés, markets and restaurants. This

purpose-built and luxurious bus is very comfortable and relaxing with an excellent crew who help passengers negotiate the finer points of Peruvian cuisine. A highlight is a visit to Surquillo Market to take in the variety found in Peruvian fresh produce.

On my tour, coffee was enjoyed at Puka Puka while lunch at La Barra in Astrid and Gastón provided an introduction to the breadth of produce that is available in Lima. The onboard cocktail bar kept everyone's spirits on a high.



Bonvivant Bus Lima

Bars and restaurants in Larcomar Miraflores Lima



Meringue sour sop and cream



Bar Cordano Lima



FESTIVE FOOD

The best of Peruvian gastronomy is showcased at Mistura, a food festival celebrated annually since 2008. This year the event staged in the middle of September over ten days attracted almost half a million hungry and thirsty visitors. While mostly a festival for the locals, it is attracting international attention and is the best time for foodies to be in Peru as produce from all over the country is prepared and showcased to hungry and thirsty patrons.



La Lucha Sanguchería Lima



Miraflores Beachfront and Restaurants

HERITAGE TRAIN

The jewel in Peru's tourism crown is the ancient Inca site of Machu Picchu. This isolated UNESCO World Heritage Site located in the Andes Mountain is accessible by rail or via a series of walking trails. Several daily train services carry passengers from Cusco and the Sacred Valley to Machu Picchu while more adventurous tourists can spend several days walking and camping out along the Inca Trail.

In 1911, Hiram Bingham 'discovered' Machu Picchu and the luxury train that now takes affluent tourists from just outside Cusco to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Machu Picchu is named after him.

This three-hour train trip to Machu Picchu started with a glass of champagne and the rest of the day followed with similar premium and luxurious offerings. Lunch included produce such as smoked trout, corn, sweet potatoes and duck sourced from Cusco and the adjoining Sacred Valley.

Musicians entertained the passengers for the entire journey and the bar staff kept the free-flow of beverages coming. Pisco Sour cocktails were a highlight of the return journey after a rewarding three-hour excursion to the mystical Machu Picchu archaeological site.

Peruvian gastronomy is very much the cuisine of the moment but with a culinary history dating back thousands of years, it's not something that's going to come and go like many other trends.



Hiram Bingham Train Peru



*View through window
Hiram Bingham Train Peru*



Machu Picchu



Passionfruit Pisco Peru



Bottles of Pisco





TRAVEL INFORMATION

GETTING THERE AND ABOUT

Royal Dutch Airlines or KLM (www.klm.com) flies daily from Kuala Lumpur to Lima via Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport. While it's a 30-hour flight, the excellent food and drinks served, onboard wi-fi and extensive entertainment system help the hours pass in comfort. KLM also has an Economy Comfort Zone between Business and Economy Class that offers extra legroom for a small charge.

ACCOMMODATION

Stay in luxurious accommodation at various Belmond properties throughout Peru (www.belmond.com). Belmond properties include Park Hotel Miraflores (Lima), Palacio Nazarenas (Cusco) and the Rio Sagrado (Sacred Valley).

CONTACTS

Asia to Africa Safaris (www.a2asafaris.com) has expanded beyond the African continent to include tailor-made luxury tours to Peru and other countries in South America. They offer excellent itineraries, knowledgeable guides and access to all the leading destinations and sites in Peru.

BEST TIME TO VISIT

The hottest months in Lima are December to April and June to August are the most humid. Lima receives just 3mm rain per year so the chances of rain are very remote.