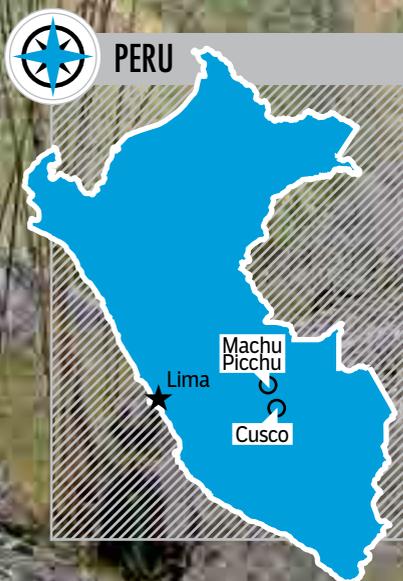


TASTE OF THE INCAS

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." >>

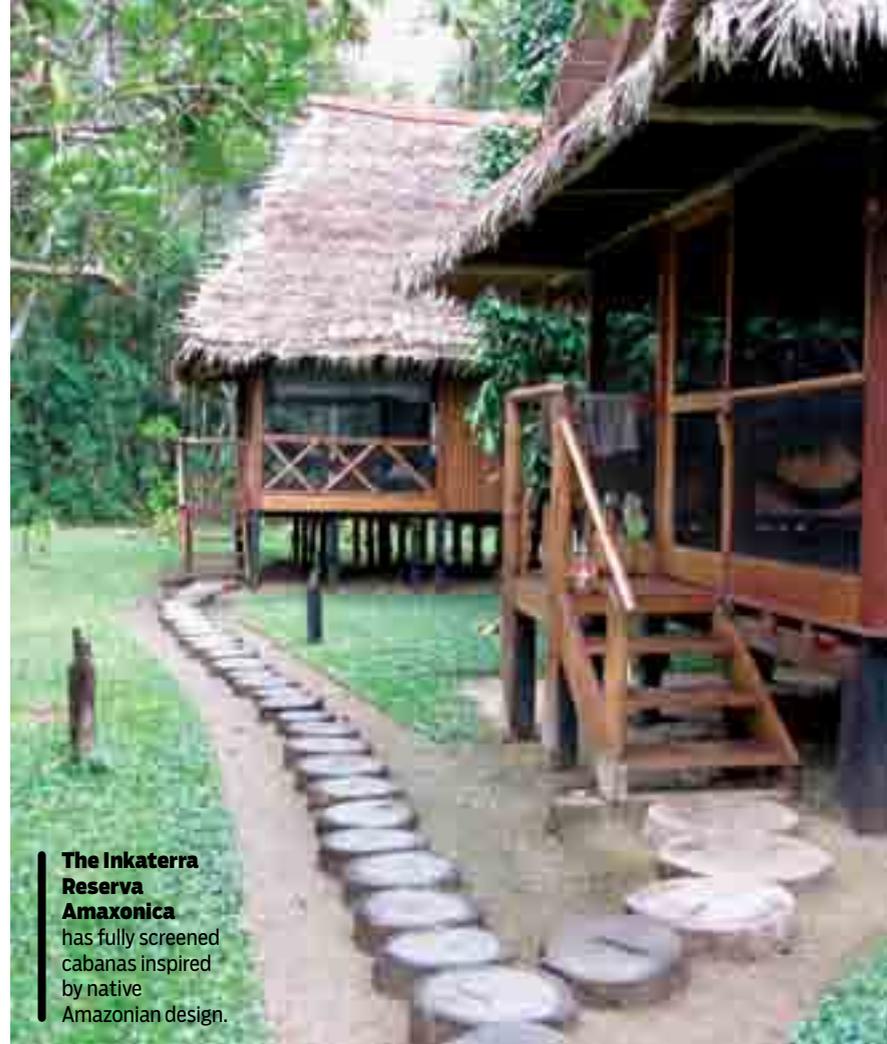


The Peruvian currency is the *nuevo sol*. One U.S. dollar is equivalent to about 2.7 *soles*. The flight is the most expensive part of a Peruvian vacation. Once you get to the country, the favorable exchange rate makes your purchases seem cheap.

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

