



Why is Lima on everyone's lips?

Black, yellow and red corn, more than 3000 types of different potatoes in all shapes and sizes, quinoa, kiwichas, cañihua, aji, fresh-caught fish turned ceviche. The world has fallen in love with Peruvian food. Tatyana Leonov eats her way through Lima to find out why.



Move over Brazilian barbeque. Peruvian gastronomy is the new in thing. And its epicentre is the chaotic, colourful and sometimes crazy Lima. With a population of almost nine million, the city is a cultural mishmash, a brimming hot pot of people, architecture and cuisine. And here the young don't aspire to be sports stars or celebrities... here they dream of being chefs.

No longer just a stop-over for tourists heading to Machu Picchu, Lima is the place to stop – and eat and eat and eat. There are top-notch restaurants headed up by chefs rising to global stardom, some of them barely out of their teens. Culinary day tours, multi-day foodie safaris and cooking schools are increasingly popular. On every corner a street vendor cooks up succulent sticks of meat or fries luscious picarones (squash and pumpkin or sweet potato fried donuts). The colourful markets are a delight to visit, showcasing ingredients you may have never seen before. And getting lost in the plethora of streets and laneways is just plain fun, each one a potential culinary revelation.

Peruvian cuisine is an eclectic jumble of cuisines, absorbed influences from an influx of different ethnicities settling in Peru at various times in history.



Previous page: The coastline of Lima, Peru at twilight looking from the district of Miraflores in the direction of the district of Chorillos to the south. Peru's corn varieties at Mercado de Surquillo. This page A chef prepares meat kebabs at an event. Ceviche is the star dish of Lima's culinary repertoire.

Naturally, Spain's rule from 1533 to 1821 left the biggest influence on Peru and its food. There were also the Africans, Chinese, Japanese, French and Italian, and each group left behind a soupçon of their culinary practices.

Fusion cooking became the norm – so commonplace, that today the different fusions have names. The combination of African, Spanish, Andean, Asian and Pre-Columbian influences is Criollo cuisine. Hundreds of Chifa restaurants, blending Peruvian with Chinese are scattered all over Lima. The real hot trend right now is Nikkei, typically taking Peruvian ingredients and coupling them with Japanese techniques and sauces.

What makes exploring Lima's food even more interesting is the amount and varieties of edible ingredients. Peru has 4400 known medicinal and edible plants, of which 2500 are endemic, and 36 different indigenous Andean grains. Peru was the first country to cultivate potatoes and chillis. On top of that Peru is the number one spot in the world for fish – with more than 2000 species of fish and 10 per cent of the world's entire fish population.

Ceviche is the star dish of Lima's culinary repertoire. Definitely a day-time delicacy, it's a must-eat when in Lima: Raw fish. Onions. Chilli peppers, all marinated in lime juice. It's a zesty,

refreshing snack best consumed with a pisco sour, a cocktail of local grape brandy (pisco) as the base, with egg white, syrup, lemon juice and bitters. Locals also drink the fishy marinade on its own (called leche de tigre, the milk of the tiger) – it's said to cure hangovers. And act as an aphrodisiac...

Ceviche may be Lima's foodie soul, but it's the restaurants that the world is watching.

Hot restaurants and rock star chefs

The uber chic seaside suburb of Miraflores is the focus of all the attention.

Gastón Acurio is leading the culinary wave. If you haven't heard of him you soon will. He's the Jamie Oliver of Peru. Hell, he's the Jamie Oliver of Latin America, and together with his wife Astrid, runs an empire of 32 restaurants in 12 cities. Lima is home to a bunch of them – most within short taxi rides of each other. Other chefs gaining global attention include Diego Muñoz, Pedro Miguel Schiaffino, Virgilio Martínez, Mitsuharu Tsumura, just to name a few, all of them heading up restaurants in Lima well worth a visit.

Astrid y Gaston is Acurio's flagship restaurant in Lima. Last year it was number 42 on San Pellegrino's top 100 list. This year it's 35. This is



This page from top: The first dish at Astrid y Gaston delivers with a bang: achira herbs and garlic, kiwicha and seaweed sweet and sour cashew, apple begonia and granadilla sour maracuya. Ice Cream egg dessert at Maido. A modern take on ceviche at Central.



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largely due to Acurio's sidekick, Muñoz, who has taken the menu to further heights since his start there a year ago. The seasonal 17-course degustation menu is true to its Peruvian roots. "Peruvian cooking is a journey through time" Muñoz tells me, and the inventive menu reflects this.

Dishes are artistically presented and the combination of textures and flavours used is gobsmackingly wonderful – and often odd (in a good way). Peking cuy (guinea pig) comes Chifa-style and combines the Peruvian meat with sweet and sour vegetables in a purple corn crepe.

The desserts are a concoction of sweet and sugary delights fusing modern techniques with classic local ingredients. The luscious Lucuma (an Andean fruit) popsicle comes with 60 per

cent native cocoa chocolate and Andean granola. In 2013 the restaurant will move from a relatively unassuming restaurant setting to a new premise in a 300-year-old building.

If you're going to check out a Nikkei-style restaurant and you should, **Maido** is the place. Head chef Mitsuharu Tsumura's 23-step degustation is a great way to sample just how many different ways you can combine Peruvian food with Japanese techniques. Tsumura's favourite? "Nigiri de papada – which is pork jowl nigiri with adobo sauce," he tells me. "I like it because it perfectly blends together a traditional Peruvian preparation method (the adobo sauce from Arequipa) with sushi."

There are several great places popping up in what is the hot food hood in Miraflores – the corner of 28 de Julio and Avenida La Paz. **Ache**, Spanish for 'H' is lead by Hajime Kasuga. In true Nikkei fashion the menu features a long list of sashimi and nigiri on the same page as ceviche and tiraditos, a similar dish to ceviche but without onions. Acurio's new Italian-Peruvian restaurant, **Los Bachiche**, glammed-up fast food, is on the same street and ideal for a quick bite in kitsch US diner-inspired surroundings.

Amaz is there too, and yes it is amazing. Head chef Schiaffino sources all his produce from the Amazon, which makes for a unique dining experience. "We source from four different Amazonian regions, working with people who produce sustainable goods. These people come from communities, cooperatives, and associations. We then fly products from some of the regions, and others get to Lima by land," explains Schiaffino. "It is a great effort to have fresh products every day – but it is possible".

Mushrooms, yuccas, palm hearts and potatoes are featured prominently on the menu. Our tip is to ask the staff for their recommendations on what to order that day, Add a juice or juice-based cocktail to the order as Amazonian fruits are all scrumptious.

Down the road Martínez, chef-patron of **Central**, takes the concept of Peruvian cooking as a lesson in history to the ground. "We start from the soil, the soil as a living being tells a story – a moment, an emotion." Martínez tells me. His one key goal for all meals is "offering a Peruvian experience". And it works. The scallop with amaranth and Amazon jus is a favourite, and the dish showcases ingredients native to the coast, the Andes and the Amazon.

To an average Aussie, this connection between emotion and soil may seem a little far-fetched, wishy-washy, just plain silly – but it's the way things work in Lima. Think before you eat – about the produce, where it has come from and who grew it. It's an emotional and thought-provoking experience.

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Gastronomic experiences and vibrant markets

With all this excitement about the restaurants it's natural that culinary tours would boom.

For Brisa Deneumostier it's a way of life. "Cooking, eating, travelling and living is integrated – it's holistic. So with the tours I run I introduce travellers to Peru's gastronomic scenery. It starts with getting in touch with the land," she explains. Her **Brisa Culinaria** tours include a visit to a biodynamic farm just south of Lima in the Pachacamac Valley, harvesting from an organic vegetable garden, visiting a potter – and of course indulging.

Back in Miraflores, chef Yurac Romero runs **SkyKitchen** cooking classes from his own rooftop terrace kitchen. He teaches attendees how to cook classic Peruvian food and his passion lies in typical, traditional dishes many families cook at home. "Ceviche is one of the most important dishes in Peruvian cuisine, so we make that. And I always try to include causa rellena," he tells me while demonstrating how to cut the avocado into small bits for the dish effectively. "It's a typical starter dish of cold and salted mashed potatoes mixed with a yellow chilli paste and lime juice. The potato mix is combined with meat, seafood or vegetables in layers. It initially sounds odd to visitors," he laughs.

Like a lot of the Limanian chefs, he often shops at **Mercado de Surquillo** for fresh produce. The colourful and vibrant market is well worth a visit. Just the meat aisle is a real eye opener, with everything from guinea pig to rabbit on sale. There are also cute little food stands, where 'Mama' or 'Papa Jose' cook simple, fresh and delish meals for just a few soles.

Another market to check out if you're around on a Saturday is Lima's first organic farmer's market, **Bioferia de Miraflores**. Organised by local organic farmers and environmental organisations, it's full of fresh produce, including fruits, vegetables, homemade yoghurts, quinoa, goat's milk cheese and Peruvian coffee – it's a health foodies haven.

So what now?

Not even all locals are aware of the exciting times in Lima. Bioferia de Miraflores has now been around for over 12 years but some Limanians still don't know it exists.

So now is the time to get to Lima. If you're in South America and wondering where to go when, it's always the season for food in Lima. Summers are great and winters are mild, and the food on offer is spectacular all year round. Lima's thoughtful food and sustainable produce is capturing the imagination of visitors, and increasingly the world.

That's why now, more than ever, Lima tastes so good. ●



Brisa Deneumostier leading one of her Brisa Culinaria tours.

The Details

How to get there

Qantas flies to Santiago non-stop from Sydney three times a week (Monday, Wednesday and Saturday). LAN Airlines flies six times a week from Sydney with a stop in Auckland. From Santiago LAN Airlines have regular direct flights to Lima.

Top 3 things to do when in Lima

1. Do the Brisa Culinaria tour. Deneumostier is a truly amazing and inspiring guide (brisaculinaria.com) and will ensure that you get a true Peruvian culinary experience.
2. Learn to cook with SkyKitchen (skykitchen.pe) in Miraflores. The Peruvian cooking classes runs from chefs Yurac Romero's top floor apartment with pretty impressive city views.
3. Head to the markets. Any markets. Food markets, antique markets, Inca markets. Food wise though, Mercado de Surquillo (Avenida Paseo de la Republica block 53, Surquillo) and Bioferia de Miraflores (Calle 15 de Enero, Miraflores. Sat 8am-2pm) are definitely worth checking out.

Where to eat

Everywhere and anywhere where it looks good.

IT went to and recommends:

Ache Avenida La Paz 1055, Miraflores.

Amaz Avenida La Paz 1079, Miraflores.

Astrid y Gaston Cantuarias 175, Miraflores. astridygaston.com

Central Calle Santa Isabel 376, Miraflores.

centralrestaurante.com.pe

Los Bachiche Avenida La Paz 1025, Miraflores.

Maido Calle San Martin 399, Miraflores. maido.pe

Where to stay

If you're in Lima to eat, then staying close to the coast is the way to go – **Miraflores**, **San Isidro** and **Barranco** all provide a range of accommodation options a taxi-ride away from most of the restaurants. **Central** is another viable option close to a lot of the historic sights.

Luxury

Surrounded by fashionable shops and dining destinations, **Orient-Express' Miraflores Park Hotel** is the place to stay if you want to get pampered. All 82 suites are decked out with fine furniture, and the outdoor plunge pool in the

presidential suites is pretty swish. The Observatory rooftop deck for breakfast is not a bad way to start the day too. From \$698 per night (plus taxes). Avenida Malecon de la Reserva 1035, Miraflores. miraflorespark.com

Comfortable

Located in the heart of the business district, **Hotel Novotel Lima** has everything you need – wifi, a great buffet breakfast, and staff that are always happy to help. With 208 rooms, a restaurant, a well-equipped gym, pool and beauty centre, it's ideal for both business and leisure travellers. From \$118 per night (plus taxes). Victor Andrés Belaunde 198. San Isidro. novotel.com

Affordable

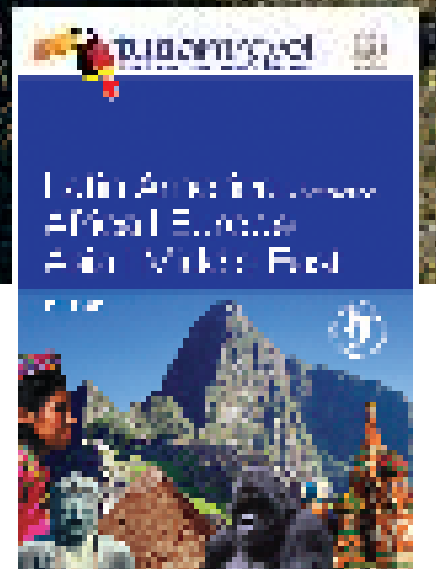
Just four blocks from Plaza de Armas, **Hotel Espana** is housed in a colonial-style building and is a quirky, decently-priced place to stay. Full of statues, plants and paintings (the roof garden even has peacocks, turtles and caged birds) it's eclectic, but good fun. From \$15 per night for a private room (shared rooms from \$8), not including taxes. Azangaro 105, Lima. hotelespanaperu.com

You need to know

- It will take a while getting out of Lima's Jorge Chávez International Airport. When you do get through immigration and customs head to a taxi counter and book a private taxi to your hotel. You'll get a receipt, then get transported to the door.
- Taxis are the way to get around town. Agree to a fare before you hop in and have your intended address written down (most drivers don't speak English) and it's as easy as that. Traffic is very interchangeable so always plan for it to take a while.
- It's standard to tip at least 10 per cent for good service in a restaurant. Some restaurants will however add this to your bill so always check.
- Degustation experiences at top restaurants really are worth it when in Lima. You need to book ahead and you need to specify that you're booking a degustation – otherwise you'll probably get stuck with the a la carte menu.



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