

LIMA: CULINARY INSPIRATION

In Peru, Lima has become known for its cuisine, attracting worldwide attention. Chef and restaurant owner Gaston Acurio is perhaps the leading Peruvian food entrepreneur, having created famous restaurants not only in Peru, but also in many other countries. His latest venture is Astrid y Gaston, which he intends to turn into one of the leading restaurants in the world, according to those familiar with the culinary scene in Peru.

Culinary Tours

Cruise passengers can experience the culinary treasures of Peru by venturing into town on their own or by taking tours offered by the Lima Gourmet Company or Condor Travel.

Said Lucas Montes de Oca, general manager of Lima Gourmet: “We offer a combined city and culinary tour, but limit the groups to 10 to 12 people, to allow each one to have a more personalized experience.”

According to Debbie Sutcliffe, head of the Cruise Division at Condor, its tours start at a typical Peruvian market, where passengers will see and learn about the variety of fruits, vegetables and seafood that form the main ingredients of its cuisine.

The Lima Gourmet tours run from the ship through the bohemian neighborhood of Lima to a coffee shop, roasting

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handpicked beans for organic coffee. That is followed by a visit to a garden and a nearly 150-year-old Lucuma tree, which has fruits used for smoothies, then on to a traditional market with local fruits, vegetables, fish and medicinal herbs. The highlight follows: a top Peruvian restaurant, according to Montes de Oca, where passengers can make their own traditional dishes under the guidance of the head chef, before sitting down for lunch.

The meal will consist of traditional dishes, such as anti-cucos (grilled meat on skewers), grilled octopus, broiled Parmesan scallops, and causa – mashed yellow potatoes – with a topping of fish, meat or eggs.

Added Condor’s Sutcliffe: “We visit several restaurants and passengers get to make their own Ceviche or Pisco Sour, for instance.”

Both companies also offer private tours.

Anything, Anytime

Peru is blessed with the Pacific Ocean and the mountains, Montes de Oca said. He explained that Peru has 80 micro



1. Hands-on Ceviche making
2. Pisco Sour

climates, meaning the “country can produce anything any time of the year.”

According to Sutcliffe, the cuisine has evolved over the past 400 years, starting when the Spanish conquerors blended their cuisine with that of the original Peruvians. Subsequent waves of immigrants from China, Japan, Italy and France brought their foods and styles which they adapted to local products.

“Do you know that Peru has 493 traditional dishes?” asked Montes de Oca. Sutcliffe countered: “We have 250 traditional desserts and close to 3,000 varieties of potato.”

She continued: “There is no accident that seven of the top 15 gourmet restaurants in South America are in Lima and that the city annually welcomes more than 75,000 tourists who come specifically to taste the food.”

Popular Dishes

Among the popular dishes is Pollo a la Brasa, which is chicken marinated in 20 different spices overnight and grilled over charcoal. It is served with French fries.

Lomo Saltado is a Chinese-inspired hybrid stir-fry with beef, tomatoes, peppers and onions, mixed with soy sauce and fried potatoes.

The Peruvian Ceviche is unique, according to Montes de Oca. “While in other South American countries they tend to marinate the fish overnight, we always make it fresh, only allowing it to marinate four to five minutes. The raw fish has to be white and non-oily, sea bass or flounder are preferred, and the juice must be freshly squeezed lime, plus a little salt and pepper.”

Pisco Sour is Peru’s national drink. Sutcliffe explained that it uses local pisco as the base liquor (distilled from grapes), and is made with egg whites, freshly squeezed lime, and sugar syrup. Two drops of Angostura bitters are added at the end.

The Astrid y Gaston restaurant offers a tasting menu, promising to give guests a gastronomic experience from across Peru: the Pacific, the desert, the Andes, the highlands and the Amazon. The experience includes 29 different dishes. ■