



# EPICUREAN PERU



*Renowned for its eco-tourism and storied culture, the Land of the Inca has now emerged as a center of global gastrotourism, boasting indigenous-inspired menus, a stylish Lima dining scene, and bustling Cuzco cocktail bars – not to mention an expanding array of chic places to stay.*

**BY VIIA BEAUMANIS**



From far left: A mestiza cuzqueña dancer in motion, plating paiche (an Amazonian fish) at Lima's Central restaurant, poolside at Belmond Miraflores Park in Lima, and a Marticha with gooseberries from Cuzco's Museo del Pisco.



## AMAZON ADVENTURE

“Look!” exclaims our guide, as a band of spider monkeys darts through the jungle canopy and, moments later, a flock of scarlet macaws soars overhead. Our skiff is gliding down a tributary of the Peruvian Amazon, bright-orange passion fruit flowers and tall sprays of lushly plumed grass ornamenting the dense rain forest that edges the river. Around a bend, a dozen pink dolphins surface and then disappear among lotus-like “river lettuce,” an edible green enjoyed by local manatees.

Two hours later, we pull up alongside our Amazon lodging: the newly refurbished, 16-cabin *Aria Amazon*, designed by Peruvian architect Jordi Puig for Aqua Expeditions as one of the world’s most stylish adventure boats. Soon it’s lunchtime, and we settle into an upholstered banquette in a dining room wrapped in panoramic windows. Waiters fill glasses with crisp white wine as we tuck into avocado and hearts of palm salad, *paiche* (a river fish baked in banana leaves), and *churos pishpirones* (huge river snails).

With menus conceived by **Pedro Miguel Schiaffino** – one of the country’s most renowned chefs and a pioneer of Amazonian cuisine – innovative regional fare is a keynote on both the *Aria* and its sister craft, *Aqua Amazon*. Along with scouring rural Peru for novel ingredients and quizzing locals on their cooking techniques, Schiaffino has welcomed some illustrious peers on board, including the likes of Nobu Matsuhisa and Ferran Adrià, who on occasion have even surprised passengers as guest chefs.



From top: Lounging on the *Aria Amazon*, Pedro Miguel Schiaffino’s shrimps with *huancaína* sauce, going out on a limb, and setting out in the ship’s skiff.



Rolling on the river.





## ADVISOR TIP

*“Peru serves up some of the best ceviche you’ll ever have, and its endless bounty includes 4,000 varieties of potatoes alone. One of my favorite indigenous meals is causa, a layered potato dish with fish or chicken that typically includes avocados, olives, eggs, chilies, and key lime. Enjoy traditional Peruvian dishes with a pisco sour while dining in the shadow of an ancient pyramid at **Huaca Pucllana** [www.resthuacapucllana.com] in Lima’s historic Miraflores district.”*

– TRISHA IANNAZZI  
Pittsford, New York

“And you *must* go to **Toshiro’s**,” he adds. “The sushi is amazing – the best in Lima.” It’s no small compliment in a country whose signature dish is ceviche and a recommendation that speaks to the rich multiculturalism that makes Peruvian cuisine so distinctive. The country’s slave-trading Spanish conquerors brought Africans and Asians with them, and today’s chefs draw on centuries of their diverse culinary influence: African flavors and inventiveness coupled with the traditions of Chinese and Japanese cookery (known as *chifa* and *Nikkei*, respectively).

Later, at the ritzy **Belmond Miraflores Park**, barmen shake Peru’s national drink, the pisco sour – a frothy blend of egg white, sugar, fresh lime juice, and pisco (local grape brandy) – the de facto star of the nationwide 5 to 7 PM happy hour. Relaunched this spring as part of the hotel’s extensive redesign, a cozy lobby bar opens onto a library lounge and, just beyond, **Tragaluz**, a restaurant fronted by Augusto Baertl, a jet-setting local who’s made a splash with his coastal hot spot (also named Tragaluz) a few hours from town. With an eye on Lima’s increasingly buzzy food scene, Miraflores Park is betting that Baertl’s first city venue – and its Mediterranean-Peruvian-Asian fusion cuisine – will add fashionable fizz to its restyled property.



Clockwise from top: Belmond Miraflores Park’s reimagined Belo Bar, pisco perfection, and caviar served at Schiaffino’s Malabar.

## CAPITAL CUISINE

Back in Lima – now widely regarded as the culinary capital of South America – a few days later, I’m chatting with chef Schiaffino at **Malabar**, his vaunted restaurant in the upscale San Isidro neighborhood. Dedicated to sustainability and indigenous communities, he’s pleased by both local foodies’ expanding palates and the fact that their interest in new ingredients supports farming cooperatives cropping up to harvest them. Having uncovered native delicacies such as *paiche* (the “king of Amazon fish” in his estimation), Schiaffino incorporated it into his menus and is proud to now see it stocked in city markets. “Behind these ingredients is a big culture,” he stresses. “Native people with a lot of knowledge who really understand what nature gives them.

(PISCO SOUR) ILDI FOOD/ALAMY. (CAVIAR) INTI MEDIA



### MATSUEI

Local legend **Toshiro Konishi** arrived in Lima from Tokyo with his friend Nobu Matsuhisa in the 1970s to open Matsuei, the capital's oldest Japanese sushi bar. [www.matsueiperu.com.pe](http://www.matsueiperu.com.pe).



### CENTRAL

**Virgilio Martínez's** elegantly reinvented Peruvian cuisine has made tables at his Lima dining room the capital's most coveted. [www.centralrestaurante.com.pe](http://www.centralrestaurante.com.pe).



### ÁMAZ

Known for inventive dishes and unusual regional ingredients, **Pedro Miguel Schiaffino's** recently opened second address specializes in the Amazonian cuisine he's lovingly pioneered. [www.amaz.com.pe](http://www.amaz.com.pe).

## LIMA DINING

More top tables.

### LA MAR

The Nuevo Andean empire of **Gastón Acurio**, Peru's original star chef, now spans Madrid to Miami. His Astrid y Gastón is a perennial star in Lima; La Mar is his more casual, ceviche-centered eatery. [www.lamarcebicheria.com/lima](http://www.lamarcebicheria.com/lima).



### MAIDO

A Lima native who honed his skills in Osaka, chef **Mitsuharu Tsumura** has made his minimalistic Japanese-Peruvian fusion restaurant the capital's current Nikkei hot spot. [www.maido.pe](http://www.maido.pe).



### MARAS

The menu ranges from rain forest-influenced cuisine to mod spins on traditional cookery in this swish dining room of chef **Rafael Piqueras**, who honed his skills at the Cordon Bleu in Lima and Spain's famed elBulli. [www.marasrestaurante.com.pe](http://www.marasrestaurante.com.pe).



(CENTRAL, ÁMAZ, AND MARAS) INTL MEDIA, (LA MAR) PETER RIGAUD/LAIF/REDFOX



## CULTURAL CUZCO

An hour's flight – but a world away – from the capital's high-rise modernity, Cuzco's Spanish colonial facades hide ancient Incan ramparts. Encapsulating the city's architecture and atmosphere, **Belmond Palacio Nazarenas**, a former sixteenth-century convent, launched two years ago as an Orient-Express property (the brand recast itself as Belmond this year) following a four-year restoration that unearthed myriad relics.

The hotel is exquisitely run by Floris Boyen, who polished his skills overseeing the culinary program at Rio's Copacabana Palace, and its dining room, **Senzo**, boasts a menu from one of Peru's hottest chefs, **Virgilio Martínez**. Cuzco is home to many excellent restaurants – Gastón Acurio's **Chicha** and Coque Ossio's **Limo** among them – but Senzo's Martínez is the first, and only, Peruvian to earn a Michelin star (this year). Like Pedro Miguel Schiaffino, he's fascinated by his country's undiscovered ingredients and forages the countryside for unusual edibles. Many of them, say the leafy marsh samphire that Martínez found amid the mangroves of San Pedro de Vice, appear in his dishes as he continuously pushes the frontiers of Peruvian gastronomy.

The next day, I have a yen for something sweet, so the hotel's concierge directs me to **ChocoMuseo**, a café/shop/museum off Cuzco's main square that also offers chocolate-making workshops. Winner of a 2013 International Cocoa Award from Paris' Salon du Chocolat, Peru's emerging chocolate industry is transforming rain-forest communities that once processed coca leaves for drug lords into producers



From top: Belmond Palacio Nazarenas, dinner is served at Senzo, and hands-on at ChocoMuseo.



### ADVISOR TIP

*“In Cuzco, I would definitely recommend dining at **Cicciolina** [[www.cicciolinacuzco.com](http://www.cicciolinacuzco.com)]. Home to a two-room tapas bar and a formal restaurant, it's located on the second floor of an old colonial house and is just a short walk from Belmond Palacio Nazarenas. Dishes feature fresh vegetables and herbs from Peru's Sacred Valley, and everything I've tasted there has been divine. It's such a happening place – you'll definitely feel like part of the local scene.”*

– ADRIANA BREIDENSTEIN  
Houston, Texas



## PEAK EXPERIENCES

Named for the first foreigner to stumble across Machu Picchu, the **Belmond Hiram Bingham** train is the most elegant way to make the four-hour journey from Cuzco to the ancient Incan city. You'll feel like a character in an Agatha Christie novel, enjoying a four-course meal in the wood-paneled dining car as the vintage train trundles across the lush Sacred Valley. A UNESCO World Heritage site and one of the New Seven Wonders of the World, **Machu Picchu** is certainly impressive, especially given its elevated Andean setting, but purists will want to arrive early: After 10 AM, platoons of tourists arrive.



(SENZO) INTI MEDIA. (MACHU PICCHU) R. IAN LLOYD/MASTERFILE



Cocktail culture at Museo del Pisco and (right) Tambo del Inka's Hawa restaurant.

of coveted cacao for the global chocolate trade.

Though a bastion of history and culture, Cuzco has acquired a modern reputation for lively nightlife, and after sundown, I stumble across a different sort of museum. At **Museo del Pisco**, a stylish cocktail lounge stocked with 35 in-house pisco infusions, I find locals and foreigners sampling passion fruit-, cranberry-, and rose-laced shots along with the establishment's more unusual concoctions: piquant wasabi and earthy *chuchuhuasi*, a blend steeped in a wood much prized for its aphrodisiac qualities.

Thanks to endless lashings of pisco, I'm a tad worse for wear the following morning and quite grateful when a sedan arrives to ferry me to **Tambo del Inka**, an hour's drive from town. The extensive wellness program at this strikingly designed countryside resort is enhanced by a selection of health-conscious dishes, including gluten-free options (rare in Peru). Here, between massages, nature hikes, river rafting, and yoga, I cycle through quinoa salads on the dining



menu and quinoa facials at the spa – two days of diligence to work off the trip's cocktails, chocolate, and endless fine dining.

Until the last night. Then, sitting fireside in **Hawa**, the hotel's rather glam restaurant, I cave and order a rack of alpaca and a nice rich red to go with it. Giving in to yet another epicurean pleasure seems, really, the only proper way to conclude my tour of Peru. **VT**

## PERFECT PAIRINGS

 *Tasteful travels in Peru.*

**FLY** **LAN Airlines** operates daily **direct flights** to Lima from Manhattan and Miami with numerous connections to Cuzco and Iquitos, the largest city in Peru's rain forest.

**CRUISE** With four-, five-, and eight-day voyages departing year-round from Iquitos aboard the 32-passenger *Aria Amazon* and 24-passenger *Aqua Amazon*, **Aqua Expeditions** provides uncommon pleasures ranging from **gourmet local cuisine** to visits to tribal communities. *Departures: Multiple dates through December 27, 2014; from \$2,850.*

**STAY** Overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Lima's poshest district, the 82-room **Belmond Miraflores Park** is within strolling distance of many of the city's **best restaurants**. Thanks to a recent refurbishment, guests can now book suites with spa bathrooms equipped with saunas and plunge pool-size baths. *Doubles from \$320; Virtuoso guests enjoy breakfast daily and complimentary 50-minute massages.*

Spread throughout a maze of courtyards and gardens, the 55 suites of Cuzco's **Belmond Palacio Nazarenas** are flushed with oxygen to ward off altitude sickness and outfitted with butlers, **gratis minibars**, and on-request iPads or iPhones. *Doubles from \$495; Virtuoso exclusive perks include breakfast daily and a \$100 spa credit.*

Set in the Sacred Valley along the Urubamba River, the 128-room **Tambo del Inka** – Peru's first luxury **destination spa** – offers a vast wellness center, gourmet dining, and some of the country's most stylish contemporary interiors. *Doubles from \$285; Virtuoso guests receive breakfast daily and a \$100 spa credit.*

**EXPLORE** Journeys on the **Hiram Bingham** train, guided tours of Machu Picchu, alfresco lunches in the Sacred Valley – **Blue Parallel** brings you the best of Peru during an eight-day tailor-made tour that travels round-trip from Lima. *Departures: Any day through December 31, 2014; from \$8,000 (including domestic flights).*