

# Eat Your Heart Out

KRISTY ALPERT SIPS AND SAVORS  
HER WAY THROUGH THE FLAVORFUL  
CAPITAL OF PERU

**L**ima made me a liar. After spending a week in Cusco, using the JW Marriott El Convento Cusco as my home base for exploring the Sacred Valley and the awe-inspiring ruins of Machu Picchu, I made the case to my family, friends, and coworkers that I needed to extend my time in Peru to check out the capital city of Lima.

"I've heard the city is supposed to be stunning," I lied, knowing locals actually take pride in the city's infamous nickname, "Lima the Ugly," a reputation earned due to a lack of architecturally significant buildings and minimal city planning, despite a smattering of landscaped parks and picturesque neighborhoods.

"I'm going for the beach," I embellished, fully conscious of the fact that the chances of my cold-water-loathing body submerging in even an inch of that 65 degree water were slim to none.

"The shopping there is supposed to be amazing," I exaggerated, using the city's well-earned reputation for boutique shops, luxury goods, and cliff-side shopping malls as fodder for my stopover.

But the real reason I couldn't pass up the chance to visit Lima? I wanted to eat everything in the city.

And I know I'm not the only one who feels that way. An estimated 75,000 tourists visit Lima each year just to see why it's become known as the Gastronomical Capital of the Americas. You'd be hard pressed to find any local population more obsessed with food than in Lima, and I couldn't resist finding out why.

## A TASTE FOR HISTORY

Despite the city's current passion for gastronomy, hometown pride hasn't always been a part of the culture here. Founded on January 18, 1535, by Francisco Pizarro as the Ciudad de los Reyes (City of the Kings),



Chef at Astrid y Gaston

the settlement's inhabitants hastily tried to establish this as a center for commodity exportation, virtually giving away any local resource that could draw revenue in the process, from guano to gold.

Times were hard in the early years of Lima, and the desire to establish a sense of identity was thwarted over and over again by the constant plague of war, earthquakes, guerilla uprisings, political skirmishes, and more. Yet through the changing regime and periods of poverty, one thing remained constant: the people had to eat.

Peru is rich in biodiversity, and local cuisine has always pulled from the grains and crops





of the Andean valleys, and the fruits and produce of the Amazon jungle. Lima's flavors and combinations became more interesting, however, as new immigrants arrived at the port from Spain, Africa, China, Japan, and Italy. In 1973, a young Japanese chef named Nobuyuki Matsuhisa arrived in Lima and soon opened his first restaurant; unable to find the same ingredients he used in his homeland, the chef created a unique combination of Japanese and Peruvian flavors—and the legend now known the world over as Nobu was born.

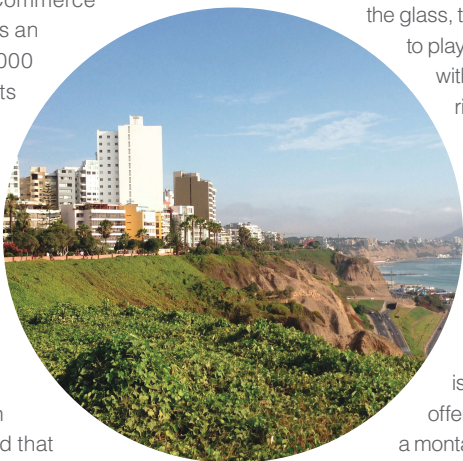
Thanks to the creativity, talent and dedication of chefs like Nobu and local superstars Gastón Acurio, Virgilio Martínez, and Diego Muñoz Velasquez, Peruvian cuisines has not only become elevated and refined, but famous around the globe—and a point of pride and passion for Peruvians.

Lima is now home to three of the World's 50 Best Restaurants—Central, Astrid y Gastón and Maido—and according to the Ministry of Tourism and Commerce for Peru, draws an estimated 75,000 culinary tourists each year, who spend an average of \$1,250 per person on dining

experiences alone. In fact, a local consultancy in Lima estimated that the gastronomy industry in Peru is growing faster than the economy as a whole, and that restaurants alone account for three percent of Peru's entire GDP.

### SAVOR THE FLAVORS

Facts and figures aside, there's one main reason why Lima's cuisine is so haute right now: it's delicious. Dishes of tangy and tender ceviche



lead the way to courses of fresh seafood and unlimited options of potatoes (more than 4,000 varieties of potatoes exist in Peru), all of which can be washed down with a refreshing pisco sour (the national drink.)

Gastón Acurio was the first chef to change the face of the dining scene in the city, and today his signature restaurant, Astrid y Gastón, remains one of the best restaurants in Lima. Although Acurio is no longer in the kitchen, head chef Diego Muñoz Velasquez showcases the varied flavors of Lima with a three hour, 30-course tasting menu. The restaurant is housed inside Casa Moreyra, which is also home to Acurio's more casual concept La Barra, where patrons can order fresh cocktails and shared plates.

If time and stomach space aren't an issue, a reservation at Central is a must. There, guests



Chef at Central Restaurante

can savor the unique flavors and presentations dreamed up by star chef Virgilio Martínez. The entire room focuses around the kitchen, with an open window and mirrors that give every seat in the house a view of the master at work. While the chef's laugh, snack, and banter behind the glass, the wait staff encourages diners to play with their food and experiment with the tasting menu (tip: there's no right or wrong way to eat what's on the plate). It is a truly unique experience, and is without a doubt the best way to kick off any journey through the city.

### BEYOND THE PLATE

After sampling the tasty treasures of Lima, the only logical thing to do is to explore the rest the city has to offer. Peru's capital is more accurately a montage of micro-cities, comprised of 43 districts that range from the swanky seaside neighborhood of Miraflores and bohemian, artsy Barranco to the historical city center, a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site.

There is so much to see and experience around the city that on any given morning, you might spy locals catching the early morning surf or joining a yoga session in a park in front of a pre-Columbian temple before heading into the office. During the day, visitors can adventurous

LIMA PERU

DESTINATION



with activities from biking to paragliding, explore art and artifacts at the Larco Museum (set inside an 18th-century colonial mansion) and the MALI Lima Art Museum, travel back in time at the Plaza de Armas and Church of San Francisco, or spend the day shopping and soaking in the sea air at Larcomar Mall, nestled on El Malecón's three-mile seaside promenade. Come sunset, it's time to check out the lounges, theaters, and casinos of Miraflores (the JW Marriott Hotel and Casino is a favorite), then cross the famous Puente de los Suspiros (Bridge of Sighs) to end the night listening to live music, dancing, or eating ceviche and sipping pisco in the lively bars of Barranco.

### DETAILS

#### WHERE TO STAY:

JW Marriott Hotel Lima

[www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/limdt-jw-marriott-hotel-lima](http://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/limdt-jw-marriott-hotel-lima)

Belmond Miraflores Park

[www.belmond.com/miraflores-park-lima](http://www.belmond.com/miraflores-park-lima)

#### WHERE TO EAT:

Central

[centralrestaurante.com.pe/en](http://centralrestaurante.com.pe/en)

Astrid y Gastón

[www.astridygaston.com](http://www.astridygaston.com)

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[www.astridygaston.com](http://www.astridygaston.com)

#### CONCIERGE CORNER:

A Tip from Cecilia Rispa, Destination Sales Manager at JW Marriott El Convento Cusco: "As long as your hotel is a member of Les Clefs d'Or International, the concierge can most likely help you get a last-minute reservation at the city's most popular restaurants—which are almost always full, especially for dinner. Can't-miss local specialties include a good ceviche, aji de gallina, and tuna causa. Adventurous types can enjoy a delicious anticucho de corazon (kabob of beef hearts) along El Malecón."