

Incredible!

Peruvian food is fast becoming one of the UK's hottest trends. **Laura Price** meets the man behind the marinade

Martin Morales is teaching a bar full of people how to make ceviche. He meticulously slices fresh, raw sea bass into uniform chunks that he will later cover in a tangy lime and chilli marinade. The dish must be served immediately – if not, the fish will “cook” for too long in the marinade, ruining the delicate flavour and texture.

Morales' pupils all have their own reasons for attending the class at Ceviche

restaurant in Soho, central London. One woman has been to Peru and is enamoured with the local cuisine; another is going there on honeymoon; others simply love the restaurant's namesake raw seafood dish and want to learn how to make it at home.

Flash back only 10 years and most of these people wouldn't even have heard of ceviche, let alone eaten it. But the dish has become so popular that Waitrose executive chef Jonathan Moore recently dubbed it “the new sushi” and predicted a boom in South American cuisine.

Peruvian restaurants won seven of the top 15 spots in *Restaurant* magazine's list of 'Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants', and world-renowned chef brothers Ferran and Albert Adrià recently opened a new Peruvian-Japanese restaurant called Pakta in Barcelona. So why exactly is the food of the Andes so hot right now?

“Latin American food is bang on trend,” says William Drew, editor of *Restaurant*. “Peru in particular has a long and rich culinary heritage, but only in recent times when its economy has grown and it has had

Ande cooks too: Peruvian chef Martin Morales making ceviche





Quinoa burger at Andina

Quinoa

“Quinoa was sacred to the Incas; it’s been grown in Peru for the last 5,000 years. It’s a complete protein, there’s no fat, it’s great for coeliacs, and it has tons of nutrients: vitamin B, D and E, zinc, magnesium, and iron. I love it because it’s super versatile. Our quinoa burgers are really popular.”



Lucuma mousse at Andina

« Lúcumá

“It’s a superfood, like quinoa. Lúcumá is very special; very, very tasty. It comes from the lúcumá fruit, which is grown in the foothills of the Andes going into the Amazon. We make a lúcumá mousse as well as a lúcumá puree that we use in savoury dishes.”

Don Ceviche with amarillo chilli at Ceviche



Martin's top five ingredients

Amarillo chilli

“The amarillo chilli is native to Peru and has tons of flavour and aroma. You can use it in ceviche and also cook stews and marinate lots of different meats with it.”

Pisco

“Pisco is our Peruvian spirit made from pure grape juice, which is distilled naturally and rested. We infuse it with a range of ingredients: some Peruvian, some British, such as ginger, coffee, amarillo chillies, or cinnamon.”



Pisco Sour at Ceviche

Choclo corn

“Choclo is a giant kernel corn from the deep Andes. It’s very nutritious, filling, and tasty. It holds a lot of history for us.”

Choclo corn cake at Andina



more interaction with the wider world has it exported its food to a wider audience.”

Morales says that it’s the mixture of different flavours and influences that makes Andean food so special. After the age of the Incas, Peru saw an influx of immigrants, from the Spanish conquistadores to the Japanese, Chinese, Italians, and Africans who came later on.

All this contributed to a culture of sub-cuisines, such as Nikkei (Japanese-Peruvian) and Chifa (Chinese-Peruvian). Add to that the country’s wide-ranging geographical microclimates and vast selection of natural ingredients, and you have a winning combination.

“All the world’s top chefs are travelling to Peru right now, whether it’s René Redzepi from Noma or Ferran Adrià,” says Morales in an English accent perfectly honed after 30 years in the country. “It’s just the first step. All kinds of chefs are experimenting with Peruvian foods, which is really exciting.”

Apart from ceviche, perhaps the most popular Andean export in recent years has been quinoa (pronounced ‘keenwah’), a superfood now used in everything from salads to soups.

Marks & Spencer has launched a porridge containing quinoa, and celebrities are hailing it as one of the ultimate health foods.

Morales serves it in burger form at his new restaurant Andina, and says it is great for coeliacs, who need a gluten-free diet.

But quinoa is just one of eight key superfoods in Peru. Another is maca, a starch usually sold in powder form and used in smoothies or sauces. It provides an instant burst of energy and can even be used as an aphrodisiac.

These ingredients are cropping up more and more in restaurants and health food shops around the UK, partly thanks to Morales, who decided to ditch his high-flying DJ career in 2010 and turn his talents

All the world’s top chefs are travelling to Peru right now

to cooking. Frustrated with the lack of Peruvian restaurants in Britain, he tweeted: “Does anyone care about Peruvian food?”

As it turned out, plenty of people did. His first restaurant Ceviche paved the way for pricier rival Lima in Fitzrovia, while Andina opened in Shoreditch to great reviews.

“We will gradually understand that it’s about more than just ceviche,” says William Drew. “I certainly see lots of Peruvian food in the supermarkets, as well as more Peruvian restaurants.”

With a budding food empire to rival Jamie Oliver’s, Morales has built a name for himself with a recipe book, *Ceviche: Peruvian Kitchen*; a pop-up cookery tour; and an appearance on celebrity cooking show *Saturday Kitchen*.

He even started a record label, Tiger’s Milk Records, named after the marinade used in ceviche. Last year’s pop-up tour encompassed 10 cities in England, Scotland and Wales and was a sell-out success.

“It was really, really well received,” he says. “No one has ever served Peruvian food north of Manchester before. We had a lot of people from Belfast saying we should have gone there as well. It just proves this is not a fad, it’s not only a London trend.”

So what does the future hold for Andean food in the UK? Morales is working on a range of ideas to combine his food with other arts, such as theatre, photography, and film, and he hasn’t ruled out another restaurant at some point.

We may have to wait a while to find out what’s next, but one thing is for sure: Peruvian food is here to stay. 



Octopus Olivo at Lima

Lima
31 Rathbone Place, Fitzrovia W1T 1JH
020 3002 2640

Upmarket Lima is the brainchild of Virgilio Martinez, head chef at Central in the Peruvian capital, which was ranked fourth in Restaurant's list of 'Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants' last year.

Try: Octopus Olivo (braised octopus with organic white quinoa and botija olive, £14)



Smoothies at Andina

Ceviche
17 Frith Street, Soho W1D 4RG
020 7292 2040

Ceviche is Martin Morales' first food venture, specialising in its namesake dish of marinated raw fish. Morales also runs cookery masterclasses on the last Sunday of each month around the bar of his restaurant.

Try: Don Ceviche (fresh sea bass ceviche in amarillo chilli-infused tiger's milk, limo chilli, sweet potato, and red onions, £8)

London's best Peruvian food

Coya
118 Piccadilly, Mayfair W1J 7NW
020 7042 7118

With an incredibly grand interior decorated in Inca style, Coya is the best place to go to feel like you really are dining in Peru. Watch the chefs at work in the open kitchen and be sure to sample the Pisco Sour cocktail.

Try: Solomillo de res (spicy beef fillet, spring onions, aji rocoto, and star anise, £32)



Salmon anticuchos at Coya

Andina
1 Redchurch Street, Shoreditch E2 7DJ
020 7920 6499

Morales' latest Shoreditch offering is based on Peruvian picanterias: all-day restaurants serving traditional Andean foods such as potato cakes and soups. It is open for breakfast and serves rejuvenating smoothies and superfood porridge.

Try: Cheeky ceviche (thinly sliced hake and cod cheeks in a Nikkei-style tiger's milk with blood orange and spring onion, £8.50)



Ceviche at Coya

Lima Floral
14 Garrick Street WC2E 9BJ
Open from July 2014

After the success of Lima – the first Peruvian restaurant in Europe to be awarded a Michelin star – chef Virgilio Martinez and his partners, Gabriel and Jose Luis Gonzalez, are opening a second site in Covent Garden. The menu at Lima Floral is set to include favourites from Lima, plus new dishes with rare Peruvian ingredients. Keep an eye out for the scallops with chia ceviche. ☑

Upstairs at Andina, Shoreditch



Images: Lima, Coya, Andina