



Club Chefs of

Westchester

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Newsletter: February 20, 2007

Dear Club Chef,

In January, the Club Chefs of Westchester participated in a fabulous trip to Peru where we spent 10 education-packed days that far exceeded our expectations. The selection of Peru as our culinary destination was initially met with doubt and concern by many chefs and general managers since Peru is only beginning to be accepted as an international culinary force. Two months prior to our departure, Peruvian cuisine was featured in the New York Times. However, prior to that article, Peruvian chefs had been featured in newspaper and magazine articles throughout the U.S. and the rest of the world. We stayed the course in our determination to have Peru as our 2007 culinary destination, arriving at Lima airport on January 13th to begin our journey.

One of the first of many fabulous meals that we enjoyed was at El Rincon Que No Conoces (the corner restaurant you don't know), run by Teresa Izquierdo. There, we were exposed to Criolla cuisine which is typical Peruvian cooking, providing the framework to understanding the cuisine. We were introduced to the main ingredients of Peruvian cuisine and the basic combinations that are staples of Peruvian food.

At our first visit to the open market, we were exposed to a large number of produce from Peru, from the mountains to the jungle. There was a wide array of not commonly known ingredients such as achote, rocoto, aguaymanto, lúcumá and many different varieties of ají, corn and potatoes. In Peru, there are over 2,000 species of potatoes and 55 varieties of corn, more than anywhere else on earth. Additionally, Peru is the number one exporter of both white and green asparagus.

Once we purchased our seafood and other ingredients at the market, we went to the home of Cucho La Rosa, the first chef to introduce Nova Andina cooking to the rest of the world. He has taught most of the leading chefs of Peru and is considered to be the master of ceviche, a famous Peruvian dish. In his kitchen, we were taught how to prepare this fish delicacy properly.

After we left Cucho's kitchen, we were treated to a seven course tasting dinner menu prepared by Gaston Acurio at what is considered to be one of the best restaurants in Lima, Astrid & Gaston. Prior to the dinner, Chef Acurio and his staff prepared approximately 20 varieties of Pisco cocktails.

During our stay in Lima, we were invited to the home of Mariella Balbi, an established food critic, author, and journalist, for a lecture on pisco. This white brandy, made from grapes, was once only known in the States due to the pisco sour, a popular drink in the early 20th century. Today, pisco is appearing in trendy Manhattan restaurants and the U.S. Bartenders Guild sent entrants to the 2006 Pan-American cocktail competition held in Lima.

Our next lesson took place at Le Cordon Bleu School in Lima, where we were taught how to prepare suspiro a la limena and arroz con pato. We also learned an Arabic style of preserving food called escabeche which was brought to Peru by the Spaniards.

From Lima, we traveled to Cusco. Once there, we were given a private tour of Cusco City followed by a marvelous five-course novo andina dinner at MAP Café which is located at the Museum de Arte Precolombino. The food was prepared using native ingredients, old recipes and new techniques resulting in a delicious end product.

The next day, we were on our way to the Sacred Valley of the Incas where we visited a ranch, La Hacienda de Huayocari, observing a vegetable and cooking demonstrations which displayed the regional cuisine.

While the tastes we discovered in Peru were phenomenal, the tour of Machupicchu, the Lost

City of the Incas, was the highlight of the tour and will not be forgotten by anyone who has had the good fortune of being able to travel to this awe inspiring site. The magnitude of these ancient ruins against the breathtaking backdrop of the Andes was mesmerizing.

After Machupicchu, we returned to Cusco for more education, this time at the Blue Ribbon Culinary School of Cusco. The afternoon, after stopping at the open market to purchase our ingredients, we learned how to prepare a classic cusquenian lunch using basic Andean ingredients and classic techniques.

While in Cusco, we ventured to the neighboring towns of Maras and Moray. In Maras, we enjoyed a classic cusquenian cooking demonstration. The tour of Moray, an archaeological site, was an eye opening experience. The ancient Incas were already creating microclimates for cultivating a variety of crops, using retaining walls to create an irrigation system and agricultural terraces.

Once back in Lima, we were introduced to the pachamanca style of cooking which is similar to what we know as a clambake. Marinated poultry, assorted red meats, vegetables, potatoes, all wrapped in banana leaves and cornhusks, as well as earthenware crocks containing a local cheese fundue, rice, chicken legs, fat and whatever needs to be cooked are placed in the pit and covered with more hot stones. Everything is then buried with earth and left to slowly cook for precisely one hour. The result was out of this world.

That evening, after our pachamanca demonstration, we attended a desserts festival at La Trattoria Restaurant. South American television personality, Chef Sandra Plevisani, offers 50 dessert items on her menu from traditional Peruvian desserts like suspiro a la limena to a tiramisu. Chef Plevisani transforms desserts into beautiful pieces of art.

Lunch the next day was served up at La Puerta Cerrada by Chef/Owner Javier Wong. He prepared three different ceviches and a chifu style seafood dish. Chifu is a Chinese-Peruvian style of cooking. In October 2006, Chef Wong appeared in a USA Today article describing the explosion of Peruvian cuisine in the States.

Our last dinner in Peru was at Costanera 700 which features nobu cuisine. Nobu cuisine is the blending of Japanese and Asian influences with Peruvian cuisine. It was the Japanese who taught the Peruvians to eat fresh fish and the Japanese then adopted Peruvian ingredients and fused them into their cuisine. The result is a wonderful cuisine bringing the best of two worlds together. Costanera's chef, Humberto Sato, trained Nobu Matsuhisa of Nobu in New York City for six years.

On to other subjects, I would like to remind everyone that the next meeting will be at Shenorock Shore Club where Chef Lenny Phillips will be hosting us on Wednesday the 14th of March at 6 PM. Please call Lenny at (914) if you wish to attend.

The vendor show will be at the Glen Island Club on Tuesday the 27th of March. I have forwarded the menus to the teams captains. We still need more volunteers to ensure the success of the event.

Thank you for your support,

Jacques Larsen