

Peruvian Ceviche: A simple and Refined Dish

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Peruvian food is considered to be one of the most refined, complex and important in the world. It has had representatives and ambassadors who have known how to export it very well and have made it possible to recreate it the best way possible in many countries.

Since I tasted Peruvian food for the first time when I lived in Miami, I became completely enamored by it. Legends and historians tell us that the pre-Incan cultures from the Peruvian coasts already knew about ceviche. Tombs have been found in some of the cultures of the zone with evidence of cut-up fish in fruit acids.

There are many versions about the origin of the word ceviche. When the Spanish came to America, they brought lime, celery, onion, orange and fruits from Arabic, African, Asian and European countries. They also brought slaves of Moorish and Muslim origin with them. They used the lime and orange of Arabic origin to prepare ceviche instead of the fruits like maracuya or tumbo of pre-Columbian origin. With the addition of lime and orange to the ceviche, they wanted to emulate the “sebec” dish that was eaten a lot in the Arabic countries. It is believed that the origin of the word ceviche comes from this word even though many other theories exist as to its origin.

Ceviche is such an important part of the Peruvian culture that when someone asks a Peruvian who does not live in his country what he misses most from Peru, he will answer, “The family, a ceviche and a cold Inca kola.”

It is said that there are more than 2,000 recipes of ceviche combined with more than 800 species of fish that come from Peru’s huge ocean, in addition to the way that each place and region prepares this dish.

Until the middle of the 20th Century, ceviche had been considered a dish from the common people. There were times that it was known to be vulgar because of its acidity and spiciness from the chili, being eaten on the docks and at the ports. This makes me stop and think that the dishes that were considered from the common people or vulgar were the ones that endured and remained in the culture with more strength. The ones that lasted the test of time wound up being the culinary representatives of their countries. The popular food is that which has the wisdom and nutrition for its people.

Before ceviche was cooked in lime for more than three hours, but today you don’t need more than a few minutes. At the beginning of the 1980s, it left the idea of being exclusively from the ports and docks of the fishermen, and expanded to the cities forming an essential part of its culinary offerings. By the 1990s, it began an explosion of ceviche places in Lima and in the world, and actually it is the most important Peruvian food.



Ingredients

2 lb. fresh fish that is not greasy
1 onion cut in Julian strips
1 aji lime or (if not aji) chili for those who do not live in Peru
10 limes

Decoration

1 boiled large sweet potato or 2 medium
1 bunch of cilantro
1 boiled choclo which is corn with large kernels. It can be found in Latin stores. In Mexico it is known as corn pozolero
Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions

Cut the fish in 2 cm. pieces. Cut the aji limo. Be very careful because it is very spicy and hot. Put it in a glass bowl. Add the cut fish to the bowl, squeeze the limes over the fish until it is covered. Add salt and pepper, half teaspoon of crushed garlic, the onion which has been sliced in Julian strips and chopped cilantro. Add ice cubes for three minutes to cool the mixture.

Let the fish soak for as long as you like depending on how cooked you want it. Normally you let it rest for 10–20 minutes. Serve on a platter, decorating with cubes of boiled sweet potato and the boiled corn on each side. The ceviche is served with lime. ♦