

The Five Best Reasons To Go To Peru

Warm hearted welcomes, the ruins of the greatest pre-Columbian Native civilization, sunsets on the beach, mountain hikes, and jungle adventures—these are all great reason to take to trip the heart of Spain's former Empire in South America. As attractive as these may be, I offer five even better reasons to go to Peru. Because, after all, just about every country has nice people and cool things to see. Only Peru has:

1. Lomo Saltado



This is the nation's signature dish. It's a beef stir-fry with tomatoes and onions, served over garlic rice and crispy fries. Just about anywhere you go, Peruvians know how to season this dish perfectly. It's the perfect fusion of Latin American tastes like cilantro and garlic with soy sauce borrowed from Chinese immigrants. Perhaps even better is Lomo Saltado's cousin Tallarin Saltado, which is basically the same stir-fry mixed with noodles instead of rice and fries.

2. El Chicharron



Like so many words in Latin America Chicharron means something different everywhere you go. In Peru, it is not simply fried pork rinds, but rather the most delicious sandwich you've probably never tasted. It begins with crisping up some slow cooked pork belly, but the outcome is much more meat than fat. You place this bit of magic on a nice French bread roll along with some slices of boiled sweet potato. You have sweet, you have salty-fatty, and now it's time for something bold: **salsa criolla**.



Salsa criolla is a condiment that's ubiquitous in Peru and makes everything taste better. Criolla is thinly sliced red onion, cilantro, key lime, and some aji (spicy yellow pepper). Make sure whoever serves it to you applies plenty of the salsa on there. These three flavors placed in-between the French bread roll unite to form something truly special. Peruvians eat it for breakfast, which sounds to me like the best way to possibly start your day.

3. Tallarin Verde



The Chinese were not the only immigrant population to make Peru taste better. The Italians brought pesto and Peruvians perfected it. Peruvian pesto is creamy, making genius use of traditional Latin American cheese, queso fresco. You can find generous portions of Tallarin Verde at just about any Menu del Dia restaurant where it is served with a thinly pounded, breaded chicken breast cutlet and salsa criolla. If you are lucky, you may even be able to get an over-easy egg on top to make your pasta sauce even more incredible.

4. Empanadas



Sure, these are not unique to Peru, but Peru does them better than anyone. (I mean, my Peruvian wife does them better than anyone.) Sometimes on the street, you can find some pretty subpar empanadas in Peru, but you don't have to look hard to find a good bakery or sandwich place that makes the empanadas that will change your life. A beautiful little pastry with ground beef, onions, and olive inside. What makes Peruvian empanadas so unique is that they are savory but sprinkled with powdered sugar and garnished with key lime. The result is a great flavor combo that makes a great snack.

5. Anticuchos



One of the best foods in any country is usually grilled meat on a stick. This is certainly true of Peru. Anticuchos are made with beef heart, which has a texture that is a cross between tenderloin and calamari. Peruvian Anticuchos are marinated in vinegar, cumin, garlic, and chilies. They are a tangy and succulent street food that is often served over crisped-up slices of boiled potato. Although just about all Peruvian food boasts bold flavors, Anticuchos are a delicious cut above.