



# 10 OF THE Best FOOD AND DRINK EXPERIENCES

Get a taste for Latin America, says Aby Dunsby

@AbraDunsby

**What better way to embrace the beauty, fun and flavour of Latin America than by eating and drinking your way through all that this glorious part of the world has to offer?**

Whether you're tucking in to tacos in Mexico, swilling a sassy cabernet sauvignon in Chile, or creating your own ceviche in Peru, Central and South America are bursting with scintillating flavours to get clients' taste buds buzzing, while at the same time taking them to the heart of local cultures.

Here we round up 10 of the best food and drink experiences in Latin America, allowing you to showcase its diversity and innovation to food-loving clients. Buen provecho!

## 1 FOOD MARKETS IN PERU

When it comes to cuisine, Peru is about as cool as it gets right now. Regularly honoured as one of the world's best culinary destinations, its flavours have transcended borders, finding a home-from-home in the UK, where pisco bars and award-winning restaurants are springing up faster than you can say 'Mine's a quinoa salad'.

"Thanks to a 500-year melting pot of cultures - Spanish, African, Japanese and Chinese immigrant with native Quechuan - Peru's traditional cuisine has transformed into a creative mishmash of styles, from nouveau-Andean to Asian-Peruvian fusion dining, and its capital, Lima, is its

gastronomic epicentre," says Tom Power, co-founder and director at Pura Aventura.

As well as street food delicacies such as ceviche and cuy (that's guinea pig to you and me), must-try dishes include lomo saltado, a Peruvian take on stir fry, and aji de gallina, a spiced creamy chicken stew with a pisco-splashed kick.

**Book it:** Cox & Kings offers 10 days on its Peru: An Andean Culinary Adventure, from £2,825, with cooking classes and market visits on the itinerary. [coxandkings.co.uk](http://coxandkings.co.uk)

## 2 ASADO IN ARGENTINA

Forget New York, Paris, and Japan: for the sort of steak most of us only dream about, send clients to Argentina. The country prides itself on the quality of its beef, which is derived from grass-fed cattle that graze principally on the open plains of the Pampas.

The country exports only about 7% of its beef, so to enjoy the best cuts, clients will have to visit the county's chic, vibrant capital Buenos Aires, where they can head to its excellent traditional parillas, or grill restaurants.

A typical menu will feature around a dozen cuts of steak, from lean tenderloins to fatty rumps, flavoured only with salt and the smoky taste of the grill.

At home, Argentines eat their beef alongside a host of other meats, from sausages to sweetbreads, all cooked on the asado, or barbecue, and served

alongside salads, chimichurri sauce, and Malbec so good it'll make you swoon.

**Book it:** Latin Routes offers a tailor-made 10-day foodie itinerary to Argentina from £2,987, based on two sharing. Experiences include a street food photography tour, asado and two nights at a wine resort in the Uco Valley. [latinroutes.co.uk/agents](http://latinroutes.co.uk/agents)

## 3 ARTISAN EATS IN PANAMA

Vibrant, dynamic Panama City acts as the bridge between Central and South America, welcoming an abundance of travellers and immigrants, and boasting a cosmopolitan food and drink scene that's definitely on the up.

Prices are affordable in restaurants, and Panamanians eat out often, so there is an impressive selection to choose from, from grungy underground bars to gleaming gourmet options.

A great way to get under the skin of this historic city is with a walking tour, and clients can eat and drink their way through the colonial neighbourhood of Casco Viejo on Viator's foodie tour, learning about historical landmarks on the way.

The area is home to some of Panama City's hippest food and drink joints, and clients will be able to visit a few with the help of an expert guide. They'll go to sites including a coffee roaster, chocolate shop, microbrewery, seafood market and rooftop

cocktail bar, stopping to eat and drink as they go.

**Book it:** Viator offers a two-hour Taste of Panama City Walking Tour from £54. [viator.com](http://viator.com)

## 4 MEZCAL IN MEXICO

Rich and distinctive in flavour and packing a spicy punch, the celebrated cuisine of Mexico is like a jubilant fiesta in your mouth, and there's no better place in the world for food-lovers to sample it in all its authenticity than at the source.

Mexico's rich culinary heritage goes back thousands of years, fusing indigenous Mesoamerican cooking with flavours from Europe - and from colonising power Spain in particular - as well as Africa and Asia.

Clients can stuff themselves in the knowledge that the avocados, tomatoes, lime and garlic used in staple dishes are superfoods, while the fiery mezcal family of liquors, which is made from the native agave plant and includes tequila, are essential for any all-nighter.

Foodie highlights on Journey Latin America's Taste of Mexico tour include mezcal tasting at a distillery, sampling street food in bustling Mexico City, and learning about the culinary traditions and history of the Oaxaca region, before cooking a traditional meal alongside expert chefs.

**Book it:** Journey Latin America offers a 14-day A Taste of Mexico private tour from £3,786. [journeylatinamerica.co.uk](http://journeylatinamerica.co.uk)

PICTURES: CONTIKI; INTREPID TRAVEL/KAREN WOOLLEY; LATIN ROUTES; JOURNEY LATIN AMERICA; TITANI; VIATOR; SHUTTERSTOCK; TOMAS RANGEL; A. BRYCE

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10  
OF THE  
Best

## LATIN AMERICA FOOD AND DRINK DESTINATIONS

### 5 COOK YOUR OWN CATCH IN BELIZE

The tiny Central American country of Belize is a beguiling blend of Latin American and Caribbean culture, and its food takes influence from both, with popular dishes including rice and beans served with chicken, beef or shrimp; fresh ceviche; rum cake; and Johnny Cakes, a dangerously moreish baked bread roll made with flour and coconut and stuffed with chicken, refried beans and cheese.

Trudi Pearce, UK marketing representative for the Belize Tourism Board, recommends lionfish spearfishing on the Belize Barrier Reef as a must-do foodie experience. Lionfish are not indigenous inhabitants of the Caribbean Sea and with no natural predators, their numbers are increasing rapidly, affecting much of the marine life's ecosystems on the reef, which is the second-largest in the world.

"Many operators offer 'sea to plate' experiences, whereby tourists get the chance to hunt lionfish and then learn to cook it themselves before enjoying their meal, safe in the knowledge that they have contributed to the welfare of the reef," says Pearce.

### 6 Many operators offer 'sea to plate' experiences, giving tourists the chance to hunt lionfish

**Book it:** Blue Ventures offers a nine-day lionfish trip for £800, with daily dives in the Bacalar Chico Marine Reserve and accommodation in eco-cabins on the beach.  
[blueventures.org](http://blueventures.org)

### 6 MICHELIN-STARRED DINING IN RIO

Unsurprisingly given its size and history, Brazil's cuisine is a smorgasbord of epicurean flavours, from Portuguese to African and Amerindian.

Clients can embrace true carioca living by chowing down on as much meat as they can handle in a churrascaria one night; lazing on the beach and chomping flaky chicken and cheese-filled pastry empadas the next; then eating in some of South America's most glamorous



ABOVE: Mezcal and more, Mexico

fine dining restaurants, or spending the night sipping caipirinhas to salsa beats.

The national dish is feijoada, a hearty stew made with black beans and various cuts of pork that's deserving of the 'comfort in a bowl' cliché.

For fine dining lovers, recommend Insight Luxury Gold's Classic South America tour. Clients will be able to sample the creativity and expertise of celebrity chef Ken Hom's cooking with a meal at his restaurant Mee, in the iconic and achingly cool Copacabana Palace Hotel. The restaurant was the first pan-Asian venue to open in Brazil, and one of the first in South America to win a Michelin star.

**Book it:** Insight Luxury Gold's Classic South America tour starts from £4,089 and features a dinner at Mee Restaurant.  
[insightvacations.com](http://insightvacations.com)

### 7 CHOCOLATE MAKING IN GUATEMALA

Chocoholics can fuel their addiction in Guatemala, touted as the birthplace of the

mighty cocoa-based treat. The beautiful, historic city of Antigua is a particular draw, and clients visiting the former capital will find a variety of chocolate shops, cocoa-dusted desserts and even a chocolate museum. The museum tells the story of chocolate from its discovery by the Mayans, who used to worship the cacao tree, dubbing it the food of the gods, and revering it for its aphrodisiac qualities.

The museum also extols cacao's ability to reduce blood pressure and ease ailments including asthma, so clients can then visit its gift shop to buy creamy truffles and exquisite chocolate bars without feeling any pangs of guilt.

On Contiki's tour of Guatemala, clients can indulge further by making their own chocolates from locally sourced cacao.

**Book it:** Contiki's 18-day Latin Legends trip explores Mexico, Belize and Guatemala, and includes a Guatemalan feast, plus options to make chocolate in Antigua. Prices start from £2,813.  
[contiki.com](http://contiki.com)



ABOVE: Fine dining, Brazil



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LEFT:  
Cartagena,  
Colombia



RIGHT:  
Santiago,  
Chile

→ **8 COFFEE IN COLOMBIA**

Colombia is famed for its delicious coffee, but nowhere is the mighty bean more valued than in the coffee-sprinkled, verdant hilltops of the Zona Cafetera, made up by the departments, or regions, of Caldas, Risaralda and Quindio.

As with most of Colombia, the coffee heartland has been off-limits to tourists in the past, but is now very much open for business, and clients who visit will find an area of stunning natural beauty, complete with



**Quito restaurants serve local delicacies such as roasted pig and soup of potato, cheese and avocado**

coffee pickers working in the blazing heat, women gossiping over steaming coffee cups in cafes, and many working fincas, or coffee farms. Some of the

farms are open to tourists, offering tours, and clients can even bed down in a traditional hacienda for the night and feel as though they are part of a Gabriel Garcia Marquez novel.

**Book it:** Titan's Contrasts of Colombia tour starts from £2,999 for 15 days, and includes a cooking lesson with a Colombian chef and a visit to a hacienda.  
**titantravel.co.uk**

**9 COOK WITH LOCALS IN CHILE**

Chile's culinary repertoire is impressive, combining impeccable seafood and refined traditional dishes with taste bud-tlingling wine pairings and glasses of mote con huesillo, a peppery liquor made from peaches and wheat. It'll soon be easier for clients to get to Santiago, the country's energetic and cosmopolitan capital, with British Airways launching direct flights from Heathrow in January.

There's no better way of experiencing a culture than by meeting the locals and seeing how they live. Intrepid Travel's three-day Bite-size Break Santiago allows clients to do just that, featuring a cooking lesson with a Chilean family where they'll learn how to cook dishes including sopaipillas (fried pastries) and tomatican (Chilean stew).

Other highlights of the trip include exploring the capital's buzzing bar scene, a food walking tour of the city, and

a visit to the celebrated fish market, Mercado Central.  
**Book it:** Intrepid's Bite-size Santiago break is priced from £330 per person.  
**intrepidtravel.com**

**10 BAR-HOPPING IN QUITO**

In a continent that boasts such foodie giants as Lima and Buenos Aires, it can be hard for smaller capitals to be heard, but Quito is fast emerging as the new foodie hotspot. The good news for clients visiting the dizzy heights of Ecuador's capital is that the altitude means the metabolism speeds up, so they can take full advantage of the city's restaurant scene.

Many of the top restaurants are run by talented international chefs - including plenty from neighbouring Peru - while those looking for more-traditional fare will find plenty of restaurants serving local delicacies such as hornado (roasted pig) and locro, a soup made with potato, cheese and avocado.

In the evenings, clients should head to La Ronda, a buzzing street lined with cafes, bars and restaurants, where locals queue for empanadas or stop for hot chocolate on their evening stroll.  
**Book it:** On the Go Tours offers eight days on its Ecuador Explorer trip from £835, including time in capital Quito.  
**onthegotours.com**



LEFT:  
Quito,  
Ecuador