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DEPARTURES

Roots Revolutionaries

A food adventure in Peru and Bolivia.

BY GIGI RAGLAND

Adventure comes in many forms; it's not limited to the extreme athlete, the Marco Polos of the world or even jalapeno-eating record holders. In the case of the Roots Revolutionaries tour developed by Culture Xplorers founder and owner, Jim Kane, the exclusive adventure is a combination of food anthropology and gastronomic exploration discovered through the "New Frontiers of Food Travel."

If ever there was something akin to an Indiana Jones food travel experience, then this is the trip; tantalizing bait for all foodies, eaters of world cuisine, gourmet wannabes, culinary divas and Latin gastro-afficionados. Concerning his "Lima, Peru to La Paz, Bolivia" tour, Kane insists that it "is not a culinary tour but a high impact experience where food is used as the lens through which you make connections with the people, place and culture of the country."

Of course that's not to dispute that nabbing a seat at one of Lima's finest restaurants, sampling the provocative cuisine of a Latin American top chef, is not a substantial culinary highlight of any trip to Peru. Far from it. In fact, the trip invites adventurous food travelers to dine, then go beyond the table and into the fields, gardens, markets and kitchens to learn about the personal philosophy and projects of the most talked about chefs in Peru and Bolivia, and for that matter all of Latin America.

Three restaurants featured on the Roots Revolutionaries itinerary have been listed in Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants of 2014. Holding the coveted number one spot is Lima's Central, the brain child of top chef Virgilio Martínez, and ranking number two on the list, also located in Lima, is the esteemed Astrid y Gastón manned by Peruvian chef Diego Muñoz and founded by celebrity-chef Gastón Acurio.



Roots Revolutionaries culinary trips take travelers beyond the restaurant and into the fields.

CULTURE XPLORES, JIM KANE



Guests hone their cooking skills with students at a cooking school founded by Gastón Acurio.

EPIC EPICUREAN ADVENTURE

Culture Xplorers founder and owner, Jim Kane, sees travel as a way to make a positive impact, and he creates itineraries with that goal in mind. “I see food as a way to break down barriers and connect through the senses of taste, touch, smell and seeing colors,” he says. “Ultimately, it makes a trip last longer as a memory, far beyond the trip itself.”

2015 departure dates are July 23 and September 17. Intrepid food travelers who can't make the group trip dates will be happy to know that this experience can be customized and run privately for two or more people at any time. The 11-day food adventure explores Lima, the Sacred Valley, Machu Picchu, Cusco and La Paz, Bolivia, with optional extensions to the Amazon, Lake Titicaca or further into Bolivia. cultureexplorers.com

Another restaurant on the heralded 50 Best List, located in the neighboring country of Bolivia set in La Paz is Gustu, opened by the celebrated Danish chef, Claus Meyer. The restaurant features all-endemic produce and traditional Bolivian-sourced foods to create inventive takes on classic dishes, such as native potatoes cooked in pink salt, nasturtium flower and elderberry capers. All three restaurants support the idea of giving new value and life to native foods.

The Roots Revolutionaries tour begins in Lima, the food capital of Peru, and offers an excellent opportunity to whet travelers' tastebuds for the rest of the journey. No doubt ceviche will be on the menu in many of the restaurants as it is the country's signature dish. But Peru is much more than mouth-watering ceviche, more than 1,000 varieties of potatoes and a major producer of quinoa, as guests discover.

Travelers are transported into an immersive, multi-layered food adventure: a seat at the table at Central and Astrid y Gastón relishing Peru's finest multi-course dining one day and the next day enjoying an equally exhilarating experience hiking into the Andes to meet the farmers who produce the food. A lot of development went into crafting the unique itinerary. It's true that anybody could make reservations at these top restaurants and dine there, but what they can't do so easily is access the exclusive opportunities built artfully into the itinerary.

One example is a private chat at the restaurant with Virgilio Martínez and his sister Malena to talk about their passion for Peru and the dynamic Mater Iniciativa project where the team goes on scouting missions across Peru to document, assist and bring back the rich biodiversity of Peru's larde—such as edible clay, an ancient food found in very remote locations—to Central's kitchen. Diners sample this form of edible clay in a Central dessert imaginatively named Cacao Forest, composed of arcilla

THROUGHOUT THE 11-DAY FOOD ADVENTURE, GUESTS ARE IMMERSSED INTO THIS NEW FRONTIER OF FOOD TRAVEL ON A DAILY BASIS. THERE'S AN EQUAL BALANCE OF EDUCATION, CULTURE, HERITAGE AND HISTORY.

CULTURE XPLORES, JIM KANE

ADVENTURE

DEPARTURES



clay, el shunte cacao, yuyo flower and muña mint. It's the kind of multi-layered experience where eating something new isn't the only adventure; guests also discover and explore the origins of foods they've never tried before.

Throughout the 11-day food adventure, guests are immersed into this "new frontier of food travel" on a daily basis. There's an equal balance of education, culture, heritage and history along with active adventurous pursuits such as hiking. Not only are the days planned well, but so are the nights.

Thoughtful consideration was given when arranging accommodations along the route. A variety of lovely lodgings with a distinct sense of place, focusing on heritage and culture, can be expected. Hotel B, a boutique luxury hotel in Lima, delights with its quiet Bohemian artsy neighborhood, while later in the stay guests are enchanted by the secluded luxury of the Belmond Hotel Rio Sagrado, nestled within the Sacred Valley, and built with natural materials to resemble an authentic Andean village. The location provides an ideal opportunity to acclimate before venturing on to Machu Picchu where guests overnight at the exclusive Inkaterra Machu Picchu Hotel close to the site.

Educational components of the trip offer an exciting opportunity to connect with locals involved in the food world. One day guests will visit students at a cooking school founded by super-chef Gastón Acurio in the coastal desert of Pachacutec. The school offers skills that assist Lima's impoverished youth with life-changing education.

A thoughtfully planned itinerary allows foodie travelers to experience luxury accommodations and award-winning restaurants in Lima, Peru and La Paz, Bolivia.

In this way the Instituto Culinario Pachacútec is a leading model for how the power of food is being leveraged to create important social change. Guests roll up their sleeves with the students and cook up a few classic Peruvian dishes.

The next day, travelers leave Lima for a hike along the ancient pilgrimage paths of Pachacamac, a coastal route in pre-Inca times. The head agronomist of Gastón Acurio, Luis, will talk about the history of the area and guests will learn how he turned the dry desert terrain near his home into a verdant organic vegetable garden. Later, feast on a home-hosted picnic sourced from Luis' private garden, or huerta.

Whereas in Bolivia, at the end of the trip, a visit to La Paz reveals exciting markets to explore on foot. Not your typical farmers' markets but yielding lots of surprises such as the Witches Market where there are hundreds of traditional, herbal and superstitious remedies and rituals. But foremost, is the chance to visit nonprofit, Melting Pot Bolivia, to see how this school is changing the face of Bolivia's food future by enhancing the culinary culture. Travelers enjoy a luncheon with leaders of the Bolivia Slow Food Movement. And, of course, what is an experiential food tour without a grand finale dinner? A celebratory farewell dinner is held at fabulous Gustu.

It's obvious this is far more than a culinary tour. No wonder Kane of Culture Xplorers came up with the description "new frontiers of food travel" to explain an itinerary that is as diverse and rich as the colorful countries visited. **DLM**