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# Chef-restaurateur Virgilio Martinez offers tasty tour of Peru at Blu

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River fish and quinoa (above) and anticucho wagyu heart with moraya potato and edible clay are among the dishes by chef Virgilio Martinez. PHOTO: SHANGRI-LA HOTEL SINGAPORE

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Michelin-starred chef Virgilio Martinez to prepare dishes with ingredients from his country

Eunice Quek

Go on a gastronomic tour of Peru - from the Andes mountains to the Amazon rainforest - as chef-restaurateur Virgilio Martinez showcases the very best of its local produce.

In Peru, the chef owns Central restaurant, which has been ranked No. 1 on the Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants list for three years. It is fourth on The World's 50 Best Restaurants list.

In London, he also runs the one-Michelin-starred Lima restaurant, along with the more casual Lima Floral.

Martinez, 39, will be in town for the second edition of the Shangri-La International Festival of Gastronomy, where he will cook from Oct 25 to 29 at Blu restaurant.

**BOOK IT / A GASTRONOMIC EXPEDITION TO PERU WITH MICHELIN-STARRED CHEF VIRGILIO MARTINEZ**

**WHERE:** Blu, Level 24 Tower Wing, Shangri-La Hotel Singapore, 22 Orange Grove Road

**WHEN:** Oct 25 to 29, from 7pm (last seating at 8pm)

**PRICE:** \$448++ a person

**INFO:** Call 6213-4393 or e-mail [eunice.yong@shangri-la.com](mailto:eunice.yong@shangri-la.com)

The festival runs from Oct 25 to Nov 1, featuring a line-up of chefs from 11 Shangri-La hotels in 10 cities.

Dishes on his seven-course dinner menu (\$448++ a person) include scallops, sea lettuce and coral; river fish and quinoa; and anticucho wagyu heart with moraya potato and edible clay.

Included in the dinner is a selection of beverages, such as Argentinian wines and Cusquena Premium Peruvian Beer, which is made from pure Andes mountain water.

There is also a traditional Peruvian cocktail, Capitan, which is made from pisco quebranta (brandy), vermouth rosso, averna (Italian liqueur) and orange bitters.

Martinez says: "We love to surprise with ingredients that come from different regions of Peru - tubers, roots, edible clay and freeze-dried potatoes."

The clay, collected from the driest areas of the Antiplano (Andean Plateau), is commonly used for medicinal purposes. He uses it for sauces or in desserts.

Highlighting the rich biodiversity of Peru is very much the soul of Central, as can be seen in his new 256-page cookbook named after the restaurant.

In the book, Martinez writes about "cooking ecosystems".

"We take into account every aspect of the natural environment and dynamics of ingredients when creating a dish. This exposes our country's mega-diversity in a particular way," he says.

"We talk about preservation as well. We believe there is the need to be aware of everything that happens in our surroundings, to maintain natural balance and harmony," adds the former professional skateboarder and law student.

Like the tasting menu at Central, the book is organised according to the altitudes of Peru - from below sea level at the Pacific Ocean to the heights of the Andes mountain range. Each chapter explores an area and its produce, along with recipes and stories about Martinez's journey.

During his visit to Singapore this time, he hopes to call attention to the innovation of his restaurant, compared with last year when he was here with the Tiger's Milk Gang and the focus was more on "fun-style" and traditional Peruvian food, such as ceviches.

The "gang" included chefs Gaston Acurio of Astrid y Gaston (No. 7 on Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants list), Mitsuharu Tsumura of Maido (No. 2 on Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants list) and Rafael Piqueras of Maras.

Tiger's milk refers to the citrus-based marinade used to cure seafood in a ceviche.

"Now, it is all about Central, talking about innovation in a global view to see how we are connected to the world," says Martinez, whose wife, chef Pia Leon, 28, works with him. They have a nine-month-old son, Cristobal.

He is in the process of moving Central to a new and bigger location, which will include a research centre.

His dinner at Blu marks the closure of the restaurant, as the hotel is in the midst of a revamp, which also involves restaurants The Rose Veranda and Nadaman, as well as the

Tower Wing rooms and lobby, Horizon Club and Mezzanine Floor rooms. It is slated for completion in the first quarter of next year.

Besides cooking at Shangri-La Hotel, Martinez will prepare a degustation dinner (\$450++ a person, includes a signed copy of the Central cookbook) at Restaurant Andre in Bukit Pasoh Road.

• **The Central cookbook (\$97.08) is available at Books Kinokuniya.**

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