



FOOD *cities* OF SOUTH AMERICA

Its topographical range is huge, its cultures diverse, and if eating and drinking your way around the continent's major cities sounds like a tempting way to sample it all, Laura Price has the highlights





This page: traditional meets modern in a thriving restaurant scene. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Chilean cottage pie; wine tasting goes with the territory; horsemen show off their rodeo skills; the city's spectacular setting, bordered by mountains; national drink pisco sour; orange trees; a vender on every corner; mainstay empanadas

Hearty home-style dishes, street food and fine dining all draw on the traditions of the Mapuche people, a seafood culture and Spanish culinary influences in Chile's cosmopolitan hub

SANTIAGO, CHILE

Often described as the most 'European' city in South America, Santiago is a bustling cosmopolitan hub with centuries of culture and a thriving gastronomic scene. Nestled in a valley surrounded by the Andes and the Chilean Coast Range, the city has more than its fair share of stunning views and historical landmarks, with the palm-tree-lined Plaza de Armas being a star attraction.

The capital city was founded here in the 1500s due to its proximity to Cerro Santa Lucía, a high vantage point, and the Mapocho River. While the influence of Chile's original inhabitants, the Mapuche people, is still felt in modern cuisine through seasonings and stews, there are also plenty of Spanish influences and a solid tradition of serving seafood as well as meat, specifically barbecued lamb. Local gastronomy has something for everyone, with a mix of hearty, home-style food and world-class fine dining.

As in most big cities throughout South America, there's a thriving street-food scene here, with a plethora of deep-fried comfort foods and unusual juices. On the travel side, it's essential you make time for a hike to the top of the Cerro San Cristóbal mountain and order a *mote con huesillo*, a purple-hued drink made from peaches and husked wheat that is commonly sipped while admiring the breathtaking views across the city.

Back at street level, the essential snack is the empanada, either baked or fried and filled with beef and onion, cheese, vegetables or even seafood. To try the best, it's worth venturing a 45-minute drive out of the city to El Rancho de Doña María along Autopista Los Libertadores. At this no-frills roadside eatery the legendary Doña María serves her empanadas hot from a clay oven. While

you're there, note that Doña María is also renowned for her *leche asada*, or egg custard flan dessert.

The central La Vega Market is another essential stop for all your street-food needs, alongside colourful fresh fruit and veg and a real mix of locals. Among the best are *sopaipilla*, a fried disc of dough topped with spicy sauce, and the *completo*, a large hotdog topped with avocado, mayo, mustard and ketchup: aka the full works. The *cazuela*, a chicken soup that originated with the Mapuche is worth a try, too.

Great fish dishes are a given here, since Chile's 6,000km of Pacific coastline ensures access to some of the world's best seafood. The ceviche on the menu differs somewhat from Peruvian versions, usually made with small chunks of white fish and peppers. What the two countries have in common, though, is their love of *pisco sour*, a zingy cocktail made with local brandy, lemon juice and egg white. Both claim to have invented the drink, but regardless of its origin, the thirst-quenching beverage is both abundant and delicious throughout Santiago.

For the ultimate gastronomic journey from the Andes in the north to the southern tip of Patagonia, book a table at chef Rodolfo Guzmán's Boragó *borago.cl* the country's top-ranking restaurant. Over the course of a tasting menu, you'll discover wild fruits and flowers, seaweed and rock plants.

Chilean wine, of course, has a worldwide reputation. With grapes grown in terrains as diverse as the northern desert and the cold south, there are endless varieties to sample, but you won't go far wrong with a bottle of the country's famed *carménère*, with its deep red colour and notes of pepper and berries. ———>>



Photos by Emma Wood; Francesco Kemeny, Lorena Samponi/Unsplash



This page, clockwise from top left: find octopus and other seafood in abundance; grilled and plated up; street scene; clifftop view from the Miraflores district

As well as markets bursting with colour, offering a mix of Japanese, Chinese and Andean cuisine, the city that brought us ceviche is as likely to serve it up on street corners as in fine dining venues

L I M A , P E R U

A decade ago, the word 'ceviche' meant little to the average British food lover, whereas now menus and recipe titles have no need of translation, thanks to a handful of increasingly well-known Peruvian chefs who have brought the zingy marinated seafood dish to our shores. Back in Lima, ceviche is a staple found on every corner, a result of the wave of immigration from Japan to Peru at the end of the 19th century that led to Nikkei cuisine. To get a sense of the prominence of ceviche culture, sample a dish at a counter in the Mercado de Surquillo, an indoor market favoured by locals, including top chefs, for its enormous variety of top-quality seafood, fruit and vegetables. While you're there, look for Huerta-Chinén where you'll get a good-value sit-down meal - order a traditional mashed potato *causa* (a layered terrine) or *cau cau*, a beef tripe and potato stew.

The most delicious ceviche is arguably found at Tomás Matsufuji's legendary hole-in-the-wall restaurant Al Toke Pez in the Surquillo district, which comes complete with giant crunchy corn and chunks of sweet potato. To sample it in a fine-dining setting head to Astrid y Gastón en.astridygaston.com in upmarket San Isidro, which offers a tasting menu within the beautiful historic Casa Moreyra. La Mar lamarcebicheria.com in swanky Miraflores is another favourite for seafood and the national pisco sour cocktail (just don't mention it to the Chileans, see previous

spread) - there are no reservations, so factor in queue time. Head to Maido maido.pe which topped Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants three years in a row, for chef Mitsuharu Tsumura's Japanese-influenced tasting menu or straight-up à la carte sushi.

But it's not all about Nikkei. Chifa, or Chinese-Peruvian, is another important cuisine thanks to the city's large Chinese population. One Cantonese classic is 65-year-old restaurant Chifa Titi chifatiti.com which serves dishes like pork-fried rice, mooncakes and delicious fat wontons. Madam Tusan madamtusan.pe is a favourite for dim sum and chicken-fried rice.

Colour shines through Peruvian culture, from the crimson and pink clothes worn by Andean communities to the bright green avocados and red and yellow cacao pods that adorn every market shelf. Taste local fare at Isolina isolina.pe a two-storey restaurant within a house in bohemian Barranco, in traditional dishes such as chicken stew and a stir-fried beef dish known as *lomo saltado*.

Destination diners will want to make a reservation at world-renowned Central centralrestaurante.com.pe run by husband-and-wife team Virgilio Martínez and Pía León, who also have upstairs haunt Kjolle. Using ingredients from all over Peru, like piranha and cacao mucilage (the pulp surrounding the bean), Central explores the country's biodiversity via a multi-course menu - a superb way to travel the country over the course of a meal. —————>>



Opposite page, clockwise from top: the vibrant city; colourful veg is on sale everywhere; stuffed squid; painted houses; tubers at the market; a potato seller; Convento de San Francisco



Photos by Robert Pogson; Sarah Coghill; Emma Wood; Aarom Ure; Andres Urena; Fabio Hanashiro/Unsplash; Natalie Pecht



Shrugging off its war-torn reputation, this laid-back city is welcoming visitors with open arms – and what feasts await, with inventive young chefs returning to put a fresh spin on native produce

This page, from left: pumpkin flesh for sale; a vendor displays her array of chilli products; corn sold on the street. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: white stucco blends in with modern architecture; view over the rooftops; restaurants line hilly streets; papayuela fruit; sweet beans of the native chachafruto plant; pinto beans; market lemons and limes; pastel facades; coffee on tap; a crate of tree tomatoes; city scenes

BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA

With tourism only recently opening up after years of civil war, Colombians are understandably some of the most welcoming people in Latin America, and their laidback spirit shines through in a new crop of unpretentious restaurants. Many now serve previously undiscovered ingredients and at 2.6km above sea level, the capital feels unique. Dining rooms have been built into old houses on hills in trendy neighbourhoods like Chapinero Alto, where a bunch of young chefs have returned from training overseas to put their own spin on Colombian produce.

One such chef is Alvaro Clavijo, whose restaurant *El Chato elchato.co* offers a dessert with lemongrass, marshmallow and *mambe*, a green powder made from coca leaves that has long been used by indigenous communities. Meanwhile, *Salvo Patria salvopatria.com* serves Amazonian fruits and seafood like snapper from the Pacific, as well as macambo, a fruit from the cacao family.

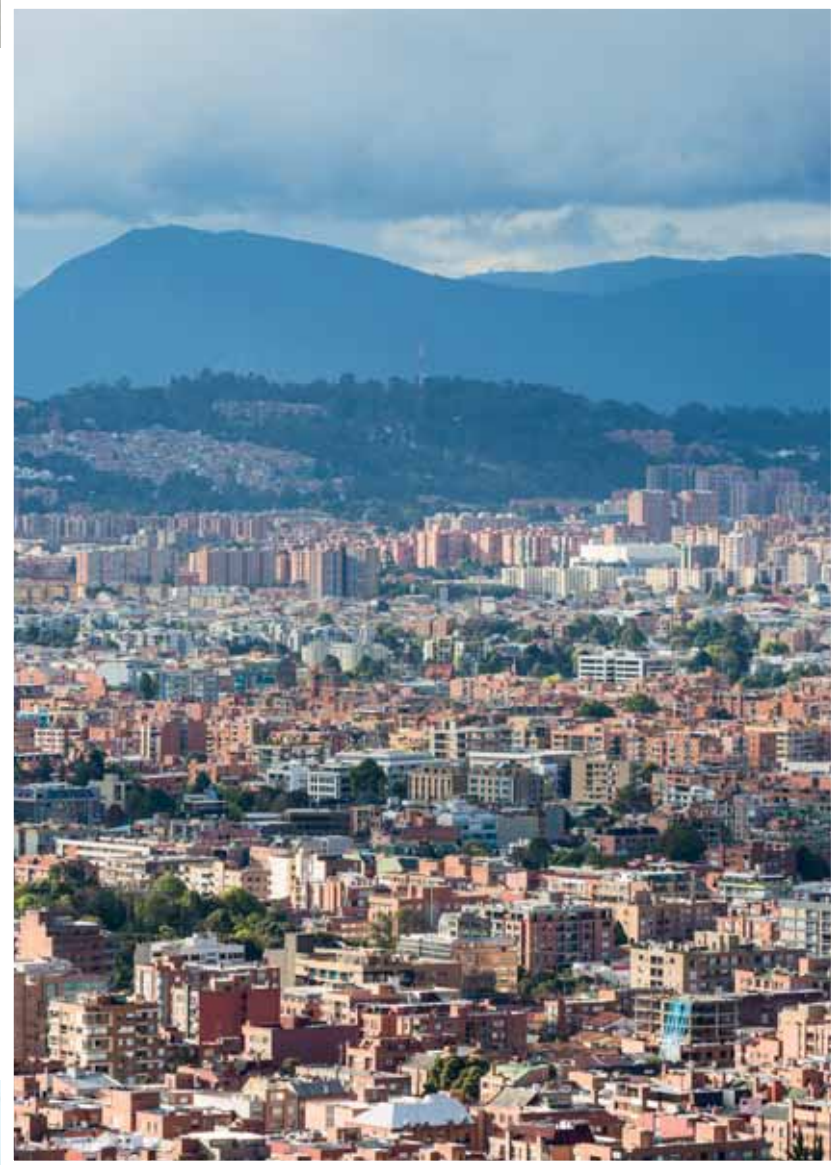
Traditional cuisine should be sampled too, including *bandeja paisa*, a meaty platter of sausage, beef, fried egg, beans, rice and plantain – comparable to a Full English. Another staple is *ajiaco*, a hearty soup made from chicken, several types of potatoes, sweetcorn, avocado and capers. Try it at La Puerta Falsa, *Calle 11*, a tiny, 200-year-old restaurant in the historic centre of Candelaria that also specialises in tamales, or at La Plaza de Andrés

andrescarnederes.com an eclectic food court. Don't miss fresh smoothies with Colombian *guanábana* (soursop) and guava.

Street food generally means *arepas*, deep-fried cornmeal discs stuffed with scrambled eggs or meat or topped with butter and salt. Other fried goods include the empanadas found across the continent, deep-fried cheese balls known as *buñuelos* and plantain discs called *patacones*. The entirely women-run Plaza de Mercado la Perseverancia food court, which starred in Netflix's *Street Food: Latin America* series, is a one-stop shop for them all.

As the world's third-biggest coffee producer, Colombia is naturally the place to come for a world-class brew, and there's a burgeoning craft coffee scene. Start at Amor Perfecto in Chapinero, one of the oldest speciality coffee shops, for a cold brew or Chemex drip coffee, or seek out Devoción, a brand found in many cafés that supports farmers in conflict-affected areas. Meanwhile, the best pastries, sourdoughs and grilled cheese sandwiches are at Masa, a series of cafés run by two sisters.

Finally, a night at Andrés Carne de Res *andrescarnederes.com* a vast restaurant-cum-club a little out of the city centre, is a rite of passage for any Bogotá first-timer. Alongside cocktails and Latin American wines, locals and visitors tuck into anything from steaks to ceviche before dancing into the early hours. ➔



Photos by Sarah Coghill and Robert Pogson



Clockwise from top left:
 a group of vineyard
 workers; in the town
 centre; an essential
 pour; harvesting the
 grapes; vineyard
 hopping is a must;
 grape picking by hand



The heart of Argentina's wine country naturally has superb tasting opportunities, but along with that comes a superb gastronomy usually sampled while gazing out over unrivalled scenery

MENDOZA, ARGENTINA

An obvious choice for oenophiles, Mendoza is the very heart of wine country in Argentina, which in turn is the biggest wine producer in South America. While the first vines were planted here some 500 years ago, the region really took off as a wine destination in the Nineties and is now synonymous with malbec. There are plenty of other grape varieties, though, with whites such as torrontés and reds including bonarda. The abundance of wineries means it's also a top gastronomic spot, with a huge variety of restaurants looking out over sprawling vineyards.

Francis Mallmann, the free-spirited Argentinian celebrity chef who is famous for cooking on fire, was one of the first to recognise Mendoza as a dining destination when he opened his 1884 Restaurant here in the late Nineties. A series of talented cooks followed suit, and now the city is packed with options. A local favourite in the centre is Fuente y Fonda fuenteyfonda.com a homely spot serving oozing lasagnes and *provoleta*, the national grilled cheese dish. A little further out of the city is Siete Fuegos vinvesresortandspa.com another of Mallmann's restaurants, where guests can enjoy a ribeye cooked over nine hours on the open flame overlooking the Vines Resort & Spa vineyards.

Try Mendoza's version of empanadas - baked instead of fried, and usually filled with beef, onions, boiled egg and olives - at Casa del Visitante at Bodega Santa Julia santajulia.com.ar in

outlying Maipú, where chef María del Carmen Vicario took the crown in the 2019 empanada championships. Then see the butchers and fruit and veg sellers in action and try a slice of ham and bell pepper pizza at the historic, untouristy Mercado Central.

A wine tasting tour will be high on the agenda, and one of the best ways to do it is by hiring a bicycle and hopping from vineyard to vineyard. Organised bike tours with companies such as Wine Paths winepaths.com and Mendoza Wine Camp mendozawinecamp.com typically involve around three winery visits with several tastings each and a lunch in a scenic location.

There are several distinct wine regions here, but Luján de Cuyo, a short drive from the centre, is considered the birthplace of Mendoza's wine industry, with vines planted at up to 1km above sea level. Visit Catena Zapata winery catenazapata.com to learn about the history of the family who pioneered the planting of malbec grapes at high altitudes in the early 1900s. Slightly further from Mendoza city is the Uco Valley, the newest wine region with vines planted in the foothills of the Andes. At Super Uco superuco.com a biodynamic winery run by four brothers, the vines are planted in a fascinating circular design. Those with less time should head to Trapiche Vineyard trapiche.com.ar in Maipú, the closest wine region to central Mendoza, to enjoy one of Argentina's oldest wine brands in a beautiful setting. ———>>



This page: clockwise from top left: ribeye served with sweet potato and onion, where hormone-free, grass fed cattle are the norm; palm-tree-lined vista; chillies piled high; the old railway station at La Paloma on the coast – a trip to the beach is easy to combine with a stay in the capital. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: painted bottles adorn a restaurant shelf; ready for a succulent cut; a gaucho herds cattle; rack of lamb; a vendor and his homemade sauces and preserves

With more cattle than humans, the continent's smallest country beckons carnivores with tender cuts cooked on the asado. The reverence for good ingredients extends to the capital's stalls and food trucks

MONTEVIDEO, URUGUAY

It may be the second-smallest country in South America, with a population of just under 3.5 million, but Uruguay rivals its larger neighbours in terms of its food and drink offering, from abundant steakhouses to eclectic street food and exceptional wines. With consumption of more than 50kg beef per person per year, Uruguay overtook neighbouring Argentina as the world's biggest beef consumer per capita just over a decade ago, and cows outnumber humans. Montevideo's inhabitants aren't about to give up their steak habit - Uruguayan beef is among the finest in the world, with high animal welfare and grass-fed, hormone-free cattle creating excellent flavour.

For an authentic taste, try it at an *asado*, or barbecue. A good place to start is La Otra Parrilla laotraparrilla.com a steakhouse that's been going since 2002 and offers all the classics from juicy chorizo to ribeye and skirt steak, which is among the most lauded in the city. For those who favour seafood over meat, the coastal city also boasts excellent options - one of the best, Es Mercat esmercat uy is considered a top spot for squid or sea bass.

Street food has a place in Montevidean hearts too, with essential bites including *choripán* a meaty hotdog also found throughout Argentina, and *tortas fritas* or fried puffed bread

stuffed with cheese. Don't miss the super-sweet *alfajores*, a biscuit sandwich filled with a layer of the sweet national staple, dulce de leche caramel. Head to the long boardwalk known as the Rambla to take your pick from various stalls and food trucks.

Widely considered Uruguay's national dish, *chivito* is a huge steak sandwich stuffed with the likes of melted cheese, fried eggs or tomatoes. Enjoy it at Bar Tinkal, *Dr Emilio Frugoni 853*, near Playa Ramírez, a 50-year-old restaurant run by the grandchildren of Spanish immigrants, or at Futuro Refuerzos in Colonia, which has some of the best sandwiches in the capital, including vegan alternatives. Another classic, Café Misterio cafemisterio.com.uy is an elegant, 30-year-old spot in Carrasco offering plates from sushi to homemade gnocchi. Jacinto jacinto.com.uy near Plaza Zabala is a popular joint run by two sisters offering fresh pasta dishes and salads alongside homemade bread and cakes, all washed down with a glass of tannat, Uruguay's signature red.

While the Uruguayan capital has culture and cuisine enough to keep you occupied for several days, South Americans often combine it with a trip to the local equivalent of St Tropez, the glamorous Punta del Este beach resort along the coast, which boasts its own fine set of gastronomic delights. □

