



# From PISCO To WAGYU

*A Culinary Adventure at La Mar Bellevue*

| BY TRACY ELLEN BEARD



Peruvian cuisine is a celebration of cultural convergence, shaped by centuries of Indigenous tradition and influenced by Japanese, Chinese, Spanish, African, and Italian culinary techniques. At La Mar Bellevue, this rich mosaic is presented with refined precision, translating Peru's coastal vibrancy into a modern, upscale dining experience in the heart of the Pacific Northwest. Part of an internationally acclaimed restaurant collection—with locations spanning Lima, Santiago, Bogotá, Madrid, Dubai, Miami, San Francisco, and beyond—La Mar Bellevue carries forward the brand's commitment to authenticity and innovation under the leadership of Gerente José Carpena and Corporate Chef Anthony Vasquez.

Stepping into the Bellevue dining room, I felt an immediate sense of warmth and understated sophistication. The restaurant's ambiance merges cosmopolitan polish with a distinctly Peruvian spirit, creating an ideal setting for Experiencia La Mar. This immersive tasting menu guides guests through Peru's diverse landscapes, flavors, and multicultural culinary history.

## Exceptional Cocktails & a Thoughtful Wine Program

La Mar Bellevue's cocktail and wine program stands among the most compelling in the region, balancing South American identity with world-class mixology. Pisco, Peru's iconic

grape brandy, serves as the foundation for many of the bar's signature creations. At the same time, the wine list highlights standout South American producers alongside internationally recognized luxury labels, all curated by an in-house sommelier.

I began the evening with a classic Pisco Sour, crafted with Caravedo Quebranta, lime juice, egg white, and Angostura bitters. Creamy, aromatic, and impeccably balanced, it honored the cocktail's century-old heritage. My friend Connie ordered the Cancha Old Fashioned, a smoky, cancha-infused bourbon cocktail enhanced with rich demerara and chocolate bitters—bold, elegant, and unmistakably Peruvian.

## The Heritage of Peru's Icons: Pisco Sour & Ceviche

Pisco's origins trace back to the mid-1500s, when Spanish settlers introduced grapevines to the Ica region of Peru and began distilling wine into brandy. The spirit takes its name from the port city of Pisco, which became a central hub for export along the southern coast.

The Pisco Sour gained prominence in the early 20th century. A 1903 Peruvian cookbook documented a pisco cocktail with lime, sugar, and egg white—an early blueprint of the modern drink. Around 1916, Victor Vaughen Morris, an American living in Lima, popularized the cocktail at his Morris Bar by



adapting the classic whiskey sour format. By the late 1920s, bartender Mario Bruiget refined the recipe with Angostura bitters, solidifying the Pisco Sour as a national symbol. Today, Peru celebrates it annually as a source of cultural pride.

### **Ceviche: A Cultural Anthem**

Ceviche—bright, fresh, and rooted in Indigenous coastal traditions—is another defining element of Peruvian cuisine. Over centuries, global influences, particularly Japanese culinary techniques, shaped the precise and elegant ceviche styles seen today. At La Mar Bellevue, these preparations showcase the harmony of acidity, texture, and bold flavor that define Peru’s gastronomic identity.

### **The Experience Dinner: A Journey Across Peru**

The Experiencia La Mar offers a curated exploration of Peru’s culinary landscape, requiring full table participation and delivered in a thoughtfully paced progression. Connie and I embraced each course with anticipation, knowing we were in for something extraordinary.

### **Ceviches & Tiraditos**

Our dinner opened with a vibrant showcase of raw preparations:

Chifa Ceviche – Atlantic salmon dressed in sesame leche de tigre, accented with pickled vegetables, Peruvian chili crunch, and crispy wontons, reflecting Peru’s Chinese-Peruvian Chifa tradition.

Nikkei Ceviche – Ahi tuna paired with Japanese cucumber, daikon, and Nikkei-style leche de tigre. Clean, balanced, and elegantly executed, this was a highlight of the evening.

Criollo Tiradito – Silky hamachi layered with aji amarillo sauce, topped with chalaca, choclo, and sweet potato chips, offering a nuanced interplay of texture and flavor.

### **Signature Courses**

The Concha Oka featured a pristine Hokkaido scallop crowned with a delicate cloud of 24-month Parmigiano Reggiano foam and a touch of lime. The parmesan foam added unexpected depth while maintaining refined lightness.

Next, the Halibut Solterito combined grilled Alaskan halibut with quinoa, cherry tomatoes, avocado, crispy lima beans, and an aji amarillo vinaigrette. The crunchy lima beans added a welcome textural contrast.

The Wagyu Adobo was exceptional—American wagyu beef cheeks simmered to perfect tenderness in a savory, tangy adobo sauce. Aji amarillo, butter, and mashed potatoes added richness and depth, making this one of the most memorable dishes of the evening.

### **Dessert**

Dessert arrived as a remarkable Torta de Chocolate, a rich yet airy Peruvian chocolate cake layered with manjar blanco mousse, dark chocolate shards, and chocolate-covered malt balls. The mousse—created by folding whipped cream into traditional manjar blanco—provided a smooth, luxurious finish.

### **An Elevated Expression of Peruvian Dining in Bellevue**

My night at La Mar Bellevue was more than a remarkable meal—it was an exploration of Peru’s culinary heritage interpreted through modern technique and world-class hospitality. From the historical depth of the Pisco Sour to the artistry of each ceviche and the richness of the Wagyu Adobo, every course reflected thoughtful craftsmanship and cultural storytelling.

La Mar Bellevue stands as a sophisticated gateway to Peruvian cuisine in the Pacific Northwest—vibrant, elegant, and deeply rooted in tradition. It is a culinary journey I will return to again and again. ❖