

Lima. When visiting Machu Picchu, most visitors first fly to the historic city of Cusco. The city marked a culinary milepost in 1998 with the opening of Inka Grill, now part of a six-restaurant collection, all in Cusco, that includes the innovative, elegant **MAP Café** (51/84-242-476). The restaurant puts a modern spin on a traditional dish dating from pre-Columbian times: cuy (guinea pig, still sold by street vendors in the Andean foothills), here served as a confit with mint and a local white bean called tarwi.

Until recently, leaving Cusco for Machu Picchu, about 50 miles away, meant leaving behind avant-garde Peruvian cuisine. Most travelers visiting the ruins stay in Machu Picchu Pueblo, an adjacent way station characterized by dive bars, tourist markets, and backpackers. The opening of two excellent hotels in the 1990s—Inkaterra's Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel and Machu Picchu Sanctuary Lodge—raised the town's dining standards. Qunuq, the restaurant at the **Sumaq Hotel** (sumaqhotelperu.com), launched in late 2007, lifted the bar even higher.

Qunuq chef Rafael Piqueras is an Acurio devotee who studied at the Lima outpost of Le Cordon Bleu. Unlike most Lima chefs, Piqueras emphasizes ingredients from the surrounding Andes, like alpaca and alluco (a yellowish root vegetable), as well as trout from Lake Titicaca, which he turns into a knockout ceviche. Guests can take a cooking class with Piqueras's sous chef to discover the formula: diced trout marinated in lime juice, rocoto chili, piquillo pepper, garlic, ginger, cilantro, and red onion, with sweet potato and Peruvian choclo corn with super-

FROM TOP: The pre-Columbian Inca ruins of Machu Picchu; **Sumaq Hotel** chef Rafael Piqueras's version of causa rellena; chef Claudia Canessa's honey-grilled shrimp atop mashed manioc for Rio Sagrado

size kernels—all local ingredients prepared sans gimmicks. "I wanted to make everything into foam or ice cream when I started studying modern techniques 10 years ago," says Piqueras. "But [now] it's more about letting the original textures show through."

His novo Andina (new Andean) menu also includes an excellent alpaca carpaccio served with porcini mushrooms, as well as chicken fingers coated in crunchy two-colored quinoa with Thai-Andean wasabi sauce. His rendition of causa rellena (a traditional dish of cold mashed potatoes layered with avocado and fish or chicken) comes as a Jenga-like tower of trout tartare, smoked trout, and shoestring yellow potatoes with a mint-flavored sour cream emulsion.

En route to Machu Picchu, visitors frequently pass through the Sacred Valley town of Urubamba. Here, **Rio Sagrado** (riasagradohotel.com), opened last April, is the latest in a string of luxury resorts where cuisine takes center stage. At its restaurant El Huerto, chef Claudia Canessa (the rare female chef at an haute Peruvian restaurant) takes a more rustic approach than Piqueras. She incorporates a large variety of organic vegetables, spices, and fruits grown on the hotel's compound into ravioli, spaghetti, and other such dishes. "We grow peppers like aji amarillo, aji limo, and rocoto," says Canessa. When tasting them, "you fly ... and I like that!" ■

