



Serving Mom's seviche

Chef Jose Garces shares variations of a childhood favorite with patrons of Philadelphia's Alma de Cuba.

Story by Sharon Sanders / Recipes by Jose Garces

As a youngster growing up on the northwest side of Chicago, Jose Garces always looked forward to Saturday lunch. While other kids knocked back hot dogs, canned spaghetti, or macaroni and cheese, Garces feasted on fresh seviche. The Latin-American dish of fresh fish cured, or "cooked," in citrus juice might have seemed exotic in America at the time—but not in the Garces home. Garces's mother, Magdalena, a talented home cook, was born in Ecuador,

that use poached fish and shellfish—ideal for those making seviche for the first time. Garces stresses the importance of using high-quality ingredients, from ripe tomatoes to fresh seafood. "Ten years ago, it may have been hard for home cooks to find fish fresh enough for seviche, but not now," he says.

where seviche is a national treasure.

"She made clam seviche, oyster seviche, and the classic shrimp or whitefish seviche with a marinade of diced tomatoes, orange juice, cilantro, and red onions," recalls Garces, who is now executive chef at Alma de Cuba in Philadelphia. (The restaurant is a partnership of Garces's mentor, New York City chef Douglas Rodriguez, a champion of Nuevo Latino cuisine, and restaurateur Stephen Starr.) "My mother inspired me to cook. I was always in the kitchen with her," Garces says.

Now, seven days a week, Garces treats diners at Alma de Cuba to a variety of exquisite seviches flavored with ingredients from around the globe. Assertive chiles, fragrant fresh cilantro, sharp red onion, creamy avocado, and other vivid ingredients lend bold flavor to his creations. Often they are topped with dried CornNuts, popcorn, or other crunchy garnishes.

Seviche wasn't on the all-Cuban menu when Alma de Cuba opened in 2001. "After being open for six months, we worked to make our menu lighter. There was a perception of Latino food being heavy and greasy," Garces says. "Our clients loved this lighter fare. Last summer, the seviches really took off. We expanded the offerings and now have a station devoted just to preparing seviches."

Even at home, Garces whips up seviche as an antidote to Philadelphia's hot, humid summer. He and his wife, Beatriz, a dentist, delight in Rainbow Seviche (see the recipe on page 204), along with clam and salsa verde, and shrimp and avocado seviches for warm-weather dinners. "We'll prepare three seviches with a salad. It's a meal," Garces says. "It's so refreshing."

Three seviches Garces shares include a traditional version with raw seafood, and two

Pineapple Seviche Mixto ▶

Mixto refers to a mix of two or more seafoods—here, shrimp, scallops, and mussels. The sauce designed to go with this dish also pairs well with grilled fish. Coconut water, the natural liquid inside a coconut, is used in the sauce.

SAUCE:

- Cooking spray
- ½ cup finely chopped red onion
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- ¼ teaspoon saffron threads, crushed
- 1 cup finely chopped fresh pineapple
- ¼ cup coconut water
- ¼ cup water
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch
- 2 teaspoons water
- ½ cup pineapple juice
- ½ cup fresh lime juice
- ⅛ teaspoon hot paprika

SEVICHE:

- 1½ cups water, divided
- 1 pound medium shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 1 pound bay scallops
- 24 mussels (about 1 pound), scrubbed and debearded
- 1 cup fresh lime juice
- ¼ cup finely chopped fresh pineapple
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped red onion
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh chives
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and finely chopped

REMAINING INGREDIENT:

- ¼ cup freshly grated coconut

1. To prepare sauce, heat a nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Coat pan with cooking spray. Add onion and garlic; sauté 2 minutes. Add saffron; sauté 30 seconds. Stir in 1 cup pineapple, coconut water, and ¼ cup water. Reduce heat to medium; cook 5 minutes or until liquid almost evaporates, stirring occasionally. Combine cornstarch and 2 teaspoons water, stirring well with a whisk. Add the pineapple juice and ½ cup lime

juice, stirring with a whisk. Add cornstarch mixture to pan; bring to a boil. Cook for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat, and stir in paprika. Cool completely.

2. To prepare seviche, bring ½ cup water to a boil in a large nonstick skillet; add shrimp. Cook, covered, 1 minute or until done. Rinse shrimp with cold water; drain and place in a bowl.

3. Bring ½ cup water to a boil in a large nonstick skillet, and add scallops. Cook, covered, 1 minute or until done. Rinse scallops with cold water; drain and add to shrimp.

4. Bring ½ cup water to a boil in a large nonstick skillet, and add mussels. Cook, covered, 2 minutes or until shells open; discard any unopened shells. Remove meat from mussels; discard shells. Add meat to shrimp mixture.

5. Combine 1 cup lime juice and next 5 ingredients (1 cup lime juice through jalapeño); stir jalapeño mixture into

seafood mixture. Cover and chill 1 hour.

6. Divide seviche evenly among each of 8 chilled bowls using a slotted spoon; top with 2 tablespoons sauce and 1½ teaspoons grated coconut. Serve immediately. Yield: 8 servings.

CALORIES 213 (18% from fat); FAT 4.3g (sat 1.3g, mono 0.7g, poly 1.1g); PROTEIN 28.5g; CARB 15.5g; FIBER 1.1g; CHOL 121mg; IRON 4.1mg; SODIUM 347mg; CALC 72mg

Nut Cracking

Fresh coconut water (the liquid inside a coconut) and coconut meat are essential to this recipe's success. To crack a coconut, drive a long nail through 2 of the 3 eyes with a hammer. Drain the coconut water into a bowl; chill. Place a bed of towels on the floor. Set the coconut on the towels; hit with a hammer until the shell cracks. Cut the white meat from the brown shell using a paring knife. Grate the coconut meat with a box grater or food processor.



Rainbow Seviche ►

Three types of fish are “cured” in slightly different marinades, resulting in a dish with complex layered flavor. Wrap each type of fish in plastic, and place it in the freezer for about 30 minutes to partially freeze. This makes it easier to dice.

- 1 pound sweet potatoes
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup lime juice, divided
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped red onion
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro, divided
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon sugar
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and chopped
- 8 ounces sushi-grade Yellowfin tuna fillets, diced
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup low-sodium soy sauce
- 8 ounces sushi-grade salmon fillets, diced
- 8 ounces sushi-grade grouper fillets, diced
- 1 tablespoon sesame seeds, toasted
- Cilantro sprigs (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 400°.
2. Bake potatoes at 400° for 1 hour or until tender. Cool. Peel potatoes; slice into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch rounds.
3. Combine $\frac{1}{2}$ cup juice, onion, 2 tablespoons cilantro, black pepper, sugar, and jalapeño, stirring with a whisk. Place 3 tablespoons of jalapeño mixture in a medium bowl; add tuna. Cover and chill 1 hour. Stir soy sauce into remaining jalapeño mixture; add salmon, tossing to coat. Combine remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup juice and 1 tablespoon cilantro, stirring well; add grouper, tossing well to coat. Cover and chill 1 hour.
4. Divide tuna mixture among each of 6 (8-ounce) ramekins or custard cups using a slotted spoon; repeat procedure with salmon and grouper. Divide sweet potato slices evenly among each serving. Place a small plate upside down on top of each ramekin; invert onto plate. Sprinkle each serving with about $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon sesame seeds, and garnish with cilantro sprigs, if desired. Yield: 6 servings (serving size: 1 ramekin).

CALORIES 251 (20% from fat); FAT 5.7g (sat 1.1g, mono 1.8g, poly 2.1g); PROTEIN 26g; CARB 23.7g; FIBER 2.9g; CHOL 53mg; IRON 1.7mg; SODIUM 423mg; CALC 57mg



Ecuadoran Shrimp Seviche

This dish is made with cooked shrimp. Serve with lightly grilled French bread to savor every drop of the sauce, which is made from grilled vegetables. CornNuts are a traditional topping; look for them with other snack foods at the grocery.

SAUCE:

- 1 large tomato, cored
- 1 small onion, quartered
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded
- 1 small green bell pepper, halved and seeded

Cooking spray

- 1 cup fresh orange juice
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup ketchup
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh lime juice

SEVICHE:

- 1 cup fresh lime juice
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped red onion
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped green onions
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ pounds medium shrimp, cooked and peeled

REMAINING INGREDIENTS:

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup diced peeled avocado
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup CornNuts, lightly crushed

1. Prepare grill to medium-high heat.
2. To prepare sauce, lightly coat the tomato, onion, and peppers with cooking spray. Place vegetables in a wire

grilling basket coated with cooking spray; grill 4 minutes on each side or until vegetables begin to blacken. Remove from heat; cool slightly. Combine orange juice, ketchup, and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup lime juice in a food processor. Add grilled vegetables; process until smooth, scraping sides of bowl occasionally. Spoon sauce into a large bowl; cover and chill at least 1 hour.

3. To prepare seviche, add 1 cup lime juice, red onion, green onions, and shrimp to sauce; stir well to combine. Cover and chill 1 hour. Divide seviche evenly among each of 6 chilled dishes; top with 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons avocado and 2 teaspoons CornNuts. Yield: 6 servings.

CALORIES 230 (19% from fat); FAT 4.8g (sat 0.8g, mono 1.8g, poly 1.3g); PROTEIN 25g; CARB 23.5g; FIBER 2.6g; CHOL 172mg; IRON 3.4mg; SODIUM 432mg; CALC 81mg



Sharon Sanders is a freelance writer and Certified Culinary Professional. She lives in Center Valley, Pennsylvania.