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Canchita Peruvian Cuisine: Chef Chavez nails down Peruvian food that works for Singaporeans

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The anticipation I'd built for myself leading up to my dinner at **Canchita Peruvian Cuisine** was palpable as the last I'd experienced Chef Daniel Chavez

(<https://www.instagram.com/chefdanielchavez/?hl=en>)'s cooking was years ago, in my previous role at another publication. That was more than five years ago, and that evening, I'd have the honour of being impressed, once again, by his culinary prowess, along with his wife, Chef Tamara Chavez.



Credit (<https://www.facebook.com/CanchitaSg/photos/230672202490016>)

Calling Dempsey their new home, Canchita is a world's apart from the former OLA Cocina del Mar, in terms of space, as well as flavours. The first thing I noticed was the dining area is split into two floors, allowing for a breath of personal space and freedom for each diner—especially handy during social distancing requirements. But more than that, its backdrop is Dempsey's luscious foliage, a trademark of the area that's unrivalled and a welcome shift away from the bustle of the CBD.

What I tried at Canchita



The evening starts off with **Crunchy Chips (S\$14)**, a plain Jane name for a seemingly addictive appetiser. It's a tumble of yam, potato, *canchita*, and purple sweet potatoes, with a side of rocoto chilli sauce. If you're wondering what *canchita* means, it actually casually translates to 'popcorn', explaining the repeated use of corn across their menu.

Needless to say, if you're a sucker for comfort food and prefer a safe entry to your dining experience at Canchita, this appetiser is a reliable bet.



I, however, love to switch my meals up when I have an opportunity to try new things, and especially at new places. The **Ceviche Clásico (S\$26)** speaks to the adventurer in me, with its use of white tiger's milk, red onions, sweet potato, and yes, *canchita*. While it doesn't scream 'unique', it forces my palate to ready itself for something with a bit more spunk. The fish is, needless to say, fresh and inviting, but it's the raw red onions here that lend its wonderful zing.



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I hold my breath just a little every time I order a taco, so it's a given that I did the same for the **Chicken Taco (S\$18)**. 'How could anything go wrong with a pedestrian *Chicken Taco*?', I ask myself. Its no-nonsense make-up of corn tortilla & beans, smokey mayo, onions, and chilli sauce sadly didn't prove itself, instead, showing up as an insipid offering of tender chicken that's barely seasoned atop a floppy tortilla wrap.

It pains me to grade Canchita's taco so poorly, given that I recall the wondrous plates of Peruvian fare that OLA once served—perhaps it is my own

downfall for comparing the two.



Like an answered prayer, the *Sudado Amarillito* (S\$34) swooped in like a masked crusader, to save the night. The Peruvian fisherman soup boasts ocean-sweet clams, and “*Chicha de Jera*“, along with *canchita* and corn cider. It packs quite a moreish punch as well as a pleasant wave of heat that envelops your tastebuds soothingly.

Order this on a rainy day, and I can guarantee you’ll be yearning for this for many stormy days to come.



Cooked similarly to risotto, the *Arroz Con Pato* (S\$36) also enlivens the evening's meal with its coriander & dark beer rice, crowned with duck confit, and Criolla salad. Every grain retains enough resistance to counter the fork-tender duck confit. The seasoning is immaculately restrained, teetering on the delicate line of being too salty.

This is the type of powerplay on a plate that I remember so fondly at OLA, and while I know it's an unfair comparison, I have to say, Chef Chavez's still got *it*.



To wrap up the evening of nostalgia, the *Tres Leches* (S\$14) served as the closing number. I'd forgotten to ingest my lactose pills before heading out, so I defaulted to not more than a spoonful of dessert, unfortunately. The utterly moist coconut cake was nowhere near as cloying or dense as it may look, making it an easy dessert for consideration if you're curious enough to order.

Final thoughts

The vibe at Canchita is breezier and more casual and fun, as is the direction of the menu. But more importantly, here we have the dynamic duo that is the Chavez couple leading the culinary crew, which is an exciting journey to witness.

I left the restaurant attempting to shake off my predispositions about Chef Daniel Chavez, and I'd like to believe I was successful. All I can think of now is when can I make time for a return to Canchita and why it's taken me so long to have a taste of undoubtedly superb Peruvian cooking.

Expected damage: S\$60 – S\$80 per pax

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Price \$\$\$

Our Rating ★★★★★

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An enthusiastic food editor/writer who is on a relentless hunt for the elusive commitment to stick to a workout plan. And who's obsessed with cats.

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