Canchita lives up to the hype

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There is something magical about South American food. The tingle from the heat, the tickle of the tartness - it is familiar yet new.

My exposure to Peruvian food has been limited to versions found outside of Peru, and so far, I have enjoyed whatever I have sampled.

At Canchita Peruvian Cuisine, I was constantly excited by what was presented in front of me.

Some restaurants are meant to be experienced in person, and Canchita is certainly one of those.

Located at Dempsey Road, the place is surrounded by greenery, evoking a sense of serenity.

While the surroundings tend to slow things down, the food gets the heart racing.



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Ceviche is probably the dish most associated with Peru, and Canchita's Ceviche Mixto (\$28) is impressive.

The seafood is fresh, and the tiger's milk (the marinade for the seafood) had me slurping.

I love how bright it is, and how it wakes up the appetite for the meal ahead. And it stops just short of being overwhelming.

TACOS

Another typical food item from South America is tacos, and the version here is called The Tacos of Love (\$22 for two).

It comes stuffed with a mix of pork chorizo sausage, tiger prawn, pineapple, pickled onion, Mexican beans and, of course, avocado.

It is a huge bite and a joyous one because the different ingredients and flavours come bursting through.

Go easy on the accompanying habanero sauce though - the spice level is through the roof.

Smooth and comforting, the Arroz con Mariscos (\$34) is also a plateful of flavours.

Short grain rice is cooked into a garlic pilaf, then accompanied with crayfish and a sauce that features Peruvian yellow chilli, and it is rounded off with Parmesan cheese and crab butter.

While the Lomo Saltado (\$42) is not bad, it is a tad boring.

Essentially, it is Cantonese-style Peruvian stir-fried beef tenderloin, served with crispy thick potato fries.

The restaurant also serves Alfajores (\$14), a delicious tedious-to-make butter cookie, but it is the more common Tres Leches (\$14) that drew me in.

The coconut cake is adorned simply with strawberries and pastry cream, and the well-known combination works as always.

Usually I leave my desserts half-eaten, but I completed this one - and even contemplated ordering one more to go.

Sometimes, hyped-up restaurants fail to live up to expectations, but thankfully, it was not the case with Canchita.

From Sept 11, it will offer brunch items, and it should give you one more reason to dine there.

Canchita Peruvian Cuisine Block 9A & 9B Dempsey Road, Tel: 8028-1994 Opens Tuesday to Friday, noon to 2.30pm, 6pm to 10.30pm; weekends 11.30am to 10pm

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