

# DINING OUT

## Peruvian dishes take the spotlight on weekends El Tule began with Mexican food, but a cook from Lima moved in

Susan S. Yeske

A flavor explosion of Peruvian food has come to Lambertville, N.J.

El Tule, the Mexican restaurant that opened early this year on North Main Street, now also has a Peruvian menu each Friday, Saturday and Sunday. That's when Carmen Egoavil, the matriarch of the family who owns the restaurant, comes to El Tule to prepare the dishes that for years she has made at home for her family.

"We started with a few Peruvian specials, and people kept asking for more," explains Jack Egoavil, general manager of the restaurant and the son of Carmen and her husband Fausto. The entire family, who emigrated from Lima 20 years ago and lives in Bucks County, works at El Tule. That includes daughters Mechelle and Sylvia, and son-in-law Said Anguino, who is the chef in charge of the Mexican dishes on the menu.

Peruvian food, which is gaining momentum among foodies around the nation, had been hard to find in the Delaware Valley before El Tule expanded its menu. Now food fans are showing up at the pocket-sized restaurant on Main Street to try Carmen Egoavil's specialties, including ceviche limeno, fresh fish marinated in lime juice and mixed with red onions, cilantro and hot pepper. Served with sweet potato, fat kernels of yellow corn and potato, it is an example of homestyle Peruvian food at its best.

Quickly becoming a customer favorite is the Peruvian Sampler, a colorful plate filled with the four most popular appetizers at El Tule. They include palta a la reina, a half avocado stuffed with shrimp, red onions, tomatoes and corn and marinated with cilantro-lime dressing. It also includes a serving of papa rella, fried stuffed mashed potatoes with meat sauce served with red onions, avocado salad and salsa.



*A sampler-size portion of Peruvian Lomo Saltado shows off the beef sautéed in red wine, onions and tomatoes in the dish, which is served over crunchy potatoes with rice on the side.*

### Photographs by Susan S. Yeske

The restaurant offers Peruvian specials that change every three weeks. Currently on the menu is carapulcra, an ancient Peruvian stew that dates back to the time of the Incas. Carmen Egoavil adds her own culinary magic with Peruvian spices to the dish made from dried potatoes and pork.

Another reminder of the Incas comes in the form of Incan corn, served with some of the authentic dishes. One of dozens of varieties of corn grown in the fertile Andes, which was the birthplace of the potato and quinoa, Incan corn is roasted and eaten as a side dish, much like North American popcorn.

Authentic Peruvian food is popular among those in search of gluten-free foods, said Egoavil, because wheat is not used in cooking. Vegetarians also find plenty to like, he said, because many of the dishes are either vegetarian or come with

and quinoa.

After its wintertime opening, El Tule quickly gained popularity with locals, Egoavil said, with some customers coming as often as three times a week. On weekdays and nights they might choose from the extensive Mexican menu, while on weekends the Peruvian dishes move into the spotlight. Every day there are Mexican seafood, steak and pork dishes, and traditional favorites including enchiladas, burritos, tamales and tacos.

El Tule takes its name from the El Tule Tree in Santa Maria del Tule, Mexico. The tree has a circumference of over 160 feet at its base, and is estimated to be between 2,000 and 3,000 years old, making it one of the oldest living things on earth. For the Egoavils it symbolizes the spreading comfort and shelter of family working together.

Whether looking for traditional Mexican food or the chance to try homestyle Peruvian dishes, expect a warm, family-style welcome at El Tule.

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*From left, Alvaro Hernandez is sous chef, Said Anguino is head Mexican chef, Carmen Egoavil is the Peruvian chef and Jack Egoavil is general manager at El Tule in Lambertville.*

### EL TULE

49 N. Main St.,  
Lambertville, N.J.

609-773-0007

[eltulorestaurant.com](http://eltulorestaurant.com),  
Facebook.

**Cost:** Mexican small plates \$4-\$12, entrees \$10-\$17, sandwiches \$7.50-\$8.50. Peruvian appetizers \$8-\$20, entrees \$14-\$17.

**Hours:** Tuesday-Thursday 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., Friday-Saturday 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., Sunday 7 a.m.-9 p.m.

**Signature dishes:** Peruvian Lomo Saltado, beef sautéed with onion and tomatoes and served with rice; Carapulcra, a traditional stew made with pork, dried potatoes and spices; a variety of ceviche, made with fresh fish marinated in lime juice and mixed with peppers and other vegetables. Mexican Falda de Res en Rajas Poblanas, skirt steak with poblanos and tomatoes; Pescado Ranchero, pan-seared tilapia over pan-seared spinach; and Mole Oaxaca, chicken breast topped with Oaxacan mole sauce.

BYOB

