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THE DISH

From Tokyo to Lima with Love

Hong Kong's new Nikkei eatery serves ceviche, *tiradito* and *causa* with a wink and a nudge. **Diana Hubbell** swings by for a bite.

The "Feed Me" menu at TokyoLima is a parade of small plates.

COURTESY OF TOKYO LIMA



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Sake on ice; the open kitchen; *la causa*, topped with tempura prawn; the sultry Smoking Gun cocktail.



THE BARTENDER LIFTS THE LID

on a miniature treasure chest inked with Chinese characters and a heady plume of perfumed smoke escapes. When the fog clears, I see the scarlet glint of a Smoking Gun, a sultry spin on a negroni. A basket of miso-brined *karaage* (Japanese fried chicken) materializes beside it. The latter is dubbed “ki-mo-chi,” which roughly translates to “feel good.” As for the colloquial meaning in Japan—well, you’ll have to ask Google about that.

“We’d been open for two weeks before I noticed that guys kept giggling every time they ordered it, while the women looked confused,” says Luis Diez, the restaurant manager, shaking his head. “So I looked it up on my phone and... Oh.”

The man behind the cheeky moniker is chef Arturo Melendez. “I don’t want my food to be too serious,” he says. “I hate when you have these long descriptions on the menu that take more time to read than the dish does to eat.”

His flare for fun shows here at **TokyoLima**, a slick new eatery showcasing Japanese-Peruvian cuisine in Central. The sexed-up *izakaya* (gastro-pub), with gleaming brass accents centering on an open



kitchen, has a vast selection of ice-cold sakes and clever cocktails that keeps patrons buzzing until 3 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. But don’t let the drink menu distract you from the main act: the food. Order the “Feed Me,” an *omakase*-esque experience, where a seemingly endless parade of dishes like tuna tartare with watermelon, *la causa* (seasoned mashed potatoes with toppings), and *tiradito* (raw marinated fish) appear in quick succession. The courses may fly by fast, but they are the product centuries of tradition.

“People ask, ‘Oh, so you’re doing fusion?’ But there have been Japanese people in Peru for over 200 years. For Latinos, history already did its thing; now we just have to interpret it. The Spanish, the French, the Chinese and Japanese:

they all transformed our cuisine,” says Melendez, who happens to be part Nikkei. As the first Peruvian chef to open a Peruvian restaurant in Hong Kong, he’s been both a passionate advocate of his country’s cuisine and a something of a culinary anthropologist. He takes note of how Cantonese words, like “ginger,” crept into Peruvian dialect, and how Moroccan *escabeche* helped produce what we know as ceviche.

While inspired by Peru, his style isn’t one you’d find there. “It’s my own interpretation,” Melendez says. “Nikkei cuisine started as an attempt to recreate Japanese food with Peruvian products, whereas mine is more Peruvian cuisine with Japanese products,” like the Hokkaido sea scallop ceviche.

He may get playful with his plates, but he is a stickler for the details, especially when it comes to sourcing seafood. “Hey, a wild chef needs to use wild fish,” he says with a laugh. “You could use farmed sea bass for ceviche, but it would lack flavor. If a sea bass comes from the ocean, it tastes of the ocean.”

It’s a buttoned-down blend that’s one part Tokyo, one part Lima, and all part of the modern-day melting pot of Hong Kong.

tokyolima.hk; mains HK\$260-\$360; “Feed Me” menu HK\$480.