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## Have lunch and tour a farm with Peru's 'Potato Whisperer'

Along with cuy (guinea pig) and corn, no culinary ingredient holds such a special place in Peruvians hearts than the potato. And now visitors have the opportunity to interact with one of the country's most renowned potato farmers.



Oca on display. Image by Kelly Magyarics

Twelve thousand feet above sea level in the country's Sacred Valley, Manuel Choque grows more than twenty varieties of oca, colorful tubers whose variety in appearance is matched only by their marked differences in flavors. Known as “uqa” in the native Quechua language, oca thrive in the Andes because of their tolerance for poor soil, high altitude and harsh climates.



[Sumaq Machu Picchu Hotel](#), one of the closest properties to iconic Inca citadel, is now offering an excursion to Choqqe's oca farm before or after a stay at the hotel. "We tapped the expertise of Mr. Choqqe to introduce and immerse guests in a [gastronomic experience](#) that showcases the centuries-old importance of this singular product, which is essential to [Peruvian](#) cuisine," said Angie Clavijo, general manager of Sumaq Machu Picchu Hotel. "Today's travelers are eager for unique cultural insights [like] the know-how of a true Peruvian agricultural innovator."

The day starts with private transportation to the ten-hectare organic-practising farm about an hour from [Cuzco](#), which supplies oca to area hotels and restaurants. Here guests walk through the fields, which just before harvest in May and June are awash in vibrant flowers. Back on the property adjacent to his house Choqqe explains the differences in flavors among the different colors and shapes of oca with the help of a tour guide translator, as well as how their striking colors are the key to their nutritional benefits including antioxidants and Vitamin C.





Visitors also taste four kinds of fermented beverages he's crafting using oca that are similar to wine: a drier white, rosé, sweeter white and a red that's actually fooled pros in a blind tasting into thinking it was a fruity red. (Don't miss the bowl of addictive potato chips made with fuchsia, gold and purple oca which serve as the perfect palate cleanser.)

Take one or several glasses to a three-course lunch served in an open-air tent with traditional rustic wooden furniture and clay utensils, prepared by a hotel chef featuring (what else?) oca. A corn and oca soup is followed by a bowlful of steamed oca accompanied by two Andean dipping sauces: one made with yellow chilies and another with muña, an herb that's similar to mint. A warm creamy potato custard ends the meal. Future menus may include a meat course with pork, duck or chicken.



Oca is incredibly versatile. Image by Sumaq Machu Picchu Hotel

“Getting out into the fields and spending time with our Potato Guru makes the tour a [one-of-a-kind opportunity](#) for travelers... that will bring them closer to our Andean communities and their traditions,” says Clavijo.

Small potatoes, big experience.

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