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The National Aquarium offers a taste of the Amazon

Apr 30, 2012 - by [Lisa Shapiro](#)

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Who could be a more knowledgeable host for a dinner showcasing an exotic marine species than the National Aquarium? No one; that's precisely the point. The **National Aquarium's Fresh Thoughts sustainable seafood dining series**, now in its second year, is designed to help increase the understanding of sustainable seafood practices. Each dinner, which is offered three times per season, is themed around a sustainable seafood choice that is available in this region.



Setting the table for fresh thoughts. Photo by L. Shapiro

Most recently, the National Aquarium, Washington, DC, hosted a special dinner on Wednesday, April 25, that showcased a taste of the Amazon! National Aquarium employees, members, and guests mingled during the cocktail reception followed by a spectacular four-course meal featuring sustainable paiche, a South American tropical freshwater fish. Paiche, is a living fossil and one of the largest freshwater fishes in the world. During the cocktail reception and dinner, a slideshow was presented for guests to be able to catch of glimpse into their journey to Peru.

Amazona, a respect for nature initiative located in Peru hosted Xavier Deshayes, executive chef at the **Ronald Reagan Building** and International Trade Center, and his team in order to familiarize them about paiche, the culinary ancient delicacy, also referred to by culinary connoisseurs as the Amazonian Cod. Amazona, specializes in naturally producing and commercializing Paiche and other Amazonian species, using environmentally friendly methods and supplies, raised in total harmony with its natural habitat, assuring an environmentally sustainable year-round supply.

Chef Xavier Deshayes, after returning from his expedition to Peru, crafted an Amaz-ing (pun intended) four-course dinner menu inspired by his educational journey. For the first course, chef Deshayes prepared a fresh salmon ceviche with bright yellow corn, colorful purple potatoes, topped with pisco shavings, adding a delicious crunch to each bite. The ceviche was artfully prepared and presented in a martini glass.



Salmon Ceviche. Photo by L. Shapiro

The second course was the "MSC certified" sea scallops with Caribbean Culantro Quinoa Pilaf. The **Maine Stewardship Council (MSC)** has developed standards for sustainable fishing and seafood traceability and offers a fishery certification program and seafood ecolabel to reward sustainable fishing. The sea scallops that were served at the dinner meet that gold standard.

While the sea scallops were delicious, it was the Culantro that stole the show. This biennial herb

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Sea Scallops. Photo by L. Shapiro

The paiche fillet was thick and white and had a subtle and elegant taste, similar to a white fish such as orange roughy, but is more dense. Like other white fish, Paiche provides a great deal of diversity when pairing flavors. It is quite firm when cooked and has no bones. The polenta added a nice texture to the fish, and the tangerine added a bit of sweet to the dish.



Dessert custard. Photo by L. Shapiro

The dessert as a grand conclusion was a show-stopper and created quite a stir with its presentation. The "manjar blanco" caramel milk custard with port wine toasted meringue, blue corn pine nut tuile, and tropical fruit salsa was very rich. The custard was silky smooth and very sweet with the meringue was crispy and just a tad tart. So full from the other courses, I was barely able to eat it at all. It was lovely, though.

The next and final **Fresh Thoughts sustainable seafood** dinner for the season will be in September.

More about the Aquarium:

Established in 1873, as part of the Federal Fish Commission, the National Aquarium operates as a nonprofit aquatic education and conservation organization with the mission to inspire conservation of the world's aquatic treasures. Though the National Aquarium has changed locations, to the Department of Commerce Building in 1932, it is considered the longest continuously operating aquarium in the United States. The Washington, DC location holds approximately 3,000 live specimens.

In 2003, the two separate aquariums in Baltimore, MD, and Washington, DC, joined as one National Aquarium. The National Aquarium venues together hold living collections that include more than 16,000 animals from more than 660 species of fish, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals living in award-winning, naturalistic habitats.

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Tags: **Fresh Thoughts**, **National Aquarium**, **paiche**, **Sustainable seafood**, **Xavier Deshayes**

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Lisa Shapiro

2 Responses to "The National Aquarium offers a taste of the Amazon"



Lauren

Great descriptions!

indigenous to continental Tropical America and the West Indies, is used in dishes throughout the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Far East; however, is relatively unknown in the United States. Apparently it is often mistaken and misnamed for its close relative cilantro — which has a strikingly similar taste, as well.

For the main course, the paiche was pan roasted and served on a bed of fresh corn polenta with tangerine serrano mojo sauce.



Paiche fillet. Photo by L. Shapiro

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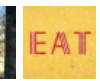
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It was such a nice dinner, nice people, nice setting, great conversations, and of course, Chef Xavier did a great dish with Paiche fish.

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