



Ceviche Salad with Avocado, Cilantro and Green Chile

Ensalada de Ceviche con Aguacate, Cilantro y Chile Verde



Ceviches, the wonderful lime-marinated seafood cocktails of Latin American, are experiencing an evolution. In Mexico, for centuries ceviche has meant ultrafresh fish or shellfish that's preserved/marinated/"acid-cooked" in lime juice. But many modern chefs have broadened the concept to include practically any bold-flavored combination of seafood, vegetables, chiles, herbs, even fruit, that can be served as a cool appetizer or snack, usually with a bracing bolt of lime. My version here is pretty traditionally Mexican except that the fish in Mexico would likely be mackerel or kingfish, it would typically be marinated long enough to "cook" through and it would be served in a glass bowl or on a tostada, rather than nestled into greens. I've recently become enchanted with the Peruvian take on ceviche (the fish is marinated only moments before serving), especially since sashimi-grade fish (the top, okay-to-eat-raw grade) is becoming more common in our fish markets. Whatever your marinating preference, this salad is just the ticket on a warm summer night, served with crusty bread or crackers.

Serves 4

1 cup fresh lime juice
 2 garlic cloves, peeled and roughly chopped
 1 cup (loosely packed) roughly chopped cilantro
 Fresh hot green chiles to taste (I like 2 serranos or 1 jalapeño), stemmed and roughly chopped
 Salt
 1 to 1 1/4 pounds sashimi-grade boneless, skinless fish (salmon, tuna and snapper are options you'll likely find), cut into 1/2-inch cubes
 OR 1 to 1 1/4 pounds medium-to-small cooked shrimp

1 ripe avocado, pitted, flesh scooped from the skin, and cut into 1/4-inch cubes
 1 large head Boston/butterhead lettuce (or an equivalent amount of Bibb lettuce), leaves separated
 1 green onion, roots and wilted outer leaves removed, thinly sliced crosswise, or a little chopped cilantro, for garnish

In a blender or food processor, combine the lime juice, garlic, cilantro, chiles and 1 scant teaspoon salt. Process until smooth.

Scoop the fish into a large bowl. Pour the lime marinade over it and let it "cook" in the lime juice to suit your own taste: you can eat it right away (Peruvian-style) if you like raw fish, or let it "cook" for an hour or 2 if you like it more well-done; cooked shrimp need only a few minutes to soak up the flavor. (It takes about 4 hours to "cook" fish well-done in lime juice; if that is your desire, add the cilantro, chopped, just before serving to preserve its fresh color.)

Pour off half of the marinating liquid and set aside. Toss the avocado with the fish, then taste and season with additional salt if you think necessary.

Divide the lettuce among four dinner plates. Scoop a portion of the ceviche into the center of each arrangement. Sprinkle with the chopped green onion or cilantro. Drizzle some of the reserved lime marinade over the lettuce, and you're ready to serve.

Ceviche Riffs (Some for the Adventurous)

Practically any edible piscine morsel can be made into ceviche: Squid and baby octopus are favorites—I simmer both of them until tender (usually 20 to 30 minutes) before marinating them. Scallops are wonderful raw and barely marinated, as are sardines. Around Guadalajara, the fish markets offer ground fish for making ceviche to pile on little tostadas—it cooks through in a matter of minutes; if that appeals, look for ground fish for fish cakes in your local fish market. Avocado is just a start when it comes to add-ins: tomato, red or white onion, olives, cooked cactus (nopales), roasted poblano chile—these should get your creative juices flowing.