

Chicama, Chelsea

I'd like to caveat this post by saying that our meal was kindly gifted on behalf of [Harper's Bazaar](#) magazine in exchange for a review

I'd heard whispers of this new-ish Peruvian seafood restaurant, the lesser-known sibling of London's [Pachamama](#) group, but I'd never found the chance to go. Tucked behind the rougher end of the King's Road, Chicama is one of Chelsea's best kept secrets (for now).

I arrived at 7pm and was a little surprised to find the restaurant so empty. On a Wednesday night just before Christmas, you'd have thought the place would be heaving. (I'm inclined to put this down to the glaring lack of pigs in blankets on offer.)

The waitress greeted me with a warm smile, took my coat and led me to our table. Motown music played gently from the speakers and I knew we were off to a good start. Despite the gorgeous and clearly expensive interior (think plentiful foliage, marble countertops and brass accents), Chicama had none of that stuffy atmosphere you often find at restaurants in Chelsea.

I ordered a cocktail and waited for my friend to arrive. The 'Paloma' (£10) arrived first – a pastel-pink, tequila-based concoction Barbie would have approved of. Historically, tequila was the only spirit I'd refuse a shot of (yes, even if it's free). The Paloma forced me to rethink. Paired with caramelized grapefruit and grapefruit soda, it was sweet and sharp in equal measure; an excellent start to the meal.

Meg arrived, in typical fashion, 15 minutes later, and we ordered up a storm – starting with the courgette and cornmeal beignets, herb mayo and chilli jam. At £9 for a plate of four, you might expect a more generous portion. But what these crispy morsels lack in size, they make up for in flavour. Despite the fact they're deep fried, they managed to be fresh and light, but the chilli jam on the side really stole the show.

Next up was the aubergine with plantain miso, sour cream and pecans (£11), which came highly recommended. I have to admit it wasn't love at first bite - I actually thought we'd mistakenly been brought a dessert it was so sweet – but I warmed to it. Wrapped in a layer of crispy batter akin to the fish at your local chippy, the aubergine was soft and smoky. The sour cream balanced it out, making for a slightly strange but ultimately very tasty dish.

While Meg wasn't overly impressed, I loved the smoked mushroom ceviche with ceps tiger's milk and smoked olive oil. (Contrary to what I thought, tiger's milk has nothing to do with the animal – it's traditionally made from lime juice, onion and chilli.) The mushrooms were nestled in a fragrant broth next to delicately shredded raw vegetables and herbs. It was deliciously light and something I could happily eat all summer long. Although at £11, I'd suggest that other dishes are better value for money.

Ceviche to Peru is what Sunday roasts are to Great Britain. So we thought it only right to try the sea bass ceviche with soy tiger's milk and sesame (£14). Bold in flavour, these tiny pieces of raw fish were some of the best seafood I've ever tasted. The spicy crab & green papaya salad with fresh herbs, sesame and crispy shallot (£16) was light and refreshing – I could've eaten buckets of the stuff. Black rice with chakalaka (a South African vegetable relish) was the perfect carb hit, and a bargain at £5.

A mix up with dessert meant that, to our delight, we tucked into a pudding each rather than one to share.

The special that day was a chocolate and coconut ice cream dish. Not something I'd usually go for, (not my most popular opinion but I consider ice cream to be empty calories), but this was amazing. The piura porcelana (a traditional cacao variety from northern Peru, in case you're as stumped as I was) with a black olive and chocolate crumb came in at £10 and was worth every penny. Kudos to whoever thought of dressing it in olive oil – it worked.

Our charming waiter – who I’m told was the manager – was impossibly polite and nothing was too much trouble. He even offered us a free cocktail on the house on our next visit, as if we needed another reason to return.

The kind of place where you can take your mates, a date or even your (adventurous) grandma, Chicama is not one to be missed. While not exactly budget-friendly, your stomach will definitely thank you for it. Book a table [here](#), or try one of their pisco sour-fuelled [ceviche masterclasses](#).