

Chinese Peruvian Stir-Fried Filet Mignon 🍖 Lomo Saltado

The first time I tasted lomo saltado was at Red Egg, a sophisticated Chinese Peruvian restaurant in New York City's Chinatown. The restaurant is owned by Darren Wan whose grandfather emigrated from Guangzhou, China, to Peru in the 1930s. The dish was indescribably delectable: the meat, tender and succulent, was lightly spiced with fragrant chili heat and refreshed by onions and tomatoes that were barely cooked—then so unexpected served over French fries. When Wan brought me into the restaurant's kitchen to watch the chef cook the dish I was surprised to discover filet mignon was used—no wonder the beef was so tender even without being marinated!

The Chinese began immigrating to Peru in the nineteenth century, and by the mid-1800s, there were over 100,000 Chinese living in Peru. The popularity of Chinese cooking in Peru has resulted in thousands of chifas, or Chinese restaurants, throughout the country. Lomo saltado is so popular with Peruvians that many make the dish at home.

A few months later in San Ramon, California, I met Luis Li, a native of Peru, whose father emigrated from Guangzhou to Peru in the 1920s. Luis kindly showed me how to prepare lomo saltado for the home cook. He explained to me there are many different varieties of the aji chili, but he prefers aji amarillo, a moderately hot, fruity chili native to Peru. He buys the chilies frozen in a local Mexican store, or he uses aji mixto, which comes in a 15-ounce jar. Li used 1 tablespoon of the frozen chilies and the dish was delicious but wildly hot. In the recipe I've given a range for cooks with tamer tastes. The Union Square farmers' market in New York City carries a variety of aji chilies in the summer. Li feels there is no

substitute for aji, but because this chili is so difficult to find, I have substituted one thinly sliced Thai chili, with seeds, in its place with very good results. Of course, the flavor of the dish will be superior if you are able to find aji amarillo.

Li also explained to me that he misses the incredible selection of potatoes available in Peru. He is not fond of American potatoes and prefers frozen potatoes from Peru. I call for a russet potato since frozen Peruvian potatoes are not an option in most markets. These potatoes are incredible because they are twice fried. There are apparently many ways to cook lomo saltado, including with and without sauce. Li prefers his without sauce and he mixes the French fries into the stir-fry just before serving. Timing is critical for this stir-fry. A minute too long and the beef will be overcooked. The moment it is done, transfer the beef out of the wok so it does not continue to cook.

- 12 ounces russet potatoes, peeled and cut into sticks 3 inches long by 3/8 inch wide (about 2 cups)
- 12 ounces lean filet mignon
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons red wine vinegar
- 3 cups plus 2 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 1 small red onion, cut into thin wedges (about 1 cup)
- 1 medium ripe tomato, cut into thin wedges
- 1/4 teaspoon sugar
- 1 to 3 teaspoons aji amarillo chili, seeded and cut into scant 1/4-inch-thick slices
- 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro

1. Pat the potatoes dry with paper towels. Line two large plates with several sheets of paper towels. Cut the beef with the grain in half. Cut each half with the grain in half so that you have a total of 4 quarters. Cut each quarter section across the grain into ¼-inch-thick bite-sized slices. In a small bowl combine the soy sauce and vinegar.

2. In a 2-quart saucepan heat the 3 cups oil over medium-high heat until the oil registers 300°F on a deep-frying thermometer, making sure the tip of the thermometer does not touch the pan. Carefully add the potatoes and fry 3 minutes or until they are tender. Remove the pan from the heat. Carefully remove the potatoes with a metal skimmer and drain on one of the paper towel-lined plates. Then discard the oil-soaked paper towels (because the potatoes sometimes will stick to the towels).

3. Reheat the same oil in the saucepan over medium-high heat until the temperature reaches 360°F. Carefully add the same potatoes to the oil and fry until light golden, about 2 to 3 minutes. Carefully remove the potatoes with a metal skimmer and drain on the second prepared plate. Then discard the oil-soaked paper towels. Let the hot oil cool before discarding.

4. Heat a 14-inch flat-bottomed wok or 12-inch skillet over high heat until a bead of water vaporizes within 1 to 2 seconds of contact. Swirl in the remaining 2 tablespoons oil, carefully add the beef, and spread it evenly in one layer in the wok. Cook undisturbed 1 minute, letting the beef begin to sear. Sprinkle on the garlic, salt, and pepper. Then, using a metal spatula, stir-fry 30 seconds, until the beef is lightly browned but not cooked through. Add the red

onions and tomatoes and stir-fry 30 seconds or until the tomatoes begins to soften. Swirl the soy sauce mixture into the wok, sprinkle on the sugar and chilies, and stir-fry 30 seconds or until well combined. Add the cilantro and fried potatoes and stir-fry several seconds until the ingredients are combined and the beef is just cooked.

Serves 2 to 3 as a main dish or 4 as part of a multicourse meal.



Luis Li stir-fries outdoors on a portable stove.