



← Pedro Jose Ramirez Flores and Mary Williams at their Peruvian restaurant, Doncha, in Fort Walton Beach. Doncha is a truncated version of “Don Chancha,” which is Spanish for Mr. Pig. The restaurant has a pig in its logo and pigs are scattered about the restaurant.

**DINING OUT**

# Mr. Pig *from Lima*

Peruvian restaurant serves authenticity

by LAURIE EINSTEIN KOSZUTA

**D**iners at Doncha Peruvian restaurant in Fort Walton Beach immediately have their senses met with pure Peruvian authenticity. From its eclectic decor to the aromas wafting from the kitchen, the family-owned restaurant is

steeped in the love and devotion of the food they serve.

“We want our customers to truly feel like they are eating a meal in a Peruvian home,” said Mary Williams, a native of Fort Walton Beach who owns Doncha alongside husband Pedro Jose Ramirez Flores.





The name Doncha is a shortened version of “Don Chancha” — Spanish for Mr. Pig — a nickname given to Ramirez as a child. Ramirez, a native of Lima, used the name for his business, which sold smoked meats to restaurants in Peru.

Doncha first opened in Fort Walton Beach in February 2020 in an unused portion of Chapala Mexican restaurant.

“We were there for just a year,” Williams said. “That was right at the start of COVID-19.”

The restaurant had a rough beginning, but its small size allowed it to prosper through carry-out orders. When the lease ended in March of 2021, Doncha moved to the current location on Perry Avenue.

“One of the first things we had to do when we opened was educate our customers about Peruvian cuisine,” Williams explained. “Many thought it was the same as Mexican food and were surprised when we didn’t serve chips and salsa or tortillas and they couldn’t order margaritas.”

Known for its bold fusion of flavors, Peruvian food consists of Asian and European influences while using indigenous ingredients such as potatoes, with nearly 4,000 varieties of the root vegetable available in Peru. Main staples include sweet potatoes, rice, yellow beans, onions, tomatoes and plantains. Multiple starches, like french fries, Peruvian mashed potatoes and rice, are served alongside beef, chicken or seafood.

“Several hours before the restaurant opens, my husband is in the kitchen prepping and making authentic Peruvian sauces and stews,” Williams said. “He is so picky about getting all the flavors and ingredients just right. When we travel, we seek out other Peruvian restaurants for comparison. If he orders a dish he feels is not authentic, he won’t eat it.”

Doncha’s extensive menu contains more than 12 appetizers and many choices of causa, a cold dish made of a top and bottom layer of mashed potatoes seasoned with lime juice and chili pepper. The middle is filled with meat, such as chicken or tuna, mixed with mayonnaise.

Ceviche is another staple on the menu, with more than 10 choices available. Ceviche, often considered Peru’s national dish, is fresh fish “cold-cooked” with fresh lime juice and spices. Mouthwatering picks include Ceviche Clasico »

➤ Pedro Ramirez got his start in business preparing and selling smoked pork to restaurants in Peru. In Fort Walton Beach, dishes (top photo) include smoked pork drizzled with a sweet sauce and served with rice, fried potato and salad. Art in middle photo depicts a scene in a Peruvian jungle. Servers Harumi Vega, Lilly Menjivar and Valery Mendez, left to right, roll silverware.







⌚ Clockwise from top left: Peruvian beers surround a shot glass decorated with Peruvian art; lomo saltado, a signature Peruvian dish made up of chunks of steak with onion and tomato and served with rice and French fries; ceviche — raw fish and onion cured in lime juice and “leche de tigre” and served with sweet potato and Peruvian corn; Darby Williams making a “Pisco Sour,” Peru’s signature cocktail.

de Pescado, a classic fish served with sweet potato and corn, and Leche de Tigre, a ceviche marinated in spicy lime juice and served with fried corn.


Filling out the rest of the menu are selections of saltados, a stir-fry of meat or vegetables served with french fries and rice; chaufas, fried rice with choice of meat, egg and green onion; at least five types of soups; and some options for kids are available, too.

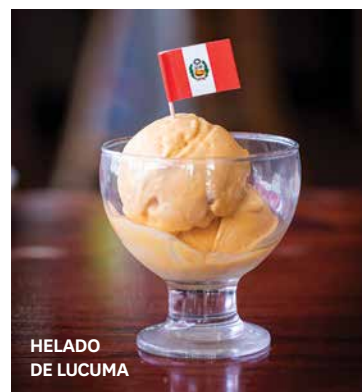
“We don’t sell anything that is not authentic Peruvian,” Williams said. “All of our bar drinks are made with Peruvian pisco or Peruvian gin. One of our most popular is the Pisco Sour, made with pisco, lime juice and simple syrup, and then shaken with an egg white to create a thick foam on the top.”

Ending a meal at Doncha has everything to do with satisfying a sweet tooth.

“About once a week, I make all of the desserts,” said Williams, who starts the process long before the doors open to have the restaurant kitchen to herself. “Fan favorites are tres leches de cafe, a sponge cake soaked in a sweet milk and coffee mixture and topped with chocolate drizzle and homemade fruit ice cream known as helado de lucuma.”

Truly a family business, servers at Doncha include Williams’ sister, Darby; her daughter, Valery; and Rebeca, one of Ramirez’s daughters.

“We hope to expand in the future,” Williams said with a wink. “We’ll just have to wait and see.” 



HELADO DE LUCUMA



TRES LECHE DE CAFE

**WHY DONCHA?** The restaurant is open Sunday through Thursday from 11 a.m.–8 p.m. and Friday and Saturday from 11 a.m.–9 p.m. During the summer months, Friday and Saturday hours are 11 a.m.–10 p.m. Visit [DonchaPeruvianFood.com](http://DonchaPeruvianFood.com) for reservations and more information.