



LATIN · MEDITERRANEAN · SPANISH-JAPANESE · APPETIZER / COLD COURSE

Swordfish Ceviche with Bottarga

Dense, meaty swordfish acid-cured in lime and finished with grated bottarga — two ocean flavors, completely different textures, meeting on a spoon.

Protein Swordfish

Serves 10-12

Difficulty Beginner

Active 15 min

Total 15 min prep + 30-60 min cure

THE STORY

The Whole Sea in One Bite

Most ceviche fish — snapper, sea bass, fluke — are flaky and delicate. They break down fast in acid. Swordfish is the opposite: dense, meaty muscle fiber with almost no connective tissue. It holds its cube shape for hours in lime juice without turning mushy. The texture stays firm with a slight chew — more like tuna tartare than traditional ceviche. Which makes it perfect for a boat day, when the container is sitting in a cooler for an hour before it reaches anyone's mouth.

Then the bottarga. Fine orange snow grated on top at the last moment. The ceviche is bright, clean, acidic — pure lime and raw fish. The bottarga drops a layer of briny, umami depth on top — like finishing sashimi with bonito flakes. Two ocean flavors meeting: one raw and fresh, one cured and concentrated. Completely different textures. The contrast is the dish.

AT A GLANCE

Specs

YIELD 10–12 servings	PROTEIN Swordfish	CURE TEMP Cold · 4 °C	DIFFICULTY Beginner ●○○○○
ACTIVE TIME 15 min	PASSIVE TIME 30–60 min cure	MAKE-AHEAD Yes — same-day	CUISINE Latin / Med / Japanese
COURSE Appetizer	PAIRS WITH Albariño, Txakoli		

UMAMI ADAPTATION

What Changed & Why

Traditional Peruvian ceviche is short-cured (10–15 min) with whole fish that breaks down fast. The adaptation uses swordfish for a longer-hold ceviche suitable for boat days and dinner parties, and introduces bottarga as a finishing umami element — a Mediterranean-Japanese bridge that wouldn't appear in a classic Lima preparation.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
SUB	Snapper or sea bass	Swordfish (dense muscle, no connective tissue)	Holds cube shape for 60–90 min — boat-day friendly
ADD	—	Bottarga di muggine, microplane-grated at service	Briny/umami counterpoint to pure acid — the Mediterranean-Japanese bridge
TECH	Submerged acid bath	Half-submerged cure (acid halfway up the fish)	Curing not drowning — preserves raw center

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
ELEV	Lime only	Lime + yuzu juice (No Limits)	Floral citrus complexity — the Japanese axis
SUB	Jalapeño only	Jalapeño OR ají amarillo (No Limits)	Deeper, fruitier heat vs sharp green heat — optional Peruvian depth

INGREDIENTS

What You Need

Everyday

The Ceviche

- 500 g swordfish steak (any fish counter — widely available)
- 6–8 limes, juiced (~120 ml)
- ½ red onion, very thinly sliced into half-moons
- 1 jalapeño, seeded and minced (leave seeds for more heat)
- 1 bunch cilantro, roughly chopped (stems included — more flavor than leaves)
- 1 tsp fine salt
- 1 tbsp good olive oil (drizzled at service)

Finishing

- Flaky sea salt
- Tortilla chips or saltines for serving

Substitution Notes

- *No swordfish?* Mahi-mahi is next best — firm, meaty, holds up. Snapper works but softens faster (eat within 1 hour).
- *No fresh limes?* Bottled works in a pinch but fresh is dramatically better — zest oils contribute aroma.

No Limits

The Ceviche

- 500 g swordfish steak — **sashimi-grade if available** (Honolulu Fish Co carries swordfish; ask for center-cut loin — fewer sinews, more uniform)
- 6–8 limes, juiced (~120 ml)
- 1 tbsp yuzu juice (adds floral citrus complexity lime alone can't reach)
- ½ red onion, thinly sliced, soaked 5 min in ice water (removes raw sulfur bite, keeps crunch)
- 1 jalapeño seeded and minced **OR** 1 tsp ají amarillo paste (Peruvian depth)
- 1 bunch cilantro, roughly chopped
- 1 tsp Maldon flaky salt
- 1 tbsp Arbequina EVOO, drizzled at service

Finishing — The Upgrade

- **Bottarga di muggine** — whole piece + microplane. Grate fresh over each bowl right before eating. *15–20 passes per serving.*
- Maldon flaky salt
- Microplane (bring it in the cooler bag)
- Optional: 1 avocado, diced, folded in at the last moment (richness against the acid)
- Tostones or high-quality plantain chips for serving

EQUIPMENT

Your Kit

- Sharp chef's knife + cutting board

- Citrus juicer or reamer (or hand-squeeze)

- Large mixing bowl

- Airtight container for transport

- Cold packs or cooler with ice

- Microplane (No Limits — for bottarga)

MISE EN PLACE

Before You Start

- Swordfish trimmed of sinew and bloodline, cut to uniform 1.5 cm cubes

- Red onion thinly sliced (ice-water-soaked if No Limits)

- Jalapeño seeded and minced (or ají amarillo measured)

- Limes juiced — yuzu measured if No Limits

- Cilantro washed, roughly chopped — HELD SEPARATELY (do not add to cure)

- Avocado diced and held in lime juice (No Limits, if using)

- Bottarga piece + microplane packed for the boat (No Limits)

- Airtight container sealed, cooler pre-chilled

MAKE-AHEAD

Timeline

- T-75 min — Prep**

Trim and cube swordfish (1.5 cm). Slice onion, soak in ice water if No Limits. Mince chile. Juice citrus. Wash cilantro (hold).
- T-60 min — Build**

Combine fish, lime (+ yuzu), onion, chile, salt in bowl. Toss gently. NO cilantro yet. Transfer to sealed container.
- T-60 to T-0 — Cure**

Into the cooler. Acid works for 30–60 min. Sweet spot for serving: 30–45 min total cure time.
- T-2 min — Finish**

Open container. Fold in cilantro (fresh and green). Fold in avocado if using. Drizzle EVOO.
- T-0 — Serve**

Grate bottarga over top (15–20 passes per serving, No Limits). Maldon. Serve with chips, tostones, or spoons.

METHOD

The Cook

1 Prep the Fish

1. Inspect the swordfish steak. Run your finger across the surface — feel for tough sinew or bloodline (the dark red strip). Trim these with a sharp knife. They're chewy and bitter.
2. Cut the swordfish into 1.5 cm cubes — uniform size matters here. Pieces too small (1 cm) will over-cure and turn rubbery. Pieces too large (2.5 cm) won't cure at all in the center.
3. Hold fish cold while you prep everything else. Warm fish + acid = faster, sloppier curing.

WHY THIS WORKS

The 1.5 cm cube gives the ideal ceviche texture after 30–60 min of acid exposure. The outer 2–3 mm sets opaque and firm (acid denaturation of myosin). The center remains translucent and sashimi-like. The contrast between cured exterior and raw center is the whole point of the dish.

2 Build the Ceviche

1. In a large bowl, combine swordfish cubes, lime juice (+ yuzu if using), sliced red onion, minced chile (or ají amarillo paste), and salt.
2. The liquid should come about **halfway up the fish**. *Don't submerge completely* — you want curing, not drowning. Half-submerged preserves the raw center.
3. Toss gently with a spoon or spatula. Do not mash — cubes should stay intact.
4. **DO NOT add cilantro yet**. Cilantro wilts and turns dark in acid. Add only at service.

WHY THIS WORKS

Citric acid from lime juice denatures surface proteins (primarily myosin) at the fish's surface, turning it opaque and firm — texturally similar to gentle heat cooking. But acid penetrates only 1–2 mm per hour. Full submersion doesn't speed up the center cure — it just over-cures the exterior. Half-submerged is the correct ratio for this cube size.

3 Cure in the Cold

1. Transfer to an airtight container. Seal. Into the cooler (or refrigerator if home service).
2. Let cure 30–60 min. This is the sweet spot: firm exterior, sashimi center.
3. Check at 30 min. The outer 2–3 mm should be opaque white. The center should still be slightly translucent.
4. If you miss the 60-min mark and go to 90+ min, the ceviche is mostly opaque — still good but losing the raw-center contrast.

WHY THIS WORKS

Cold (4 °C / 40 °F) slows the acid denaturation to a controllable pace. The window for ideal texture is wider in cold than at room temp — this is why ceviche is always a cold preparation. At room temp, the 30–60 min sweet spot collapses to maybe 15 min.

4 Finish & Serve

1. Open container. Fold in chopped cilantro — NOW, fresh, green, vibrant.
2. Fold in diced avocado if using (No Limits version).
3. Drizzle with EVOO.
4. **Grate bottarga over the top** (No Limits) — 15–20 passes on the microplane per serving. The fine orange snow melts slightly on contact with the cold, wet fish.
5. Finish with Maldon flaky salt.
6. Serve immediately with tostones, plantain chips, or just spoons.

QUICK REFERENCE

Timing Cheat Sheet

STEP	TIME	CUE
Trim + cube fish	5 min	Uniform 1.5 cm cubes, no sinew
Slice onion + soak	5 min	Translucent, no raw-sulfur snap (No Limits)
Juice + measure acids	3 min	~120 ml lime + 1 tbsp yuzu

STEP	TIME	CUE
Build in bowl	2 min	Liquid halfway up fish. NO cilantro yet.
Cure in cold	30–60 min	Outer 2–3 mm opaque, center translucent
Fold in cilantro + avocado	1 min	Fresh green, bright
Drizzle EVOO	30 sec	Even sheen, not pooled
Grate bottarga	1 min	15–20 passes per serving
Finish salt	15 sec	Maldon crystals visible on top
Serve	–	Cold. With crunch. Immediately.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Emergency Protocols

FISH IS MUSHY OR RUBBERY

Over-cured — too long in acid, or too much acid. Next time: cut cubes bigger (2 cm), use less lime, or shorten cure to 30 min. No fix once over-cured, but folding in diced avocado can mask texture issues.

FISH TASTES RAW OR SLIMY

Under-cured. Either not enough time, not enough acid, or the fish wasn't held cold. Add more lime juice, toss, wait another 15–20 min. Check texture — outer edge should be opaque.

TOO SPICY

Fold in diced avocado — fat binds capsaicin and mutes heat. Add more lime juice (dilutes heat while maintaining acid balance). Or add a splash of coconut milk (No Limits — Asian-Peruvian bridge).

FLAT / BLAND / ONE-NOTE

Under-seasoned. Three moves in order: (1) more salt, (2) more lime, (3) finish with bottarga — instant umami depth that lifts the whole bowl. If still flat: a small pinch of toasted cumin adds warm earthy bass note.

ONION TASTES TOO SHARP / RAW

You skipped the ice-water soak. Next time: slice, soak 5 min, drain. Removes raw sulfur compounds (allicin) while keeping crunch. For rescue now: fold in more cilantro and avocado to mute.

DEEP DIVES

Technique Notes

Acid Denaturation (Ceviche Chemistry)

FOOD SCIENCE · RAW PREPARATIONS · UNIVERSAL

Citric acid lowers pH enough that muscle proteins (primarily myosin and actin) unfold — the same denaturation that heat causes, just chemistry instead of thermal. The protein strands cross-link into a firmer, more opaque structure. Unlike heat, acid penetrates slowly (~1–2 mm/hour), which is why cube size is the primary texture control. Reference: Food Science Core §1 (protein denaturation), §10 (acid cookery).

Cube Size as Texture Control

KNIFE SKILLS · PRECISION · UNIVERSAL

The 1.5 cm cube is deliberate. At 1 cm, acid penetrates to the center in 30 min — the entire cube becomes opaque and rubbery. At 2.5 cm, the center never cures — the outer 2 mm firms up but the interior stays sashimi-raw, which some people perceive as under-done. 1.5 cm is the Goldilocks zone for a 30–60 min cure: ~3 mm of opaque exterior (enough to read as 'cooked') plus ~9 mm of slightly translucent, silky-textured center (sashimi payoff). Reference: Knife Skills §3 (dice sizes).

No Limits: The Bottarga Bridge

UMAMI · MEDITERRANEAN-JAPANESE · EXTENDS "FINISH & SERVE"

Bottarga di muggine (pressed, salt-cured mullet roe) is a Sardinian product with enormous concentrated glutamate content — the same umami compound that drives katsuobushi (bonito flakes) in Japanese cuisine. Microplaned over ceviche, it functions exactly as bonito does over sashimi: a briny, umami finishing that doesn't overpower the raw protein beneath. The dual nationality is the point. Reference: Sauces & Condiments §5 (umami synergy).

● No Limits: Ice-Water Onion Soak

PREP · ALLIUM CHEMISTRY · EXTENDS "BUILD THE CEVICHE"

Raw red onion contains propyl sulfoxides — the sulfurous compounds that give raw onion its sharp bite (chemically related to tear-gas compounds). Slicing thin and soaking in ice water for 5 minutes dissolves roughly 40-60% of these sulfoxides into the water, while the cold temperature preserves the cell-wall crunch. Drain, pat dry on paper towels, add to ceviche. The onion contributes its color, crunch, and sweet allium character without the aggressive raw-onion hit that can overpower delicate fish. Why ● only: the Everyday version uses plain sliced onion — simpler, more assertive, works fine for a home-cook ceviche. The ● version refines for dinner-party palate-sensitivity.

● No Limits: Yuzu as Citrus Amplifier

FLAVOR ARCHITECTURE · JAPANESE-SPANISH BRIDGE · EXTENDS "BUILD THE CEVICHE"

Yuzu (Citrus junos) has a uniquely complex aromatic profile — notes of grapefruit, Mandarin orange, and lemon with a floral, resinous top note you don't find in any single Western citrus. Added as 1 tbsp alongside the lime juice (not replacing it), yuzu provides a floral high-note that bridges the Peruvian-style lime cure with the Japanese-axis bottarga finish. The result is a citrus profile with more depth than lime alone. Source: bottled yuzu juice (Amazon, Asian grocery), or microplane fresh yuzu zest if you're lucky enough to find fresh. Why ● only: yuzu is \$15-25/bottle and specialty-sourced — Everyday tier uses lime-only, which is perfectly authentic to the Peruvian ceviche tradition. The ● adds a layer, doesn't replace one.

● No Limits: Ají Amarillo (Peruvian Depth Option)

FLAVOR ARCHITECTURE · LATIN AMERICA · SUBSTITUTES JALAPEÑO

Ají amarillo paste (1 tsp, in place of fresh jalapeño) gives a different heat profile entirely — fruitier, deeper, more complex. Ají amarillo is a Peruvian yellow chile (*Capsicum baccatum*) with its own aromatic signature distinct from Mexican/Central American *Capsicum annuum* cultivars. Jalapeño provides a sharp, green, herbal heat. Ají amarillo provides a warm, fruity, faintly smoky heat with a much longer finish. In the context of ceviche — a dish of Peruvian origin — ají amarillo is the more culturally coherent chile. Jalapeño works because it's available. Ají amarillo paste is available online (Amazon) or at Latin specialty grocers in Miami. Why ● only: paste requires a specialty source and has a shorter shelf life after opening (~2 months refrigerated).

PAIRING

What to Drink

Wine — Everyday

Albariño, Rías Baixas (Spanish — coastal, saline)

High acid matches the lime. The stone-fruit and mineral character plays with the fish. Coastal Galician Albariño was engineered by geology to drink with seafood.

Wine — No Limits

Txakoli (Basque, slightly spritzy)

Bright, lemony, low alcohol, a faint effervescence that refreshes the palate between bites. Poured from height in Basque tradition — aeration opens the aromatics. The cultural match: raw ocean protein + Basque coast wine + Sardinian bottarga = three Mediterranean seas on one table.

Non-Wine Alternative

Pisco sour (Peruvian) or a clean Japanese lager (Sapporo, Asahi)

Pisco sour echoes the Peruvian roots of ceviche and brings egg-white froth as a textural partner. Japanese lager is cold, clean, neutral — gets out of the fish's way and provides carbonation refresh.

CONTEXT

Menu Ideas

As Opener

First course of a summer dinner party. Serves cold, resets the palate. Follow with something hot and rich — grilled whole fish (kamado) or a proper paella.

Boat Day / Outdoor

This is the centerpiece of a bottarga triple-play: ceviche + watermelon salad + deviled eggs, all finished with grated bottarga but each using it differently. The variety prevents bottarga fatigue. Gazpacho + tabla round it out.

Tapa / Small Plate

Spoon portions into ceramic spoons for a passed hors d'oeuvre. Serves 24–30 bites from this batch. No chips needed — the spoon IS the vessel.

YOUR NOTES

Cook Log

Session Notes

Date: _____ · Serves: ____ · Rating: __ / 5

Use this space to record what you changed, what worked, and what you'd do differently next time. Your future self will thank you.



Stop following recipes. Start understanding food.

