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Iliana De la Vega, left, and Isabel Torrealba are the cofounders of an immersive culinary and wine travel business. Photo by Monica Toledo

Iliana De la Vega and Isabel Torrealba, a mother-and-daughter team, remember celebrating the Night of the Radishes on Dec. 23 each year they lived in Oaxaca, Mexico.

"Oaxaca is a place that has a lot of ingrained traditions," Torrealba says. "It's kind of weird and surreal and only happens in Oaxaca. It's called the Night of the Radishes. They carve out themes and figurines with radishes. Some of these radishes are enormous. It was one of my favorite things to do around the holidays."

As the founders of Culinary Traditions, a company offering immersive culinary and wine travel, De la Vega and Torrealba bring their individual talents to the business. Torrealba splits her time between Austin, Texas, and Mexico City, Mexico, as a food writer and food anthropologist, and designs the itineraries for their company's weeklong food journeys.

De la Vega taught at the Culinary Institute of America in San Antonio, Texas, for five years before moving to Austin, where she and her husband opened El Naranjo, a restaurant featuring Oaxaca inspired dishes. She's the 2022 winner of the James Beard Award Best Chef.

In Mexico, Dec. 24 is commemorated by attending a church service and enjoying a late dinner with family and friends. "For that night in Mexico, it is tradition to serve bacalao," De la Vega says. "It is quite delicious."

Bacalao de Navidad

6 servings

Ingredients

- 2 pounds salted cod
- 2 chile anchos
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 medium garlic cloves, chopped
- 2 pounds tomatoes, roughly chopped
- 2 bay leaves
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- Black pepper, to taste
- 1 red bell pepper, sliced
- 1 green bell pepper, sliced
- 1/2 cup blanched almonds
- 4 tablespoons raisins
- 2 tablespoons capers
- 1/2 cup olives
- 1 pound new potatoes, peeled and cooked
- 1 can chiles güeros o chiles largos (white or long chilis), pickled
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley

Directions

Place the salted cod in a shallow bowl and cover with cold water for at least 12 hours. Change the water 3 or 4 times, being careful not to pour out the water. Because the salt will remain on the fish, it is best to take the fish out with a slotted spoon and discard the soaking liquid, then cover the fish with water 1 more time.

After 12 hours, place the fish in a pot, discard the soaking liquid, cover it with water and bring it to a boil. When the fish is soft, transfer to a strainer and discard the cooking liquid. Carefully remove and discard the fish bones and skin.

Remove the stems and seeds from the chiles; dry roast for a few seconds in a skillet and soak in hot water for 10 minutes. Transfer the chiles to the blender and process with enough water.

Heat the oil in a medium Dutch oven and cook the onion for 3 minutes, then the garlic for 1 more minute; add the tomatoes along with the chile puree. Cook for 6 to 8 minutes or until the mixture changes color. Add the cod, bay leaves, cinnamon, black pepper, bell peppers, chopped almonds, raisins, capers and olives. Cover with a lid and cook for 15 minutes, add the cooked potatoes and leave it covered for 10 more minutes. Add salt and pepper for taste.

Add the chiles güeros to the dish or serve them separately. Garnish with the parsley.

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