

Hola pavlova!

AN AUSSIE AMATEUR WOWS THE MEXICANS WITH AN OLD FAMILY TAKE ON A CLASSIC DOWN UNDER DESSERT.

Words and Photography **Jocelyn Pride**

“Mexican hens lay good eggs,” says Executive Chef Fabrice Gusset in his smooth French accent. Hopefully he’s right. Anyone who has ever made a pavlova knows it’s all in the eggs.

I’m far from a chef, far from home and about to unleash my husband’s secret family ‘pav’ recipe in one of the most glamorous resorts in the world. Part of the charm of Las Ventanas al Paraiso is that although it often caters for celebrities, the staff make each guest feel like a star.

Where the desert meets the Sea of Cortez, on the tip of Baja California Sur, Las Ventanas al Paraiso (known as LVP) was built from the ground up using local artisans, indigenous materials and no heavy machinery. Blending into the azure water and white earth, for the past 15 years this understated elegant resort has set the standard for luxury and service in Mexico. It is a consistent winner of esteemed accolades including AAA Five Diamond, and Travel + Leisure: 500 World’s Best Hotels, in 2012 it was awarded Virtuoso’s Best of the Best – Most Innovative Guest Experience.

CHALLENGING THE CHEF

Brainchild of Chef Fabrice, the concept of the ‘Challenge the Chef’ program is simple. Guests make a dish; a team of chefs taste it and award three spoons (on the menu for a week), two spoons (on the menu for a day) or one spoon (a shot of tequila for a work in progress).

“We encourage guests to cook a local dish from their country,” says Fabrice. “It becomes a cultural culinary exchange.”

Although Fabrice has heard of pavlova, he hasn’t tasted one, and although I’ve tasted plenty, I’ve only made one (and that was 20 years ago). So instead of spending an afternoon swanning around the stunning infinity pool sipping margaritas, I phone the ‘queen of pavlovas’ – my mother-in-law, confirming the ingredients (plus secret tip) to ‘challenge the chef’ with a classic Aussie dessert.

Chefs Gustavo and Rene are in charge of helping to gather the ingredients and prepare the oven in the pastry kitchen. Donning a chef’s hat and apron, I at least look the part. The comforting smell of bread baking calms my nerves and looking across at the brightly coloured macaroons lined up in pretty rows gives me faith in Mexican hens.

Fortunately the egg whites beat up perfectly – shiny and stiff. Whilst waiting for the six individual sized pavlovas to cook, we head outside to the demonstration kitchen in the herb garden.

Baja California Sur is considered the ‘Provence of Mexico’ and the exquisite food served in the three restaurants at LVP treads lightly on the environment. Part of ‘challenging the chef’ is that two ingredients need to come from the herb garden. After much deliberation I settle on the fragrant mint leaves and tiny lilac flowers from the abundance of basil spilling over the narrow pathways.

AWARD WINNING DESSERT

By the time I finish decorating the pavlovas a small crowd has gathered around the bar of the outdoor kitchen. Accompanied by a glass of Dom Perignon, the all-important



Jocelyn Pride with her winning pav and resort chefs Gustavo Pinet (left) and Rene Bermond.

‘taste testers’ deem the ‘true blue’ dessert as “sublime and multilayered in texture” and award it three spoons.

The following night in the lavish main restaurant, a fanfare accompanies the tasting plate of desserts that includes pavlova. The menu description reads: “Pavlova – a dessert created in Australia to honour the Russian ballet dancer, Anna Pavlova during the 1920s. Challenge the Chef dish winner – Jocelyn Pride.”

AND THE SECRET IS...

Dampen the baking paper before cooking the meringue. However, perhaps we need to add – ‘use Mexican eggs’.

+ Travel

- + Los Cabos International airport (SJD) is a two hour direct flight from LAX. Many airlines including Alaska, American and United Airlines offer daily flights.
- + Why not cruise to Mexico in luxury with Oceania and explore the towns of Cabo San Lucas, Acapulco, Puerto Vallarta, Costa Maya and more. There are 10 sailings from Aug 2013 to Nov 2014. Visit oceaniacruises.com.au for details.
- + For more on Las Ventanas al Paraiso go to rosewoodhotels.com/en/lasventanas/



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