



Claudette Zepeda is an award-winning, San Diego-based chef and culinary entrepreneur known for her fearless style and bold approach to regional Mexican cuisine. A celebrated culinary anthropologist, Zepeda draws upon 20+ years of experience working in restaurant kitchens, as well as her extensive travels around the world and throughout Mexico that inform her vast knowledge of indigenous ingredients and cross-cultural expressions of cuisine. Zepeda's multi-faceted expertise is showcased in her role overseeing the creative vision as Founder of Chispa Hospitality which started in the Spring of 2022, including food concepts in Australia and Mexico. VAGA restaurant in San Diego's North County is where she authors a love letter to her hometown with a menu that celebrates local flavors and immigrant influences. Previously, Zepeda garnered more national acclaim for her time as the executive chef & partner behind El Jardín, a regional Mexican restaurant in the area. During her tenure, El Jardín received a glowing

review from the New York Times, inclusion on Esquire's 2018 Best New Restaurants, and recognition from Michelin on their 2019 Bib Gourmand list. Zepeda was named both Eater San Diego and San Diego Union Tribune's Chef of the Year in 2018, and was a James Beard Best Chef West semifinalist in 2019. Prior to El Jardín, Zepeda was chef de cuisine at Javier Plascencia's celebrated Bracero. She has competed on US & Mexico's Top Chef, as well as Iron Chef: Quest for an Iron Legend, winning her challenge & Iron Chef México where she successfully won her challenge and tied in the finale.

In 2019 Zepeda Founded Viva La Vida, LLC., establishing micro businesses with single mothers throughout Mexico's seven regions to import their heirloom ingredients previously unavailable in the U.S. Through Viva La Vida, Zepeda helps Mexican women support their families without sacrificing their safety. Named for a famous Frida Kahlo quote, the company celebrates the colorful life and death Mexicans lead, with plans by 2023 to grow into a 501c3fund dedicated to helping Hispanic women break from generational poverty in the United States.