A few days before the appointed date, two manhekat or persons authorized to invite relatives and neighbors on behalf of the celebrant, goes around the different barangays to announce the forthcoming celebration.

The manhekat, typically a woman, begins the invitation or miniwara warah with salutations to the invited family and then explains the purpose of the invitation. The message conveyed usually goes like this: “Mapakapya sa su dios di miyo sa wily asa sa vayay ah may kamo du nawi a araw (date).” [“The family of ___ extend their greetings to your family and would like to invite you to come and see what has been prepared just to mark the day and be able to strengthen your relationship with each other.”]

On the morning of the servado, guests are greeted by rousing pitugtugan (entertainment) from a local band (mitugtog) playing music that can be heard up to the adjacent barangay alerting the people of the start of the merrymaking. Accompanied by the mitugtog, a manayay, the person assigned to start the dance, leads the guests in dancing the pandanggo, their version influenced by the island’s close contact with Spain where the courtship dance called fandango originated. When a man extends his hand to a woman, it is an invitation to dance. Right after dancing, the partners are offered a glass of parek (sugarcane wine) to drink and rinavor, a cocktail of minced beef skin mixed with blood and intestine, to eat. By nightfall, guests shift to dancing the waltz.

At lunchtime, people patiently line up to get vonong or food wrapped in abaya or breadfruit leaves of the atipovo tree [Artocarpus terebinianus Elm. Family Moraceae]. A set of vonong consists of three individually wrapped foods arranged in order. At the topmost is a tasty viand, which includes grated uvud (banana pith), sinaga (finely chopped vunus or dried gabi [taro] stalks mixed with pork blood and intestine), pritada (sliced pork or beef) and kaldereta (beef or pork ribs). This is followed by the balencyana or rice mixed with yellow ginger. The last of the assemblage is the wrapped inapuy or paray (rice). These delectable dishes come with not too steaming lamoya or vegetable soup also served on the abaya shaped like a cone.

During the servado, as in any pivonungan, community members gladly volunteer to help and are divided into well-organized groups. The men are mostly in charge of butchering the animals to be cooked. Usually, a group of women is tasked to clean hundreds of pieces of abaya gathered two days before the event. Another group does the cooking while a mixed group takes charge of preparing and wrapping the food and neatly arranging them in a kanastro (big basket) or sometimes in a batulang (basket usually hanging at the back of a carabao). A different group is assigned to distribute the vonong to the guests forming long lines along the street.

In all their celebrations, pisisidonga, the Itbayat’s cooperative spirit is ever present.

Cecilia V. Picache (CVP)
Liquid saline crystals. The liquid is then drained adjacent shallow dug-out well to wash off the mounds. It is situated close to the mouth. It is situated close to the sea, exposed during the dry summer months from January to April.

The bakar is a circular dug-out container made of clay mixed with rice husk, and has a depth of one meter and a diameter of one and a half meters at the mouth. It is situated close to the karaang, for boiling. And after fifteen to twenty hours of continuous boiling, the liquid turns into a semisolid crust, which is then scooped out with a wooden ladle and placed into bamboo baskets (karabut), that are lined on a bamboo ledge a meter high from the ground, to drain off liquid. The drippings from the baskets accumulate on the ground and form salt mounds akin to stalactites. The salt drips onto these from the baskets accumulate on the ground and form salt mounds akin to stalactites. The salt drips onto these similar to a fodder.

Salt produced in Davila are normally traded in a system of exchange called mara. For instance, a ganta of salt is exchanged for ten pieces of eggplant while two hundred fifty kilos of salt is exchanged for fifty kilos of milled rice or fifty kilos of salt is exchanged for fifty kilos of unmilled rice. Prior to the onset of the rainy season, salt is brought in baskets to various towns of Ilocos Norte and to far northern towns of Cagayan and Isabela, on carts pulled by cattle, to be bartered with clay cooking pots, palm woven mats, blankets, rice and other products of the localities visited. These baskets are then lined up along the side of a bamboo ledge and a lounging area of slatted bamboo is constructed with an elevation of two feet from the ground.

When the southern winds start to be felt, clouds get a fiery dark tinge at sunrise and grayish clouds looms on the horizon bringing rain showers in May, it is time to pack up, load the last basket of salt produce on the cart, and dismantle the huts. Before finally leaving for their homes by the highway, the piles of soil around the bakar are brought back to the shore to be covered again with sea waters during the rainy months. These accumulate the natural salinity of the sea and turn to crystalline soil deposits once more. Meanwhile, the families work in their farms inland, until the next season of salt-making.

The season of agsana cannot start without the performance of the riang, a ritual to implore the blessings of the ancestral and nature spirits for a productive salt-making period. The person who performs the riang is an elderly woman. At the break of dawn, the woman, wearing white, goes out to the shore where bakasa is gathered. She carries an offering of sticky rice cooked in coconut milk topped with an unshelled hard-boiled egg on a coconut shell bowl. The offering is laid on a big limestone. Then, she scrapes the ground to gather bakasa into three mounds forming a triangle. With these offerings, she stands up and utters aloud the prayers to the spirits.

When members of the community see the offering and the three mounds, they know that the riang has been performed. This signals that a new season of salt-making has begun. The families clear the shore of debris and then they construct make-shift huts of cogon grass and bamboo where they spend the four summer months of salt-making. The roof of the hut is extended to cover the area of the furnace and a vat is prepared to accumulate the saline liquid extract. Also, bamboo baskets for the salt are lined up along the side of a bamboo ledge and a lounging area of slatted bamboo is constructed with an elevation of two feet from the ground.

Family members get involved in the production process, particularly in the gathering of the bakasa and carrying firewood from inland hills. The older men and women spend sleepless nights tending the fire and stirring the solidifying white fine granules on the silyasi.

Joyriders on a bovine-drawn planer in a salt field.