



Media Release | 2011

## Take A Trip To The Kingdom Of Vanilla With Chef Damien Styles

Don your summer linens and an appetite for new discoveries and delicacies and be one of only a few to witness the magical world of vanilla on an intimate journey with highly acclaimed chef, Damien Styles\* to the Heilala Vanilla plantation, located on the Vava'u Islands in the Kingdom of Tonga.

Over seven glorious days (**Mon 24 Oct – Mon 31 Oct 2011**) in the Tongan sunshine, intrepid gourmands will be immersed in the humble village life and the Tongan way, appreciating and learning the complex and intricate processes of growing and harvesting vanilla. This trip will be on Tongan time i.e. very relaxed and not a five star hotel, butlers and spas kind of holiday!

October is the perfect time to experience the unsurpassed beauty of the Vava'u Islands – one of the 170 archipelago islands in the Polynesian South Pacific. During the month of October thousands of beautiful vanilla flowers will be opening each morning, ripe for hand pollination. Guests will have the opportunity to take part in the hand pollination process and make their mark on a green developing bean. Nine months later the bean will have their own unique tattoo and be sent to guests once cured and dried.

With highly acclaimed chef Damien Styles on board guests will be treated to a number of inspiring demonstrations and delicious feasts – all featuring a touch of vanilla of course! The itinerary includes an adventure through the local food markets to take in the sights, smells and tastes of local produce and a chance to gain first hand tips from Damien. Included in the itinerary is a trip out around the picturesque islands via catamaran to the resort of Ika Lahi Hunga Lagoon for a demonstration class and superb lunch on the deck.

Remote and truly unspoiled, the waters around Vava'u are crystal clear with a visibility exceeding 100 feet. During the week guests will have the opportunity to put their feet up and enjoy the local beauty that surrounds the island group. The weather promises to be stellar (20–28 degrees Celsius) with the water around 26 degrees Celsius – perfect conditions for swimming, snorkeling and sailing.

Saturday is a free day and on the Sunday guests can choose a Tongan family tradition – the opportunity to experience church in the village of Utunagke with the Latu family! From here the group will enjoy a traditional feast, prepared the Tongan way – in an underground oven called an 'umu' – at the Heilala Vanilla plantation.

Guests will stay at the Tongan Beach Resort in beachfront units which is walking distance to the Heilala Vanilla plantation or a short ride on the back of the Heilala truck! The resort has 10 share twin rooms available exclusively for the group. This trip follows on from Heilala Vanilla's very successful plantation trip with NZ chef Peter Gordon and LA based pastry chef extraordinaire Natasha MacAller last year with a group of NZ foodies.

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**For media enquiries including images, interviews and the full itinerary please contact:**

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– more to come –



## **Additional Information**

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### **\* About Damien Styles**

Damien has worked in some of the country's top restaurants including Two Small Rooms (QLD), Bistro Mars (NSW), Punch Lane Wine Bar/Restaurant (VIC), Taxi (VIC), The Point (VIC) and Mission Australia's restaurant Charcoal Lane (VIC) where he worked alongside and trained young Aboriginals in the profession he loves; with the hope to give them the opportunity to form lasting careers in hospitality. Damien also fell in love with Heilala Vanilla at Charcoal Lane and has been an unofficial ambassador ever since! Today, Damien can be found flexing his creative culinary muscle as head chef at Matt Wilkinson's hip establishment Pope Joan (VIC). More: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJWRFmNiKSg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJWRFmNiKSg)

### **Trip Dates:**

Departs Sydney on Monday 24<sup>th</sup> October 2011. Returns Sydney Monday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2011.

For those needing to get back to civilization earlier there is the option to depart Vava'u on Friday afternoon (28<sup>th</sup> October) to Nukualofa, Sydney bound via Auckland. .

### **Trip Cost:**

Price per person ex Sydney is \$4,150 twin share (\$5,000 single). The cost includes:

- Return flights (ex Sydney) to Nukualofa flying Pacific Blue
- Return flight transfers from Nukualofa to Vava'u
- Six nights accommodation at The Tongan Beach Resort
- One night accommodation in Nukualofa (stop over, first night)
- Breakfast in Nukualofa on the first morning at Friends Café
- Dinner on Wednesday evening at Mangoes Restaurant in Neiafu
- Two cooking classes and meal with guest chef Damien Styles; one at the Tongan Beach Resort and the other is a day trip on a Moorings Catamaran to Hunga Lagoon with meals and demonstration class at Ika Lahi
- Sunday Tongan feast

*Allowable variations to trip: Guests may return to Nukualofa on Friday afternoon and onward to Sydney early Saturday morning via Auckland. Costing for this variation provided on enquiry.*

### **Bookings & Enquiries**

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### **About Heilala Vanilla**

Named after the national flower of Tonga, Heilala Vanilla was created out of love and a duty of care to a Tongan village, and is a business that reaps benefits that are rare and remarkable in the commercial world. In 2002 retired New Zealand farmer and frequent holidaymaker to the village of Utungake, John Ross, mined his horticultural know-how and appreciation of the Tongan way to put to use a block of dormant land that the village had at their disposal. It then took three years to develop and nurture the vines through careful training, weeding and looping, applying organic and sustainable farming practices. With full community involvement charged by the Ross/Boggiss family (alongside the local

- more to come -

Latu family) this has been a true labour of love. Today, the aid project has blossomed into a business that not only creates a range of the most exquisite, premium vanilla products, but also provides the local people with an income, necessary infrastructure and a sense of pride and purpose.

**Useful Links**

Accommodation | [www.thetongan.com](http://www.thetongan.com)

Ika Lahi Resort | [www.tonganfishing.com/resort.htm](http://www.tonganfishing.com/resort.htm)

Moorings Yachts | [www.tongansailing.com](http://www.tongansailing.com)

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