



EDITED BY ROBERT OLIVER

Eat Pacific

**THE PACIFIC ISLAND
FOOD REVOLUTION
COOKBOOK**

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Foreword



In 2019 it was my happy privilege to launch a revolution — one that is at the heart of every home and person. Involving several Pacific nations, it was a challenge to the habits of old to embrace a new, wholesome, vibrant approach to food. The Pacific Island Food Revolution revealed new concepts and approaches to traditional ways, innovating and promoting better living, better eating and a stylish way of healthy dining.

In now Covid-normal times, we must pay more attention to wellbeing and have the courage to change old methods for those that will serve us better. As I have said many times before, with the Food Revolution we must continue the work of our ancestors, the erstwhile guardians of our islands. We are admired around the globe for our pristine region and the bountiful harvests that our forebears cherished and sustained. I urge you all to take this to heart, to protect the produce of our land and sea that is our inheritance.

We are part of a life cycle and, as we are learning, a green economy will slow climate change and mitigate catastrophic effects on our islands. By ensuring we don't pollute our environment, by mandating clean and efficient methods of manufacture, agriculture and aquaculture, we will gift to our society and those who come after a legacy of high-end, sustainable produce and enviable self-sufficiency.

We can thus foster a unique cuisine built on cultural and national roots, with a modern, positive twist. I have put my beliefs into action by establishing a home-gardening project in my neighbourhood. This comprises a group of households willing to grow their own vegetables and herbs. We have then engaged local chefs who form part of the Pacific Island Food Revolution family to conduct cooking classes for the women of my local home-gardening project. This is my personal contribution to the Pacific Island Food Revolution, one home garden, one cooking class at a time.

Eat Pacific is a wonderful achievement, a collaboration of talented, creative minds and souls who care about our part of the world. It is a homage to culture, regional tastes, local produce and culinary innovation. As always, I am grateful to the indefatigable and talented celebrity master chef Robert Oliver and his team for their passion, dedication and boundless energy in producing this high-quality publication.

I am inviting you to venture into 'our' kitchen, be the chef of a healthy destiny, and together let us revolutionise Pacific cuisine to shape healthier, happier Pacific communities for today and tomorrow.

**THE PRINCESS ROYAL, HER ROYAL HIGHNESS
PRINCESS SALOTE MAFILE'O PILOLEVU TUITA**

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Votausi Mackenzie-Reur,
Pacific Island Food Revolution
co-host for Vanuatu; season
2 contestants and judges;
Dr Jone Hawea, co-host for
Fiji, and Dora Rossi, co-host
for Sāmoa; Fololeni Curr,
co-host for Tonga.



The Pacific Island Food Revolution

It began with a simple realisation. Over the course of a generation, there had been a fundamental shift in the way Pacific people ate. Processed foods and sugary drinks had displaced the beautiful market foods that I ate growing up in Fiji. You can see how this has happened just by switching on the TV: the screen is blaring with jingly, jangly ads promoting instant this and tasty that, so-called 'foods' that have no real nutrition. Reading the ingredients lists of these non-foods is like perusing a chemistry experiment. This is not nourishment. This is not food.

I remember seeing a TV ad for a multi-(artificially)-coloured ice cream that had a young boy gleefully saying how healthy it was because of the colours. Which is categorically not true. And these products are being promoted as more than just food — it's a whole way of life. If you eat this, you too will have perfect teeth, a perfect life, the modern and cool look of the people in the ad. You too will be part of a modern Western world. But that isn't what's happened.

Instead, across the region, diabetes rates have skyrocketed, obesity has ballooned and Pacific people now have the highest rates of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the world. As of 2021, Fijians are averaging three diabetes-related amputations a day; and Pacific Island countries have the most obese people in the world. A staggering 75 per cent of all Pacific deaths are attributed to NCDs. It turns out that West is not best after all. In other words, all of that marketing is a lie — what we eat is killing us. And it doesn't have to be this way.

The key to good health still sits right in the Pacific backyard — in its farms, its gardens, its fabulous markets, and in the rustic dishes that Pacific grandmothers cook. *The answer lies in local cuisine.*

So how do we move local cuisine back to that top position in people's lives and in people's minds? How do we energise local food culture to combat the diabetes epidemic in the Pacific? How do we make something that's perhaps viewed as only traditional into something sexy for young people today?

The impetus came when I was cast in one of those mega-global cooking-competition reality shows, *My Kitchen Rules* (MKR). Many of you will have seen it. I hadn't. In fact, I had a rather dim view of reality TV. To me, it was tasteless, emotionally farcical and . . . well, trashy! But I signed on — I respected the producer and loved my co-judges, who were all friends. And when the show screened . . . man, I really had to eat my hat. This was not trashy TV at all. It had everyone tuned in, cooking at home, talking about food. I was visiting Fiji and Sāmoa a lot at this time and noticed that Australian and New Zealand *Masterchef* and MKR were prime-time favourites in the Pacific.

Could this be a solution for the Pacific health crisis? Could this turn the spotlight on the Pacific's own food culture and create the kind of food movement that would lift the region back to good health? How about making one of these shows for the Pacific, with Pacific contestants, judges, humour and stories? And — most of all — showcasing the incredible multi-dimensional and delicious cuisines of the many Pacific Islands?

What I most loved about this idea was that out of something quite dire — the NCD crisis — we could create a brazen celebration of the Pacific. And so *Pacific Island Food Revolution* was born. But it didn't happen overnight.



The first concept document I wrote up, dating back to 2013, hasn't really changed since then. The idea was always to create a local food movement anchored in a reality TV series. After a long period of finessing the concept, we were fortunate enough to pique the interest of both the Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand governments. Both nations were keen to try something new: the NCD numbers had been steadily growing despite best efforts by many agencies.

Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand are our natural partners; we share the Pacific Ocean and they have significant Pasifika populations. I quickly learned that both nations are genuinely committed to the wellbeing of Pacific people. We decided to develop the project in Fiji, Sāmoa, Vanuatu and the Kingdom of Tonga. It felt right to me. I have deep, long-held relationships in each country and I knew I would have the support of the Australian and New Zealand High Commissions.

Now I needed some heavy-hitters to make this great! I had worked with television producer Cindi Lucas on *MKR* and on a beautiful show on Māori TV in Aotearoa called *Marae Kai Masters*. Reality TV is a specialised skill, and Cindi is known as the best. Plus, she had lived in Fiji as a child so had old connections there. There really was no one better to produce the television series.

I also needed some stars to work with me as co-hosts in each country. Votausi Mackenzie-Reur in Vanuatu was a natural. We have been friends for years and she is the reigning queen of Ni-Van cuisine. I was only halfway through describing the idea to Votausi when she interrupted me, saying, ‘You don’t have to tell me anything more, Robert. I’m with you.’

In Fiji, I approached Dr Jone Hawea. We had worked together before and aligned over the wider concept that local food is the best. Dr Jone is also terrifically telegenic, dazzlingly handsome; a natural star. And he speaks brilliantly to the spiritual nature of food.

In Sāmoa, I approached Dora Rossi, another old friend. Dora, I knew, would bring not only the Samoan vibe but also the food perspective that sits within her soul. Dora is half-Samoan and half-Italian. If we could make Pacific Island cuisine as famous as Italian cuisine is, we’d be on the right track.

That left the Kingdom of Tonga. My friend Joanna Bourke invited me to speak at an event in the Kingdom where my old friend Her Royal Highness Princess Salote Mafile’o Pilolevu was the guest of honour. I told her about my idea, and she asked me, ‘How do we bring this to Tonga?’ I replied, tongue-in-cheek and thinking I had a real nerve, ‘If you would agree to be my co-host, I’m sure we’d find a way.’ She gave me a look, one that I have come to know very well, and said, ‘You’re on!’

We were lucky to have the effervescent and cheeky Fololeni Curr step in for Her Royal Highness in the finals of season 1. I had never worked with Flo before but, wow — did she bring sparkle to the show! She’s quick with the one-liners, has a wicked sense of humour and had us in stitches. She was so good in season 1 that we asked her to host the Tongan episodes for season 2.

All of these people’s perspectives make *Pacific Island Food Revolution* what it is. Votausi captured it well when she said, at an event in Port Vila, ‘This is a Pacific solution for a Pacific problem. We don’t need anything from outside to help us. We have the crops and the traditional knowledge to guide us. You see, through food, NCDs are not just government business. Through food, NCDs are everyone’s business. And you know what — we can do this!’

It wasn’t just about creating a TV show. And we didn’t want a traditional development approach — we wanted a revolution. To make the message top-of-mind for everyone, we needed a communications strategy that took the messages from the TV series and showed them to everybody, everywhere. From social media to news stories to YouTube recipes to

radio shows to our website and back to TV. You see, this wasn't just about food — this was to be an emotional appeal to the hearts and minds of Pacific people to remind them that *their food is the best*. Over the course of *Pacific Island Food Revolution's* short but noisy life, three terrific communications experts have made this happen: Faumuina Felolini Maria Tafuna'i, Wame Valentine and Michelle Tevita-Singh. All have dropped their magic into the movement and we are all the better for them. I felt that with this view, and with these people, we could indeed create a food movement in the Pacific and, most importantly, make something that people would want to be a part of.

Three years into the revolution, the television series plays in every Pacific nation with an estimated 5 million viewers a week (from a total population of 12 million). When we did our surveys, we found that 42 per cent of those surveyed have made a positive change in their diet. It's working!



A lot of credit is due to the fabulous contestants you have come to know and love. From Vanuatu, we thank, from season 1, Leonid Vusilai and Knox Taleo (the 'Island Boys'), Ashi and Florian Carcasses, and Lucyana Tarosa and Maeva Williams; from season 2, Basil Leodoro and Annette Garae, Primrose Siri and Anita Frank, and Patrick Tari and Silas Kalman; and from season 3, Jane Kanas and Alistair Arthur.

From Sāmoa, from season 1 our thanks go to chef John Tu'ulama and Asia Stanley, Jerrey Young and Antonio Chadwick, Amazing Tavita and Tina Prasad, and Jerry and Charlotte Brunt; from season 2, Tino Aukisitino Suifaatau and Teuila Aukusitino, and Nunuiasolelei Vaifale and Tiose Lologa Siofele; and from season 3, Nina Va'a and Iqbal Mohommed.

We thank the teams from Fiji: from season 1, Rakesh and Pritisha Chand, Rachel Beryl Temo and Timoci Waqaniburatu, and Manasa Bolawaqatabu and Shamim Ali; from season 2, Sera Smith and Milly Hoyt, Krystelle Lavaki and Pio Fihaki, and Sumit Kumar and Avinesh Chand; from season 3, Rachel Beryl Temo and Akuila Naiova.

The Kingdom of Tonga was well represented in season 1 by Joshua Saviete and Nox Pulu, Hina Fe'ao and Piuela Taufa, and Sela Latailakepa and Taufa Halateu; from season 2, Francis Hikila and Tupou Mapumeihengalu Fifita, Lopeti Filo and Caroline Manu, and Tuiohu Mafi and Mia Asi; and from season 3, Randall Otto Blake Kamea and Ricky Vollmer.

We have been blessed with some terrific special guests. We thank the Honourable Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa, prime minister of Sāmoa, for her words and wisdom in an episode about food and climate change. We thank our other Samoan guests: farmer and informal comedian Mikaele Maiava, Adi Maimalaga Tafuna'i, Cindy of Sāmoa. From Vanuatu we say tank yu tumas to Myriam Malao, Grace Simeon and Wendy Isack from the Mama's Association in the Port Vila market. From Fiji, many thanks to Apisalome Tudreu, from the Methodist Church of Fiji, and the brilliant Fijian baker Bertrand Jang. We also had a special appearance by the president of Fiji, the Honourable Wiliame Katonivere, who wowed everyone. In the Kingdom of Tonga we are grateful to Amelia Afuha'amango Tuipulotu and from Papua New Guinea we were stoked to have Jennifer Baing represent 'The Land of the Unexpected'. We even had an Olympian — Tongan

superstar Pita Taufatofua appeared in an episode in season 1. The TV series also plays in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, all through Southeast Asia, and the United Kingdom. This is important, as during the Covid-related pause in tourism our future tourists were learning about the local foods of the Pacific and will hopefully come asking for them. Local food on tourism menus provides a vital economic supply link to local farmers and hence leaves valuable dollars in-country and in the hands of local people.

Local cuisine requires local agriculture. Local food is not just about diet or about NCDs. From a development perspective, local food also has a vital role across a range of sectors. In a changing climate, a choice for local food is a choice for the planet. There are no industrial emissions and few food miles when you chose local, and you're supporting local agriculture, which is good for the climate. In food security, growing and eating local bolsters local food systems and creates food independence.

Think about biodiversity. Local cuisine requires the full food basket, including those special crops that make cuisine unique. Local cuisine, then, is the vessel for a biodiverse food system. For example, there are over 400 taro varieties in the Pacific — some used for food, some for medicine, some for ceremony. If some of these taro crops are lost, culture is lost too. As Suliana Siwatibau once said to me, 'You don't just lose the crop — you lose knowledge.'

But food is not just about health and climate change; it is not just about food security and biodiversity. Food is what our mothers make us; it is what binds — even creates — communities. The story of the food is the story of the people. It is through food that culture is defined. Remember: we live in paradise! The Pacific is the Garden of Eden. The creator has been extravagantly generous to the Pacific. We have the purest oceans, an abundant natural world; in fact, we have been given all we need to live healthy, harmonious lives. I call this the divine design. So a choice for local food is not as simple as choosing what to eat. It is a divine act, a divine choice. Through this food, *our* food, we celebrate the spiritual majesty of nature.



What's next for us? Pacific Island Food Revolution was only ever meant to be the beginning of a Pacific-wide food movement. We are thrilled to see more local eateries popping up in the Pacific. Suva and Apia are literally jumping with them! In Vanuatu, a food tourism model is being developed, led by Votausi Mackenzie-Reur with chef Leo Vusilai, winner of season 1, at her side. We are working with The Asia Foundation on localised food movements such as Sanma Food Revolution, also in Vanuatu, and we'd love to foster more of these across the region to help address food matters at a very local level.

At its heart, Pacific Island Food Revolution is a food justice movement, helping to revive what is already there. As Dr Jone Hawea says, 'We all know that our local cuisines are the most delicious and nutritious, so Pacific Island Food Revolution is about the restoration of Pacific food culture for the modern era.'

So this is a story of hope, of fun, of resilience, of sovereignty, of delicious food. Her Royal Highness said it best: 'We're all in this together, and we can get through this together. The revolution begins at home!'

Hon. Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa,
the Prime Minister of
Sāmoa, and Hon. Ralph
Regenvanu, Minister of
Climate Change, Vanuatu.



Climate change and the Pacific Island Food Revolution

The uptake of local foods and regeneration of localised food systems and economies both foster Vanuatu's economic and agricultural independence, and has tangible and overt connections to climate change in the region. The more local a food system is, the more resilient a community is, the better their food security.

— Hon. Ralph Regenvanu, Minister of Climate Change, Vanuatu

In 2023, the role of food systems in driving climate change was tabled at COP28 UAE in a Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems and Climate Action. More than 130 countries signed up, including many nations in the Pacific.

Globally food systems contribute up to 30 per cent to overall emissions when the entire scope of agricultural production methods, logistics and transport are considered. Against this backdrop, choosing local food over imported and/or processed food has significant climate change implications.

- **REDUCTION OF FOOD MILES:** Imported foods have a far higher transportation footprint than locally produced foods.
- **PROCESSED VS WHOLE FOODS:** Processed foods create higher emissions than natural crops. Keep in mind the cost implications of importing ingredients for processed foods and the associated climate costs of using base ingredients grown through conventional agriculture, which implies pesticide use.
- **FOOD SECURITY AND RESILIENCE:** Local crops have been shown to be the most resilient in weather events, and indigenous farming methods are the best.
- **HOME GARDENING:** The promotion of local cuisine stimulates the growth of local crops. Home gardening grew out of need during the Covid pandemic and was popularised on social media. This is key to urban and peri-urban food security.
- **LOCAL AGRICULTURE:** Locally grown crops sequester carbon, so not only is choosing local crops not contributing to climate change, but it is also a mitigation measure.

People can feel powerless in the face of climate change. It can seem to be the domain solely of governments and institutions. But through what we chose to eat, climate change is not just government business, it is everyone's business. As Hon. Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa, prime minister of Sāmoa, says:

In Sāmoa, climate change is not just something we talk about — it is something we do. Just by growing or eating your own local, natural food you are taking climate change action. And that's not all. By eating local crops you are also supporting local farmers. This is of great economic value to Sāmoa. You are also reducing Sāmoa's global food miles footprint, which is created by imported foods. Our food choices can create benefits for the greater good of Sāmoa. This is what we call fa'a Sāmoa for the modern era.

Our mentor and inspiration



I met Dr Isimeli Tukana in 2014, when I was first dreaming up the Pacific Island Food Revolution. We hit it off right away and realised we had something in common — we both loved Fiji, and we both viewed local food as a critical solution to Fiji’s NCD crisis. In his role as the Fijian government’s NCD advisor, Dr Tukana was in a pivotal position to advise me.

And advise me he did; in fact, he quickly became my go-to mentor for the project. He understood the need for something visual, something cultural and something fun. In his words: ‘We need a social solution to address NCDs, not a medical solution — and that’s what Pacific Island Food Revolution is.’

Along with many in the Pacific and especially Fiji, we were saddened to learn of his passing in 2021. He was a leader to us, and to many.

He may no longer be with us, but his work, his spirit and his legacy live on in Pacific Island Food Revolution and through all those lives he has touched.

Food sovereignty



In 2020, the Hollywood actress Marisa Tomei mentioned Pacific Island Food Revolution in an Instagram post: ‘Squishing up into that special pie. Making that same sauce your great-grandma made. The comfort of family love directly into your belly. Food is our families and our personal culture. #FOODSOVEREIGNTY. Take away food sovereignty, and you take away bonds, pride and health. I love my grandma, mama, uncle and brother giving me food love!

‘As my friend chef @robertolivernz @pacificislandfoodrev says, “Food sovereignty is when a people have ownership and control over the production and cultural systems that both feed and define them. Food is not just what is on the plate — it is the hub of a complex matrix of connections to traditional, ceremonial and medicinal knowledge, farming practices, biodiversity, community, culture and even climate change. When food sovereignty is diminished, so is all of this. The story of the food is the story of the people.”’

Food sovereignty is at the heart of the Pacific Island Food Revolution’s philosophy: the celebration of authentic Pacific food culture, as created and owned by Pacific people, will nourish all aspects of Pacific life, from the individual to the collective, from the economic to the cultural, from the agricultural to the ceremonial.

I loved Marisa’s post because she takes the concept of food sovereignty out of the abstract and into the personal. It’s not just a concept, not just the realm of academia or cultural advocates: it’s yours to enact through what you choose to eat.

Food is a tangible connector to your glorious history and to those you love. It’s in the memories of the dishes your grandmother made that nourished you, both body and soul. As Marisa says, ‘The comfort of family love directly into your belly.’ Food is not just what is on the plate — it is where you come from, family and community, culture and identity.

What other food culture has coconut cream made with hot rocks, tropical fruits dropping off trees in lavish abundance, the numerous seaweeds and other countless treasures of the ocean that we take for granted? And the dishes! Laplap, palusami, ota ika, vakasakera. Ours is a culture of superfoods.

Reflect on this as you choose what you eat. Claim your memories, claim your culture, claim your beauty, claim your sovereignty. Love it, cherish it; it is yours, and it is you. And thank you to my darling friend Marisa for reminding us all that we will never forget who we really are through food.



Vanuatu





Port Vila market, Vanuatu.

Simboro, laplap, bunia, tuluk . . .
the culinary treasures of Vanuatu
are the Pacific's great secret. They
are dishes worth travelling for,
dishes that unlock the dazzling
history of this fascinating nation.
Port Vila's amazing market is
the best place to start your food
journey. If you go once, you'll
find yourself going back time and
again to this magical country.
Tank yu tumas, Vanuatu, for all
you have brought to Pacific Island
Food Revolution.



My love letter to Vanuatu

On my island Natambo, also known as Malo, I was learning how to grate coconuts, bananas and yams at seven. I also enjoyed spending time with my mother and grandmother, preparing traditional dishes. My favourite meals were often those with my mother when she was breastfeeding my younger siblings. These meals included fresh fish in coconut sauce, laplap, white or purple yam and island cabbage. I was always copying dishes that adults were preparing and would make miniature versions.

The delicious laplap that is baked overnight and into the morning is difficult to make. The laplap is as dark as a mud cake and is covered with layers of freshly cooked coconut cream. The nutty and creamy flavour melts in your mouth and the taste is out of this world. To make just one laplap namambe one needs to grate over 100 coconuts, not such an easy task. I was fortunate that home economics was offered in school from years 7 to 12. I took all the cookery courses, but it was an English syllabus that taught me how to cook pastries, meat dishes and salads, which were foreign to me. I worked hard to understand this style of cooking so that I could pass my exams. Traditional cookery was treated as something that belonged in the villages and islands, not in the modern world.

I never gave up on my dream of becoming a cook, and studied in Australia as a home economics teacher. I was confident that I could teach cookery differently by infusing traditional flavours into Western-style dishes. After a few years, however, I felt I could not achieve this as the syllabus was so rigid and left no room for creativity.

I resigned and worked for the Ministry of Health as a nutritionist. Now I was able to teach communities how to prepare healthy meals for different age groups and for pregnant and lactating mothers and weaning babies using local foods. I also taught people how to make healthy school meals, and meals for over- and under-nourished children and adults. I learned quickly in my career as a nutritionist that to change my people's mindset so that they understand our local foods are better than imported refined foods is a complex matter, and continues to be a challenge to this day.

Traditionally, our diet was plant-based. Meat was eaten during feasts or pig-killing ceremonies. In order to overcome NCDs in Vanuatu, we have to go back to what our diets were before. The stigma around going on a diet is compromising the amount of food on our plates. We need to emphasise that it is about changing our food choices and menus in our kitchens. Our plates can be full as long as there are more leafy green vegetables and fruits, and less meat and carbohydrates.

I love my people and my country and it saddens me when we lose productive young men and women to these terrible NCDs every day. I plead to my Vanuatu family to join me to inform our people that God has blessed our islands with plentiful resources to sustain our health and wellbeing into the future.

Omajina.

VOTAUSI MACKENZIE-REUR

PACIFIC ISLAND FOOD REVOLUTION CO-HOST FOR VANUATU



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Patrick Tari and Silas
Kalman; Maeva Williams
and Lucyana Tarosa; Basil
Leodoro and Annette
Garae; Leonid Vusilai and
Knox Taleo; Florian and
Ashi Carcasses; Primrose
Siri and Anita Frank; Jane
Kanas and Alistair Arthur.





SERVES 6

Basil and Nene's Tanna Nuanangen Simboro

This dish adds a nutrition punch to the classic simboro, as intended by foodie doctors Basil and Nene who created it. They see first-hand the devastating effects of eating a low-nutrient diet. Basil and Nene crisped the fish skin to garnish the dish — fancy, eh!

FILLING

5 cups grated manioke (cassava)
250 grams poulet fish fillet (any good-quality sustainable fresh fish will be fine)
1 egg, beaten
1 cup manioke (cassava) flour (or any other type of flour)
1 tablespoon virgin coconut oil
1 cup fresh or canned coconut milk
1 small tomato, diced
1 spring onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, crushed
1 thumb-sized piece ginger, grated
salt and pepper
8–10 aelan kabis leaves
spring onion shoots or aelan kabis stalks to tie rolls

SAUCE

1 teaspoon curry powder
1 handful nangai nuts, crushed (cashew nuts or almonds are a good substitute)

GARNISH

skin of 2 poulet fish fillets
coconut oil for frying
2–3 tomatoes, chopped

Squeeze out the fluid from the grated manioke, and set aside.

Dip the fish fillets into the egg, then coat with manioke flour. Fry the fish in the coconut oil until golden brown.

Add the coconut milk, tomato, spring onion, and half of the garlic and ginger. Bring to a simmer, then continue to simmer on low heat for 10 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, remove the fish, tomato and spring onion from the pan and strain, leaving the coconut milk in the pan. Flake the fish and mix with the tomato and spring onion to make the filling. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Add the remaining garlic and ginger to the coconut milk. Then add the curry powder and crushed nangai nuts and stir gently.

Lay out the aelan kabis leaves, overlapping the edges. Spread the grated manioke onto the leaves and add the fish filling. Carefully roll, ensuring that it is tightly sealed. Then tie with the spring onion shoots or aelan kabis stalks to keep the simboro roll together.



Carefully place the roll in a saucepan and cover with water. Bring to the boil and cook for 10 minutes. Once cooked, remove the roll and slice it into 2-centimetre pieces.

While the simboro roll is cooking, pan-fry the fish skin for the garnish in coconut oil until crispy. Place on paper towel to drain.

Lay out the simboro pieces on serving plates, top with the curry sauce, and garnish with the chopped tomatoes and crispy fish skin.

SERVES 2

Basil and Nene's Shelley May Simboro

Here Basil and Nene took a Vanuatu classic — simboro — and gave it a snazzy treatment by frying it. I'd never seen that done before, and neither had Votausi. The dish is named after our recipe writer, Shelley, who took care of the contestants in all countries during season 2 — they all called her 'Mum'. Don't be daunted by the long ingredient list; this is very easy to put together.

BASE

1 large ripe cooking banana (plantain)
1 large green cooking banana (plantain)
6–8 large aelan kabis leaves (or use silverbeet)

FILLING

2 spring onions, finely diced
1 thumb-sized piece ginger, finely diced
2 cloves garlic, finely diced
1 cup beef mince
2 teaspoons vegetable oil
salt and pepper

COATING

1 egg, beaten
2 cups manioke (cassava) flour (or use rice flour or wheat flour)
vegetable oil for frying

DIP

3 cherry tomatoes
1 cup chopped popo (papaya)
1 cup chopped pineapple
1 teaspoon honey
1 tablespoon lime juice

Peel the ripe and green bananas and grate into a bowl. Set aside.

Mix the spring onions, ginger and garlic, then mix with the beef mince.

Heat the oil in a pan and fry the mince until golden brown, seasoning with salt and pepper. Mix the mince filling with the grated plantain.

Wash the aelan kabis leaves and lay out. Spoon the filling onto the individual leaves and roll tightly — ensure you fold the ends in.

Place the simboro rolls into a small pot and cover with water. Bring to the boil and cook on a low heat for around 10 minutes, until the simboro are firm. Remove them from the pot and leave to cool, then pat dry with a paper towel.

Roll the simboro in the beaten egg and coat with the manioke flour.

Heat a little oil in a pan and fry the rolls until golden brown. Remove and place on paper towels to drain.

Combine all the dip ingredients, season with salt and pepper and blend until smooth. Serve with the simboro.



SERVES 4

Knox and Leo's Purple Yam Soup

This soup is an absolute winner. It's hearty enough to be a meal, and elegant enough to be served as a first course at a dinner party. Knox and Leo decided to make a purple soup to match the dress that Votausi was wearing in this episode, a tribute to her influence on the Island Boys. Beyond its gorgeous colour, the velvety smoothness of this soup grabs you. Purple indicates the presence of antioxidants, which are great for total health. I have slightly simplified the boys' recipe to be easier to make at home. Feel free to add some chopped bele to the soup at the end rather than making the bele and moringa oil as described below. It's great either way.

4 chicken thighs, bone in	10-centimetre piece ginger, sliced
½ cup virgin coconut oil	2 purple yams, peeled and diced
1 stalk lemongrass	3 coconuts
3 star anise	salt and pepper
¼ stick cinnamon	3 aelan kabis leaves
½ onion, finely diced	1 handful moringa leaves
2 cloves garlic, minced	

Sear the chicken thighs in a hot pan with a teaspoon of the virgin coconut oil. Once browned, take them out and put them in a saucepan with the 1 litre of water. Add the lemongrass, star anise, cinnamon, onion, garlic and ginger, and bring to the boil. Simmer for 30–45 minutes, to make a stock.

Strain, reserving both the chicken thighs and the stock. Put the stock back into the pot and let it continue to simmer. Remove the meat from the chicken thighs and set aside.

Add the yam to the simmering stock. Remove about ⅓ of the yam pieces from the stock after 10 minutes.

Heat about half of the remaining oil in a pan, then fry the removed yam pieces until golden brown. Set aside for a garnish.

Pour the water from the coconuts into a bowl, then grate the coconut flesh. Squeeze the coconut gratings to make coconut cream. Add the coconut cream to the soup and season with salt and pepper. Blend the soup to achieve a smooth texture.

TO MAKE THE OIL GARNISH: Wash the aelan kabis leaves and blanch quickly in hot water, then refresh in cold water. Add the remaining coconut oil (about ¼ cup) and the moringa and blend until smooth. Season well with salt and pepper.

TO SERVE: Pour the soup into bowls. Add the fried yam pieces. Top with shredded chicken meat and add drops of oil for colour and contrast.



Eat Pacific

THE PACIFIC ISLAND FOOD REVOLUTION COOKBOOK

Edited by
Robert Oliver



MASSEY UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Foreword



In 2019 it was my happy privilege to launch a revolution — one that is at the heart of every home and person. Involving several Pacific nations, it was a challenge to the habits of old to embrace a new, wholesome, vibrant approach to food. The Pacific Island Food Revolution revealed new concepts and approaches to traditional ways, innovating and promoting better living, better eating and a stylish way of healthy dining.

In now Covid-normal times, we must pay more attention to wellbeing and have the courage to change old methods for those that will serve us better. As I have said many times before, with the Food Revolution we must continue the work of our ancestors, the erstwhile guardians of our islands. We are admired around the globe for our pristine region and the bountiful harvests that our forebears cherished and sustained. I urge you all to take this to heart, to protect the produce of our land and sea that is our inheritance.

We are part of a life cycle and, as we are learning, a green economy will slow climate change and mitigate catastrophic effects on our islands. By ensuring we don't pollute our environment, by mandating clean and efficient methods of manufacture, agriculture and aquaculture, we will gift to our society and those who come after a legacy of high-end, sustainable produce and enviable self-sufficiency.

We can thus foster a unique cuisine built on cultural and national roots, with a modern, positive twist. I have put my beliefs into action by establishing a home-gardening project in my neighbourhood. This comprises a group of households willing to grow their own vegetables and herbs. We have then engaged local chefs who form part of the Pacific Island Food Revolution family to conduct cooking classes for the women of my local home-gardening project. This is my personal contribution to the Pacific Island Food Revolution, one home garden, one cooking class at a time.

Eat Pacific is a wonderful achievement, a collaboration of talented, creative minds and souls who care about our part of the world. It is a homage to culture, regional tastes, local produce and culinary innovation. As always, I am grateful to the indefatigable and talented celebrity master chef Robert Oliver and his team for their passion, dedication and boundless energy in producing this high-quality publication.

I am inviting you to venture into 'our' kitchen, be the chef of a healthy destiny, and together let us revolutionise Pacific cuisine to shape healthier, happier Pacific communities for today and tomorrow.

**THE PRINCESS ROYAL, HER ROYAL HIGHNESS
PRINCESS SALOTE MAFILE'O PILOLEVU TUITA**

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Votausi Mackenzie-Reur,
Pacific Island Food Revolution
co-host for Vanuatu; season
2 contestants and judges;
Dr Jone Hawea, co-host for
Fiji, and Dora Rossi, co-host
for Sāmoa; Fololeni Curr,
co-host for Tonga.



The Pacific Island Food Revolution

It began with a simple realisation. Over the course of a generation, there had been a fundamental shift in the way Pacific people ate. Processed foods and sugary drinks had displaced the beautiful market foods that I ate growing up in Fiji. You can see how this has happened just by switching on the TV: the screen is blaring with jingly, jangly ads promoting instant this and tasty that, so-called 'foods' that have no real nutrition. Reading the ingredients lists of these non-foods is like perusing a chemistry experiment. This is not nourishment. This is not food.

I remember seeing a TV ad for a multi-(artificially)-coloured ice cream that had a young boy gleefully saying how healthy it was because of the colours. Which is categorically not true. And these products are being promoted as more than just food — it's a whole way of life. If you eat this, you too will have perfect teeth, a perfect life, the modern and cool look of the people in the ad. You too will be part of a modern Western world. But that isn't what's happened.

Instead, across the region, diabetes rates have skyrocketed, obesity has ballooned and Pacific people now have the highest rates of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the world. As of 2021, Fijians are averaging three diabetes-related amputations a day; and Pacific Island countries have the most obese people in the world. A staggering 75 per cent of all Pacific deaths are attributed to NCDs. It turns out that West is not best after all. In other words, all of that marketing is a lie — what we eat is killing us. And it doesn't have to be this way.

The key to good health still sits right in the Pacific backyard — in its farms, its gardens, its fabulous markets, and in the rustic dishes that Pacific grandmothers cook. *The answer lies in local cuisine.*

So how do we move local cuisine back to that top position in people's lives and in people's minds? How do we energise local food culture to combat the diabetes epidemic in the Pacific? How do we make something that's perhaps viewed as only traditional into something sexy for young people today?

The impetus came when I was cast in one of those mega-global cooking-competition reality shows, *My Kitchen Rules* (MKR). Many of you will have seen it. I hadn't. In fact, I had a rather dim view of reality TV. To me, it was tasteless, emotionally farcical and . . . well, trashy! But I signed on — I respected the producer and loved my co-judges, who were all friends. And when the show screened . . . man, I really had to eat my hat. This was not trashy TV at all. It had everyone tuned in, cooking at home, talking about food. I was visiting Fiji and Sāmoa a lot at this time and noticed that Australian and New Zealand *Masterchef* and MKR were prime-time favourites in the Pacific.

Could this be a solution for the Pacific health crisis? Could this turn the spotlight on the Pacific's own food culture and create the kind of food movement that would lift the region back to good health? How about making one of these shows for the Pacific, with Pacific contestants, judges, humour and stories? And — most of all — showcasing the incredible multi-dimensional and delicious cuisines of the many Pacific Islands?

What I most loved about this idea was that out of something quite dire — the NCD crisis — we could create a brazen celebration of the Pacific. And so *Pacific Island Food Revolution* was born. But it didn't happen overnight.



The first concept document I wrote up, dating back to 2013, hasn't really changed since then. The idea was always to create a local food movement anchored in a reality TV series. After a long period of finessing the concept, we were fortunate enough to pique the interest of both the Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand governments. Both nations were keen to try something new: the NCD numbers had been steadily growing despite best efforts by many agencies.

Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand are our natural partners; we share the Pacific Ocean and they have significant Pasifika populations. I quickly learned that both nations are genuinely committed to the wellbeing of Pacific people. We decided to develop the project in Fiji, Sāmoa, Vanuatu and the Kingdom of Tonga. It felt right to me. I have deep, long-held relationships in each country and I knew I would have the support of the Australian and New Zealand High Commissions.

Now I needed some heavy-hitters to make this great! I had worked with television producer Cindi Lucas on *MKR* and on a beautiful show on Māori TV in Aotearoa called *Marae Kai Masters*. Reality TV is a specialised skill, and Cindi is known as the best. Plus, she had lived in Fiji as a child so had old connections there. There really was no one better to produce the television series.

I also needed some stars to work with me as co-hosts in each country. Votausi Mackenzie-Reur in Vanuatu was a natural. We have been friends for years and she is the reigning queen of Ni-Van cuisine. I was only halfway through describing the idea to Votausi when she interrupted me, saying, ‘You don’t have to tell me anything more, Robert. I’m with you.’

In Fiji, I approached Dr Jone Hawea. We had worked together before and aligned over the wider concept that local food is the best. Dr Jone is also terrifically telegenic, dazzlingly handsome; a natural star. And he speaks brilliantly to the spiritual nature of food.

In Sāmoa, I approached Dora Rossi, another old friend. Dora, I knew, would bring not only the Samoan vibe but also the food perspective that sits within her soul. Dora is half-Samoan and half-Italian. If we could make Pacific Island cuisine as famous as Italian cuisine is, we’d be on the right track.

That left the Kingdom of Tonga. My friend Joanna Bourke invited me to speak at an event in the Kingdom where my old friend Her Royal Highness Princess Salote Mafile’o Pilolevu was the guest of honour. I told her about my idea, and she asked me, ‘How do we bring this to Tonga?’ I replied, tongue-in-cheek and thinking I had a real nerve, ‘If you would agree to be my co-host, I’m sure we’d find a way.’ She gave me a look, one that I have come to know very well, and said, ‘You’re on!’

We were lucky to have the effervescent and cheeky Fololeni Curr step in for Her Royal Highness in the finals of season 1. I had never worked with Flo before but, wow — did she bring sparkle to the show! She’s quick with the one-liners, has a wicked sense of humour and had us in stitches. She was so good in season 1 that we asked her to host the Tongan episodes for season 2.

All of these people’s perspectives make *Pacific Island Food Revolution* what it is. Votausi captured it well when she said, at an event in Port Vila, ‘This is a Pacific solution for a Pacific problem. We don’t need anything from outside to help us. We have the crops and the traditional knowledge to guide us. You see, through food, NCDs are not just government business. Through food, NCDs are everyone’s business. And you know what — we can do this!’

It wasn’t just about creating a TV show. And we didn’t want a traditional development approach — we wanted a revolution. To make the message top-of-mind for everyone, we needed a communications strategy that took the messages from the TV series and showed them to everybody, everywhere. From social media to news stories to YouTube recipes to

radio shows to our website and back to TV. You see, this wasn't just about food — this was to be an emotional appeal to the hearts and minds of Pacific people to remind them that *their food is the best*. Over the course of *Pacific Island Food Revolution's* short but noisy life, three terrific communications experts have made this happen: Faumuina Felolini Maria Tafuna'i, Wame Valentine and Michelle Tevita-Singh. All have dropped their magic into the movement and we are all the better for them. I felt that with this view, and with these people, we could indeed create a food movement in the Pacific and, most importantly, make something that people would want to be a part of.

Three years into the revolution, the television series plays in every Pacific nation with an estimated 5 million viewers a week (from a total population of 12 million). When we did our surveys, we found that 42 per cent of those surveyed have made a positive change in their diet. It's working!



A lot of credit is due to the fabulous contestants you have come to know and love. From Vanuatu, we thank, from season 1, Leonid Vusilai and Knox Taleo (the 'Island Boys'), Ashi and Florian Carcasses, and Lucyana Tarosa and Maeva Williams; from season 2, Basil Leodoro and Annette Garae, Primrose Siri and Anita Frank, and Patrick Tari and Silas Kalman; and from season 3, Jane Kanas and Alistair Arthur.

From Sāmoa, from season 1 our thanks go to chef John Tu'ulama and Asia Stanley, Jerrey Young and Antonio Chadwick, Amazing Tavita and Tina Prasad, and Jerry and Charlotte Brunt; from season 2, Tino Aukisitino Suifaatau and Teuila Aukusitino, and Nunuiasolelei Vaifale and Tiose Lologa Siofele; and from season 3, Nina Va'a and Iqbal Mohommed.

We thank the teams from Fiji: from season 1, Rakesh and Pritisha Chand, Rachel Beryl Temo and Timoci Waqaniburatu, and Manasa Bolawaqatabu and Shamim Ali; from season 2, Sera Smith and Milly Hoyt, Krystelle Lavaki and Pio Fihaki, and Sumit Kumar and Avinesh Chand; from season 3, Rachel Beryl Temo and Akuila Naiova.

The Kingdom of Tonga was well represented in season 1 by Joshua Saviete and Nox Pulu, Hina Fe'ao and Piuela Taufa, and Sela Latailakepa and Taufa Halateu; from season 2, Francis Hikila and Tupou Mapumeihengalu Fifita, Lopeti Filo and Caroline Manu, and Tuiohu Mafi and Mia Asi; and from season 3, Randall Otto Blake Kamea and Ricky Vollmer.

We have been blessed with some terrific special guests. We thank the Honourable Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa, prime minister of Sāmoa, for her words and wisdom in an episode about food and climate change. We thank our other Samoan guests: farmer and informal comedian Mikaele Maiava, Adi Maimalaga Tafuna'i, Cindy of Sāmoa. From Vanuatu we say tank yu tumas to Myriam Malao, Grace Simeon and Wendy Isack from the Mama's Association in the Port Vila market. From Fiji, many thanks to Apisalomé Tudreu, from the Methodist Church of Fiji, and the brilliant Fijian baker Bertrand Jang. We also had a special appearance by the president of Fiji, the Honourable Wiliame Katonivere, who wowed everyone. In the Kingdom of Tonga we are grateful to Amelia Afuha'amango Tuipulotu and from Papua New Guinea we were stoked to have Jennifer Baing represent 'The Land of the Unexpected'. We even had an Olympian — Tongan

superstar Pita Taufatofua appeared in an episode in season 1. The TV series also plays in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, all through Southeast Asia, and the United Kingdom. This is important, as during the Covid-related pause in tourism our future tourists were learning about the local foods of the Pacific and will hopefully come asking for them. Local food on tourism menus provides a vital economic supply link to local farmers and hence leaves valuable dollars in-country and in the hands of local people.

Local cuisine requires local agriculture. Local food is not just about diet or about NCDs. From a development perspective, local food also has a vital role across a range of sectors. In a changing climate, a choice for local food is a choice for the planet. There are no industrial emissions and few food miles when you chose local, and you're supporting local agriculture, which is good for the climate. In food security, growing and eating local bolsters local food systems and creates food independence.

Think about biodiversity. Local cuisine requires the full food basket, including those special crops that make cuisine unique. Local cuisine, then, is the vessel for a biodiverse food system. For example, there are over 400 taro varieties in the Pacific — some used for food, some for medicine, some for ceremony. If some of these taro crops are lost, culture is lost too. As Suliana Siwatibau once said to me, 'You don't just lose the crop — you lose knowledge.'

But food is not just about health and climate change; it is not just about food security and biodiversity. Food is what our mothers make us; it is what binds — even creates — communities. The story of the food is the story of the people. It is through food that culture is defined. Remember: we live in paradise! The Pacific is the Garden of Eden. The creator has been extravagantly generous to the Pacific. We have the purest oceans, an abundant natural world; in fact, we have been given all we need to live healthy, harmonious lives. I call this the divine design. So a choice for local food is not as simple as choosing what to eat. It is a divine act, a divine choice. Through this food, *our* food, we celebrate the spiritual majesty of nature.



What's next for us? Pacific Island Food Revolution was only ever meant to be the beginning of a Pacific-wide food movement. We are thrilled to see more local eateries popping up in the Pacific. Suva and Apia are literally jumping with them! In Vanuatu, a food tourism model is being developed, led by Votausi Mackenzie-Reur with chef Leo Vusilai, winner of season 1, at her side. We are working with The Asia Foundation on localised food movements such as Sanma Food Revolution, also in Vanuatu, and we'd love to foster more of these across the region to help address food matters at a very local level.

At its heart, Pacific Island Food Revolution is a food justice movement, helping to revive what is already there. As Dr Jone Hawea says, 'We all know that our local cuisines are the most delicious and nutritious, so Pacific Island Food Revolution is about the restoration of Pacific food culture for the modern era.'

So this is a story of hope, of fun, of resilience, of sovereignty, of delicious food. Her Royal Highness said it best: 'We're all in this together, and we can get through this together. The revolution begins at home!'

Hon. Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa,
the Prime Minister of
Sāmoa, and Hon. Ralph
Regenvanu, Minister of
Climate Change, Vanuatu.



Climate change and the Pacific Island Food Revolution

The uptake of local foods and regeneration of localised food systems and economies both foster Vanuatu's economic and agricultural independence, and has tangible and overt connections to climate change in the region. The more local a food system is, the more resilient a community is, the better their food security.

— Hon. Ralph Regenvanu, Minister of Climate Change, Vanuatu

In 2023, the role of food systems in driving climate change was tabled at COP28 UAE in a Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems and Climate Action. More than 130 countries signed up, including many nations in the Pacific.

Globally food systems contribute up to 30 per cent to overall emissions when the entire scope of agricultural production methods, logistics and transport are considered. Against this backdrop, choosing local food over imported and/or processed food has significant climate change implications.

- **REDUCTION OF FOOD MILES:** Imported foods have a far higher transportation footprint than locally produced foods.
- **PROCESSED VS WHOLE FOODS:** Processed foods create higher emissions than natural crops. Keep in mind the cost implications of importing ingredients for processed foods and the associated climate costs of using base ingredients grown through conventional agriculture, which implies pesticide use.
- **FOOD SECURITY AND RESILIENCE:** Local crops have been shown to be the most resilient in weather events, and indigenous farming methods are the best.
- **HOME GARDENING:** The promotion of local cuisine stimulates the growth of local crops. Home gardening grew out of need during the Covid pandemic and was popularised on social media. This is key to urban and peri-urban food security.
- **LOCAL AGRICULTURE:** Locally grown crops sequester carbon, so not only is choosing local crops not contributing to climate change, but it is also a mitigation measure.

People can feel powerless in the face of climate change. It can seem to be the domain solely of governments and institutions. But through what we chose to eat, climate change is not just government business, it is everyone's business. As Hon. Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa, prime minister of Sāmoa, says:

In Sāmoa, climate change is not just something we talk about — it is something we do. Just by growing or eating your own local, natural food you are taking climate change action. And that's not all. By eating local crops you are also supporting local farmers. This is of great economic value to Sāmoa. You are also reducing Sāmoa's global food miles footprint, which is created by imported foods. Our food choices can create benefits for the greater good of Sāmoa. This is what we call fa'a Sāmoa for the modern era.

Our mentor and inspiration



I met Dr Isimeli Tukana in 2014, when I was first dreaming up the Pacific Island Food Revolution. We hit it off right away and realised we had something in common — we both loved Fiji, and we both viewed local food as a critical solution to Fiji’s NCD crisis. In his role as the Fijian government’s NCD advisor, Dr Tukana was in a pivotal position to advise me.

And advise me he did; in fact, he quickly became my go-to mentor for the project. He understood the need for something visual, something cultural and something fun. In his words: ‘We need a social solution to address NCDs, not a medical solution — and that’s what Pacific Island Food Revolution is.’

Along with many in the Pacific and especially Fiji, we were saddened to learn of his passing in 2021. He was a leader to us, and to many.

He may no longer be with us, but his work, his spirit and his legacy live on in Pacific Island Food Revolution and through all those lives he has touched.

Food sovereignty



In 2020, the Hollywood actress Marisa Tomei mentioned Pacific Island Food Revolution in an Instagram post: ‘Squishing up into that special pie. Making that same sauce your great-grandma made. The comfort of family love directly into your belly. Food is our families and our personal culture. #FOODSOVEREIGNTY. Take away food sovereignty, and you take away bonds, pride and health. I love my grandma, mama, uncle and brother giving me food love!

‘As my friend chef @robertolivernz @pacificislandfoodrev says, “Food sovereignty is when a people have ownership and control over the production and cultural systems that both feed and define them. Food is not just what is on the plate — it is the hub of a complex matrix of connections to traditional, ceremonial and medicinal knowledge, farming practices, biodiversity, community, culture and even climate change. When food sovereignty is diminished, so is all of this. The story of the food is the story of the people.”’

Food sovereignty is at the heart of the Pacific Island Food Revolution’s philosophy: the celebration of authentic Pacific food culture, as created and owned by Pacific people, will nourish all aspects of Pacific life, from the individual to the collective, from the economic to the cultural, from the agricultural to the ceremonial.

I loved Marisa’s post because she takes the concept of food sovereignty out of the abstract and into the personal. It’s not just a concept, not just the realm of academia or cultural advocates: it’s yours to enact through what you choose to eat.

Food is a tangible connector to your glorious history and to those you love. It’s in the memories of the dishes your grandmother made that nourished you, both body and soul. As Marisa says, ‘The comfort of family love directly into your belly.’ Food is not just what is on the plate — it is where you come from, family and community, culture and identity.

What other food culture has coconut cream made with hot rocks, tropical fruits dropping off trees in lavish abundance, the numerous seaweeds and other countless treasures of the ocean that we take for granted? And the dishes! Laplap, palusami, ota ika, vakasakera. Ours is a culture of superfoods.

Reflect on this as you choose what you eat. Claim your memories, claim your culture, claim your beauty, claim your sovereignty. Love it, cherish it; it is yours, and it is you. And thank you to my darling friend Marisa for reminding us all that we will never forget who we really are through food.



Vanuatu





Port Vila market, Vanuatu.

Simboro, laplap, bunia, tuluk . . .
the culinary treasures of Vanuatu
are the Pacific's great secret. They
are dishes worth travelling for,
dishes that unlock the dazzling
history of this fascinating nation.
Port Vila's amazing market is
the best place to start your food
journey. If you go once, you'll
find yourself going back time and
again to this magical country.
Tank yu tumas, Vanuatu, for all
you have brought to Pacific Island
Food Revolution.



My love letter to Vanuatu

On my island Natambo, also known as Malo, I was learning how to grate coconuts, bananas and yams at seven. I also enjoyed spending time with my mother and grandmother, preparing traditional dishes. My favourite meals were often those with my mother when she was breastfeeding my younger siblings. These meals included fresh fish in coconut sauce, laplap, white or purple yam and island cabbage. I was always copying dishes that adults were preparing and would make miniature versions.

The delicious laplap that is baked overnight and into the morning is difficult to make. The laplap is as dark as a mud cake and is covered with layers of freshly cooked coconut cream. The nutty and creamy flavour melts in your mouth and the taste is out of this world. To make just one laplap namambe one needs to grate over 100 coconuts, not such an easy task. I was fortunate that home economics was offered in school from years 7 to 12. I took all the cookery courses, but it was an English syllabus that taught me how to cook pastries, meat dishes and salads, which were foreign to me. I worked hard to understand this style of cooking so that I could pass my exams. Traditional cookery was treated as something that belonged in the villages and islands, not in the modern world.

I never gave up on my dream of becoming a cook, and studied in Australia as a home economics teacher. I was confident that I could teach cookery differently by infusing traditional flavours into Western-style dishes. After a few years, however, I felt I could not achieve this as the syllabus was so rigid and left no room for creativity.

I resigned and worked for the Ministry of Health as a nutritionist. Now I was able to teach communities how to prepare healthy meals for different age groups and for pregnant and lactating mothers and weaning babies using local foods. I also taught people how to make healthy school meals, and meals for over- and under-nourished children and adults. I learned quickly in my career as a nutritionist that to change my people's mindset so that they understand our local foods are better than imported refined foods is a complex matter, and continues to be a challenge to this day.

Traditionally, our diet was plant-based. Meat was eaten during feasts or pig-killing ceremonies. In order to overcome NCDs in Vanuatu, we have to go back to what our diets were before. The stigma around going on a diet is compromising the amount of food on our plates. We need to emphasise that it is about changing our food choices and menus in our kitchens. Our plates can be full as long as there are more leafy green vegetables and fruits, and less meat and carbohydrates.

I love my people and my country and it saddens me when we lose productive young men and women to these terrible NCDs every day. I plead to my Vanuatu family to join me to inform our people that God has blessed our islands with plentiful resources to sustain our health and wellbeing into the future.

Omajina.

VOTAUSI MACKENZIE-REUR

PACIFIC ISLAND FOOD REVOLUTION CO-HOST FOR VANUATU



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Patrick Tari and Silas
Kalman; Maeva Williams
and Lucyana Tarosa; Basil
Leodoro and Annette
Garae; Leonid Vusilai and
Knox Taleo; Florian and
Ashi Carcasses; Primrose
Siri and Anita Frank; Jane
Kanas and Alistair Arthur.





SERVES 6

Basil and Nene's Tanna Nuanangen Simboro

This dish adds a nutrition punch to the classic simboro, as intended by foodie doctors Basil and Nene who created it. They see first-hand the devastating effects of eating a low-nutrient diet. Basil and Nene crisped the fish skin to garnish the dish — fancy, eh!

FILLING

5 cups grated manioke (cassava)
250 grams poulet fish fillet (any good-quality sustainable fresh fish will be fine)
1 egg, beaten
1 cup manioke (cassava) flour (or any other type of flour)
1 tablespoon virgin coconut oil
1 cup fresh or canned coconut milk
1 small tomato, diced
1 spring onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, crushed
1 thumb-sized piece ginger, grated
salt and pepper
8–10 aelan kabis leaves
spring onion shoots or aelan kabis stalks to tie rolls

SAUCE

1 teaspoon curry powder
1 handful nangai nuts, crushed (cashew nuts or almonds are a good substitute)

GARNISH

skin of 2 poulet fish fillets
coconut oil for frying
2–3 tomatoes, chopped

Squeeze out the fluid from the grated manioke, and set aside.

Dip the fish fillets into the egg, then coat with manioke flour. Fry the fish in the coconut oil until golden brown.

Add the coconut milk, tomato, spring onion, and half of the garlic and ginger. Bring to a simmer, then continue to simmer on low heat for 10 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, remove the fish, tomato and spring onion from the pan and strain, leaving the coconut milk in the pan. Flake the fish and mix with the tomato and spring onion to make the filling. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Add the remaining garlic and ginger to the coconut milk. Then add the curry powder and crushed nangai nuts and stir gently.

Lay out the aelan kabis leaves, overlapping the edges. Spread the grated manioke onto the leaves and add the fish filling. Carefully roll, ensuring that it is tightly sealed. Then tie with the spring onion shoots or aelan kabis stalks to keep the simboro roll together.



Carefully place the roll in a saucepan and cover with water. Bring to the boil and cook for 10 minutes. Once cooked, remove the roll and slice it into 2-centimetre pieces.

While the simboro roll is cooking, pan-fry the fish skin for the garnish in coconut oil until crispy. Place on paper towel to drain.

Lay out the simboro pieces on serving plates, top with the curry sauce, and garnish with the chopped tomatoes and crispy fish skin.

SERVES 2

Basil and Nene's Shelley May Simboro

Here Basil and Nene took a Vanuatu classic — simboro — and gave it a snazzy treatment by frying it. I'd never seen that done before, and neither had Votausi. The dish is named after our recipe writer, Shelley, who took care of the contestants in all countries during season 2 — they all called her 'Mum'. Don't be daunted by the long ingredient list; this is very easy to put together.

BASE

1 large ripe cooking banana (plantain)
1 large green cooking banana (plantain)
6–8 large aelan kabis leaves (or use silverbeet)

FILLING

2 spring onions, finely diced
1 thumb-sized piece ginger, finely diced
2 cloves garlic, finely diced
1 cup beef mince
2 teaspoons vegetable oil
salt and pepper

COATING

1 egg, beaten
2 cups manioke (cassava) flour (or use rice flour or wheat flour)
vegetable oil for frying

DIP

3 cherry tomatoes
1 cup chopped popo (papaya)
1 cup chopped pineapple
1 teaspoon honey
1 tablespoon lime juice

Peel the ripe and green bananas and grate into a bowl. Set aside.

Mix the spring onions, ginger and garlic, then mix with the beef mince.

Heat the oil in a pan and fry the mince until golden brown, seasoning with salt and pepper. Mix the mince filling with the grated plantain.

Wash the aelan kabis leaves and lay out. Spoon the filling onto the individual leaves and roll tightly — ensure you fold the ends in.

Place the simboro rolls into a small pot and cover with water. Bring to the boil and cook on a low heat for around 10 minutes, until the simboro are firm. Remove them from the pot and leave to cool, then pat dry with a paper towel.

Roll the simboro in the beaten egg and coat with the manioke flour.

Heat a little oil in a pan and fry the rolls until golden brown. Remove and place on paper towels to drain.

Combine all the dip ingredients, season with salt and pepper and blend until smooth. Serve with the simboro.



SERVES 4

Knox and Leo's Purple Yam Soup

This soup is an absolute winner. It's hearty enough to be a meal, and elegant enough to be served as a first course at a dinner party. Knox and Leo decided to make a purple soup to match the dress that Votausi was wearing in this episode, a tribute to her influence on the Island Boys. Beyond its gorgeous colour, the velvety smoothness of this soup grabs you. Purple indicates the presence of antioxidants, which are great for total health. I have slightly simplified the boys' recipe to be easier to make at home. Feel free to add some chopped bele to the soup at the end rather than making the bele and moringa oil as described below. It's great either way.

4 chicken thighs, bone in	10-centimetre piece ginger, sliced
½ cup virgin coconut oil	2 purple yams, peeled and diced
1 stalk lemongrass	3 coconuts
3 star anise	salt and pepper
¼ stick cinnamon	3 aelan kabis leaves
½ onion, finely diced	1 handful moringa leaves
2 cloves garlic, minced	

Sear the chicken thighs in a hot pan with a teaspoon of the virgin coconut oil. Once browned, take them out and put them in a saucepan with the 1 litre of water. Add the lemongrass, star anise, cinnamon, onion, garlic and ginger, and bring to the boil. Simmer for 30–45 minutes, to make a stock.

Strain, reserving both the chicken thighs and the stock. Put the stock back into the pot and let it continue to simmer. Remove the meat from the chicken thighs and set aside.

Add the yam to the simmering stock. Remove about ⅓ of the yam pieces from the stock after 10 minutes.

Heat about half of the remaining oil in a pan, then fry the removed yam pieces until golden brown. Set aside for a garnish.

Pour the water from the coconuts into a bowl, then grate the coconut flesh. Squeeze the coconut gratings to make coconut cream. Add the coconut cream to the soup and season with salt and pepper. Blend the soup to achieve a smooth texture.

TO MAKE THE OIL GARNISH: Wash the aelan kabis leaves and blanch quickly in hot water, then refresh in cold water. Add the remaining coconut oil (about ¼ cup) and the moringa and blend until smooth. Season well with salt and pepper.

TO SERVE: Pour the soup into bowls. Add the fried yam pieces. Top with shredded chicken meat and add drops of oil for colour and contrast.

