

3 July 2013 **New Zealand based chef Robert Oliver is in Tonga this week filming a programme on Tongan food and cooking, as part of TV series promoting food from the Pasifik food, airing in New Zealand later this year. Robert Oliver's visit is sponsored by the Ministry of Commerce, Tourism and Labour, as part of a programme to help facilitate and accelerate growth in Tonga's food and beverage sector.**



The Ministry is working with other key stakeholders to develop the Me'akai Cook Book - Tonga Project in an effort to further enhance the promotion of Tonga's Tourism, agricultural and fisheries sectors at both the local and international markets. The project is based on the renowned Me'akai Cook Book authored by Mr Oliver. This Cook Book celebrates six South Pacific nations, their culture, cooking and traditions and promotes the 'farm to the table' concept introducing the delicious local food and cuisine which are available off the typical tourist route.

Part of the project includes the focus on Tongan food and beverage products and Tongan cuisine as an additional component of Tonga's Tourism Destination marketing. The episode explores the unique local cuisine and organic produce available in Tonga. Over the seven days of shooting Robert and local chefs visit food heroes will look at unique Tongan cuisine, including a Royal Food Story that filming the preparation and the Royal Luncheon celebrating His Majesty's Birthday.

Local chefs will work alongside Mr Oliver to create distinct specific island "cuisine" based on local food culture and formatted to meet food outlet menu needs; aiming at designing a tourism food brand strategy which is Tongan based and same time delivering more authentic visitor experience and supports local farmers

The project links with existing Tongan programs including the Buy Tonga Made Campaign and PHAMA to ensure local pride in local products and realistic and achievable export pathways exists and can be accessed for quality Tongan agriculture exports. The key objectives are to gain good exposure of Tongan cuisine, tourism properties, attractions and Tongan product through the TV series in New Zealand and Australia.

A finale lunch will be held on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> July at the Scenic Hotel, where Mr. Oliver and the local chefs will prepare a 5 course meal inspired by the culinary and agricultural treasures of Tonga. The banquet will be filmed and forms part of the final section of the television episode.

The support is part of the Ministry's thrust to grow Tonga's tourism industry. Tourism has been identified as the major economic development opportunity for the country, with potential to provide broad based employment and income generation, as well as support the retention of cultural traditions and the sustainable management of the nation's environmental assets. The Tonga Strategic Development Framework highlights the priority placed on growing the tourism sector.

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