

HENRY ONESEMO

Location: Auckland

Chef Henry Onesemo is the executive chef and co owner of Tala in Parnell, Auckland, the world's first Samoan fine dining restaurant to receive a MICHELIN Star.

In June 2026, Tala made history when it was awarded One MICHELIN Star in the inaugural MICHELIN Guide New Zealand, making Henry the first chef in the world to receive a MICHELIN Star for contemporary Samoan cuisine. It was a landmark moment for Henry, for Tala, and for Samoan food globally.

"Tala invites guests on a journey as we showcase the beauty of traditional Samoan cuisine and heritage through an innovative contemporary dining experience." Henry and the team at Tala are putting Samoan food exactly where it belongs: on the top table, without sanding off the warmth. The cooking is refined, but the feeling is human, and Henry's the sort of chef who can hold a room without needing to dominate it.

Henry grew up in Samoa, with food shaped by family, service, and the rituals around an umu. He talks about early Sunday fish market trips with his dad and learning the basics properly, the kind of grounding that still shows up in the way he builds flavour and looks after people.

His path into fine dining is not a tidy, straight line, which is partly why he connects. He moved to America and joined the military, then worked as a dancer in a Hawaiian luau show, followed by years performing at Walt Disney World in Florida, where he met his wife Debby, now his co owner and the operational force behind Tala.

After training as a chef in Samoa and spending time in Hawaii and Florida, Henry's turning point came on a trip to New Zealand after eating at Meredith's. He wrote to chef Michael Meredith asking for a shot, and in 2014 that mentorship brought him into Auckland kitchens and into the next level of his craft.

Since Tala opened in 2023, the recognition has been loud, but Henry stays pretty grounded about it. Tala won Cuisine's New Restaurant of the Year in

2024, holds Three Hats with a score of 19 in the Cuisine Good Food Guide 2025, and in 2025 was named Supreme Winner at the Viva Top 50 Restaurants, with Jesse Mulligan saying the call took only “a few seconds” and praising Tala as “enchanting” and “nothing like it”.

Internationally, Henry became the first Samoan chef to receive the One Knife distinction at The Best Chef Awards in Milan, turning up with his Samoan flag and calling the moment “very humbling.”

For live appearances, Henry is a rare fit across the full range: high end private dining and intimate chef’s table experiences, brand and partner events, public cooking demonstrations, and speaking engagements that land with both food people and non food people. He speaks clearly about culture and hospitality, the discipline behind an umu, and how you translate memory into a modern menu, plus the leadership piece of building something with your partner and team and keeping the room feeling looked after.

Henry delivers world class cooking while making guests feel like they’ve been welcomed into his home, he’s that guy.

SKILLS

Other	Chef, Cooking Demonstrations, Corporate Speaking, Public Speaker
Speaking Topics	Cooking / Chef, Keynote Speaking, Lifestyle, Motivational, Resilience, Well-being, Work-Life Balance