

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.

Henry was born in American Samoa and raised in Samoa, in the village of Malaemalu in Falealili. His earliest food memories were shaped by village life: Sunday umu, early morning fish market trips with his father, taro, coconuts, family, service and the rituals of feeding people properly. That grounding still sits at the centre of his work, even as his food has been refined to an international standard.

His path to the kitchen was anything but predictable. Before becoming a chef, Henry lived and worked in Hawaii and Florida, served in the US military, and spent years in cultural performance, including luau shows and a role at Walt Disney World's Polynesian Resort. That experience gives him something rare in the culinary world: a natural understanding of timing, presence, audience and how to connect without overplaying it.

Henry later returned to Samoa and trained as a chef, before moving into serious kitchens including Meredith's in Auckland, where fellow Samoan chef Michael Meredith helped open his eyes to what fine dining could be. He also spent time at Gaa in Bangkok, where traditional Indian food was presented through a Michelin starred lens. Those experiences helped sharpen Henry's own vision, not to make Samoan food fit someone else's version of fine dining, but to let it stand in its own power.

Tala, which means story, is the result of that vision. Opened in Parnell by Henry and his wife Debby, the restaurant is built around contemporary Samoan tasting menus that draw from village technique, street food memory, family tradition and fa'a Samoa, the Samoan way. The food is precise

and highly considered, but it never loses its warmth. Guests are not just served dishes. They are welcomed into a story.

Since opening, Tala's rise has been extraordinary. It was named Cuisine's New Restaurant of the Year in 2024, holds Three Hats with a score of 19 in the Cuisine Good Food Guide 2025, was named Supreme Winner at the Viva Top 50 Restaurants 2025, and Henry received a One Knife distinction at The Best Chef Awards in Milan, becoming the first Samoan chef recognised by the international awards. In 2026, TIME also named Tala one of the World's Greatest Places, recognising the restaurant's singular focus and its role in creating space for culturally specific dining in New Zealand.

For brands, Henry offers premium credibility without the ego. He brings the authority of a MICHELIN starred chef, the discipline of someone who has built his career the hard way, and the warmth of a host who understands that food is never just food. It is culture, memory, welcome and connection.

Henry is a strong fit for premium food and drink, kitchenware, appliances, travel, hospitality, tourism, cultural storytelling and brands that want real integrity alongside exceptional execution. He can deliver recipe development, campaign shoots, short form social content, media interviews, hosted events, speaking, private dining experiences and live demonstrations. He moves easily between exclusive fine dining energy and public facing storytelling, with the confidence of a chef whose work now stands on the world stage, and the personality that makes audiences want to stay with him.

SKILLS

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