



Under the Banyan Tree - Autumn Issue

Welcome to issue two of the White Grass Ocean Resort e-newsletter *Under the Banyan Tree*.

A great deal has happened in the past few months which has enabled White Grass to continue its commitment to maintaining high standards within the resort, and the services it provides. Consequently a number of bures have been given a total refurbishment. All rooms now have ceiling fans and our honeymoon suites have new soft furnishings which have added to their romantic feel whilst being mindful of our South Pacific décor.

Our pool is now finished and fully operational and is a great hit with all our guests. Set in the manicured gardens on the ocean side of the resort, swimmers have uninterrupted views to the sea from this lovely haven. The surrounds are fully landscaped and planted out in lush tropical plants which have already become well established.





UNDER THE BANYAN TREE



Hot Tours – Ipai Kastom Village

A glimpse into another world.

Guests at White Grass are always keen to ask what the essential things are to see during their stay. The list is long, but an experience that never fails to impress is a visit to Ipai Kastom Village only 20 minutes drive from the resort.

The people of Tanna are a proud race. Historically they are renowned for rejecting the petty baubles offered by Captain Cook in exchange for timber and water he required on landing at Port Resolution. Tannese control their own destiny. As such there are many villages throughout the island who choose to reject all Western and technological changes and live a simple, subsistence “kastom” life. One such village is Ipai, located on a hilltop mid way between the airport and the main town of Lenakel. These villagers are proud to show visitors their way of life and their carefully fashioned handcrafts – but when you, the visitor departs, there is no transformation to the rhythm of the village nor does the scene change, this is not an experience contrived for sightseers. Life continues on as it has for centuries.

On arrival a village elder heralds your presence by sounding the conch which echoes hauntingly through the forest. You are then led along one of the winding pathways taking you through the vegetable gardens and crops filled with a curious array of produce growing for the village’s use. You pick

your way through chickens, pigs and piglets, living a life of abandon before their time draws near for the cooking pot. Thatched roof huts form sleeping quarters and kitchens throughout the village and are designated to certain family groups or sets of adolescent boys awaiting their entry to manhood. Kava plants sprout in unexpected places – the roots of which will become the social beverage to be shared amongst the adult men each evening in the Nakamal. Children play with simple found items which act as toys and as they grow older they will learn the ways of their village in the form of oral history. They will learn of seasons to plant, how to preserve crops for difficult times, medicinal plants and so on. Simultaneously they learn the social and cultural expectations of their clansmen through their family and the village chief and elders – to our Western minds the ideals can be both highly practical and also highly confronting. As a guest in their midst, you have the privilege of sharing in their knowledge.

As you wander with your guide you will perceive gentle chatter interspersed with tinkling laughter; you too are

interesting to curious eyes. Finally after observing and discussing the village ways you are lead to the Nakamal or meeting place under the massive Banyan tree. Villagers gather quietly. Young women and girls swish quietly past as their grass skirts catch the breeze. Men and boys cluster together until a silent signal starts the chanting and clapping of the dance. Men and women swirl in widening circles as their voices join together in haunting rhythms which are inter-dispersed with complicated clapping patterns. The dancers may number many dozens and the ground reverberates beneath you from the stamping of feet. The dances tell of times of plenty and special occasions, and as quickly as they start, the chanting ceases. The silence of the forest surrounds you and seems heightened by the scene you have just witnessed.

Your presence within the village leaves you contemplating your reliance on modern paraphernalia – and your mind keeps drifting back to the simple yet happy village you have been welcomed within. A truly poignant experience.



You may be interested to know.....

Whitegrass Ocean Resort is proud to be a participant in a co-operative traineeship program with the TAFEA College located in Tanna. As the largest school in the province, the school undertakes a rigorous selection process to choose a student who shows the most potential and desire to be trained for 12 months in all facets of hospitality in the resort. Last year this award went to Mary Willie who has spent 3 months training in each of the resort's divisions, namely housekeeping, food service, front office and guest relations.

We have been delighted with Mary's progress and she is thrilled to have learned so many new and valuable skills. Mary has now joined the 'resort family' on a permanent full time basis sharing her time between the restaurant and the front desk. Our new trainee is Ruth Naiou who has just completed year 12 and is doing her first rotation in the kitchen and restaurant.

Staff Member Profile

Featured in this edition is Inam Redi who is the Resort's head gardener. Inam's love of nature and its bounty are extremely evident to all who have been lucky enough to walk around his masterpiece.

After discussions with management, Inam and his team set to work to make the visions a reality and can be seen quietly going about his work in a very dedicated way. Having worked at the resort since its inception, Inam, along with his work mates have nurtured and sculpted the grounds from a largely bare and rutted field on a very open and ragged coastline into a garden which boasts, mass plantings of vibrantly coloured bougainvillea, banks of

cactus, daisies and spider lilies as well as stunning birds of paradise and the lusciously perfumed frangipani. Such landscaping beautifully highlights the golf course, pool and of course the stunning sunset points. All of this work has been done with a minimum of mechanical assistance and therefore represents thousands of man hours by the gardening team over 5 years. Inam is married to Iauko and has 3 children, he lives at Lounamilo and enjoys relaxing with his friends at the Nakamal over a coconut cup or two of the local kava brew.

Thank-you Inam and 'boys' for all your hard work which we can all only admire.





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A Quote To Ponder:

A description of a typical village when first contact with missionaries was made.

“Every year, a part of the forest was cleared and yam, taro, sugar-cane and bananas planted. More food was always grown than was strictly needed in order to have a surplus for gift giving and to forestall famine in case of natural disaster.....people also fished, reared pigs, collected shellfish, caught birds and bats, and picked nuts and fruits. People did not want and satisfied all their needs from what they found growing around them.”

Jeremy MacClancy To Kill a Bird With Two Stones.

A Traveller's Tale Raising the Flag – John Frum Day.

Pre-dawn we gathered together to start our journey to the far side of the island. The vehicle bumped and jolted along the deeply worn road as we approached the volcano. As we neared the village, more and more brightly dressed people could be seen walking towards the site of today's festivities – the annual John Frum Day. A dozen or so cars formed a great conundrum for the 'marshal' who ushered us into an appropriate bay with his long pointing stick which may also have other uses if we chose not to heed his words. We entered the parade ground along with many hundreds of local people and like them took up a spot around the perimeter. There was an air of expectation. Quiet chatter and orderly preparation gained momentum. The marshal became more agitated as the time of 8:00am approached – his stick waved and poked in the air more furiously – telling all that the time was nearing.

A shrill whistle startled the assembled crowd into silence – the marshal's stick stilled. All eyes went to the top of the hill as the door to the thatched roofed house opened. Out stepped the village chief - dressed in a blue suit, white shirt and tie, leather lace up shoes and military sash. Behind him came his group of 10 soldiers in uniform. Solemnly and with military precision they raised the flags. First the flags of Vanuatu, France and indigenous Australia, followed majestically by the oversized stars and stripes of the USA. Although unseen from this vantage point, Mt Yasur volcano rumbled its presence in the background. Another whistle filled the air and bare chested soldiers in blue jeans precision marched onto the arena, bamboo 'guns' to their shoulders and USA emblazoned onto their backs and chests in carmine red zinc cream. The crowd roared and clapped. The marching ceased and the dancing began – for hours and hours dancers interchanged – to entertain the highly engaged crowd. The chief and his military aid – complete with a chest of medals and the word “ranger” emblazoned on his shoulder - shared a pack of Benson and Hedges, lit with a zippo lighter, haughtily watched on. After all this was a day to be proud of.



Flag of the John Frum movement

