

Tilapia sportfishing ecofarms in Vanuatu

You've travelled to Tanna Island in southern Vanuatu. You've swum. You've dived. You've just visited the famous active volcano, Mt Yasur, and find that you still have half of the day left before it's time to head back and admire the sunset. What will you do? Go fishing!



You've seen all there is to see at Tanna Island's active volcano. Now what are you going to do?

To help adventure-seekers do this, is the Imaio tilapia ecofarm, a community ecotourism venture in lush jungle about a 10-minute drive from the base of Mt Yasur. The farm's spring-fed fish ponds were initially established as a food security project, because in the uplands of Tanna Island fresh animal protein for human nutrition is scarce. The community started out growing Nile tilapia as a food fish for their own consumption, and any surplus fish were sold for about VUV 300 (USD 3.00) per 200 g fish.

With no net to catch them, the fish were caught by hook-and-line, with the line tied to a stick. This caught the eye of some visitors who also wanted to have a turn! Naturally this kind of activity can make you hungry and thirsty. All that was needed was a swept area under some shady trees and space for an esky, barbecue and picnic tables.

The concept now is for visitors to pay VUV 500 (USD 5.00) per person for admission to the beautifully landscaped gardens surrounding the Imaio community fish ponds, and be issued with fishing tackle and bait. They can catch and then release the tilapia purely for sport. Should they wish to eat the fish for lunch, however, then for another VUV 500 the fish will be barbecued for them. This earns the Imaio community VUV 1,000 (USD 10.00) for each 200-g tilapia.

Now that's value adding!

News of the tilapia sportfishing venture has been travelling fast. Now there is a recently established tilapia farm that plans to offer the same experience on neighbouring Aneityum Island, where regular cruise liners bring ashore upwards of 2,000 passengers at a time.

The aquaculture and tourism sectors have occasionally been at loggerheads. In the case of the Imaio tilapia ecofarm, however, it's gratifying to see the two sectors come together for the benefit of a remote inland community that has few opportunities for income generation.

For more information:

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All images in this article are by Tim Pickering.



- A. Fun can be had at well-stocked fish ponds, without any sophisticated fishing gear.
- B. The Imaio community fish ponds have been landscaped into a tranquil and beautiful picnic spot.
- C. This tilapia could now be released back into the pond to fight again on another day. Or it could be your lunch. If so, then please pay an extra VUV 500.
- D. You can see the pride in the faces of Imaio community members who implemented this project with assistance from the Vanuatu Department of Fisheries and KfW, the German Development Bank.

