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**“IT IS REWARDING
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AND ENJOY BEING
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OVER THE WORLD”**

TAMARA JOHNSON

Chef

By Deborah Hady

At a young age, Tamara Johnson's career is already glittering with many highlights. From her current position working as a Head Chef at Malaysian-inspired restaurant Madame Woo, to working at Orlando's Hyatt Regency Hotel in Florida, Tamara's journey as a chef has involved a lot of discipline and hard work.

While in high school, Tamara took Home Economics classes and started working part time in a roast shop, serving up pork, beef and fried chicken for customers. She also worked in a pizza shop, learning how to cut pizzas, operate fryers, and basic customer service skills.

After school, she went straight into a job. While doing courses at Auckland Hotel and Chefs Training School,

she landed an apprenticeship with the HIP Group, the company at the forefront of Auckland's exciting food scene. Working in establishments like Takapuna Beach Café, Tamara learned a variety of skills, from making gelato to butchery.

Tamara was named 2013 Apprentice of the Year by the organisation ServiceIQ. Her prize? An all expenses paid trip to Melbourne for their Food and Wine Festival, where she got to work with some of the world's greatest chefs!

Coming back, she worked at 3 Hat Restaurant's Clooney, working and learning under the tutelage of Chef Des Harris, where she "got the best discipline" of her kitchen career.

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After a short stint in the USA, and a Britomart Café, she worked for TV series *My Kitchen Rules NZ* and *Masterchef NZ* as a food coordinator, where she first met Michelin-starred celebrity chef and judge Josh Emmet, and impressed him so much that he offered her a trial at his then newly opened Takapuna Restaurant, Madame Woo.

While her father had wanted her to be a model, Tamara was inspired by her hospitality teacher, who worked as a chef in London and ended up working for the Queen. It sparked her young passion for food and all things culinary, so she looked towards a career in hospitality – and has never looked back!

A career in the food industry came with a price – she had to work hard, sacrifice time with family and friends, and felt “like a soldier in the army.” While friends her age were going out on the weekends, enjoying music festivals, Tamara learned to make soups, pastries, stocks, and pasta.

Yet, as Tamara explained, “The people who are in this industry make it all worth it. They become your family because you spend more time with them than your blood family. They understand you like no-one else because you go through the hard times and the good

times together... It is rewarding if you love food and enjoy being challenged. You love to learn new things, love working with people from all over the world and want the opportunity to be part of the experience a customer has.”

Tamara might not have followed a traditional university pathway, but obtaining an apprenticeship in the hospitality industry jump-started her career from the roast shop near her house, to the prestigious Madame Woo.

Tamara’s journey to becoming a chef was not a straight and easy path. She had to take risks, grab opportunities, work hard and put in her body, mind and soul into every job she did. There were hardships and unexpected challenges – like when her grandmother’s illness meant that her time in America was abruptly cut short. Yet Tamara was always open to new experiences, and look where she is now!

Her journey is certainly far from over. Her new position as Head Chef at Madame Woo is a career highlight. In the coming years, she dreams of owning a restaurant, and here at TEARAWAY, we can’t wait to try the delicious offerings Tamara’s future will give!

This article was written by a Maverick from TEARAWAY, The Voice of New Zealand Youth!
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