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# Paradise Found Island-style *bisnis*

Story by Patricia Gil. Photography by Valery Lebeau, IGmedia, courtesy of the TVET program.

In recent years, the island of Espiritu Santo has seen a surge of new locally owned and managed tourism businesses. Island-style bungalows, sand-between-your-toes restaurants, and activities showcasing aspects of traditional culture are adding yet more to the allure of Santo. TVET initiatives and training programs have much to do with this latest out-

pouring of entrepreneurial action. Funded by the Australian and Vanuatu Governments, the TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training Sector) Strengthening Program has been providing small business owners with the skills to make their operations grow. The program has encouraged the appearance of new economic opportunities by providing individuals with the

knowledge and skills necessary to start their own commercial activities. Since 2009, the TVET program in Santo has been offering accredited courses, workshops and coaching on different industries, from agriculture to hospitality. The tourism industry is an important source of revenue for the islands and one of the goals of the program has been to provide individuals with the skills necessary to establish and/or operate hospitality businesses. From how to furnish bungalows using locally-made furniture and items, to commercial cooking, customer service and book-keeping, these courses have given locals the knowledge and confidence necessary to launch themselves into the task of becoming economically self-sufficient, using the resources available to them. As a result, more and more locally-owned businesses are

surfacing in the islands. "The TVET centre has seen a lot of interest from local people who, unable to make it to the capital to further their studies, have been able to access education and new skills here in Santo. There was a great need to grow the skills and capacity of people who wanted to start their own small-scale business but did not know how to," explains Ellise Sailas, Sanma TVET centre business development service coordinator and coach. Ellise is full of energy and his passion for the program is contagious. "Through progressive training and providing workshops and coaching that fits the level of skills and the needs of individuals, we now see that this is translating into real and practical economic opportunities. This year, we are adding more accredited modules to our curriculum to cater for the demand and the skill growth

that our program has generated," he explains. The TVET program's flexible and holistic approach provides not only the training that is needed but also works together with other organisations to ascertain that small industry receives the ongoing support it needs to be able to flourish. In the Malampa Province, after running extensive workshops and training for locals to develop their own tourism business, it was clear that a platform was needed to market these products to potential visitors. Little access to internet and phone meant that once a business was up and running, local operators found themselves without avenues to market their services. Visitors were discouraged by difficulties securing information and accommodation ahead of their visit. To re-

solve this problem, the TVET program, in conjunction with the Department of Tourism, set up the Malampa Call Centre in Malekula which now covers the islands of Malekula, Ambrym and Paama and which has proved to be an incredibly successful resource for both visitors and tourism businesses. Following this model, the Sanma Information Centre was created to improve access to market for tourism-related products in Santo and the northern islands. Almonique Seule, manager of the Sanma Information Centre, comes with a wealth of experience and knowledge and is ready to help visitors at the office located on Luganville's main street. "The information centre is a fantastic resource for locals to market their products," she explains. "For the local business owners, we provide the link between their product and their mar-