



Q&A with Emmanuel Laroche, author of
A Taste of Madagascar: Culinary Riches of the Red Island
(Post Hill Press, January 27, 2026)

What is this book about?

A Taste of Madagascar is a journey through one of the most flavorful and fascinating places on Earth. It's a book that blends travel, taste, culture, and biodiversity into one immersive story. I traveled across the island—meeting farmers, chefs, beekeepers, and entrepreneurs—each one working to protect Madagascar's natural and cultural heritage while giving back to their communities.

Most people know Madagascar for its vanilla. But I discovered so much more—caviar raised in pristine lakes, endemic wild black pepper, pink peppercorns, honey from mangroves and lychee orchards. These ingredients became entry points into deeper stories—about resilience, tradition, and the future of food. This book isn't just about what we eat—it's about where our food comes from, who it touches, and what it says about the world we want to live in.

Madagascar didn't just change my palate. It changed my perspective.

Who is the book for?

It's for curious travelers, food lovers, chefs, and anyone who cares about culture, sustainability, and discovery. Whether you've been to Madagascar or barely know where it is, this book is for anyone who finds joy in learning about the world through its flavors and the people behind them.

Why did you write this book?

I came to Madagascar for the vanilla—like most people know, it produces 80% of the world's supply. But I stayed for the caviar, the wild black pepper, the pink peppercorns... and the people behind them.

I discovered ingredients worth crossing an ocean for, and I met individuals whose stories moved me. I couldn't keep it to myself. This book became my way of sharing the flavors and voices of the Red Island.

But beyond the food, I realized Madagascar has something bigger to say—about resilience, creativity, and the connection between culture and nature. I wanted to give the island a voice, through its ingredients, its landscapes, and the lives of the people who call it home.

What is the biggest misconception about this topic?

I think the biggest misconception is that most people don't really know where Madagascar is—or how big it is. It's almost the size of Texas. But even more surprising, it's one of the most biodiverse places on the planet; with plants and animals you won't find anywhere else.

People usually think of lemurs and vanilla—and yes, Madagascar produces 80% of the world's vanilla—but there's so much more.

What often gets missed is that Madagascar isn't just a source of ingredients—it's a living, breathing culture with deep roots, incredible creativity, and global relevance. The flavors are just the beginning of the story.

What's the one thing you want people to take away from this book?

I want people to see Madagascar not just as a faraway island, but as a place with real people, vibrant traditions, and ingredients that connect us all. Take vanilla, for example—it's not "plain." It's emotional. It ties generations together. And behind every vanilla bean is a person whose story matters. If we want to keep enjoying these flavors, we have to care about where they come from and who produces them. This book helps people connect the dots between food, memory, culture, and respect.

How did you come up with the title?

I chose *A Taste of Madagascar* because it gives you just that—a sample, a glimpse into something much bigger. Like a tasting menu, it offers bites of food, stories, landscapes, and people. It's not just about flavors, though they're front and center. It's also about identity, connection, and inviting readers into a deeper understanding of this remarkable island. The subtitle, *Culinary Riches of the Red Island*, grounds it in food.

What was the hardest part for you to write?

The chapter on the zebu—the hunchback cattle—was the most challenging. They're not just livestock in Madagascar. They're cultural symbols, economic assets, and spiritual connectors to the ancestors. Writing about zebu meant navigating history, emotion, and ritual. I wanted to do justice to the layers of meaning they hold for the Malagasy people.

What part of the book was the most fun to write?

The parts that brought me the most joy were the stories involving my friend and guide, Nirina. Writing those scenes brought back so many great memories. He's not only hilarious and full of life, but he also seems to know every person—and every good food stop—on the island. When you're driving for 30 hours on bumpy dirt roads, having someone who knows exactly where to stop for the best bite is priceless, especially when you're writing about food culture.

Thanks to Nirina, I met some truly incredible people. One of the most unforgettable experiences was sitting down with the Chief of the Bara tribe, known for their strong connection to the Zebu cattle—and their tradition of stealing Zebu as a rite of passage to manhood. It was surreal. And Nirina just turned to me and said, "Ask him anything." And I did.

We also had plenty of fun after long days—sipping flavored rums, sampling local beers, and relaxing in nightclubs. Those moments of laughter and connection were as meaningful as any formal interview. Thinking of them while writing was like reliving the best parts of the adventure.

What are the three things to take away from this book?

1- *Flavors carry stories.*

Behind every spoon of vanilla, every drop of honey, or slice of zebu steak, there's a human story—of struggle, craftsmanship, and cultural heritage. This book brings those stories to life.

2- *Biodiversity is deeply personal.*

Madagascar's unique ecosystems aren't just scientific wonders—they are the daily reality for farmers, cooks, and families. Preserving them is not just an environmental issue, but a human one.

3- *Curiosity leads to connection.*

Whether you're a traveler, foodie, or lifelong learner, this book reminds you that being curious—about what you eat and where it comes from—can connect you to places, people, and perspectives far beyond your own.

What is one thing people can do right now?

Buy or read the book and take the journey with me. You'll go beyond the postcard version of Madagascar and meet the real people who shape its food and future. Explore their stories—and discover how connected we all are through the simple act of eating.

Why is it important for someone to read this book?

Madagascar is one of the most fascinating places on Earth, and yet, most people know almost nothing about it. Maybe they've heard about the vanilla, since 80 percent of the world's supply comes from there. But they're missing the full story.

This book is an invitation to see the island through a different lens—through its food, its people, and its landscapes. It shows how ingredients we take for granted, like vanilla or cacao, carry deep stories of resilience, heritage, and survival.

It gives voice to farmers, chefs, beekeepers, and artisans whose work impacts the global food world, even if they remain invisible to most of us.

Reading *A Taste of Madagascar* helps you connect the dots between what's on your plate and the people and ecosystems behind it. It's about flavor, yes—but also about perspective. And once you've seen it, you can't unsee it.

How do you find that this book will be helpful to more amateur cooks?

A Taste of Madagascar includes around 15 recipes that are approachable for home cooks—no matter their skill level. They're not just "chef-only" dishes. These recipes come from a range of voices: traditional Malagasy cooks, chefs from Madagascar and France, and even three American chefs who traveled with me on my first trip in 2022. That mix brings a beautiful variety of techniques, flavors, and inspirations.

I've also included substitution suggestions for ingredients that may be hard to find in the U.S., so anyone can try these recipes without needing access to specialty markets. Whether you're experimenting with a traditional Malagasy stew or mixing a cocktail using Madagascar citrus, the recipes are designed to spark creativity and give amateur cooks a deeper appreciation for the island's rich culinary heritage.

How do you find that this book will be helpful to travelers?

If you're thinking about visiting Madagascar—or just curious about what it's really like—this book offers a unique window into the island. I've traveled there three times, exploring many different regions with the help of local guides who took me far beyond the tourist highlights. That means you'll get a behind-the-scenes look at places most visitors never reach.

The book blends food, culture, and nature in a way that appeals to all kinds of travelers. You'll discover iconic sites like the Avenue of the Baobabs, the Indri lemurs of Andasibe National Park, the dramatic canyons of Isalo, the limestone forests of Tsingy de Bemaraha, and the beaches and Ylang-Ylang plantations of Nosy Be. But you'll also get a taste of daily life—like walking the jacaranda-lined streets of Antananarivo, sharing a meal at hidden local restaurants, and meeting the people who give Madagascar its spirit.

Whether you're planning a trip or dreaming of one, *A Taste of Madagascar* offers practical insights, personal stories, and cultural depth that go far beyond a traditional travel guide.

Do you have a final message?

Be curious. Let food open doors to places and people you never imagined. Madagascar changed me—I hope this book inspires others to explore, appreciate, and protect what makes it unique.

If this book makes you want to visit Madagascar, support a local farmer, or just think differently about the vanilla in your pantry, then I've done my job.

What's your best travel tip?

When you travel—or eat—ask questions. Who grew this? Where does it come from? Why does it taste this way? Curiosity makes everything richer.

Where can people get more information?

You can find more about the book and my work on flavorsunknown.com, or follow me on Instagram and Facebook at @flavorsunknown, and on LinkedIn.

What are you working on next?

I'm switching gears and writing a murder mystery set in the culinary world. It's a new challenge, but still deeply rooted in food, chefs, and cultural identity. Stay tuned!

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