

Screen sizzlers

As Ainsley Harriott and Rick Stein bring the Bahamas and Australia to our TVs this week, **Rhodri Andrews** and **Alice Barnes-Brown** get their recipes for turning travel inspiration into holiday bookings

The 'set-jetting' phenomenon is often associated with blockbuster films and drama series, but food-focused TV shows are a driving force too, appealing to a broad audience and showcasing top travel experiences as well as tasty regional cuisine.

Whether it's a celebrity-fronted show such as *Gary Barlow's Wine Tour* or *Cruising with Susan Calman*, or a programme that captures the public's imagination such as BBC hit *Race Across the World* – whose 2025 series sparked a 300% increase in trade enquiries for China, according to Wendy Wu Tours – it's an opportunity for agents to generate new sales.

With two series hosted by celebrity chefs starting on our screens this week, we talk to Ainsley Harriott about his foodie adventures in the Bahamas and Rick Stein about his culinary tour of Australia's New South Wales region, giving your clients plenty of food for thought for their next trip. ➤

PICTURE: James Bailey



PICTURES: James Bailey; Shutterstock/MevZap

ABOVE: Ainsley samples Bahamian dishes in Nassau and Paradise Island for the 10-part show

AINSLEY'S
food
HIGHLIGHT



Something people really need to try in the Bahamas is conch – it's a Bahamian staple. I visited Arawak Cay, one of the most famous fish fries in the Bahamas, but you can find them across the country. It's where you try lots of different recipes like conch fritters, conch salad (pictured), conch chowder and cracked conch. Once you've had a couple of conch fritters and Bahama Mama cocktails, you'll feel that the world's your oyster!"



THE BAHAMAS

The 10-part *Ainsley's Taste of The Bahamas* began on ITV1 on January 3 (continuing each Saturday), showcasing how this Caribbean archipelago – known for its glitzy hotels, tranquil cays, white-sand beaches and even its swimming pigs – is also a foodie heaven. Harriott visits capital Nassau, neighbouring Paradise Island and more, exploring everything from aquaponic farms to historic rum distilleries.

Q. The Bahamas isn't as well known for its cuisine as other Caribbean countries – what did you find as you filmed the series?

A. Our eyes were opened to the Bahamas as a culinary destination. Young people are passionate about what they're doing and are looking to encourage homegrown food. They, along with the restaurants, are beginning to understand the type of clients that come here. Visitors are used to eating good-quality food, so you can't pull the wool over their eyes.

Q. What's the best way of getting under the skin of its culinary scene?

A. By speaking to the locals. Go somewhere like the farmers' market in Nassau, where people give their time to talk to you. I met a lady who was talking about her hot sauce or, if you wanted something more refreshing, there was another stall squeezing fresh sugarcane juice. I love the rustic nature of that. When people go on holiday, they'll be satisfied by those interactions, as it's not something you can get just around the corner.

Q. Did any places stand out to you?

A. Lots! I had the pleasure of seeing the Bahamas' fresh produce first hand at Chiccharney Farms in Nassau, as well as seeing sustainable farming in action at Bluefields Farms, where they use aquaponic methods [a food production system that combines fish with growing plants in water]

to grow fresh produce that supplies local restaurants.

The hotels in Nassau and Paradise Island have a fantastic culinary offering. I was lucky enough to stay at the Grand Hyatt Baha Mar and there's a great cookery school there. If you want to learn about Bahamian cuisine, they'll show you five or six classic dishes and the proper way to cook them. There are also great cocktails available at its entertainment venue, Jon Batiste's Jazz Club.

Then there's the Graycliff Hotel, which has the third-largest wine collection in the world – more than 250,000 bottles. The food is a touch old-fashioned but there's something unique about it. It's like going somewhere and having roast beef and Yorkshire pudding – it does Bahamian classics well.

Q. How can agents sell the Bahamas to their clients?

A. Just look at that beautiful water and golden sand. There's something about the light and the colour, as well as the energy and vibrancy of the people. ➤

BOOK IT

Caribtours offers seven nights at Grand Hyatt Baha Mar in Nassau on a room-only basis from £2,649 per person, based on two sharing a Grand Room. The price includes flights from Heathrow with British Airways and transfers, based on travel between April 18 and October 31. caribtours.co.uk

DESTINATIONS

FOOD & DRINK | TV TIE-INS

RICK STEIN'S *stops*

CENTRAL COAST AND HAWKESBURY RIVER

As Rick drives up the coast of New South Wales, he shops at farmers' markets, samples oysters straight from the sea and cools off with a spot of open-water swimming.

THE OUTBACK

Heading inland, Stein tackles the five-hour drive from the mineral springs of Moree to Bourke, a town in northwest New South Wales, where he takes in remote canteens and rustic pubs and visits the 40,000-year-old Brewarrina Aboriginal Fish Traps.

SYDNEY

Stein discovers Chinese brunch traditions and meets Bundjalung chef Mark Olive, who pioneered the Indigenous cuisine served in his restaurant in Sydney Opera House, Midden by Mark Olive.



ABOVE: Rick visits Umina Beach during his 3,000-mile New South Wales road trip BELOW LEFT: With chef Mark Olive

AUSTRALIA

Australia's food scene is a big draw for many clients, from world-renowned wineries and artisan coffee shops to fresh takes on homegrown Aussie ingredients. This week, the BBC released a six-part series in which chef and restaurateur Rick Stein goes Down Under for another serving of *Rick Stein's Australia*, this time tackling a 3,000-mile road trip through New South Wales.

Q. What drew you to New South Wales?

A. I landed in Sydney when I first went to Australia aged 19, on a ship. I had family acquaintances in Sydney, so it just seemed natural to travel through New South Wales first. When I was there, the Sydney Opera House had just been built. It meant a lot to come back and see it in all its splendour.

Q. What were your highlights of filming?

A. I loved virtually every aspect of filming but particularly enjoyed the restaurants in Sydney – it was great seeing the harbour and Opera House in full Technicolor – and going up the coast of New South Wales. My favourite thing, though, was going into the outback. When I was a teenager, I worked in the outback, and it had an enormous effect on me. To return to that red land, with very little vegetation and endless horizons, was so meaningful.

Q. What do you hope viewers will take away from the series?

A. I think they'll get an idea of how incredibly beautiful New South Wales is. I also hope they'll learn about the enormous diversity of Australian cuisine – and how successful it's been. There is a piece in the series where I'm having a flat white and observing how much care and attention the Aussies put into making each coffee. That's why it's so much better than anywhere else; people there are really on the ball and realise how important food is for us all.

Q. You've opened a restaurant in Australia, which you visit in the first episode.

A. Rick Stein at Coogee Beach is on the ground floor of the new InterContinental hotel. I never really wanted a restaurant in Sydney because I don't think my style of restaurant suits cities. But Coogee Beach was perfect because it's by the ocean and it's less well known, which is better for me. **TW**

BOOK IT

Gold Medal sells a 13-night Sydney, Rock and Reef self-drive tour, which leads in at £4,199 per person on a room-only basis, based on two sharing. The price includes four nights at the InterContinental Sydney Coogee Beach, seven days' car hire, domestic flights and indirect international flights with Qantas from Heathrow, based on a September 4 departure. goldmedal.co.uk