



BEST FOOD

Takeaway to global kitchen

Celebrity chefs are introducing their fans to the sights, sounds and flavours that inspired them by leading foodie tours into the real world. writes **Grant Jones**

If you like being up close and personal with celebrity chefs, and not separated by a TV camera, many of Australia's best-loved pan rattlers tour the globe taking travellers with similar culinary passions along with them.

With Australia's diverse culture and rich heritage of taking all-comers, it's not surprising that we seek the true food experiences that we have merely tasted in the local Thai, Vietnamese, Indian, Italian or Middle Eastern restaurants.

While this list is not exhaustive, here is an entree to the world on a plate, as offered by talented local chefs:



Born in a Thai refugee camp to Vietnamese parents, Luke Nguyen has become one of our best-liked culinary tourists.

His *Mekong* series of food shows on SBS, along with his books filled with arresting images and inspiring food stories are in many a DVD and cookbook collection.

Experiences on this tour include slurping on the local soup dish, pho, in Hanoi, a Vietnamese cooking tour, class and lunch in Hoi An, visiting a nunnery in Hue for a vegetarian meal, joining Luke on a personal tour of Old Saigon, and a cooking class at the famous Xue Restaurant.



LUKE NGUYEN'S VIETNAM AND MEKONG RIVER CRUISES

Dates: From December 28

Details: 5-star accommodation throughout the 19-day tour, 18 breakfasts, 12 lunches and 17 dinners. Includes 7 nights on RV *AmaLotus*, with champagne breakfasts. \$8895 a person twin share, \$11545 a single.

1300 336 932 apt.com.au

CHRISTINE MANFIELD

Chris Manfield is one of Australia's best and most accomplished chefs, having mastered the cuisine of several countries. Indian food is one of her great fascinations.

Her book *Tasting India* scooped the 2012 International Association of Culinary Professionals book awards taking out the Cookbook of the Year Award and The Best Culinary Travel book.

Manfield's tour includes dining at her favourite restaurants across India, sleeping in majestic palaces and getting an insight to the culinary secrets that sustain one of the world's most vivid cultures. She will share her experiences of delicious street food, dining in India's fine restaurants, Punjabi cuisine, including sweets and the famous flatbread kulchas, and a stay at a family estate.

TASTING INDIA WITH CHRISTINE MANFIELD

Dates: From October 20, 2013

Details: 18 days and 17 nights on a culinary journey from Delhi to Amritsar on to Rajasthan, the Holy City of Varanasi and Mumbai. \$16,940 a person twin share, single supplement \$3794.

(03) 9486 5409.

epicurioustravel.com.au

PETER KURUVITA

Chef and author Peter Kuruvita is as likeable as he appears on TV and conducts this eye-opening food safari through the melting pot of Sri Lanka.

From street food and egg

hoppers to tea-inspired dinners at some of Sri Lanka's best restaurants through his association with Dilmah, Kuruvita connects tour participants with local people and introduces the spices and ingredients that ignited his passion for food.

Hands-on classes include making egg hoppers and kottu roti as well as cooking a curry in clay pots over an open fire.

From the palm-fringed west coast, the tour goes on to the ancient capital of Anuradhapura and its World Heritage-listed ruins, plus the Elephant Orphanage. It then continues to the rock fortress of Sigiriya before heading to the hill town of Kandy and its botanical gardens and lush tea plantations.

MY SRI LANKA WITH PETER KURUVITA

Dates: October 21, 2014

Details: The 13-day tour costs \$5560 a person excluding flights. Accommodation includes a night in the luxurious Lighthouse Hotel in Galle and dinner under the stars in Uda Walawe National Park. Another tour, Jaffna and the East, departs in July 2014.

1300 720 000

worldexpeditions.com

SOMER SIVRIOGLU

When you meet Turkish-born Somer Sivrioglu, you can tell his life revolves around food, as well as his young family. This avid proponent of Turkey's vibrant food culture has a family-run restaurant, Efendy, in Sydney's Balmain. On the first stage of Sivrioglu's tour, guests stay in boutique accommodation while combing Istanbul's finer restaurants and local cafes, both known for their authentic local specialties.

There is the Grand Bazaar and Spice Bazaar tour well as to areas with some of the lesser-known markets.

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From Istanbul, it's on to Edremit.

where a local chef takes guests on a tour to the local markets and gardens.

Participants learn, collect and help prepare an evening feast. Indulge in the local seafood scene at Cunda before heading to Bodrum via the ancient ruins of Ephesus.

After a day trip on a motorised yacht in the clear Aegean waters, the final night is spent with Sivrioglu's mother, a local restaurateur, for a farewell meal to remember.

TURKISH DELIGHTS WITH SOMER SIVRIOGLU

Dates: August 2014.

Details: Ground transport by private vehicle, 12 breakfasts, 4 lunches, 8 dinners, 4-4.5 star hotels and guesthouses, boat trip to Princes Islands. Cost \$6130, excluding airfares.

1300 720 000,

worldexpeditions.com

CARMEL RUGGERI

While she may not be a household name in Australia, Carmel Ruggeri is famous in her hometown in the Ragusa region of Sicily.

The former owner of La Casa Ristorante in Sydney's Russell Lea and her extended Sicilian family take you on a behind the scenes tour of their culinary world, in particular their small fishing village of Scoglitti on the south coast of the island.

The tour is divided into visiting farms and going on factory tours plus hands-on classes with lots of eating involved in all of the above.

The tour group is picked up from Comiso airport then heads to a seaside hotel in Scoglitti, near the town of Vittoria on the south coast of Sicily, overlooking the

Mediterranean.

The first day includes a Scoglitti familiarisation tour with Ruggeri, a stop for gelato then a Sicilian seafood degustation dinner that night.

Other trip highlights are a visit to Modica, in the Hyblaean Mountains, a UNESCO Heritage Site which is home to Antica Dolceria Bonajuto, Sicily's oldest chocolate factory founded in 1880.

There's a visit to a tomato farm in Vittoria, a barbecue lunch to sample delicious fresh produce and dinner at the Michelin-Star restaurant Il Duomo in the cobbled village of Ragusa Ibla.

Chiaromonte, also called the "balcony of Sicily" has a local winery and cheese and produce supplier to visit. Ruggeri's cousin Pietro shows gelato making at Bar Riviera, and there's a lunch at Carmel's aunt's house where Zia Maria demonstrates how to make pasta, bread and scacce, a Ragusan specialty, in a wood-fired oven.

The tour ends with a stroll known as a "passegiata" and drinks with the locals.

SICILIAN FOOD TOURS

Dates: May 21-25, 2014

Details: 5 days and nights in the Ragusa region of Sicily includes 5 nights accommodation, breakfast and one main meal each day (plus lots of food along the way) for \$3500 a person excluding airfares.

tastetrekking.com.au

LOCAL TOURS MAEVE O'MEARA

Cookbook author, journalist and TV presenter Maeve O'Meara is perhaps best known for her ongoing SBS TV series *Food Safaris*.

So far she has covered 44 different styles of cuisine, many



without leaving Australia.

Since 1998, O'Meara has been conducting personal food safaris both in Australia and overseas and has just announced her latest tours which include tastes of Italy in Melbourne's Carlton, the Turkish spice emporiums of Auburn and the Vietnamese grocers and barbecue roasting houses of Cabramatta.

More than 60,000 Australians have been on a Gourmet Safari since it started.

"I started these safaris almost

15 years ago simply because my friends were asking me to take them all over the city in search of great food, so I thought there must be a market for other food lovers to discover new areas, new cultures, new cuisines," she said. "We have kept creating new tours every year, as well as keeping some of the classics."

The tours traverse Sydney and Melbourne and cover cuisine styles from Korean and Vietnamese to Greek, Italian and Turkish. This takes them to grocers, emporiums, butchers,

bakers, cafes and restaurants.

New Sydney tours for 2014 include an introduction to Lao cuisine, a Cypriot Safari On Wheels and World in a Day – Salsa boasting some of the best South American cuisine.

In Melbourne, O'Meara has a walking safari of the vibrant Greek suburb of Oakleigh, plus French On Wheels and Italian on Wheels tours.

Among her classics, are multi-cuisine safaris, such as United Flavours of the World, which introduces seven

different styles of cuisine in a day, from the best of our butchers, bakers, cheesemakers and markets.

Safaris now also extend to Kangaroo Island and country Victoria, as well as Vietnam, Sardinia, Corsica and Greece.

MAEVE O'MEARA'S GOURMET SAFARIS

Dates: Various

Details: 8969 6555
gourmetsafaris.com.au



FAMOUS FOODIES: Somer Sivrioglu at his Efendy Turkish restaurant in Balmain (above left); SBS *Food Safari* host Maeve O'Meara; and (left) former owner of La Casa Ristorante, Carmel Ruggeri, who introduces her guests to her family and friends back home in Sicily.





TASTY TOURS: Carmel Ruggeri, formerly of La Casa Ristorante in Sydney, with a happy group of Sicilian Food Tours visitors (above). Luke Nguyen (left); Peter Kuruvita formerly of Pyrmont's Flying Fish (top right) and Christine Manfield (below right). **Main picture:** Gina Milicia