



From left to right: David Wolfe; iStockphoto.com



THE BAD BOY *of Cuisine*

As Cayman Cookout celebrates its sixth season, the prodigal chef returns.

By Christine Borges

ANTHONY Bourdain

His career is a storied one; the Culinary Institute of America graduate went from celebrated chef to rehab, then started his career again at the bottom. But that didn't slow down his resolve to get behind what really matters in the kitchen: cuisine that is not only delicious, but has a great cultural connection behind it. And so Bourdain persevered, climbing up the foodie food chain and becoming one of the most renowned chefs in history to become an author and TV host.

Because of his TV shows — from “Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations” and “The Layover,” which both aired on the Travel Channel, to today's “Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown” on CNN — the host has had his fair share of world exploration: from all over the United States to Vietnam, Malaysia and New Zealand, amongst countless other destinations. He's met the people; he's visited the underbellies. Suffice it to say, if there's an exotic dish out there, Bourdain has probably tried it. Twice.

When pressed about his favourite restaurant in the Cayman Islands, Bourdain doesn't hesitate. “Obviously, I'm a big fan of what Eric Ripert is doing at Blue at the Ritz-Carlton,” he tells *Cayman Airways Skies* via e-mail while shooting in London. A match made in gastronomic heaven, the friendship between Ripert and Bourdain has been going strong since 2001.

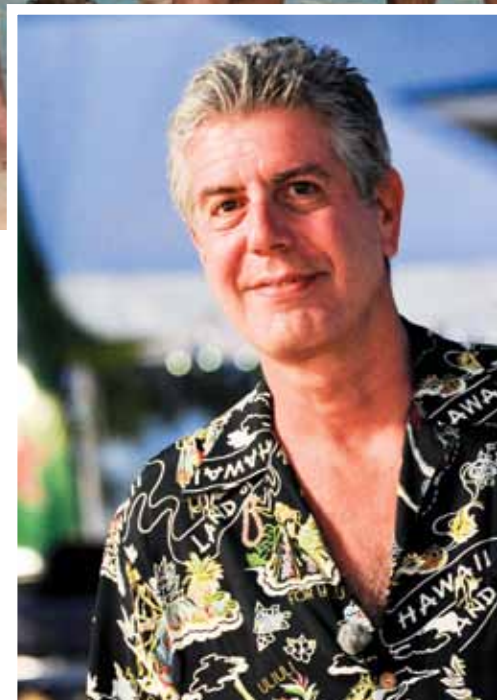
Just after the release of Bourdain's first book, *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly*, Ripert gave it a read. “He said some nice things about Le Bernardin in the book, and after I read it, I called him and invited him in to have lunch,” Ripert tells us via e-mail. “And we have been friends ever since.”

The Cayman Connection

This camaraderie has led to Bourdain's involvement in Ripert's annual foodie festival, The Cayman Cookout. Now in its sixth season, Bourdain has been an avid participant at the Cookout since 2009. Always the most sought-after tickets, this year Bourdain will be at a barefoot BBQ, as well as “The Rundown with Anthony Bourdain,” a lunch wherein he'll discuss some of Cayman's culinary traditions, and “The Adventures of Eric & Tony,” a beachside chat between the two culinary savants.

But, as can be expected, Bourdain sees more of the island than just the inside of his hotel room. “I make sure to set aside plenty of time to scuba dive,” he says. “I got certified at Happy Fish and really enjoy diving whenever I can. It's a new passion.”

New passions aside, Bourdain sees the Cayman Islands as a bonding experience, especially during the Cookout. “It's a great time to spend with family on the beach,” he continues.



“Cayman Cookout is one of the few opportunities I get to cook anymore. I love it.”

From top to bottom: © svarlophoto/stock; The Ritz-Carlton, Grand Cayman; David Wolfe



"[I get to] see other chefs from around the world. It's great that all our kids have a chance to play together. It's a special place for all of us."

What's interesting about Bourdain's involvement with the Cookout is that he not only talks and explores the culture behind food, eating and cooking exotic dishes, but he also steps back into the kitchen, which is rare nowadays. "My chef days are largely over," notes the chef-at-large of Brasserie Les Halles in New York. "In fact, Cayman Cookout is one of the few opportunities I get to cook anymore. I love it. Just like old times — except I'm standing behind an outdoor BBQ grill with some of the greatest chefs in the world."

Despite his minor reservations, Bourdain doesn't seem to regret stepping away from the kitchen. He expanded his brand into so many different aspects of the food scene largely for the experience, even if that meant living out of a suitcase for most of the year. "The opportunity to travel, see the world... and tell stories about my adventures and misadventures," he says. "[It] is a privilege and a joy I'd be insane to pass up."

A Strong Bond

In 2012, between filming seasons of "Parts Unknown," Bourdain branched out into a speaking tour dubbed "Good vs. Evil: An Evening with Anthony Bourdain and Eric Ripert."

"We travelled around the country visiting different cities," Ripert says. "[We] would host an evening of storytelling and industry insights; we would grill each other on stage in front of everyone. Anthony can be pretty tough, but it's been a lot of fun!"

That fun continued on Ripert's YouTube series, "On The Table with Eric Ripert," wherein he invited Bourdain to join him and make a dish of his choosing. "I asked him to cook for me," notes Ripert. "He made a Portuguese Octopus Stew, which was really excellent." The episode, a mere 22 minutes long, was part cooking show, part confessional and showed a side of Bourdain that few probably get to enjoy: He was forthcoming, honest and funny.

Bourdain also invited Ripert to appear on his latest TV endeavour, "Parts Unknown," where they travelled to Peru together. This, in turn, brought on their latest effort: chocolate. "Anthony and I have collaborated on a dark chocolate bar with Eclat Chocolate called Good & Evil," says Ripert. "[It] is made from rare Peruvian Nacional beans."

Parts Unknown

All of this came about because of Bourdain's current approach to filming. "We go places I'm curious about," he says. "Period. [I'm] inspired by books, films, what I've heard from others or news events. [I'm also inspired by] personal interest — a personal story that takes place in a faraway place, or a personal perspective by someone I think should be heard."

For fans of "No Reservations," "Parts Unknown" is a bit of a departure. It's more current; whereas with the former you'd get a taste of exotic local dishes, on the latter, Bourdain travels to topical countries in a state of unrest like Myanmar.

His involvement in every aspect of the show is more apparent than ever.

Bourdain in Grand Cayman

If you want to catch a glimpse of Bourdain while he's on the island, we recommend heading to one of these popular Cayman Cookout events. For more information, visit caymancookout.com.

The Rundown with Anthony Bourdain

Date: Friday, January 17

Event Type: Lunch

Location: The Great Lawn at the Ritz-Carlton, Grand Cayman

Cost: US\$139

Barefoot BBQ

Presented by Certified Angus Beef

Date: Friday, January 17

Event Type: Dinner

Location: Royal Palms

Cost: US\$299

Transportation provided

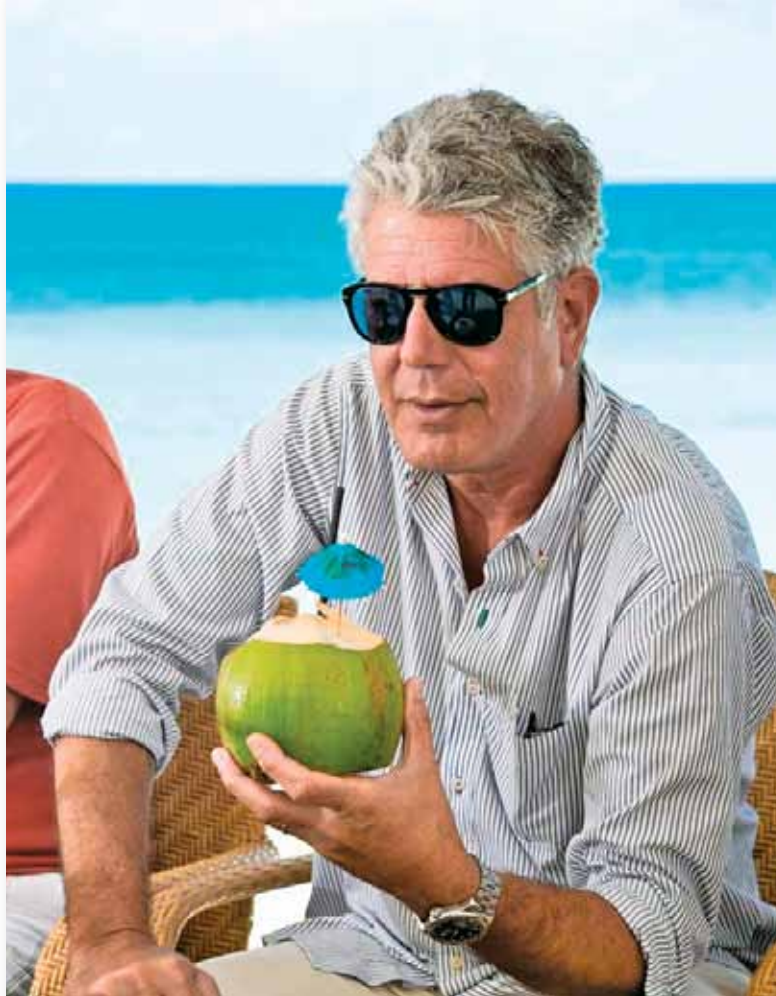
The Adventures of Eric & Tony

Date: Saturday, January 18

Event Type: Talk

Location: Jackson Family Wines North Beach Pavilion

Cost: US\$129



"I have total control over where we go, what we choose to talk about and how we tell the story," he mentions. "[I] wouldn't have it any other way. [It's] something I'm grateful to CNN for — all the freedom and trust they've given me."

CNN's worldwide audience allows Bourdain to shy away from what he referred to as a "who are the people, what do they like, what do they eat" approach to filming, and adds in the rich history and culture of the areas he visits. He now has the freedom to explore high-energy locales such as the Gaza Strip, despite its tense political situations, and Andalucia, Spain, during its Holy Week.

"I'm not looking to leave an impact," Bourdain says, modestly. "I'm just more free to tell a wider range of stories on CNN. I'm able to go to places like the Congo and Libya now, whereas before it would have been impossible."

Bourdain hung up his chef's hat more than a decade ago because it was more important for him to step out of the kitchen. Since then, he branched out into writing — with bestsellers like *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly* and *Medium Raw*, as well as articles in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *Bon Appétit* and many others — guest appearances on shows like "Bravo's Top Chef," and as a consultant and writer for the HBO series "Treme." As if that weren't enough, he has also authored a best-selling graphic novel, three crime novels, a travel journal and a cookbook, as well as a biography on Typhoid Mary.

Despite all his reinventions, it seems the bad boy of cuisine just can't seem to shake his notorious public persona. His partying days are long gone, but the family man admits that that is probably the public's biggest misconception about him: "That I'm in any way cool. I am not cool. I'm a father." To the culinary world, though, Bourdain is so much more.