

Big Zuu's 12 Dishes in 12 Hours Press Pack



Show Synopsis

Big Zuu's 12 Dishes in 12 Hours will air on ITV1 and ITvX in 2024 and is co-produced by Twofour and Zuu's new TV production label Big Productions.

Famed for his comedic flair, culinary prowess and musical ability, in this new six part series the multi-hyphenate Big Zuu will take both viewers and an all-star array of celebrity guests on a quest across Europe to get a true flavour of each city through sampling the delights of its local delicacies.

In this funny, fresh and fast paced new format, Big Zuu will teach his famous travel companions everything they need to know about a place through tasting 12 dishes.

Whether it's trying local street food or uncovering new gastronomic trends, through his culinary lens Zuu will guide both viewers and his celebrity guests across a number of cities as they seek out the destinations hidden gems, food markets, local eateries and fine dining restaurants showcasing a never before seen side to some of Europe's most vibrant destinations.

Speaking of his new ITV series, Big Zuu said:

"It's always been a dream of mine to have my own food travelogue so I'm gassed to finally be able to announce this new show! I feel like travelling the world and eating food was the natural next step for me and the audience who have followed me since the beginning of my TV career. I'm also excited that this series is a co-pro with my own production label Big Productions and TwoFour. I'm so grateful to itv and Natalie Rose for making this happen!"

Big Zuu's 12 Dishes in 12 Hours will serve up dishes that encapsulate the story of each city, whether that's through its rich cultural history or its future facing food scene. Immersing themselves in each location's culture, both Zuu and his celebrity guest will go off the beaten track befriending locals in a bid to authentically eat their cuisine.

Action packed from beginning to end, whilst on their whistle stop food tour, Zuu and his guests will have a limited time to treat their taste buds requiring them to travel across each location via foot, boat, tuk tuk and scooter as they seek out to sample 12 incredible dishes that best represent each cities culture.

Big Zuu's 12 Dishes in 12 Hours is a co-production between Twofour (part of ITV Studios) and Big Productions and will air on ITV1 and IT VX. The show was commissioned by Katie Rawcliffe, Head of Entertainment Commissioning at ITV and Natalie Rose, Entertainment Commissioner at ITV and is executive produced by Dan Adamson (for Twofour) and Alex Gilman (for Big Productions), the Production Executive is Lucy Blatch (for Twofour).

Entertainment Commissioner at ITV Natalie Rose said:

"It's great to be working with Zuu, Twofour and Big Productions again, and an exciting time to bring Zuu's infectious warmth and humour to ITV. From fine dining to mouth-watering street food, 12 Dishes combines Zuu's love for food and travel, taking his culinary passion further than ever before- and for the first time, beyond UK shores. This really is a delightfully original and fresh format that will inform on the best places to eat abroad. Of course entertainment, warmth and humour will be XXL."

Big Zuu Press Pack Interview

****Please note, this content is to be used within the context of a press pack and not billed or listed as an exclusive interview****

12 Dishes In 12 Hours is a travelogue series with a Big Zuu spin on it. Can you tell us a bit more about the premise and format of the show in a bit more detail?

Essentially, we land in a destination and the main theme is discovery. I love to discover a place through its food, whether it's going on holiday or being abroad with your friends and family. Sometimes you learn about a place by going to tourist attractions but my thing is, if you really want to learn about a place and delve into its history you can do it through the lens of food. For 12 Dishes in 12 Hours, we went to six different places and learnt about each place by understanding and learning about the culture through eating dishes that best represent that place. It's not just about tasting dishes that each country is commonly associated with, it's about learning from different angles about what's fresh and new. What might be going viral in that city or an underrepresented part of the city where the food doesn't get spoken about on television. The Big Zuu spin I guess is the fact that I love authentic, incredible flavours and yes we go to the Michelin starred restaurants but nine times out of ten you will see me in the local places eating the local food.

The show has an incredible array of all star guests from the worlds of film, TV, sport and entertainment. Are you able to tell us who's joining you and what locations you're visiting with them?

Sure, I go to Bologna with Will Poulter, London with Patrice Evra, Marseille with Oti Mabuse, Amsterdam with Anna Maxwell-Martin, Cyprus with Eddie Kadi and Valencia with Sindhu Vee. By the end of it I kind of didn't want to eat anymore food but I also can't complain, when I went around telling

people, yo, you know what my job is and I'd tell them that I was going to be eating food in different countries across the world, it's not a bad gig is it.

Unlike other shows of this nature, you already have personal relationships with many of the featured guests which viewers may not be aware of. Can you tell us about any of those friendships in particular and how you previously crossed paths?

Will Poulter came to my first ever show that I did as a musician, my first ever headline show as a musician, Will Poulter was there. I met him in the queue and was like, 'bro, I swear you're the actor, Will Poulter'. I asked him why he was there and he said it was because he liked my music, it was a beautiful moment and we were able to go from linking up as two breddins who came together on that level to him coming on the breakfast show I did for ITV to eventually come on my ITV travelogue. It was amazing to see our relationship develop in that way. I've never had the privilege of spending two days filming with him in a European city and connecting on a different level. I never thought me and Will would be in an Italian Nonna's house drinking sparkling white wine and eating fresh tortellini.

Patrice Evra is another one, I did Soccer Aid with him a couple of years back so it was nice to link up again. A funny moment was when he said to me, 'Zuu you can have my actual number' because initially I thought he gave me his real number but he didn't but this time he did because we actually got to connect as real friends.

The format uses food as a medium to bring people together in a bid to spotlight a variety of different cultures. Why is it so important to you to use your productions to provide cultural representation on a mainstream platform?

I think it's because that is the world we are in right now, with the growth of social media you can see so many different things online being represented through different creators or channels from all over the world.

I also think the landscape of food has completely changed, me personally coming from London, we live in such a multicultural diverse place it only makes sense that we represent that in our media too.

The beauty of this show is that when we went to Amsterdam for example, we tasted food from Suriname which is one of the former Dutch colonies and when people think of Amsterdam, they probably don't think about the Surinamese population there. It was beautiful to educate people about things they probably had no idea of in terms of European cuisine. For us that was very important and for me being someone who is British but with Lebanese and Sierra Leone heritage I think it's beautiful that I was able to help represent that. In the London episode with Patrice, we go to a Lebanese bakery which was really important to me personally.

Your filming schedule has been pretty hectic covering six destinations in under three weeks, can you tell us about any memorable moments or funny encounters which may not necessarily make the cut?

Being with Will Poulter sitting in a Nonna's house, I asked her what her favourite type of music was and she said it was black music and she went on to tell us that she loved Jazz music by black artists. We got taken into her living room and she showed us the most incredible selection of Vinyl. I never thought I'd be spending the day with an Italian Nonna going through her collection of jazz vinyls.

Sindhu Vee is also one of the most intelligent people I've ever met. Talking to her off camera and picking her brains was amazing because she's such an incredibly smart woman that's travelled the world.

I also never thought I'd be able to connect with Anna Maxwell Martin in a random food court in Amsterdam eating fufu, stew and jollof rice.

As an artist, broadcaster, TV chef and business owner you're firing on all cylinders as well as co-producing this series as part of your newly launched production label Big Productions? What led you to want to start your own company?

For me it was about representation in TV which was so important, on screen we are seeing a change but the real change is about who's behind the camera and who's in positions of power. Working with commissioners like Natalie Rose who's a female black commissioner is really important. I'm very lucky that she's been able to support me throughout my career, I've been able to create with her and make Big Eats when she was at Dave and now I'm working with her at ITV in collaboration with Big Productions. Being able to grow my company with incredible people has helped me to give other people opportunities. With Big Productions, I'm able to make that call in terms of having people from diverse backgrounds involved across all levels of the production.

As part of your double BAFTA award winning speech you spoke about representation and wanting to change the face of the TV industry both on and off screen, how do you hope to achieve this through Big Productions?

For me, it's not just hiring people because of their skin colour or gender it's about their skills but also we have to be mindful of the fact that there is less access into the industry for those from marginalised backgrounds.

I want to make sure that I'm forced to create opportunities for those people with less access to the industry as without that how else will they be seen or heard. There aren't enough black female directors in TV, so I want to ensure I'm giving opportunities to people who deserve the opportunity and chance to thrive.

In general, the industry is not representative of our society in terms of race, class and gender so we need to give people the chance to shine. Another thing that's really important to me is representation for those who have disabilities or those who are neurodiverse getting opportunities. Production companies and networks are very mindful of this but it's about being active and actually getting it done and not just ticking boxes.

Who has been your biggest TV inspiration that you've looked up to and admired whilst on your journey?

Big Narstie is number 1, what he's done with The Big Narstie Show and opening the doors for people like me to get into TV. What he did with Channel 4, Remarkable and his own production company set the blueprint for me. I also have to shout out Mo The Comedian, he's been a big inspiration also.

A talented cook in your own right, who taught you all you know about cooking?

My mum is definitely an inspiration for me in terms of food but I grew up watching cookery shows like Sunday Brunch and Saturday Kitchen with people like James Martin and Simon Rimmer. People like those guys taught me a lot.

What was the most memorable meal you had during the filming?

In Cyprus there's a dish we had called Sheftalia which is a grilled kebab. It's normally served with pork but they made it specially with lamb for me. It was the most succulent kebab I've ever had in my life and that's coming from someone from Lebanon where we make really good kebabs. Me and Eddie Kadi couldn't believe how good it was. It was the best kebab I've ever had and I've had kebabs from all over the world.

You've achieved an incredible amount in such a short space of time yet it feels like you're only just getting started, what are your other hopes and dreams for 2024 and beyond?

I'm very blessed to have a cookery show coming out on primetime TV so for me it's about building on that. I want to create more shows with ITV moving forward or do this one all over again if there was a second series. My other dream in terms of TV is to shoot something in Africa and show people how beautiful the food and culture is there.

With my production company, I want to make TV for other people and look at emerging talent on and off-screen and give them the opportunities and nurturing that I got.

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