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Foodie Tours: An Introduction to Local Specialties for Less

by TFB EDITORS on JUNE 12, 2012

By Jan Ross

My husband and I have learned that we don't need nearly as much food as we had previously consumed when traveling. In fact, we have even cut down on our calories at home. Maybe it's our age, maybe it's being a little overweight, but we have both agreed we are fine with eating a little less. Two meals a day and maybe a little, healthy snack and we are both satisfied.



But even if you are sensible and cut way down on the amount of food you eat when traveling, you are still going to have some food expenses and, if you are not careful, they can be a big part of your travel budget.

There are many different ways to cut down on the food part of your travel budget, but one of the most enjoyable, as we have recently discovered, is local foodie tours. For roughly the price of one nice restaurant meal, you can enjoy samples (some quite substantial) at a variety of restaurants, bakeries and other, more unique venues, like vinegar and oil shops. It's also a great introduction to a location as the tour guides are invariably knowledgeable about the area. So even though we've cut down on the amount of food we eat, we still want what we eat to be wonderful and scrumptious – and "foodie tours" are a great way to find the best local specialties.



Amsterdam cheese tasting

We first discovered foodie tours in Amsterdam where we sampled some of the best cheese in the world at the [Reypenaer Cheese Tasting Rooms](#). Located right near Dam Square and easily accessible via one of the many canal boats, this location has a schoolroom-like basement complete with tables and chairs. There they introduce you to a wide variety of their cheeses, accompanied by lovely glasses of wine and expert commentary on what you are tasting.

When we headed to San Francisco for two days on a cruise of the Pacific Northwest, I was checking out various tours and noticed a foodie tour of Little Italy with [Local Tastes of the City](#). They also

offer foodie tours in different areas of the city – the one in Chinatown in on my list for our next visit! Walking from location to location in the North Beach neighborhood, we would get to taste everything from pizza to éclairs – how wonderful! After our cheese tasting excursion in Amsterdam, I knew this was something we would enjoy.

We met our San Francisco tour guide in front of a cigar store right by Washington Square Park and made our way to our different locations, including Liguria Bakery where we were handed big hunks of freshly baked focaccia bread, some with mushrooms, some with a pasta sauce, and all equally delicious. This particular tour actually ruined us for others because they were so incredibly generous with their samples. We didn't eat again until dinnertime!



Baked goods at Victoria Pastry

The most interesting thing about the entire tour was that the neighborhood residents were just living their lives all around us – lining up for fresh bread or a cup of coffee, walking the dog through the neighborhood or playing in the park. We were surrounded by the beautiful San Francisco architecture and our tour guide told us all about the



Taffy samples at Z Cioccolato in San Francisco

neighborhood and each of the places we visited. We stopped for candy samples



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at [Z. Cioccolato](#) where they had the biggest selection of taffy I have ever seen, chocolate éclairs at [Victoria Pastry](#), and the most delicious homemade pizza I have ever tasted at Cincetta. What a great introduction to San Francisco and this lovely, interesting neighborhood!

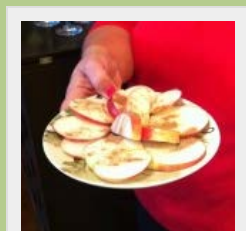


We realized we were onto a good thing with foodie tours, so when we were in Portland, Maine last year, we signed up for the [Maine Foodie Tours](#). They also offer a variety of tours and the chocolate tour was one that seriously tempted us! We met on a cold, rainy morning at the [Old Port Wine Shop](#) but we were not about to let a little rain defeat us!

We headed next door to [Vervacious](#), where we sampled a variety of spices and drizzles on fresh fruit. At [Stonewall Kitchen](#), we had freshly baked scones and blueberry preserves, then at [K. Horton Specialty Foods](#) we tried a variety of artisanal cheeses that were delicious. [Dean's Sweets](#) offered us some wonderfully unique truffles filled with such exotic concoctions as cayenne and ginger and we watched Dean painstakingly make truffles by hand. Then we pigged out on the local specialty of whoopie pies at [Two Fat Cats Bakery](#) and drooled over the fresh baked goods in their display cases. Smoked trout at the [Harbor Fish Market](#) and a variety of local microbrews at the [Shipyard Brewing Company](#)— including ginger beer which was wonderful – and we were finished eating for the day. Or at least until dinner!



This is me, enjoying cheese samples in Portland!



Spice samples at Vervacious

By the time we headed to Arizona last winter, we knew this was a great way to explore a new city and even investigate places we might like to return to later for a more substantial repast! It is also a wonderful way to buy things to take home for gifts as many of the shops will ship things for you. We bought several presents this way for our daughter, who is quite a gourmet cook.

When we began planning a visit to Scottsdale, Arizona, one of the first things I checked out was whether they had any foodie tours. Luckily, we found [A Taste of Old Town Scottsdale](#) presented by Arizona Food tours. Up to this point, our foodie tours had been quite fabulous but we were actually just visiting bakeries, etc. and only a few restaurants. That changed with Arizona Food Tours and made us realize how nice it is to visit a

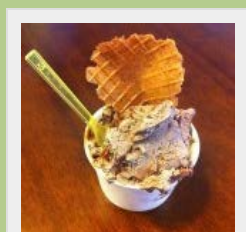
restaurant to check it out and see if it is a place we want to revisit.

We drove to the [Little Red Schoolhouse Museum](#) in Old Town Scottsdale, where we met the rest of the group to begin the tour. We strolled up the street to The Mission, a beautiful restaurant next door to an old Spanish mission. The specialty is modern Latin cuisine. The Mission is also famous for its margaritas. They use freshly pressed juice and organic ingredients to create drinks with agave nectar, pineapple, mint and ginger. We had some delicious food samples then they offered us teeny tiny margarita samples and we all tried one.

From the Mission, we walked to a little shop hidden away in an alcove with other interesting shops. [Outrageous Olive Oils and Vinegars](#) is a cute little place with literally hundreds of kinds of olive oil and vinegar from all over the world.



Margarita samples at The Mission



Homemade ice cream at Lee's Cream Liqueur

Next, we strolled a few streets over to one of our favorite stops of the day, [Grimaldi's Pizza](#), where we sampled not only great pizza but also some wonderful cannoli. We sampled some wonderful [Tom Ka Gai soup](#) at [Malee's Thai Bistro](#) and wine at [Fifth and Wine](#). Our last stop was at [Lee's Cream Liqueur](#) where they offer freshly made ice cream that is infused with a variety of liqueur flavors.

Now, when I am planning our next trip, one of the first things on my list is to check on whether or not the destination offers a foodie tour. If it does, that's the very first thing we'll do!

Have you been on a foodie tour while on vacation? Tell us about it in the

Comments section.

{ 5 comments... read them below or [add one](#) }

Jane June 9, 2012 at 7:58 am



I didn't know about these tours and they sound like they are right up my alley. thanks for the info.

REPLY

Carolyn June 12, 2012 at 5:52 pm



Food tours can be a good way to learn about different cuisines or new neighborhoods, even in your home town. I recently took a great tour of Chinatown here in Vancouver (where I live):

<http://wanderlustandlipstick.com/blogs/wanderfood/2012/01/24/wanderfood-wednesday-touring-vancouver-chinatown-with-edible-canada/>

REPLY

TFB Editors June 12, 2012 at 5:56 pm



Thanks for sharing the link with us, Carolyn. (BTW: lucky you — living in such a beautiful place as Vancouver!)

REPLY

Eileen Ludwig June 12, 2012 at 9:52 pm



Love finding ways to check out food. After reading this the other day, check locally and the cheapest one was \$69 so may have to look at other ways to do locally. For now I find that getting on Birthday invites is a good way to try restaurants in your area Here is a list of ones I found useful and many are national chains or you may have other ones in your area of the world <http://www.freelancetourist.com/free-birthday-food-list/>

REPLY

TFB Editors June 13, 2012 at 11:28 am



Great info, Eileen. Thanks!

REPLY

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