

Food tours from Milwaukee to Naples, Fla.

By KATHERINE RODEGHIER
Special to Tribune Newspapers

The line at Georgetown Cupcake snaked out the door and up the block.

"We're taking you to the best bakery in D.C. — it's just not on TV," said Jeff Swedarsky, shaking his head as our group of 12 walked past the queue.

Sure enough, after nearly four hours of walking and sampling food at four restaurants, we ended up at Baked & Wired, a quirky coffeehouse/bakery housed in an old print shop. Though no one was hungry by then, none of us could resist scarfing down luscious made-from-scratch cupcakes, Bee Sting shortbreads with a taste of honey and OMG bars that put S'mores from my Campfire Girl days to shame.

DC Metro Food Tours is all about showcasing little-known food establishments, particularly those that stand out for their historical significance, family-run ambience or just tasty cuisine, says Swedarsky, president of Food Tour Corp., which operates the Washington, D.C., tours as well as food tour companies in Indianapolis, Cleveland, Baltimore and coastal Virginia, and soon, New Orleans.

An avid traveler, the energetic 30-something says he always seeks out the best local foods in every new place he visits. "Its story is told through its food," he says.

On the Georgetown tour, our guide doles out tidbits of history and gossip as we walk. Leaving Fino, where we sample fresh-made ravioli, we pass Martin's Tavern, where JFK proposed to Jackie, and move on to the town house on N Street where the couple once resided. We stroll along the C&O Canal, begun in 1828 when President John Quincy Adams turned the first spade, on our way to Sea Catch, where we slurp fresh oysters.

DC Metro Food Tours range in size from two to 12 and in age from 20s to 70s, though children are welcome. Tours cost \$63 plus a \$2 ticketing fee. dcmetrofoodtours.com

Culinary tourism is riding a wave of interest across the coun-



PHOTO BY ALAN HILL

Customers apparently find the food *that* good on a Culinary Connectors tour. The company covers Denver, Boulder and Aspen, Colo.



PHOTO BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER

Fresh cupcakes are welcomed at Baked & Wired in Georgetown.

try. A sampling of food tours in other U.S. cities:

Milwaukee: Founded by Theresa Nemetz and inspired by her great-grandparents who immigrated to Milwaukee from Sicily, Milwaukee Food Tours touches on the city's immigrant history and its Italian, German, Irish and Polish heritage. There are three \$45 signature walking tours,

each lasting about 2½ hours; the stops are Brady Street, the historic Third Ward and River-Walk/Old World. Walking tours are also given in suburban Wauwatosa and Cedarburg. Special event tours, \$50 each, include a Bloody Mary Brunch walking tour; Pizza bus tour and Churches & Chocolate bus tour. 800-979-3370, milwaukeefoodtours.com

Providence, R.I.: Home of the prestigious culinary arts school at Johnson & Wales University, Providence boasts a thriving culinary scene. Chef and cookbook author Cindy Salvato owns Savoring Rhode Island and leads a walking and eating tour of Federal Hill, the city's "Little Italy." Three-hour tours typically depart on Saturday mornings; \$50. VIP tours are \$85. 401-934-2149, savoringrhodeisland.com

Naples, Fla.: New to the food-tours scene is Naples Food Tours. Launched in January, it offers three-hour tours by minibus, air-conditioned to keep you out of the Florida heat; there are stops at six or seven tasting venues. You might be sampling dishes from a French restaurant, a chocolatier and a Southern barbecue; \$59. 800-979-3370, naplesfoodtours.com.

Charleston, S.C.: The 2½-hour Savor the Flavors of Charleston Tour offers samples from eateries, markets, bakeries, restaurants and culinary landmarks interspersed with commentary about Charleston's history and culture. You may taste stone-ground grits, gourmet chocolates, pralines, collard greens and barbecue; \$42. 800-918-0701, culinarytoursofcharleston.com.

Los Angeles area: TOURific Escapes, founded by two Los Angeles natives, combines sightseeing with tastings on walking/driving tours. Hollywood Sites & Bites heads down Sunset Strip and features six tastings in four hours; \$99. Santa Monica Sites & Bites, which also includes Venice, covers seven tastings in four hours; \$105. The Chocolate Indulgence Tour visits four to six chocolatiers in three hours; \$130. tourificescapes.com.

Denver, Boulder, Aspen, Colo.: Join the "Friday Afternoon Club" on Culinary Connectors' two-hour Savor the Flavors walking tour with chef interactions, samplings and pairings at four locations; \$39 Denver and Boulder; \$59 Aspen. Or take a Top Restaurant Tour and spend three hours at three locations, with transportation provided between them if necessary; \$99 Denver and Boulder; \$137 Aspen. Want to go on your own? Purchase a self-guided culinary tour and check in with the proprietors when you arrive to get tastings and discounts; \$19.97. culinaryconnectors.com.

ctc-travel@tribune.com