

FORK IN THE ROAD

Arizona's 'foodie town'

Tours mix a heaping of local lore with plentiful tastings in Scottsdale

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
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Chicago Tribune

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Dining out has become a beloved pastime in this resort enclave east of Phoenix. With more than 600 restaurants and about a quarter of a million residents, the math works out to more eateries per person than in Manhattan.

So where to start?

Take a walk.

"This is a foodie town," says Zach Egedy, a guide for Arizona Food Tours, providing tastings at six establishments on its three-hour walks through Old Town Scottsdale. Five itineraries — three at lunch and two dinner — offer samples at a broad mix of dining spots: cowboy saloons, upscale Mexican restaurants, pizza parlors, wine bars, bistros, burger joints, brasseries and an oil and vinegar shop. Each is unusual in some respect, he says, and is chosen for its distinctive food or wine.

The walks draw locals who may not have made it to all 600-plus restaurants in their backyard, and visitors take the tours as an orientation to the city. "We've had people from all 50 states and 15 countries," says Egedy, who has been guiding groups since 2009. He recommends that out-of-towners take the tour early in their visit because, along the way, guides offer the inside scoop on places to see, shop and explore that visitors may want to return to later.

Guides also tell stories about Scottsdale's history. Lunch tours start outside the Little Red Schoolhouse housing the Historical Museum on the Civic Center Mall. It was the biggest building in town when it was erected in 1909 and made of brick to show the young settlement was permanent and substantial. But the city's history goes much further back. The Hohokam civilization flourished from 300 B.C. to A.D. 1450, when it disappeared. What became of the Hohokam, whose name means "those who have vanished," is a mystery, Egedy says, but they left behind a surprisingly complex network of irrigation canals, some still in use.

Egedy points to a statue of U.S. Army Chaplain Winfield Scott and his wife, Helen. In a deal that would make real estate brokers' heads spin today, they purchased 640 acres of land in 1888 at \$3.50 an acre. Their farm is now pricey downtown Scottsdale. Before it was named for its founder, it was called Orangedale for the citrus groves the Scotts grew here.

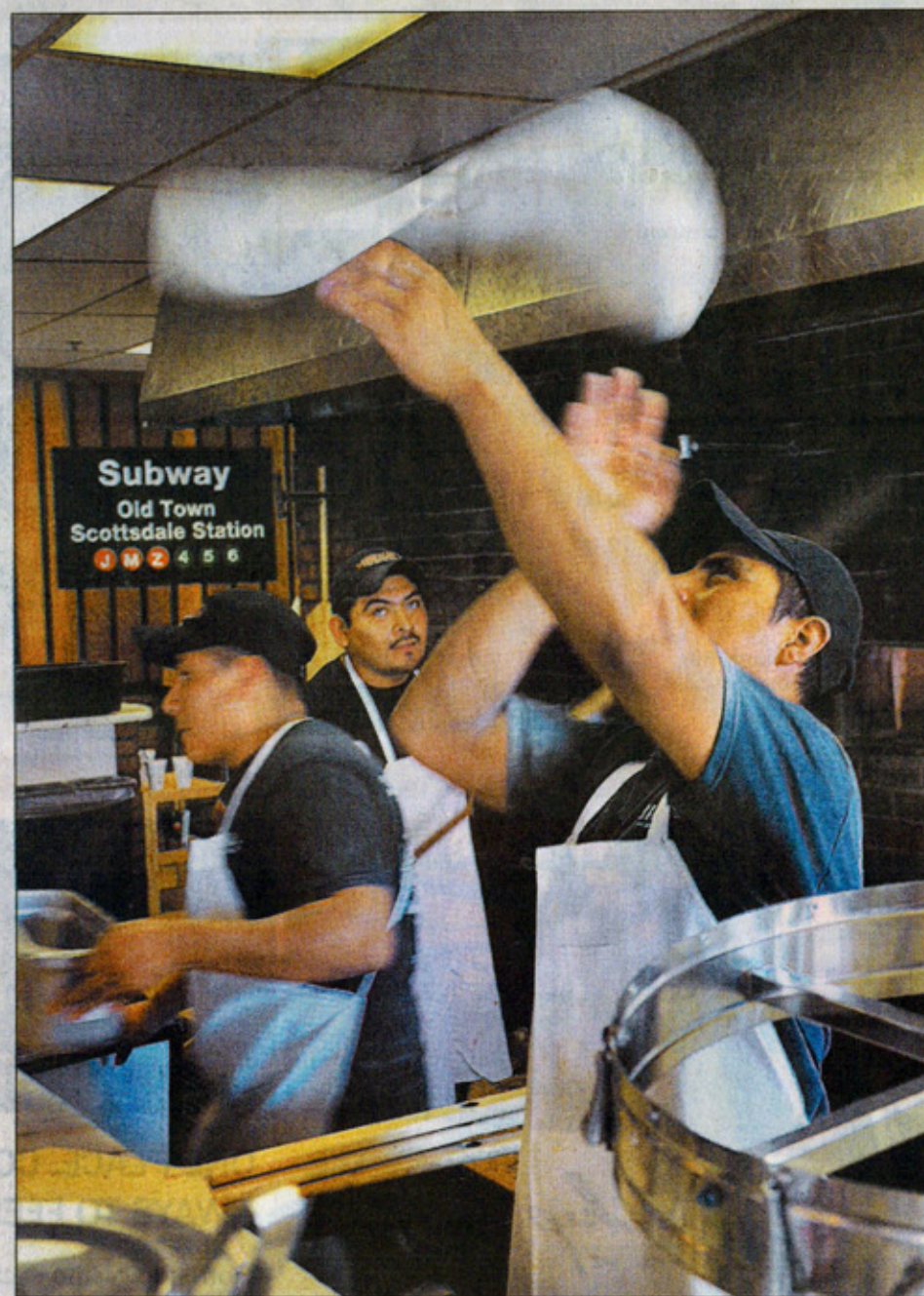
Moving on from the mall, Egedy leads the tour past the gleaming white exterior of the Old Adobe Mission. Built in 1933, it was the first Catholic church in Scottsdale. Next door, homemade chips and salsa await at The Mission restaurant, along with tacos filled with pulled pork that has been marinated for eight hours. Chef Matt Carter studied at the Le Cordon Bleu in France and worked at the famed French Laundry in the Napa Valley and Scottsdale's Zinc Bistro. Here he indulges his passion for tacos through his modern, Latin-inspired cuisine.

Vegetarians who take the tour are offered meatless options if they give notice when booking. Most dietary restrictions can be accommodated too.

Two lunch itineraries include a stop at Outrageous Olive Oils & Vinegars, where tour members sample extra-virgin olive oils and balsamic vinegars in a variety of



Upscale neighborhood bar Kelly's at Southbridge took top honors from Arizona Foothills magazine for best outdoor seating.



The dough for pizzas at Grimaldi's Pizzeria is made with specially filtered water.

flavors. They enjoy trying different combinations, such as the pomegranate balsamic with blood orange oil. The best-seller, though, is the traditional 18-year-old balsamic vinegar.

Though the tours last three hours, walking is at a leisurely pace. Wheelchairs can be provided if requested in advance. As Egedy leads the group through the Scottsdale Arts District, he points out the Art Walk emblems in the sidewalk. The walk is a major social event in the district, with galleries open late every Thursday night.

The group sits in a private dining area to sample slices of pizza made in a coal-fired brick oven at

Grimaldi's Pizzeria. The family business originated in Brooklyn in New York and expanded to Arizona after one of the sons went to college in the state. His first attempts at replicating the family's secret pizza dough were disastrous, Egedy says. He thought Scottsdale's water, containing lots of minerals, might be the culprit, so he trucked in water from Brooklyn and tried again. Success. Now the pizza dough is made with local water run through a filtering system devised just for Grimaldi's by Arizona State University.

Alcoholic drinks can be ordered at additional charge at any of the stops on the tour. Each tour also includes a wine sampling.

At 5th and Wine, pitchers of white and red sangria are set out with platters of bruschetta, fried pickles, hummus and bread. The wine bar's cozy living room setting of sofas, armchairs and coffee tables is ideal for relaxing over a glass of wine, but it also has table seating for customers ordering full meals.

Egedy challenges the group to a guessing game at Cowboy Ciao. Its Stetson Chopped Salad, a customer favorite, has 19 ingredients. As the group digs into samples, most are identified, but the dried black currants and roasted pepitas trip some up.

Just a few steps away, Kelly's at Southbridge is Scottsdale's upscale ver-



Cowboy Ciao opened in downtown Scottsdale in 1997 and serves modern American cuisine with Southwest accents. Its wine list has more than 1,800 entries.



Cowboy Ciao's Stetson Chopped Salad has 19 ingredients.

sion of a neighborhood bar, with patio seating, dart boards and a red felt pool table with overhead lights made from black bowler hats. Kelly's is known for its burgers, but because it is the last stop on the tour, the group samples desserts. Doughnut holes taste similar to New Orleans' beignets. Kelly's Twinkie, made with angel food cake and whipped creme Anglaise, is a delicious take on the famous snack cake.

Now past 2 o'clock, the group breaks up. It's been a long lunch, and no one is hungry for more food. Dinner, in fact, might wait until tomorrow.

Katherine Rodeghier is a freelance reporter.

If you go

Arizona Food Tours: Lunch tours daily, \$54, dinner tours Tuesday, Wednesday, Sunday, \$74; restaurants and food samples subject to change; 480-293-4096

The Mission: 3815 N. Brown Ave., 480-636-5005

Outrageous Olive Oils & Vinegars: 7240 E. Main St., 480-946-1888

Grimaldi's Pizzeria: 4000 N. Scottsdale Road, 480-994-1100

5th and Wine: 7051 E. Fifth Ave., 480-699-8001

Cowboy Ciao: 7133 E. Stetson Drive, 480-946-3111

Kelly's at Southbridge: 7117 E. Sixth Ave., 480-393-3205