

Food tour shows the real London

By Mansoor Ladha

The best-kept secret was revealed to me when I recently attended the Eating London Tours in the city’s East End neighbourhood. The four-hour East End Food tour not only offers eight mouth-watering authentic food tastings, but also fascinating stories, unique architecture and history of early settlers, making it an unforgettable tourist destination, giving instant history lessons.

St. John Wine & Bread

Our first stop early morning was at St. John Bread and Wine after a brisk walk where their bacon sandwich woke up the group, except me who had to contend with yogurt and fruit due to religious reasons. The morning crowds were just coming in for breakfast chosen from their elaborate menu consisting of porridge and prunes to grilled kipper to devilled kidneys. The menu of this acclaimed restaurant is always changing but it’s legendary bacon sandwich, I am told, has been a permanent fixture.

The English Restaurant

The English Restaurant, housed in a 17th-century building and dark wood-panelled outside, appropriately serves British dishes all day. With cozy surroundings, patrons can enjoy their pre-lunch pints, close to an open fire for their meals. A visitor, who wanted to taste authentic English food, recommended the haggis special and the mushroom Wellington, followed by sticky toffee and bread and butter pudding. There is live jazz music on Wednesday and Friday evenings and it has a fantastic little bar/pub, a stone throw away from Liverpool station. Although we couldn’t vouch for their food, our dessert made up of their delicious, decadent, rich, creamy bread pudding and atmosphere made it a fun stop.

The House of Androuet

The House of Androuet is a famous East End establishment operated by brothers Leo and Alex, master cheese mongers and cheese maturing experts. The House of Androuet was established in Paris in 1909 and Londoners can now buy a select range of the very best English cheese there. The shop will definitely have a seasonal cheese that you will love, pared with your favourite wine. The House of Androuet also has sister boutiques in Paris and Stockholm.

Poppies Fish & Chips

Poppies Fish & Chips is the place to go for authentic British fish and chips, served in newspapers.

Owner Pat ‘Pop’ Newland, whose career in fish and chips started in 1952, was present to greet our party. All seafood served at Poppie’s is freshly caught and delivered to the shop while a member of



PHOTOS BY MANSOOR LADHA

The Pride of Spitalfields is a London pub serving the best of English beer. At right, a staff member of the House of Androuet shows a variety of cheese offered at the cheese boutique.

the team peels and slices the award-winning potatoes for Poppie’s legendary chips. It’s a traditional fish-and-chip shop decorated with 1950s memorabilia, offering table service or takeaway. We had a satisfying traditional English fish-and-chips meal, well cooked, crunchy and gold, with mushy peas on the side.

Pride of Spitalfields

After walking for almost two hours in the beautiful warm spring weather, it was god-sent to visit the Pride of Spitalfields, a little local pub serving the best of English beer and cider. The crowd here consists of old-guard regulars and inquisitive tourists, enjoying beer selection of familiar British ales.

Aladin

After a refreshing drink at Spitfeilds, our by now hungry group appropriately trailed to the nearby Aladin, famous for its spicy



curries. Frequently listed among the top 10 Indian restaurants in London, Aladin was the most appropriate stop after our pub stop. We sampled three curies — vegetable,

lamb and chicken — with oven-cooked naan. As I was in transit in London returning from a trip to Gujarat where I had some the most delicious curries, I can vouch for Aladin’s curries were also some of the most delicious and finest that I have tasted. As a testimony of Aladin’s excellent food, we learnt that even Prince Charles used to be its patron.

Beigel Bake

By now most of us were full as we proceeded to the Beigel Bake, where we were served with melt-in-your-mouth salt beef, with hot English mustard and a sweet gherkin, encased in a soft bagel. We were given special treatment as priority customers while others standing in a long lineup watched us with envy as we devoured the delicious bagel from this renowned Jewish bakery.

Pizza East

The four-hour trip ended at Pizza East, one of the hippest restaurants in London, specializing in desserts. We had salted caramel tart before saying good bye to the group which included Swedes, Americans, Swiss and a Canadian who were entertained by our guide Emily’s informative commentary, giving insights into East End’s traditions and culture, with brief stops at shops, bakeries, pubs, restaurants and markets. We wandered the streets discovering Georgian-style mansions, hidden synagogues and the most vibrant street art in the world. This is the tour one has to take if one wants to experience the real London.

Mansoor Ladha is a Calgary-based travel writer, journalist and author of “A Portrait in Pluralism: Aga Khan’s Shia Ismaili Muslims.” Another book, “Memoirs of a Muhindi,” is scheduled to be published by University of Regina Press.



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