

Rome's gelatos come in all colours and flavours, and it is difficult to tell the artisanal apart from the artificial. Eating Europe's Taste of Testaccio food walk is a great way to identify and enjoy gelatos made with fresh ingredients.

# THE EUROPE WOLF DOWN

PARISIAN CROQUE-MONSIEURS,  
SOUSED HERRING IN AMSTERDAM, OR  
A ROARING IRISH GIN—FOOD TOURS  
ACROSS EUROPE TO GUIDE YOU  
THROUGH A STORM OF FLAVOURS

BY PRACHI JOSHI



Taking a guided tour to eat like a local could seem like quite the contradiction. But if you get past the word ‘tour,’ it makes perfect sense. Veteran travellers have always relied on locals to help them uncover delicacies, tucked in lanes they would otherwise pass by. There’s nothing like a sinfully delicious Dutch *chocoladehagel* for breakfast, or a warm square of *sfincione* munched sitting beside a Sicilian nonna; the only trouble is finding the real deal. So if Europe is on your summer itinerary this year, sign up for these food tours to make every meal more memorable than the last.



## PAST PARIS, RELISH ROME

Paris proffers plenty to polish off, from crusty, Grand Prix-competing baguettes to magical mini-barrels of pain au chocolat. Now throw some couscous into the mix.

The North African import is one of the top three most-eaten dishes in the French capital. Such precious food bytes are a given when you embark on Eating Europe’s newest food tour, Hip Eats & Backstreets. For €95/₹7,500, it’s a culinary exploration of Paris’s up-and-coming 10th arrondissement. Led by a local, it starts with a wander down Canal Saint-Martin, most famously featured in the French romcom, *Amélie*.

Sightseeing in Paris, you’ve probably already wolfed down a croque-monsieur, the ham-and-cheese sandwich that originated in the city in the early 20th century and even found its way into Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*. But on the tour, you sample its bobo version; multigrain bread stuffed with goat’s cheese, roasted dry fruits, forest honey, chives, shallots and rosemary, all floating in the cheesy, creamy

goodness of béchamel-mornay sauce. It’s every bit as delicious as it sounds (vegetarians, rejoice!). You’ll also pop in and out of a *fromagerie*, for what’s a Parisian food tour without hitting a cheese bar. And there’s a masterclass in the mindboggling variety of French cheeses in an underground, refurbished 17th-century coal cellar.

The precinct’s history is just as flavourful. Traditionally a working-class neighbourhood, it was a magnet for immigrants, especially those from Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria. Many of them arrived in the 1950s as the French colonial rule ended in their countries, bringing with them their distinctive cuisines. It’s only befitting then to dine at a traditional Algerian restaurant and do justice to the warm bowl of fluffy couscous accompanied by cooked chickpeas, a richly flavoured vegetable stew, and lamb sausage. At the end of four fruitful hours, the perfect Parisian closure awaits—a scrumptious pastry at a patisserie in the city’s bohemian quarter of Haut Marais.

Eating Europe’s also got you covered in neighbouring Rome,



*Cacio e pepe* (top left) is a simple pasta served in Rome, flavoured with black pepper and pecorino romano cheese. A walk in Mercato Testaccio allows you to sample slices of creamy mozzarella di bufala at Enzo & Lina’s stall (facing page), or pack a panini (top right); In Copenhagen, *smørrebrød*, the open-face sandwich topped with roasted pork or smoked salmon is king (bottom right); Sicily’s version of pizza is the *sfincione*, slices of focaccia-like bread topped with tomatoes, onions, cheese, and herbs (bottom left).

PHOTO COURTESY: EATING EUROPE (PREVIOUS SPREAD & CHEESE SHOP)

EDDY BUTTARELLI/CUBOIMAGES/DINODIA PHOTO LIBRARY (PASTA); NICOLE KWIATKOWSKI/SHUTTERSTOCK (MAN); LAUROB55/SHUTTERSTOCK (BREAD); PHOTO COURTESY: MAD OG STEMMING (OPEN-FACE SANDWICH)



## Belfast's highlight is 'fifteens,' a Northern Ireland sweet made with 15 crumbled digestive biscuits, 15 marshmallows, and 15 glacé cherries, all mixed with condensed milk and coconut

where it's shockingly easy to land a bad meal, especially in the restaurants flanking the Colosseum. The company's Taste of Testaccio tour winds through Testaccio, or what was traditionally the city's slaughterhouse and where *cucina Romana* (Roman cuisine) was birthed. The tour's highlight? A walk through Mercato Testaccio, a community market heaving with fresh, seasonal produce, bread, poultry, meat, and fish. Bruschetta slathered with fresh tomato, creamy mozzarella, and plenty other small bites are offered as you amble in the grand, glass-roofed market, which, in true Roman fashion, shelters an archaeological site showcasing 2,000-year-old pots and amphorae.

Outside the market, you'll stop at a salumeria to try cheese, cured meats, and balsamic vinegar (aged five to 50 years), and at a pasticceria for some luscious tiramisu. There's also a sit-down meal featuring the very Roman *cacio e pepe* (pasta swimming in pecorino Romano and pepper). The finale? A delightful dispatch in identifying real gelato at a charming, old-time gelateria. Too bright, too peaky, too fluffy? Ditch it. If it's piled high in the container, "Definitely avoid," your guide will weigh in. "That's all artificial stabilisers." You nod, gorging on a cent percent traditional gelato. (*eatingeurope.com*; *Eating Europe also offers tours in London, Florence, Amsterdam, and Lisbon, starting from €65/₹5,100 per person.*)

### AMSTERDAM ABSOLUTES

Ask for a *kopstootje* in Amsterdam and you will get a respectful look along with a pint of beer and a shot glass brimming with *jenever* or Dutch gin. Down the shot and follow it up with the beer (and try to stand still). Better yet, take a food tour with Hungry Birds where your guide will ensure that your stomach



is appropriately lined before attempting *kopstootje* (headbutt, in English). The tour starts in central Amsterdam with a traditional Dutch breakfast comprising gingerbread, home-made jams, eggs, and the delicious *chocoladehagel* (buttered bread topped with chocolate sprinkles). No visit to the city is complete without trying the Dutch culinary icon, soused herring, and the tour, called Sunday Experience, is mindful of that. The Dutch began fishing and trading in herring more than a thousand years ago and much of Holland's wealth and sea trade dominance rests on this silvery-blue fish. Kiosks all over the city serve the herring deboned and brined, along with chopped onions and sliced gherkin; hold it by the tail, throw your head back and eat it the 'Dutch way'.

Another popular street food you will tuck into is the *broodje* croquette at an *eetsalon* or lunchroom in the city centre; the *broodje* is essentially beef croquette in a bread roll, with a dash of mustard. Then there are Belgian fries with sauces that range from the regular mayo, garlic, and mustard to inventive ones like sambal, pickle, and satay. The tour also takes you to Jordaan, where you can savour a massive slice of warm apple pie served with a dollop of cream. But the real stud is the *stroopwafel* at Albert Cuypmarkt. There's little else that can compete with the high of biting into two crisp, wafer-thin layers of baked dough that break open to reveal golden caramel syrup. (*hungrybirds.nl*; *tours from €79/₹6,200 per person.*)

### BREAKFAST IN BELFAST

Built in the late 1800s, St George's Market is the last remaining Victorian-era covered market in Belfast, located on a site that has hosted a weekly market since 1604. Today, it houses about 300 food stalls and traders. Taste & Tour's food walk quite aptly begins from here, a four-hour jaunt that covers the local food scene from the historic red-brick market to the cobbled streets of Cathedral Quarter and beyond. The day typically starts with a cuppa or a steaming cup of coffee at Ireland's oldest coffee roaster, paired with treacle bread and the very Irish spelt and black pudding potato bread. But the highlight is 'fifteens,' a Northern Ireland sweet treat so named because it contains 15 of every ingredient—15 crumbled digestive biscuits, 15 marshmallows, and 15 glacé cherries, all mixed with condensed milk and desiccated coconut, which is then refrigerated for several hours and cut into 15 slices.

No Irish food tour is complete without alcohol, so there is a stop at The Garrick, a local pub for beer, cider, and champ (creamy mashed potato laced with chopped spring onions), as well as a quick round in a gin bar to sample the Belfast-made Jawbox gin. Instead of tonic, the gin here is served with ginger ale, which incidentally was invented in the mid-1800s in Belfast by Thomas Joseph Cantrell, an Irish apothecary and surgeon. (*tasteandtour.co.uk*; *tours from £58/₹5,200 per person.*)

PHOTO COURTESY: ZOSIA KONIECZNA/HUNGRY BIRDS



When in Paris, grab a croque-monsieur (top) by Canal Saint-Martin; Broodje kroket or meat croquette is a popular street snack in Amsterdam, served in tiny *eetsalon* or lunchrooms (facing page). A food truck named Original Stroopwafels at the city's Albert Cuypmarkt serves freshly made *stroopwafels* (bottom) with caramel syrup.

### DANISH DELIGHT

A four-hour Culinary Experience tour with Copenhagen Food Tours allows you to deep-dive into the city's burgeoning food scene. The tour begins at Torvehallerne, the city's favourite food hall, where you can sample artisanal foods from small producers across the country. There's cheese, honey, liquorice, caramels and much more. The next stop is at a gourmet restaurant where the Danish staple *smørrebrød* (an open rye bread sandwich topped with cold cuts, cheese, pickled vegetables, and meat) is elevated to a posh bite. Later visits include one to a microbrewery in the hipster-favourite Nørrebro neighbourhood. (*copenhagen.foodtours.eu*; *tours start from DKK850/₹9,000 per person.*)

### A SLICE OF SICILY

Locals in Palermo will proudly tell you that they are Sicilians, not Italians. And their food certainly is not what you'd immediately identify as Italian. One of the best ways to savour Sicilian cuisine is Streaty's street food tour that snakes through the cobblestoned markets of Capo, Ballarò, and Vucciria. Sicily's nose-to-tail eating approach becomes evident instantaneously. Sample this: there is *frittola*, a mixture of veal off-cuts boiled and fried in lard; and *pani ca meusa*, a sandwich with cow spleen, lung, and throat cartilage, again, all

boiled and fried in pork lard, along with a generous sprinkling of *caciocavallo* cheese. This is a typical Sicilian stretched-curd cheese made of sheep's or cow's milk.

Vegetarians, there's hope in the Sicilian pizza: *sfincione* (pronounced sfin-chee-o-nay), which comes topped with tomatoes, onions, herbs, *caciocavallo*, as well as *panelle* (chickpea flour fritters). The chickpea is a legacy of the Arab influence on the local cuisine that came about with the 10th-century Moorish conquest of Sicily. In fact, as you venture into Palermo's markets, you will notice that they seem less European and more Levantine. Your guide will tell you how the Arabs also gave Sicily its favourite street snack, *arancina*—deep-fried rice balls often stuffed with veal, onion, peas, and carrot.

The tour also takes you to a local tavern for some *Sangue Siciliano*, a cloyingly sweet, blood red dessert wine, aptly translated as Sicilian blood. The three-hour walk through the crammed alleys in the city of *The Godfather* ends in a pasticceria for a taste of *cannolo* (plural cannoli), pastry shells filled with sweetened, creamy ricotta. Pro tip: A "proper" cannolo is one where the ricotta filling is piped into the pastry shell in front of you (not pre-filled), and lightly dusted with powdered sugar.

It really is an offer you can't refuse. (*streaty.com*; *besides Palermo, Streaty offers tours in Catania, Florence, and Venice too; from €39/₹3,000 per person.*) ✂



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