

Food Tour is Seasoned by Local History

Posted On 31 Aug 2017 By : Guest Contributor Comment: 0

Share 1 Like 1 Tweet 0 Pin 0 Share 0 Email 0

By Eileen Keighley

No matter where you visit, it's likely you can find a food tour. If done well, they are rarely just about food, but offer a head first dive into the culture of a town by providing snippets about daily life and insights into its past and perhaps its future, too.

Here in Laguna Beach there are several tours to choose from. **Feast Laguna** is the latest to break into the popular pass time. The tour is headed by Quinn Christman, a culinary marketing and travel consultant, who has worked to promote brands such as Michelin, award-winning chefs and restaurants and Orient Express Hotels. She also operates bespoke tours to Italy with her husband under a sister brand, **Feast Tuscany**.



Christman, now of Simi Valley, attended Dana Hills High, but her career allowed her to travel extensively. She describes Laguna Beach "as my favorite stomping ground." And "promoting Laguna is like coming home."

Developing a food-based tour is not simple. It is about striking a balance between food and culture. How many stops, how much culture? Who are the customers? Locals or tourists? There are operational limitations too. Many restaurants open only for dinner, which limits the choice of destinations. Some restaurants have great food, but lack polish rom the exterior. Christman's tour is but three months old, so she remains

flexible. "Partners change seasonally as well as depending on the time of day. A 4 to 7 p.m. tour will be different from a morning tour." It has yet to generate any Yelp reviews or a Trip Adviser listing, online sites well-used by visitors.

Christman wants authenticity. "We believe we provide an insider's view to Laguna, from introducing our guests to classic and contemporary local businesses, to showcasing the hidden gems that most locals and tourists don't know about. On our tours, we offer a bit of everything – it's a really fun and tasty way to get to know Laguna's food, art, and heritage!"

In the name of research, and a fair bit of curiosity, I put on my walking shoes, and joined the \$75 per person tour promising a "three hour eating adventure," including a minimum of five food experiences. I was eager to know how much I didn't know, and it was vast.

As with most tours, they stand or fall with the guide. Our group was in luck with Dave Shermet, a local who clearly loves the town. When not guiding, you can see him in this summer's production of the Pageant of the Masters in the Fountain of Apollo, standing still for 90 seconds at a time. Fortunately, with us he was a little more animated, reciting anecdotes and stories that went beyond any guide book.

As the group assembled at the lifeguard tower, we were highly expectant -- and discovered our final destination would be the American flag in Heisler Park. Rit of a hike for some



PROVENANCE REALTY GROUP

SOLD \$2.2M

Laguna Beach
big views on a big lot
5 beds | 3 baths
2,850 sf

Chris Guziak
949.899.8300

426 Cypress Drive, Laguna Beach I \$1,075,000

With 50 years combined experience selling homes in Laguna Beach, the choice is obvious, isn't it?

COMERFORD & MCAFOOSE
GLOBAL LUXURY

Liz: 949-874-1321
Ray: 949-499-8957
McAfoose.com

Join the Local's List

For Email Newsletters you can trust.

SUNSETS & MEMORIES

Rates from \$379*

BOOK NOW

SURF & SAND
LAGUNA BEACH

* Valid through 9/20/17. Some restrictions & blackout dates may apply. Based on availability.

HELLO SAVINGS

Outlets
of San Clemente

Oktoberfest
BEER · BRATS · BANDS
BIG BEAR

...and wear comfortable shoes. It was nearly 3,000 Fitbit steps. Here, Dave began to tell the fascinating history of Laguna and the importance of its artistic and cultural diversity.

Our minds already fueled it was time for the first stop, an unremarkable patio overlooking the sea, belonging to the French restaurant C'est la Vie. When I lived in Paris I discovered a thing for macrons, so I was surprised to find I'd never stepped foot in this eatery as they make over 20 flavors. The second surprise was the cronut, a combination of croissant and doughnut filled with French custard, created and trademarked by Dominique Ansel, a baker in New York. *Merci monsieur!*



Omar Muratalla of Carmelita's shakes up fresh-fruit cocktails.

Nearby, we were welcomed by Daniel Osorio, general manager of Carmelita's, who introduced us to several dishes including their famous black bean and chipotle dip and carnitas. The ingredients are all locally sourced, seasonally fresh, and recipes go back to families in Guadalajara. Not to be upstaged by the food, we also sampled three of Omar Muratalla's margaritas, bursting with the scent of citrus oils and freshly pulsed fruit.

En route to our next stop we meandered through back streets in search of outdoor artwork. In the Dawson Cole Fine Art sculpture garden, we discovered how the sculptor was intrigued by Cirque du Soleil and made the pieces turn, and that the British phone booth on Forest serves as a temporary exhibit depicting the world's population at 9 billion in 2050.

Near the garden, we stopped briefly in one of the town's smallest seated restaurants, Thai Brothers. While we sipped Thai tea and sampled chicken larb (much improved by the chili sauce) we chatted about the history of the restaurant and its owners, known as Brother A and Brother B.

More walking, art history and two indulgent, on-the-go food treats. The first was delivered from the Pizza Bar as we stood on the boardwalk, a hand-held portion of Poutine, French fries with cheese curds and gravy. This famous Canadian "delicacy" is proving a big hit with beach goers.

The second treat, and a fitting "dessert" to the tour, was a waffle making demonstration at Gelato Paradiso, which offers 32 flavors.

Next, we meandered through Heisler Park, past the bowling green and the three small gardens featuring local plants from Laguna Beach's sister cities. As promised we finished for a photo op at the raised American flag, leaving us to spend more time amid the bronze, stone and steel art installations and memorials we had just discovered.

This tour was memorable on many levels. It demonstrated the town's diversity, from historical landmarks to contemporary art and a blending of global cultures. Food wise, while tasty, I didn't find much that surprised me, but with so many other delightful surprises along the way, I wouldn't have missed a step of it.

Tours operate daily; www.feastlaguna.com, 949 647 4574

NEED WE SAY MORE?
Every Weekend
Sept. 9 - Oct. 28
BIG BEAR LAUNCH
Carmelita's Big Bear
EST. 1971
BigBearEvents.com

30 YEARS EXPERIENCE & FAMILY DENTISTRY SINCE 1989

Island Dentistry

LAGUNA BEACH
610 N. Coast Hwy, Suite 110
(In the Pavilions Shopping Center)
949-497-4900



24/7 EMERGENCY DENTAL SERVICE 949-874-0534

INDULGE IN
A REST DAY
WITH A

Club Sport
LIVE HEALTHY

GET A FREE
GUEST PASS

Newport Academy