

Paris tour a gourmet's delight

Outing combines gourmet food with from-the-water sightseeing, culminating in a spectacular lunch

It's the type of order we're more than happy to obey. "Let's go eat pastry," says Paris Sweet Paris tour guide Muguet Becharat.

So we cross Rue Censier in the City of Light's 5th arrondissement with purpose, and enter Carl Marletti, the eponymous shop of the pastry chef.

Our tour group is first struck by the beauty of stylish French men in black suits serving up pictureperfect pastries from endless symmetrical displays of goodies.

And the pastries live up to the visual.

The tiny almond cake *fancier* and the specialty blackcurrant meringue made with real violet flowers are to die for.

With cream on our lips, crumbs on our fingers and checking out what to try next, we're told not to eat too much.

There are five more stops on this gastronomic walking tour.

The best foods will also be bought by Becharat along the way so that the outing culminates with a spectacular lunch of our acquisitions in a restaurant at the far end of Rue Mouffetard.

At first, the street appears like any other in Paris, albeit with the cachet of being in the Latin Quarter and dripping with history and chic.

"This is an upper-middle class neighbourhood where people live and chefs come to get the freshest and the best for a reasonable cost from small independent producer and sellers," says Becharat.

"That is the future of French gastronomy." Becharat's passion for everything local, fresh, organic, artisanal and great-tasting is admirable, but sometimes we have to prod her along mid-lecture.

There's more to nosh, after all.

Which is how we find ourselves standing in front of Fruit Mouffetardoan outdoor produce stand draped in colour from an array of strawberries, cherries, tomatoes, lettuce, apples and apricots.

"I'm particularly particular about strawberries," states Becharat.

We don't really pay attention to the rest of what she's saying because the strawberries

are amazing.

Smaller and more red than the berries we get at Canadian grocery stores, these are from the south of France where the sun, soil, water and farmer have produced a luscious fruit that tastes like summer.

Onto Androuet Cheese where entering the shop is to step into a wonderfully pungent other world. Someone in the group described it as a "cheese high."

We're teased with the smells and tales of cheese from 46 AOCs (similar to the area quality designation of French wines) from the son of the founders, Patrick Androuet. But alas no tasting.

Becharat is filling her shopping bag with the best for later. A rant by Becharat about the sticky, white, chemical-filled bad bread that most people eat leads us to Le Fournil de Mouffetard, a bakery where the baguettes are the complete opposite of bad. Baked the traditional way with hand-made fresh, never-frozen, slow-fermenting sour dough free of preservatives, it is crusty on the outside and flaky on the inside.

But this again is just a tease.

Becharat fills her shopping bags even more and we continue up the street to Pierre Champion, a combined restaurant, gourmet and wine shop.

We're given space in the middle of the wine display to unpack the shopping, add foie gras, jams and chilled white wine from Champion's store, and have a stand up feast. It's nothing fancy.

But the food, wine, setting and company combine for a contented graze of foie gras, Bondes de Gatinais, Ossau Iraty and Roquefort cheeses with fig and plum jams on the best of baguettes.

The pastries from Carl Marletti are released from their boxes and the blackcurrant with violet flower meringue, salted caramel confection and almond creams disappear.

Stuffed and happy we're asked if we can stand one more stop — Mococho Chocolat.

There we pick up little bags of rose raspberry, smoked salt praline and tonka bean chocolates for later.

But some of us can't wait and break into them right away.

While the Paris Sweet Paris tour was the most memorable food experience because we walked the route, there were certainly other great meals.

Our tour group's three-hour Seine River dinner cruise on Bateaux Parisiens served up the best of both worlds with gourmet dining accompanied by a constant parade of Paris's greatest monuments passing by.

As we sipped champagne and nibbled foie gras, loin of veal and pistachio macaroon, we were also given an eyeful of the Eiffel Tower, Louvre Museum, National Assembly, Grand Palace, d'Orsay Museum, Notre Dame Cathedral and the National Library. It's also worth it to eat salmon and chocolate cake at Le Moulin de la Galette, the restaurant in Monmartre where August Renoir painted his famous 1876 painting of the common folk cavorting.

On the way up to Le Moulin de la Galette stop for a pre-dinner drink at Les Deux Moulins, the café made famous as the place where Amelie worked in the wildly popular French movie named after her.

To combine shopping with dining drop by the landmark Galeries Lafayette department store.

This is where floors of gourmet food, wine, housewares and clothes — running the gamut from affordable to designer — are finished with a rooftop restaurant called La Terrasse.

There, the swordfish with cheese-drunk mashed potatoes and macaroon dessert are as good as the unbeatable 360 degree view of the Paris skyline. I

IF YOU GO...

- ParisInfo.com.
- Air Transat flies to Paris non-stop from more Canadian cities than any other carrier — Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Montreal and Quebec City..
- Transat can also package airport transfers and well-located hotel like Mercure Sacre Coeur in stylish Monmartre where we stayed.
- Check out TransatHolidays.com, ParisSweetParis.com, BateauxParisiens.com, LeMoulindeLaGalette.fr and GaleriesLafayette.com.



Pastry chef Carl Marletti has a bakery in Paris's Latin Quarter.