

# Milwaukee perfect for foodies

TRAVEL



**Peter Wilson**

MILWAUKEE, Wisconsin — In this city's crowded public market, you can't turn anywhere without facing delectable food stalls, tempting bakeries and, being Milwaukee, wall to wall displays of seductive smoked sausage.

So with this much fabulous food to dazzle the senses, how come I find the first weigh scale I've ever seen outside a doctor's office? Not only that, this particular weigh machine came complete with a guilt mirror focused menacingly at my waistline.

But Milwaukee is such a huge "foodie" city, it's tough staying on the straight and narrow, especially if you plan on taking in one of the popular tasting tours Theresa Nemetz operates for visitors in her city. Theresa and her husband own Milwaukee Food Tours, which feature 2.5-hour low-impact walking tours where folks discover Milwaukee's rich history and architecture, while sampling delicious tastings long the way. From Italian bakeries, meat shops and pizzerias to German eateries, cheese stores and breweries, this walking tour is quite a mouthful.

I had taken a morning tour thinking I would be able to fit in lunch later at the city's public market, another great hangout for food lovers. I should have known better. My lunchtime introduction to the weigh scale, along with the volume of "snacks" I'd eaten on my walking tour, ensured I wasn't going to be thinking food thoughts for a while.

With its rich Italian, German, Irish and Polish immigrant history, Milwaukee has many stories of the city's heritage to share with visitors. Theresa's tours provide the magic of discovery while savouring of the flavours of Milwaukee's most delicious and historic neighbourhoods.

We began our tour at the Wisconsin Cheese Mart, which is housed in the old Steinmeyer Building, constructed with terra cotta brick likely brought all the way from St. Louis. The company has been in opera-

tion since 1938 and offers 600 varieties of cheeses, a selection of which was set out for our tour group. It was 10 a.m. as we began to munch our way through a dozen types of cheese, including buttermilk blue cheese, five-year-old cheddar, aged parmesan, and a few exotic varieties, such as merlot, espresso and, no kidding, chocolate cheese fudge.

"What many people don't know is that when immigrants first settled in Wisconsin, we actually weren't the Dairy State. Back then, Milwaukee was the largest shipper of wheat in the world — until insects ruined the wheat crops. Farmers then turned to dairy cows and began producing milk, cheese and butter," she said.

Cheese tasting done, we began a leisurely trek in search of new dining treats. This time, Sciortino's Bakery on Milwaukee's Brady Street was high on Theresa's radar screen. Opened by Peter Sciortino in 1948, it was purchased 10 years ago by the Vella family. The Sicilian family has kept traditions alive by perfecting pastry specialties, including their famous cannoli, an Italian dessert meaning "little tube."

The tube-shaped shell of fried pastry dough is filled with a sweet, creamy filling of ricotta cheese, a few chocolate chips, and a half cherry on each end, said Theresa, no stranger to these tasty treats.

"The beauty of this bakery is that they fill their shells on demand so they are crisp — not soggy," she says, offering a huge platter of them for us to try.



**Peter checks his weight**



**Sciortino's bakery is a must on a trip to Milwaukee**

Filled with a couple, or was it three, cannolis, I hurried after our group as it turned a corner to head down the road towards our next stop.

In 1946, Joe, Teddy, and Eddie opened Glorioso Brothers, a small meat and grocery market at 1020 E. Brady Street, in a neighbourhood that drew many Italians.

Surrounded by aromatic and savory aromas, we met Felix Glorioso, son of Joe Glorioso, who introduced us to the delights of his olives, salami and prosciutto. Olives are a staple of Mediterranean cuisines and are often eaten as a snack, although cooks use them to flavour everything from pizzas to martinis, Felix said.

"Black olives stay on the tree until fully ripened while green olives, which are more bitter, are picked while not fully ripe," our guide explained.

Despite our steady intake of calories all morning, my mouth was watering as he described the wonders of prosciutto, another store specialty. "Try wrapping a slice around fresh or dried fruit — with soft fresh pears it's amazing," our genial host beamed.

When Theresa gathered our group for its next port of call, I'd lost track of where we were, but judging by the names above the storefronts, we had crossed an international border somewhere. As we ambled along, Theresa told us that in 1990, a stunning 48 per cent of Milwaukeeans claimed at least some German heritage.

"I've been told that if you have a chance to take a peek inside a phone book while in Milwaukee, you will see that there are

43 pages of names beginning with "Sch," including five pages of Schmidts."

In the late 1870s, 19-year-old Fred Usinger arrived in Milwaukee from Europe with just \$400 and some secret sausage recipes. The young immigrant was hired to work in a butcher shop that stood on the site of the store where he would eventually build the store now operated by the fourth generation sausage-making family.

As we chewed our way through different sausage samples, Theresa explained some sausage trivia, such as to brat means "to fry" and a "wurst" means sausage. Thus, a "Brat Wurst" is a fried sausage. A traditional bratwurst is simply pork and veal, ground up with spices, made into a sausage, and fried.

Selling 70 different kinds of old world and contemporary sausages, the thriving Usinger store is still largely the same, right down to its immaculate marble counters and floors.

A couple of more stops, and a few hundred more calories, and our delicious tour finished up at the Milwaukee Public Market, where locally owned businesses sell a stunning variety of fresh foods.

I have to say, Milwaukee Food Tours are a great way to discover the wonders and surprises of a new city, but remember to wear comfortable shoes, and stretchy pants. If you do visit the public market, the weigh scale is on the second floor, it's easy to miss.

*For information on Theresa's tours, visit [www.milwaukeefoodtours.com](http://www.milwaukeefoodtours.com).*

*For more information on Milwaukee, check out [www.visitmilwaukee.org](http://www.visitmilwaukee.org).*

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