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Culinary Escapes offers tours of eateries

Ursula Watson / The Detroit News

There is a restaurant that you are longing to try, but the risk of possibly hating it and parting with money in the failed process outweighs your culinary curiosity.

"Many of us get into a dining rut, and with the economy being so tight, you tend to stick with what you know, what you know will taste good," says Ann Wilson, owner of Culinary Escapes. Culinary Escapes offers guided walking tours, that expose folks to several restaurants and eateries in Royal Oak and Birmingham for \$35 and \$40 per person. Escapes in Ferndale and downtown Detroit are in the future, Wilson says.

During the tours, you can chat with the wait staff and managers at each stop where ample food samples await. Tours can last more than three hours, so be ready to hoof it and eat.

"We always say come hungry, because in the Royal Oak tour there are 11 stops, while in the Birmingham tour there are six," she says. "All the samples you will eat will equal a very hearty lunch."

The tours provide a level of comfort, says Wilson, because you get to know the city and the establishments.

"You get a look at the people behind the food and learn about their food philosophy," says Wilson, a native Detroiter, "so you go back and feel that the place knows you and you know the place."

One satisfied Culinary Escapes tourist is Mai Vue, who went on the Royal Oak tour. She says it didn't just expand her palate, but her mind.

"I have lived in Michigan the majority of my life, but there are a lot of places that I haven't eaten at or seen," says Vue, 28.

The Sterling Heights resident adds that she didn't like everything she tried, but was happy she tried everything.

"We went to this one tea place where you try the teas without sugar, etc. I didn't love it, but it was this cute, hidden place that was beautifully decorated. I loved the experience."

Vue adds that the price for the tours is very reasonable and is great for a couple on a date or a group of friends.

"If two people go to dinner, it will be that much per plate," she says of the \$35 and \$40 price tag of the tours. "With the tours, you get three hours and a chance to interact with a group, with your date, or with friends."

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