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You can nibble your way through Royal Oak on food tour

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From California wine country to Boston's old-time Italian neighborhoods to the barbecue pits of the Carolinas, culinary tourism has been growing in popularity across the country. And now a Farmington Hills woman has started a company offering the service in metro Detroit.

Ann Wilson, 41, earlier this summer founded Culinary Escapes, which leads guided walking tours of downtown Royal Oak restaurants, markets and other wine and food businesses. She plans to expand the tours to other areas including Eastern Market, Ann Arbor, Ferndale, Birmingham and Detroit.

Besides getting to taste something at each stop, participants meet the business owners, hear how they got started and learn about their food philosophies.



Kevin Dean, greets culinary tour guests at Superior Fish Market.
PHOTO BY SYLVIA RECTOR/DETROIT FREE PRESS

A group of six tourists began the day Saturday tasting homemade peanut butter at the Royal Oak Farmers Market before crossing the street to try sautéed fresh fish at Superior Fish Market and hear owner Kevin Dean talk about the company's history and products.

The tours make 10 stops in all, last 3 1/2 hours and cover two miles, all on foot. Other businesses on the company's schedule are Goldfish Tea, Gayle's Chocolates, Zumba Mexican Grille, Holiday Market, Memphis Smoke, Pizza Paesano, Cloverleaf Fine Wine & Spirits and Hermann's Bakery.

Wilson, who recently moved back to the area after living in Illinois for four years, believes the experience will appeal to newcomers as well as longtime residents who want a behind-the-scenes look at the places where they shop and eat.

Tours are held every other Saturday morning and cost \$35 for adults and \$20 for children. Reservations are required. The last scheduled tour of the season is Sept. 20. For information, call 248-331-7296 or see www.culinary-escapes.com.

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