

Step on it

Walking tours are a great way to savour London's rich history. Kick off with Covent Garden's gastro spots, says **Ianthe Butt**



A day that begins with a macaroon can never be a bad one. Food writer Celia Brooks arrives on Long Acre clutching a rainbow of Ladurée's finest from the nearby shop. I try orange blossom, and almond and marshmallow – each one is a melting meringue kiss.

Celia is our guide on the three-hour Covent Garden Gastrotour. Formerly a chef for the Stanley Kubrick estate, Celia launched Gastrotours in London ten years ago. 'Back then there was no

concept of a food tour,' she says, 'but now there is always something new.' She also covers Portobello, Marylebone Village and Borough Market, but I'm joining Celia on her latest tour here in Covent Garden. Originally the kitchen garden for the Abbey of St Peter at Westminster in the 13th century, the 'Convent Garden' was a major source of fruit and veg. With its foodie history, Celia felt the area was perfect for gastronomes. 'It took a while to sift through all the tourist

mayhem, but I think I succeeded.'

A short wander and we arrive at Neal's Yard Dairy, which specialises in cheese from the British Isles. After nibbling on various kinds we move to Neal's Yard. Brightly fronted houses nestle in between health food cafés in the alley where Neal's Yard Remedies was born. It's also home to the Slow Food UK HQ, where we buy 'forgotten foods', including damson ketchup.

Next up is Covent Garden's Piazza and the Real Food Market, which sets up every Thursday. It's a cornucopia of delights: burgers sizzle on hot slabs, red cabbage and ricotta strudels and slices of carrot cake are piled high. Celia shares her favourite stalls – Karantania Delicatessen, where we sample thick Slovenian pumpkin oil, and Caracas Corn House, for a Venezuelan corn pancake. After a crispy ostrich sausage from a Polish stall, we traipse downstairs at the Apple Market to munch on tangy puffed rice and pickles from Café Chutney.

Our final stop is St Martin's Courtyard for wine tasting at Dalla Terra. We make room for puntarella (green chicory) on broad bean mash drizzled with truffle oil, and goat's cheese wrapped in vines, while manager Giuseppe Gullo talks us through matched wines.

Foodies will adore the venues Celia shares, along with her easy rapport with stallholders and chefs. And the day ends, as many good days do, with a large glass of wine. *The Covent Garden Gastrotour costs £60 per person. celiabrooksbrown.com*

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