

# Tasty travels

by Lucas Laursen

I conducted a travel experiment recently. Everywhere I go, people make suggestions on what to see, which I usually politely ignore. ("Oh, England? You must see the hedgerows. Spain? Don't neglect Barcelona! Kyrgyzstan? Where's that?")

I've written for enough travel guidebooks to consider myself jaded to the whole idea of for-profit recommendations. I am generally in a hurry and

always on a budget, so I often just list the first establishment I find. But maybe I could find some use for non-profit tips from unhurried friends. Sort of like Wikipedia.org for the traveler.

So I decided to compile a list of recommendations from friends and contacts for a popular destination, Rome, and actually go to those places, in search of the best. Well, some of them. I never did figure out what my ex-roommate meant when he wrote about,

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A summer wedding is planned.

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"this great pizzeria, you know, like, in the center of Rome."

I did find one friend's recommended gelateria near the Pantheon. I can safely say it served the most delicious gelato I'd eaten that afternoon. Because, you see, I had also tried another recommended gelateria near the Pantheon the day before, and they were both so taste-bud-contorting that I was left unable to choose a favorite shop. The topic may require further research.

There were also museums, of course, and innumerable churches. But the person who thought I might distinguish the Bernini churches from the Borromini examples had a little too much faith in my architectural refinement.

My conclusion is that the recommendations said more about the people who made them than the attractions themselves. One friend, with whom I once spent exactly 12 euros and 29 cents over the course of four lean days in Spain, recommended an ultra-cheap bakery. He effused dreamily, "I caught a whiff of it from blocks away, and found it by following my nose."

He told me to look for unmarked metal doors at street level that led downstairs to olfactory bliss. It sounded authentic, gritty and anti-touristic. I plunged into the web of streets he'd mentioned. I got lost. I became suspicious of what exactly was in the baked products my friend had sniffed. But then I smelled it.

It was pure flour, eggs and sugar, confectioned and condensed into a stream of air particles. It was a tractor beam tugging at my nose. I drifted through the anonymous silver doors and down the promised stairs to a massive array of almond cookies, pizzas, lemon cakes, paninis and croissants. My father and I gorged ourselves to excess for pocket change.

This leaves me with a dilemma: How do I justify travel writing if a few off-the-cuff recommendations can make a trip happen, instead? I fear I don't have an answer yet, but get back to me after I have time to get some recommendations on the topic.



LUCAS LAURSEN eyes some tasty treats.

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