

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TOURING SPAIN ON A FULL STOMACH

Sutton native has built food tour business

By Diane Daniel
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Massachusetts native and Madrid resident Lauren Aloise, 30, founded Madrid Food Tour in 2012, which now has expanded into Devour Spain, offering culinary walking tours in several Spanish cities. Aloise, whose first restaurant job was at a Friendly's at the Auburn Mall, also runs the culinary tourism website spanishsabores.com, which includes information on Spanish food and culinary travel. Below are excerpts from an interview with Aloise.

Q. Did anything in your upbringing influence your passion for food and Spain?

A. I grew up in Sutton, near Worcester, in an Italian-American family where food was paramount. I remember how much I loved being in the kitchen. I also really had this need to travel and spent a summer with a family in Sicily. But when I came home, there was no one to use my Italian with, so I started studying Spanish.

Q. How did you end up in Spain?

A. I have two degrees from UMass Amherst, a bachelor's of science in business, specializing in hospitality and tourism management, and a bachelor's of art in Spanish language. I spent one year studying abroad, in Buenos Aires, and Granada, Spain. After college (Aloise graduated in 2009), I had an opportunity to be a teaching assistant at a school in Seville. I was considering culinary school and thought it would be a chance to get into Spanish cuisine, which I'd starting hearing about. A week into being there, I met my now-husband. He works in IT and software, and is now one of three partners in Devour Spain. Our other partner is from New Zealand. It's so helpful to have someone who is Spanish.

Q. What led you to start offering food tours?

A. During my first two years in Seville, I tried to learn as much about the food as possible. I started the blog to write about



DEVOUR SPAIN

food and I also opened my house to expats, having people come over and we'd cook Spanish dishes together and eat. I'd stumbled upon the idea of food tours and thought, this is the most perfect thing for me — combining my knowledge of food, travel, my community. We moved to Madrid in 2011 and my first tour was in 2012. I was incredibly lucky because there was little competition and high demand. There's more competition now, but still high demand.

Q. How do you deal with the competition?

A. We try to stand out by working only with businesses that are family owned and operated, are unique, and of course have great food. Many of our businesses have been around for decades or generations. Our target clients have come a long way — about 60 percent come from the US — and they want to experience the old Spain.

Q. What are some common misconceptions about Spanish food?

A. Traditional paella, which is from Valencia, wasn't made with seafood, but was farmer's food, usually with snails, rabbit, and beans. Of course you can now find seafood paella for tourists all over the country. Also, tapas to Americans are small plates or shared plates, but if you ask 10 Spanish people, they'll give 10 different answers depending on where they're from. Like in Madrid, it's the little bit of free food with your drink. In Seville, it means a size, so menus will have tapa, half, and full portions. Our most popular tours are the tapas and history tours, which is a historic walking tour with tastings at tapas bars.

Q. Can you share a few food and travel tips from your current destinations?

A. Madrid is home to so many of Spain's really nice restaurants. I really like the Literary Quarter, or Barrio de las Letras. It's charming, central, with great places to eat and drink. Barcelona is really all about neighborhoods, with so many personalities, like Gracia, which still feels like a village, with great shops and restaurants. Seville is where I fell in love with Spanish food. It has some of the best food in Spain, especially if you're interested in more modern tapas. Malaga has a great market in the tiny city center where you can see all the food that Spain produces in one place.

Q. What do your future plans include?

A. We plan to launch tours in Granada and Santiago de Compostela this year and also offer seasonal tours that show off traditions and parts of Spanish culture. Like we have a seasonal calçots tour on the countryside outside of Barcelona. Those are basically a variety of scallion and are steamed over an open fire. We hope to do something with sherry wine and the grape harvest and also with the olive harvest, from tree to oil. Within a couple years, we want to give cooking classes. For me it's a personal thing, to get people interested in something lesser known than paella and sangria.

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HERE

SKI TRAILS + CHOCOLATE = WINTER FUN IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

Cross-country ski and snowshoe enthusiasts can enjoy the perks of membership — offered for one day or one year — at the Mt. Washington Valley Ski Touring and Snowshoe Foundation. Membership includes use of 45 kilometers of well-maintained trails (connecting the Interval Resort Loop to the Village of North Conway, N.H.), free parking, touring center facilities, wax room, and programs. Over 50 percent of the network is rated easy, allowing novices as well as experts opportunities

for touring, including trails with magnificent winter views of Mount Washington. Day rates \$7-\$15; free for seniors over age 70 and children under 6. Not to be missed is the Annual Chocolate Festival, the "Sweetest Day on the Trails," when chocoholics can ski or snowshoe to trailside stops to enjoy chocolate prepared every way imaginable (Feb. 26, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.). Festival pass not included with membership. Advanced purchase \$30; event day \$35. 603-356-9920, www.mwvskitouring.org

ROMANCE ON THE SKI SLOPES

Looking for a way to kindle romance and share your favorite winter sport? The Woodstock

Inn & Resort brings love to the slopes with its Teach Your Honey How to Ski package. Includes luxury accommodations at the historic inn, located in the picture-perfect colonial town of Woodstock, Vt., plus a two-hour private skiing lesson for beginners (includes lift ticket) and one regular lift ticket for the second person at Suicide Six, the resort's downhill alpine ski area in nearby South Pomfret. In addition, enjoy two complimentary après ski cocktails after a successful day on the slopes together. Rates from \$438 per couple, not including tax, gratuity, and \$30 per room, per night resort fee. Available through March 18. 888-338-2745, www.woodstockinn.com/

THERE

HYATT DEBUTS HOTEL COLLECTION

Hyatt Hotels have debuted The Unbound Collection, a boutique-focused addition to their brand's portfolio. The first to roll out is The Confidante, a playful oceanfront property in Miami's mid-beach neighborhood. The mid-century modern hotel features 363 guestrooms and 16 suites with 1950s-inspired design reminiscent of Miami Beach's golden era. Intended to feel like a friend's beach house, the hotel's vibe is casual and family-friendly with two heated swimming pools — with private ca-



banas and bungalows — a full-service beach area, lush tropical gardens, and an open-air, full-service rooftop spa and salon. Indulge in Southern-themed cuisine at the newly opened Bird & Bone restaurant or sample Asian-fusion fare at TALDE before signing up for a variety of beachside fitness and wellness sessions. Not-to-be-missed is Nina's House, an eclectic, laid-back beach bungalow hangout offering cocktails and lite bites. February rates from \$249. 305-424-1234, www.theconfidantehotel.com.

ART HOLIDAYS IN PORTUGAL

Unleash your creativity with an arts workshop in Portugal offered by Sozo Arts. Founded in

2013 by UK artists and expats Kit and Samantha Jennings, the weeklong workshops offer the chance to learn and improve your artistic skills while enjoying the history, cuisine and local cultures of the region. This season's classes include Photography on the Silver Coast; Photography in Lisbon; Painting and Wine on the Silver Coast; and — debuting this year — Painting and Pottery on the Silver Coast. Based in the city of Caldas da Rainha, a center for ceramics and fine arts, the new ceramics package allows guests to make and glaze their own piece of pottery in the style of Portugal's famous Bordallo Pinheiro, as well as a painting workshop to design

traditional azulejos (tiles). Classes serve all abilities, "from beginners to improvers," and include a combination of accommodation, onsite workshops, most daily meals and cultural excursions. Workshops March 31-Oct. 20. Rates from \$740, double occupancy. Book by Feb. 28 for 10 percent discount. +44 (0)7737 331225, www.sozoarts.org/

EVERYWHERE

PORTABLE, SHATTERPROOF WINE GLASSES

Ready to upgrade your outdoor glassware? Trade in your red plastic cups for Vinotrek's stainless steel wine glasses. Specifically designed for outdoor use, these shatterproof glasses are vacuum insulated to keep wine cool, protecting it from the warmth of your hands without affecting taste or temperature. A stemless wide base prevents glass from toppling over on uneven surfaces, making it perfect for picnics on sand, grass, blankets, and more. Each lightweight glass holds 11 ounces filled to the rim but is perfectly balanced for a standard 6 ounce wine pour. Food grade stainless steel does not absorb odors or flavors, and is condensation-free. Lifetime warranty. Set of 2, \$39.99. vinotrek.com/pages/contact-vinotrek

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