



ILLINOIS. MILE AFTER MAGNIFICENT MILE.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 12, 2007

CONTACT: Emma Douglas 312-240-2730
emma.douglas@edelman.com

“EPI-CURIOS” TRAVELERS FIND CULINARY EXPERIENCES IN ILLINOIS *Tourism for “foodies” attracting visitors to destinations across the state*

According to a recent TIA study, almost one in five American leisure travelers have participated in a culinary-related trip in the past three years.¹ From culinary vacation packages to tours of local farms or wineries, culinary tourism gives travelers an opportunity to experience local fare and the people who produce it. With this trend on the rise in the United States, Illinois’ wide variety of culinary tourism opportunities position the state to be an industry leader.

Cooking Schools and Classes

Whether it’s to gain knife skills, learn to cook ethnic cuisine or try new wine, **The Chopping Block** has opportunities catering to all skill levels and interests. Its two Chicago locations offer tips on entertaining, wine tastings, and a variety of hands-on and demonstration cooking classes on topics such as seasonal favorites and vegetarian dishes. Group outings, date nights and individual lessons are provided for the food lover in everyone.

Perfect for the burgeoning wine connoisseur, the winemaking classes at Chicago’s **Wild Blossom Winery and Meadery** teach the fine art of wine through wine tasting lessons, hands-on winemaking, and tips on aging, cellaring and labeling. The two-class course will yield approximately 30 bottles of uniquely blended wine varietals from Chardonnay to Merlot.

For more information, contact The Chopping Block (312-644-6360, www.thechoppingblock.net); Wild Blossom Winery and Meadery (773-233-7579, www.bev-art.com).

The culinary traditions of Europe are taught through the guidance of expert chefs in Chicago’s suburbs. **Chef Madelaine Bullwinkle**, author of the highly-acclaimed book *Gourmet Preserves – Chez Madelaine*, calls on her 30 years of French cooking experience to teach the art and indulgence of French cuisine to eager students at her cooking school in Hinsdale.

¹Travel Industry of America Wine and Culinary Study, 2006

-more-

Experience the flavors of Old Italy with lessons from regionally recognized Chef Gaetano at Oak Park's **La Piazza Café**. Students can immerse themselves in the traditional flavors and aroma of Italian foods as they learn Gaetano's techniques for creating a traditional Italian meal at home.

For more information, contact Chez Madelaine Cooking School (630-655-0355, www.chezmadelaine.com); La Piazza Café (708-366-4010, www.piazzacafe.com).

Restaurants

Like a finely choreographed dance of the taste buds, Chicago's popular restaurant **Alinea** presents menus that take diners on a tour of the savory and sweet. Recently distinguished by *Gourmet Magazine* as the best restaurant in America, Alinea provides a vacation from the ordinary, offering dishes that combine the culinary with art, design and technology. Owner Grant Achatz is recognized worldwide as a leader of the forward-thinking food movement. In less than two years he has created a restaurant that is as much of a culinary destination as it is a dramatic performance.

Many chefs choose to keep their cooking secrets under lock and key, but at Chicago's **Tru**, diners sitting at the Kitchen Table witness the immense creativity, speed and talent required to prepare dinner at a five-star restaurant. There is no menu provided; instead, each diner is presented with an exceptional ten-course Collection menu created by the restaurant's expert chefs.

For more information, contact Alinea (312-867-0110, www.alinea-restaurant.com); Tru (312-202-0001, www.trurestaurant.com).

Home to more than just Abraham Lincoln, Springfield is the birthplace of the horseshoe sandwich, a cholesterol-rocketing concoction made by layering toast, meat, cheese sauce and crispy French fries. Considered the signature dish of the capital city and Springfield's original comfort food, those looking to experience the top-selling horseshoe sandwich in the city should head to **D'Arcy's Pint**. As the "luck of the Irish" would have it, this local favorite provides diners with a choice of 12 different types of horseshoe meat and three "Signature Shoes."

Travelers who want to experience the culinary treats of Southern Illinois will be in good company at **Windows Restaurant** at the Rend Lake Resort and Conference Center, where Executive Chef Jim Halpin specializes in dishes using regional game such as duck, pheasant and goose enhanced with seasonal touches and flavorful ethnic ingredients.

For more information, contact D'Arcy's Pint (217-492-8800, www.darcypintonline.com); Windows Restaurant (618-629-2211, www.rendlakeresort.net).

Culinary Tours

Learn to eat like the locals while sampling Chicago's rich history, culture and architecture. The **Near North Chicago Food Tasting and Cultural Walking Tour** offered by Chicago Food Planet introduces visitors to many of the area's authentic flavors, including ethnic eateries, pizzerias, a tea house and Jewish deli.

When visitors want to indulge, **Eli's Cheesecake Tours** are the tastiest way to explore this Chicago landmark. Rated the No. 1 food factory tour on the Food Network's *Top 5 Tasty Tours*, cheesecake lovers of all ages will delight in exploring the bakery, learning pastry-decorating tips from the experts and enjoying special taste tests.

For more information, contact Chicago Food Planet (800-979-3370, www.chicagofoodplanet.com); Eli's Cheesecake Chicago (773-308-7000, www.elicheesecake.com).

Chocolate lovers will find a little piece of heaven at the **Long Grove Confectionary Co.**, a sweet stop for those in Buffalo Grove. Guests are encouraged to tour the specialty-chocolate kitchen and learn the interesting history of this beloved family-owned business that has been a Chicagoland fixture for more than 30 years. No tour is complete without a stop at the factory store where traditional truffles, chocolate in the shapes of animals and buildings, and chocolate-covered strawberries are made.

It's more than just tofu! As one of the two major crops grown in Illinois and currently one of the leading health foods on the market today, soy beans are making their way into everyday cooking. **The National Soybean Research Institute** in Champaign invites guests to take part in a hands-on experience in its state-of-the-art kitchen and learn about the many uses for soy, new trends in soy foods, and how to cook with soy.

For more information, contact Long Grove Confectionary Co. (888-459-3100, www.longgrove.com); Champaign County Convention and Visitors Bureau (800-369-6151, www.visitchampaigncounty.org).

Organized Trips

Creating a link between sustainable farming, great cooking and respect for the environment, culinary retreats organized by **Learn Great Foods** capitalize on the growing trend of buying and cooking with organic and locally grown foods. Comprehensive two-day retreats bring together chefs, local growers, vintners and environmental engineers who provide guidance during hands-on cooking classes and demonstrations. Each retreat centers around a theme, such as "Sinfully Delicious," which is about all things chocolate, and "2 Busy 2 Cook," which provides direction on everyday cooking challenges for a busy household.

-more-

For more information, contact Learn Great Foods, (866-240-1650, www.learngreatfoods.com).

Wineries, Breweries, Farms

According to a recent TIA study, 65 percent of travelers visited wineries during recent leisure trips.² With wineries in abundance across the state, travelers will find no shortage of excellent wine and friendly vintners in Illinois. **Galena Cellars Vineyard and Winery** features The Vineyard Tasting Room, where wine tastings, gifts and guided tours are specialties. Guests are even treated to a brief winemaking lesson and given tips on tasting and wine pairings.

Baxter's Vineyard and Winery in historic Nauvoo simplifies the nagging wine-food pairing question by providing an adjacent Nauvoo Blue Cheese Factory. Baxter's also offers visitors monthly cooking classes with Liz Clark, dubbed the "Julia Child of the Midwest" by the *Chicago Tribune*.

To experience Illinois' most distinctive wine varietals, travelers can head to Southern Illinois and the **Shawnee Hills Wine Trail**, where a collection of eight wineries offer tours, tastings, wine-pairing instruction and cooking demonstrations. In December 2006, this region was designated as an American Viticultural Area, the first in Illinois recognized with this honor. This designation allows winemakers to include the region's name on any wines with 85 percent or more of their volume derived from area grapes, assuring consumers that wines with Shawnee Hills on the label are enriched by the region's characteristic grape attributes.

For more information, contact Galena Cellars Vineyard and Winery (815-777-3330, www.galenacellars.com); Baxter's Vineyard and Winery (217-453-2528, www.nauvoowinery.com); Shawnee Hills Wine Trail (www.shawneewinetrail.com).

Many of the friendly locals in America's Heartland can be found at **Flossmoor Station Restaurant & Brewery** where handcrafted beers, classic, regional cuisine and daily gossip are perfectly paired. Named "Best Small Brewpub" and "Best Small Brewpub Brewer" in America in 2006, Flossmoor Station Brewery offers tours the last Sunday of every month.

For more information, contact Flossmoor Station Restaurant & Brewery (708-957-BREW, www.flossmoorstation.com).

What began as a small farm stand in Belleville in 1837 is now the country's largest pick-your-own operation in the United States. With three locations in Southern Illinois, **Eckert's Country Store and Farms** hosts a variety of events throughout the year, including wine tastings and cooking demonstrations. And for travelers looking to truly

²Travel Industry of America Online Culinary Survey of Leisure Travelers, 2006

indulge in local cuisine, Eckert's offers fresh, homemade pies made with Illinois-grown fruit.

For more information, contact Eckert's Country Store and Farms (618-233-0513, www.eckerts.com).

To get travelers started on their culinary travel plans, the Illinois Bureau of Tourism offers additional information on one-of-a-kind attractions, events, accommodations and bookable 3-Day Getaways through the Bureau's Web site, www.enjoyillinois.com or its travel counselors at **1-800-2CONNECT**.

#

EDITOR'S NOTE: Media materials and downloadable images are now available on the Illinois Bureau of Tourism online media center at www.illinoismediacenter.com. Additional photography, available electronically, may be obtained by contacting Emma Douglas at emma.douglas@edelman.com, 312-240-2730 or Stephanie Aenchbacher at stephanie.aenchbacher@edelman.com, 312-240-2688.

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Tourism manages industry efforts that result in sustainable and significant economic and quality-of-life benefits for Illinois residents.