Reading

##### Food Markets Serve as both a Feast and Spectacle

Cathedrals are fine, but for real flavour, shop where locals do

Every serious traveller would visit museums, cathedrals, castles, monuments and legendary streets, but not food markets. Yet food markets also deserve to be visited. Modern markets are energetic and positive. They give you an idea of the economy, customs and even dialects of a city. In the world that is becoming more and more homogeneous, food markets give visitors an opportunity to see local people.

The most practical reason for such visits is to discover unfamiliar edibles, so they can be noticed on menus and ordered with some idea of what to expect.

For quick satisfaction, most of these markets have ready-to-eat treats. They can be tasted on the spot or carried off to a park bench or to a hotel room. The sellers provide a knife-fork-spoon set for tasting.

Many markets serve the most famous national specialities. You can taste some of the deep sea’s treasures at La Boqueria in Barcelona, where you can also taste Jabugo ham, the world’s best air-cured pork. In Budapest’s Central Market Hall you can enjoy peppered pork, pork cracklings and biscuits called pogasca.

But such practical pleasures may be just one of the attractions. On the other hand, you can learn a lot about the local economy by noting the quality and variety of foods.

A market is a living theatre. We can also observe how locals treat one another. Is there much **bargaining?** In some oriental markets it is traditional that you **haggle** about the price of things in the market. A visitor may see expressive hand-waving of haggling buyers and sellers. In other places there is one-price- only, but there is no fear of heavy thumbs on scales, as at Helsinki’s romantic morning harbour market, where you can find tiny almond-flavoured potatoes, fresh herring, and smoked reindeer tongue.

In my experience, the world’s most spectacular market is in Tokyo, the Central Wholesale Market, also known as Tsukiji, or Fish City. At outdoor entrance stands, small live molluscs — oysters, mussels, and shellfish — lobsters, crabs,

shrimps, and prawns — bubble and sizzle in running aerated water, and piles of octopus attract your eye. But the star here is tuna.

Anyone who doubts that meat can be as stunning as fish, need only to step into the butcher’s hall in the Agora, Athens’s central market. Prepare to be a bit shocked at the sight of meat cuts of all kinds: pork, beef, lamb, mutton and veal, and at the sight of displayed offal.

One of the most fascinating markets is Borough Market in London. Travellers may see such British specialties as cockles, mussels and icy North Sea oysters. They may taste and compare Cheddar cheeses. There are Cornish pasties, jams, buns and biscuits, and crunchily fried fish and chips.

My favourite sight at La Merced in Mexico City is the huge hanging sheets of pork cracklings. They are made of whole pig skins fried to resemble thick sheets of gold leaf.

Little known are the food markets of sub-Saharan Africa, both rich and poor, where bright fruits and root vegetables are scattered on the cloth-covered ground.

(Based on the essay by Mimi Sheraton)

##### Write the names of foods that are associated with the following food markets:

Tsukiji, or Fish City in Tokyo

Budapest’s Central Market Hall

La Boqueria in Barscelona

Helsinki’s harbour market

Borough Market in London

La Merced in Mexico City

Agora, Athens’s central market

##### Give the main reasons for visiting a market.

Practical reasons: Educational reasons: