Heimburger's
European Traveler

A web magazine to help you plan where to go, what to see in colorful Europe

Check out colorful local markets and enjoy one of Europe's most authentic food experiences

EUROPE'S FASCINATING FOOD MARKETS

By Sharon Hudgins
Photos by the author

Fresh fish at a market in Spain

Sweet juicy plums. Pungent goat cheeses. Briny black olives. Homemade pâtés studded with pistachios. Paper-thin slices of farmhouse cured ham. Multi-grain buns and rosemary-scented flatbreads. Chestnut honey and walnut tartes.

Are you hungry yet?

Great Market Hall, Budapest

On my first trip to Europe many years ago, I became hooked on shopping for food at the colorful local markets. Not the sterile supermarkets or gargantuan hypermarkets of today, which, except for the package labels in different languages, could be anywhere in the developed world. The markets that captured my imagination—and still keep drawing me back—are the ones where fresh foods are sold by individual vendors hawking their

Bright red radishes at Munich's Viktualienmarkt

wares from wooden stalls, customized vans, folding tables, or even blankets spread on the ground.

I go. I see. I buy. I eat.

Pickled olives, beans and vegetables at an open air market in Corsica

TYPES OF MARKETS

These food markets can be entirely outdoors, in the open air; or inside a cavernous covered market building; or in a combination of settings, with an indoor market surrounded by an open-air market that varies with the season. They can be permanent markets, operating year round at the same location, usually with the same vendors; or temporary events occurring only on specific days, once or twice a week, in a public square or country field, with local vendors as well as those who travel from one market to the next to sell their goods.

Local cheeses on display at an open air market in Corsica

Spanish hams and sausages at La Boqueria food market in Barcelona

Some are truly farmers' markets, where all the fruits, vegetables, meats and cheeses were grown, raised or processed by the people selling them. Others are outlets run by middlemen selling foods from a variety of suppliers, from small-time farmers to larger commercial companies. And some are a mixture of both.

London, Paris, Vienna, Madrid, Rome, and other major cities have many of these food markets located in neighborhoods throughout each metropolis. Smaller towns might have only one central market, whereas in a village there might be an open-air market only once a week, usually on Saturday. Check with the tourist office for the locations, dates and opening/closing times.

Fish at La Boqueria food market in Barcelona

Shopping at an open air market in Parks

LOCAL SPECIALTIES, GLOBAL CHOICES

At these markets you can see, smell and taste authentic local and regional specialties, some of them found nowhere else. In different regions of France, I've bought farmhouse cheeses made just down the road and jams preserved by the woman selling them. In Sicily and Greece, I've wandered through markets stocked with fish caught that morning in the nearby seas. At German markets I've left with my shopping bags filled with potatoes and apples grown in the surrounding fields, and with big loaves of rye bread still warm from the wood-fired oven in which they were baked.

Fresh herbed cheese balls at Munich's Viktualienmarkt

Fresh produce, beans and nuts at Barcelona's La Boqueia

A visit to a large metropolitan market can also be a lesson in globalization. In addition to local Catalan and regional Spanish food products, Barcelona's big Boqueria covered market also sells hot sauces from the USA, moles from Mexico, and guavas from South America. At Munich's central Viktualienmarkt, you'll find not only Bavarian meats and cheeses but also chermimoyas from North Africa, hot chiles from Southeast Asia, and exotic tropical fruits from the Philippines.

Each season brings its own specialties to European markets: strawberries, cherries and asparagus in spring and early summer; raspberries and blueberries later in the summer; mushrooms, apples and pears in the autumn; and oranges, nuts, and root vegetables in winter. Of course markets have more fresh produce during harvest time from spring through early autumn. And on any day you'll always find the best selection early in the morning, just after the market opens.

Fresh fish at market in Iraklion, Crete

Outdoor beer garden at Munich's Viktualienmarkt

LOOK, DON'T TOUCH

European markets are a great place to buy food for a picnic in your hotel room or in a park on a pretty day. Some even have a section with tables and chairs for public use, and German markets often include a beer garden on the premises, where you can bring your own food.

Tips: Always carry a shopping bag for your purchases. When you stop at a stand to buy fresh fruits or vegetables for your meal, don't poke around in the produce and pick your own selection. At most markets, customers are expected to tell the vendor what they want, and the vendor chooses the best pieces, based on their ripeness and good condition, then weighs out the amount requested.

Don't let your lack of the local language deter you from shopping in Europe's food markets. Just point to the particular food you want and write the amount on a slip of paper: 100 grams (about one-fourth of a pound), 500 grams (close to a pound), 1 kilo (a bit over two pounds). Better yet, learn some basic numbers in that foreign language and let the product labels in the market teach you the names of the foods you want to eat. Soon you'll be shopping like a European yourself.

LINKS TO FAVORITE FOOD MARKETS IN EUROPE

London Farmer's Markets
Paris Food Markets
Rome Markets
Barcelona Food Markets
Madrid Markets
Berlin Markets
Munich Fresh Food Market
Hamburg Fish Market
Amsterdam's Food and Antique Markets Guide
Guide to Seasonal Produce Markets of Brussels
Vienna Food and Farmer's Markets
Guide to Vienna Food Markets
Budapest Markets
Athens Food and Flea Markets
Athens Farmer's Markets

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About the writer

Sharon Hudgins is an award-winning writer with four books and more than 700 articles published worldwide. Her food and travel writing has appeared in National Geographic Traveler, Saveur, Gastronomica, German Life, Russian Life, The World & I, Chile Pepper, Fiery Foods & Barbecue, major newspapers in the United States, and periodicals in Germany, Russia, and the Czech Republic. For several years she was the food columnist for *The Stars and Stripes* newspaper in Europe, and since 1997 has been the food columnist for *German Life* magazine in the United States. A former editor of *Chile Pepper* magazine, she has also worked as a cookbook editor, photographer, filmmaker, university professor, and lecturer on international tours offered by National Geographic Expeditions, Lindblad, Road Scholar, and Silversea Cruises.

Sharon Hudgins has lived in nine countries of Europe and Asia and traveled in 50 countries across the globe. Her European experience includes living in Germany for 15 years, as well as in several European capitals and small towns from northern Scotland to southern Spain to the Greek island of Crete. She is the author of an award-winning cookbook about the regional cuisines of Spain, and her personal memoir, *The Other Side of Russia: A Slice of Life in Siberia and the Russian Far East*, won two national awards for travel and food writing.

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