

CLOSER
LOOK

Seattle's PIKE PLACE MARKET



JILL CARSTENS-FAUST

It began as an experiment. In an effort to control high food prices, the Seattle City Council created a plan to address the needs of both farmers and consumers. Only eight farmers showed up that rain-soaked August morning in 1907. Their wares were quickly purchased before they could even set up shop. Within days, dozens of farmers lined the streets with their produce-laden wagons,

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and Seattle's Pike Place Market was born. The famed public market has survived wars (Japanese farmers were interned and other growers went to work in defense plants during the 1940s); urban renewal (the historic buildings were nearly dozed to make way for apartment towers and office

buildings in the 1960s); and earthquakes (the 6.8-magnitude Nisqually Quake rattled the city in 2001). You might say the market is just like any other centenarian who has seen each decade bring new challenges, changes and affirmations.

A Moveable Feast

Today this 9-acre national historic district lives out its 100-plus-year-old mission as a true feast for the senses—baskets and buckets brimming with vividly hued flowers mingle with saffron-scented rice simmering in kettles and the loud banter of fishmongers attracting passersby. The market's vibrancy and diversity is captured in the faces of Hmong vegetable farmers, apron-wrapped Russian women rolling dough be-

hind flour-covered counters, quiet textile weavers fashioning scarves from dyed crimson wools and youthful cashiers dressed in urban, edgy street fashion.

Several buildings compose the market, and while some have more traditional-looking vendor stalls, many are a hodge-podge of shops and booths connected by hallways and passageways that wind up and down stairs, around corners and even into alleyways. Along this labyrinth are restaurants, souvenir shops, performance venues and the occasional merchant or business that visitors would least expect to find, e.g., a child care facility, tarot-card reader and dentist. But it all seems to work at Pike Place Market.

For first-time visitors, undoubted-



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ly overwhelmed by the never-ending clamor of commerce, a tour can quickly orient them. Several companies offer such explorations, including Savor Seattle Food Tours. The behind-the-scenes experiences are led by guides such as Nick Setten, a Boston transplant who is exuberant over his adoptive city.

For two hours, Nick takes great care in weaving the market's history into stories of the present, all the while making certain no one stays hungry for long. At Daily Dozen Doughnuts, Nick grabs a brown paper bag filled with warm, fresh, sugar-coated minidoughnuts. Tour goers munch away while Nick explains the history of the Economy Market building. As the group stops to sample Washington Jazz apples and browse the "high stalls"—the permanent fruit and vegetable stands such as Frank's Quality Produce (a market mainstay since 1928)—Nick explains the difference between the high stalls and the vendors who rent space by the day.

On the way to a stop where steamy chowder awaits, Nick pauses to say hello to a street performer known as The Cat Whisperer and explains the rules of "busking" at the market; performers, sometimes referred to as buskers, must purchase a permit and are only allowed to

perform at "pitches" designated throughout the market. As the tour meanders past the Starbucks en route to sampling the artisan cheeses at Beecher's Handmade Cheese, Nick notes the original 1970s logo and store façade that tells tourists this is the first and original Starbucks. He adds that this is actually the second location for the flagship coffee house; the first was located in a building that no longer stands.

Room at the Inn

There are several hostelries situated in downtown Seattle but none closer to Pike Place than the Inn at the Market, a 70-room boutique hotel with an attentive staff and beautifully appointed rooms that overlook the market, Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains. Pike Place Market's Main and North Arcade entrances are just steps from the hotel's cozy courtyard. So, it takes guests little time to grab a crusty baguette from Le Panier and a Washington-made vintage at Pike and Western Wine Shop before hoofing it to the hotel's fifth-floor rooftop deck to drink in the sunset and the salty sea air.

To learn more, contact the Seattle Convention and Visitors Bureau at (206) 461-5840 or www.visitseattle.org. To plan your trip, visit a local AAA Travel agent or AAA.com/travel.

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H&A

Writer's Picks

The Space Needle

Built in 1962 for the World's Fair, this iconic structure hosted more than 2 million visitors during the fair. Today's visitors, numbering more than 1 million annually, can head to the observation deck or make reservations for dinner at the SkyCity Restaurant and get a panoramic view in 47 minutes, the time it takes for the dining room to complete one revolution.

the aquarium. Touch zones staffed by naturalists engage kids and adults alike.

On the Water

Getting out onto Elliott Bay—home to the port of Seattle—and greater Puget Sound is a must for all seeking the best skyline views. Colman Dock at Pier 52 is the main Seattle terminal for the state's ferry system, and sailings regularly depart for Bainbridge Island and Bremerton. May through September, water taxis crisscross the bay, connecting downtown Seattle to West Seattle. For narrated passage, Argosy Cruises offers several voyages, including one to Blake Island's Tillicum Village, a four-hour tour that features Northwest Coast American Indian history and salmon cooked over an alder-wood fire.



MUSEUM OF FLIGHT

CONCORDE

Museum of Flight

From Kitty Hawk to the moon, museum exhibits chronicle aviation history with an amazing collection that includes World War I and World War II fighters and the story of Boeing. Also on the grounds and open for tours are a retired Air Force One jet, used by presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon, and a Concorde, the world's fastest jetliner and one of only 20 ever built.



SEATTLE AQUARIUM

Seattle Aquarium

Here, visitors explore the unique ecology of Puget Sound and the Pacific coral reef, watch tufted puffins dive for a meal and meet Lootas, the playful sea otter once orphaned who now makes her home at