

AN ADVENTURE FOR GLUTTONS AND GOURMETS – By Stephanie Jackson

A culinary journey through the Adelaide Central Market, South Australia

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In the darkness before dawn, a small group of men, accompanied by a brass band, pushed their heavily laden carts from their market gardens to a vacant paddock in the heart of the city. In the flickering light of gas lanterns, someone handed a customer a bag of spuds, a cabbage still dripping with the morning's dew, or a bunch of carrots, and as the sun climbed slowly across the nearby hills on that day in 1869, the rough outline of a recipe for success had been scrawled on the pages of Adelaide's history.

Add to that recipe a generous serving of Australians who once called Korea, China, Thailand, Poland, Russia, Greece, Italy, or India home, toss in the Vietnamese migrants who have become the major producers of vegetables in the region, and blend in a few Poms and the result is a delicious feast of culture, a bubbling stew of languages, foods, and aromas that is the Adelaide Central Market.

A tour of the market that, with more than 80 food stalls, is the largest fresh produce market in the southern hemisphere, would focus, my guide Susie Loh of Susie's Boutique Tours assured me, on meeting the fascinating characters that make the market hum with life. And that sounded fine, for although I like to let my hair down and live a little recklessly when on holiday, being reckless rarely includes abandoning my diet and tucking into every morsel of food that might be put in front of me.



People, not food, I tried to remind myself, was what this experience would be about. I'd look and listen, but not touch, and when it came to eating, I'd demonstrate a level of self-control that even the most devout of monks would envy.

I'd long ago learned to look a calorie rich cheese in the rind and turn away, to view chocolate as the enemy, and to resist the temptation of sugar-coated pastries. But as I entered a world of food from the familiar to the exotic, it was obvious that my willpower would be put to the ultimate test.

It was the takeaway stuff that did it, that caused the first crack in my determination, and that within minutes of my arrival saw good intentions crumble. And when I say takeaway, I don't mean a bread roll wrapped around a greasy rissole. Here takeaway food means chocolate-coated coffee beans, nuts, and dried fruit that are on sale at the stall where the Charlesworth family have been selling nuts for more than 70 years. It's all healthy and nutritious stuff, so when the amiable Mrs. Chatsworth presented me with a platter of free samples – dried figs, bananas, apples, pears, pineapple, apricots, mangoes, pawpaws, and other treats from the more than 140 products on sale, what could I say other than "Ta very much", for I had no qualms about scoffing the lot.

The trouble was, that first taste left me hungry for more, and with The Smelly Cheese next on Susie's itinerary, there was no hope of restraint. When invited to try as many of the more than 300 varieties on offer as I wanted, how could I refuse? I nibbled on sheep's cheese, goat's cheese, hard cheese, soft cheese, blue, orange, and grey cheese, and scoffed a fragment of what was claimed to be the world's most desirable cheese - a grotesquely mouldy variety with a pungent aroma that would make even ravenous rodents think twice about taking a nibble.

I'm all in favour of a little culinary experimentation, but there are some foods that will never be on my shopping list. And the pickled octopus that glared with glinting eyes in my direction as I browsed through the stall run by the Angelakis family, is one of them.



The family's patriarch, Michael, had arrived in Australia as a penniless Greek migrant in the 1920's, and in a borrowed dinghy, he'd cast his line into the waters of the Great Australian Bight, and hauled in a seafood empire that his sons and grandsons continue to rule. The subtle perfume that the ocean wears wafted from trays of prawns and oysters, mussels and trout, blue swimmer crabs and sardines, baby octopi, and gargantuan salmon heads destined for

the soup pot. Ducks, turkeys, quail, pigeons, and rabbits were ready for the pot too, and I've tucked into them all with gusto in my time, but chicken hearts and livers oozing blood and gore, did nothing to tempt my appetite. Mrs Angelakis, chuckling in a melodic voice peppered with the tones of her Greek past, offered me some tips on how to prepare a traditional Greek meal with these fragments of offal that, she assured me, are delicious when fried and drenched in curry. "Thanks, but no thanks," I muttered with a polite smile. If I wanted something really gruesome for an evening meal, I'd play it safe and opt for emerald green sausages - snags stuffed with chicken and spinach.



Susie was eager to introduce me to His Royal Highness, King Stan, and I wasn't rude enough to admit I'd never heard of this Australian monarch. Stan, a Polish immigrant, arrived in Australia many decades ago with barely a razoo to his name, but when he began pedalling his bike around the suburbs selling sausages based on his mother's traditional Polish recipes, he was on the road to fame and fortune. The popularity of his sausages, made only with the meat of young

female animals that has been smoked using oak sawdust, led to his coronation as Australia's National Sausage King for six consecutive years. And after downing more than a few samples of his salami, bierschinken - a smoked meat with pistachio nuts, lacschinken, and cheese and chives bratwurst, I'll be paying homage to this regal gent whenever I visit the city.

A spot of dessert was just the thing to follow Stan's spicy sausage, and yoghurt that, according to Susie, was invented by the Greek ancestors of those who now serve it at the market, would satisfy my sweet tooth. When I'd finally licked the last smudge of yoghurt from my lips all I could say was "more please!", but as I struggled to decide which of the 20 varieties of fresh fruit I wanted blended into my next serve, Susie tactfully suggested we should move on.

By the time we'd made our way through the congestion of multinational shoppers to a Russian family's stall, I'd nibbled on Danish and Turkish bread, and scoffed more than a few of the old-fashioned sweets I'd bought from the confectionery stall that has operated at the market since 1906, and was, I have to admit, well and truly stuffed.



Russian omelette and dumplings, borch – a soup based on beetroot, and piroshki – a traditional bread served with potatoes and leeks were on the mid day menu. At an adjacent stall, Koreans offered sushi, and seaweed and mussel soup, and an Italian family who had cemented their place in history by creating Adelaide's first pizza bar, offered meals based on pasta. But as temptation dragged me closer towards the precipice of gluttony, Susie came to the rescue. She introduced me to Le Tu Thai, the Vietnamese chef of the most prestigious restaurant in the Adelaide Hills, who, like many of the city's top chefs, routinely stocks his kitchen with produce from the market. He was checking the quality of fresh Asian herbs and vegetables, winter melon, taro, okra, and plantains – large green cooking bananas, then moved on to fill his shopping bags with produce from a stall crammed with the healthiest of takeaway foods.

Pears, apples, cherries, figs, and plums from the orchards of the Adelaide Hills found their way into my bag too, along with dragon fruit - the gaudy pink fruit of a climbing cactus, and a durian - an enormous brown fruit with a flavour made in heaven and a fetid odour created in hell.

It might be hell, I momentarily considered, that had given birth to some of the foods at a stall dedicated to the world of fungi, from the most gigantic and grotesque varieties, to familiar white mushrooms.



I'd collected wild mushrooms on many occasions and tossed them onto a barbecue plate with a bloodied slab of steak – and that I thought, might make another good evening meal. But for my barbecue, where the meat is invariably so well done that it's barely distinguishable from the blackened embers of the fire, the steaks available from a market butcher who's hopping mad about food harvested in the bush would never do. His trade is devoted entirely to kangaroo meat products, and the secret to cooking kangaroo, he said, is not to overcook it. But with smoked

kangaroo, kangaroo burgers, kangaroo met wurst, and kangaroo sausages to choose from, my barbecue would still have a distinctly Aussie flavour.

I'd garnish the feast with some of the spices and dried herbs, chutney, relish, and sauces made from Australian bush tucker plants including muntries, quandongs, wattle seeds, mountain pepper, and bush tomatoes that I'd sampled at the market.

And I'd patriotically wash it all down with a cup of coffee made from Australian grown beans that are one of the more than 50 varieties available at the market's coffee stall.

When it comes to tea, I'm no connoisseur for I rarely drink the stuff and know little about it other than that it comes in either packets or little jiggling bags. But things, tea wise are not what I thought they were, for at the tea stall, with more than 72 varieties to choose from, there are familiar, healthy, and unquestionably strange varieties. Caramel tea, strawberry cream tea, liquorice tea, or lemongrass and ginger tea would provide a cuppa with a difference, but not for me. And teas to reduce stress, to counter insomnia, colds, allergies, and arthritis, and Chinese gunpowder tea that makes the drinker perhaps go like a rocket? I had no need for those. For me there was only one option - the weight control tea, for I'd need all the help I could get after a few hours at the market.

For a brief moment of time, I'd allowed myself to be transformed into both a glutton and a gourmet, but with no regrets, for my journey into a world of unfamiliar foods had allowed me to discover the diverse and delightful flavours of a truly multicultural Australia.