

Stockholm's Market Halls - A historical era...

During my youth years I always heard my grandmother declare that the best food to buy, and to eat, you will find at any of the market halls in Stockholm. They are even superior to the best restaurants in town, she was saying with some authority, as she was a former restaurateur herself. During my last visit to Stockholm I remembered her words, from more than 50 years ago, and decided to have a walk around in some of the few markets left in Stockholm to buy, and taste, their food in order to see whether her words are still true.

Stockholm's market halls were built in the end of the 1800s, mainly to improve the control over bacteria that could trigger a variety of bacteria induced diseases, calling for new hygienic regulations to be introduced. The first market hall in Stockholm was Köttorgshallen in old town (opened in 1875 and closed in 1950) where charcuteries were sold. It was followed by Gamla Hötorgshallen (old market hall) at Hötorget in Stockholm. It was opened in 1884 and closed 1954, and a new building was built on the same site for a new market hall. While walking around the various food stands, with their wonderful selection of beef, pork, seafood and vegetables ready to be purchased or consumed at the premises. I stop by one foodstand to buy an enormous shrimp sandwich. Ohhh...what a wonderful creation! Swedes are known for their delicious shrimp sandwiches and I believe this is the proof of their reputation. This is a must while visiting Stockholm.

The recent renovation of Hötorgshallen is a wonderful work of art with very nice produce and eating facilities, although the ambiance, with much glass and steel, is too modern for my taste with the loss of most of the market hall atmosphere with its very high ceilings and the old decorative wood carvings.

After spending a couple of hours in Hötorgshallen I continue my walk towards Östermalmshallen situated at Östermalms torg. I'm arriving at the subway station at Östermalms torg. At the station you will see something very uniquely Swedish with significant artwork on the walls by worldknown artists. At this station you see art by Siri Derkert, called Simone de Beauvoir, on the wall. Stay a minute and contemplate, it is worth it...



A view at Östermalms Market Hall



Hötorgshallen 2008, photo Holger Ellgaard



Shrimp sandwich (räkmacka in Swedish)



Art by Siri Derkert

Leaving the subway station and walking accross Östermalms torg, I see the Östermalms Saluhall, a very large building with a facad of red clinker bricks, cement and ironwork. With it's very impressive brickbuilding front, the building project an impression of a real old fashion market hall. The internationally renounced magazine Bon Appetit ranked the Östermalm Saluhall the seventh best market hall in the world.



Östermalms Saluhall, front view 2013



Östermalms Saluhall, early 1900

When I enter into the market hall itself I'm met by an overwhelming view of all the vendors and their range of food offerings. I will never find something similar in any supermarket in the USA. This is a different world to immerse myself in, and just enjoy the market hall ambience of color, aroma and people.



Views from the Östermalms Saluhall entrance

Here I find the most exquisit offering of vegetables, charcuteries, and seafood. The ambience, colors and scents are fantastic and are setting the tone for the entire market hall.



Various produce at the market hall

After browsing around for a while I sit down to eat my early dinner at “Tysta Mari” (Silent Mari) restaurant. The restaurant adopted the name Tysta Mari when it opened in 1974 at Östermalmshallen, and is part of the restaurant group “Melanders Fisk”. They offer the most fabulous selection of seafood, all freshly delivered the same day.

After considering the impressive menu for a couple of minutes I decided to start with some oysters with Mignonette sauce (mix of shallots, peppercorn, dry white wine, lemon juice and sherry vinegar)...Yum.

As the main dish I select my absolute favorite “Stekt Strömming (Fried Baltic Herring). Freshly fried Baltic Herring tastes especially good on top of buttered hard crispbread, but there is certainly nothing wrong about eating them with fluffy mashed potatoes, lingonberries and generously sprinkled with chopped parsley.

Stekt strömming, or fried Baltic Herring, is one of hundreds of recipes based on the smaller-sized eastern relative of the North Sea Herring. Swedes often say that Baltic Herring is better the fatter it is, but the truth is perhaps, that all Baltic Herring tastes very good indeed.

I have a cold beer with my meal, making it even better tasting. I’m now convinced that my grandmother’s wisdom in her assessment of the benefits of eating at these market places has true and clear merit.

After dinner I slowly browse around the different vendor food stands, absorbing all the impressions they retain.

After a little while I end up on a tall barstool and order a glass of white wine to sip while observing people walking by. They represent different ethnic backgrounds, languages and interests in what is available to fulfill their tastes. I like to chat with them when an opportunity appears.

My walking trip to some of the market halls in Stockholm is over, but I would like to end with a recommendation to the reader to visit, taste and experience the ambience these market places provide to the visitor, as this is an integral part of the life in Stockholm.



Tysta Mari restaurant



Oyster



Fried herring dinner

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More information for the interested reader:

- Google, type in Östermalms Saluhall in the search window
- Google, type in Stockholm's Saluhallar
- Stockholmskällan, go to Östermalms Saluhall