

DESTINATION ♦ ITALY



MERCATO CAMPO DE' FIORI

Rome's Mercato Campo de' Fiori market (main, below) is one of the most colourful in the Italian capital.

PICTURES: ISTOCK

TOP TIPS

A GUIDE TO LOCAL MARKET CUSTOMS

HANDS OFF THOSE ARTICHOKEs

Unlike heading to the supermarket for a speedy self-service affair, picking up or handling produce at vendors' stalls is frowned upon, especially before you're greeted one another. Merchants will often put up a sign reading "non toccare" (don't touch).

When it's your turn to select goods, vendors will either ask you what you're after or, less commonly, pass a bag to drop your chosen items into.

Use the word "posso?" (can I?) with a gesture towards the fruit or veg on display, which shows you'd like to start choosing.

That'll be met with an enthusiastic "vai!" (go ahead!) or "prendi pure" (help yourself) or "dimmi cosa vuoi" (tell me what you want) if the stallholder wants to choose the items for you.

KNOW YOUR PLACE

At markets, patrons don't form lines stretching away from food stalls while waiting to be served, but tend to converge around the stand. So, each shopper must take note of those who were there when they turned up.

The vendor will ask, "chi è l'ultimo?" (who's the last one?) when working out which customer to serve next. Queue jumping will absolutely happen if you don't pay attention, but it's not uncommon to allow an elderly person to be served before you, even if they arrived later - especially if they're only buying one or two items.

CAREFUL WITH YOUR CAMERA

Towers of juicy tomatoes make for a great photo opportunity, but food markets are living, breathing places that locals frequent every day, and shouldn't be viewed in the same way as tourist destinations like monuments or museums.

Be sensitive that vendors might not like to be photographed, so if you'd like to feature them in your picture, it's polite to ask first "posso farti una foto?" (can I take your photo?) or use "posso fare una foto?" (can I take a photo?) if you're interested in shooting the goods on display.

CARRY SOME CASH

Take cash to the markets if you'd like to buy anything, because credit cards are almost never used.

Plus, keep an eye on your belongings - markets tend to be crowded, noisy and distracting, something pickpockets are well aware of.

FRESH FROM ITALY

They're crowded, noisy and utterly charming. For a real taste of Italy, visit a local market

ALECIA WOOD

For food-loving travellers, visiting Italy's bustling food markets is an essential culinary experience, because you get to rub shoulders with locals, discover the best seasonal produce, pick up delicious snacks, and immerse yourself in a way of life that's still important for many Italians.

These five are among the top food markets to check out in Italy.

MERCATO CAMPO DE' FIORI ROME

This market may be on the small side, but it's definitely big on charm. The name of the piazza - Campo de' Fiori - means "field of flowers" which it's rumoured to have been before being turned into a paved square. Ivory umbrellas surround a 19th-century statue of Italian philosopher and astronomer Giordano Bruno, shading crates of vivid produce and bundles of flowers in rows at the cobblestones.

After a snack? Head for Forno Campo de' Fiori in the corner of the square for sweet and savoury baked treats.

6AM-2PM MONDAY-SATURDAY, PIAZZA CAMPO DE' FIORI, ROME

PORTA PALAZZO TURIN

Said to be Europe's largest open-air market, Porta Palazzo is sprawled across Piazza della Repubblica, the largest square in Turin in Italy's northwestern Piedmont region. Fresh produce from across Italy and Europe is sold from a network of stalls, across from a smaller pavilion where local contadini (farmers) bring their goods. And there are halls selling cheese, cured meats and fresh pasta.

Collect a round of Piedmontese tomino cheese to snack on later and head for fishmonger-cum-diner Pescheria Gallina on the piazza's north side for a generously portioned, fixed-price lunch, complete with house wine and homemade focaccia. Most of their fish comes straight from the Ligurian seaside 130km away.

7AM-1PM MONDAY-FRIDAY, 7AM-7PM SATURDAYS, PIAZZA DELLA REPUBBLICA, TURIN

MERCATO DI RIALTO VENICE

Right on the banks of the Grand Canal in Venice's San Polo neighbourhood, the Mercato di Rialto has been going strong since the 11th century.

One side of the space stocks fresh



MARKET COLOUR

THERE ARE HALLS SELLING CHEESE, CURED MEATS AND FRESH PASTA

produce (the erberia) while the other side is a corridor of fish and seafood vendors known as the pescheria, housed under a colonnade with giant arches. If you've no occasion to take home one of their glistening octopi, make a pit stop, around the corner, at Lino Fritto which preps individual portions of contemporary fish and seafood dishes to carry home.

7AM-12.30PM EVERY DAY EXCEPT MONDAY, CAMPO DELLA PESCHERIA, VENICE

MERCATO DI BALLARO PALERMO

Maybe even better known than the markets themselves are the "abbanniate", the vendors who make

booming announcements in Sicilian dialect to advertise goods to passers-by. As well as piles of fruit and veg, olives, preserved anchovies and dried fish, there's plenty of street food to be had. The most famous is arancine - crumbed, deep-fried mounds of risotto stuffed with cheese, ragu or simmered eggplant.

7.30AM-8PM MON-SAT, 7.30AM-1PM SUNDAY, VICOLO DEL CARMELO, PALERMO

LA PIGNASECCA NAPLES

Pop out of Montesanto train station in Naples' Quartieri Spagnoli (Spanish Quarter), follow Via Portamedina downhill and you'll arrive at this rambling series of food stalls and brick-and-mortar stores stretching along the street.

La Pignasecca is the city's oldest outdoor market and where you can spot the display of dangling lemons and tripe out the front of Trattoria Le Zendraglie, stop by Pescheria Alberto's stacked trays of vongole, calamari and sea bass, and buy all manner of fresh fruit to take with you on your Neapolitan tour.

7.30AM-12PM MONDAY-FRIDAY, VIA PIGNASECCA, NAPLES



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