



Detroit's Eastern Market

Stroll and snack your way through this scrumptious foodie stop in Michigan.

Story and photos by Katherine Rodeghier

Smoke rises from the outdoor grills where ribs sizzle outside Bert's Market Place. Customers crowd along the sidewalk inhaling the aroma and eyeing lunch. A combination barbecue joint, soul food restaurant, jazz bar and theater, Bert's ranks among the most eclectic businesses in Detroit's Eastern Market.



Just a mile from downtown Detroit, Michigan, one of the oldest and largest year-round markets in the nation brims with foods and merchandise in five sheds ringed by restaurants, shops and food purveyors to form a district encompassing 24 acres. The market serves wholesale and retail customers and hosts a farmers market every Saturday, as well as Tuesdays and Sundays in summer. In 2018, it added a night market on the third Thursday each month from June through September. Saturdays remain the busiest with as many as 45,000 customers and up to 250 vendors.

Where to begin?



Visitors overwhelmed by Eastern Market's size can go with a guide. Feet on the Street Tours take guests through the sheds and specialty stores, sampling foods along the way and often meeting the owners. That's how our group meets Bert Dearing Jr., whose 24,000-square-foot complex functions not only as an eatery and entertainment spot but as a museum of Detroit's black history. Dearing leads us past his barbecue grills to a hallway where murals tell the story of the Motor City in vibrant colors.

Founded in 1891, Eastern Market is packed with history; many family-run businesses are now operated by second, third, even fourth generations of owners.

DeVries & Company began as a butter, egg and cheese shop in 1887 and moved to the market a few years later. Its second generation added hard-to-find specialty goods and cheeses from around the world. We sample some of the 240 varieties of cheese now carried before exploring three floors of merchandise, including a large selection of Michigan-made gift items, novelties, food and drink such as cherry jam from Traverse City and wines from southwest Michigan. Now owned by David DeVries, grandson of the founder, the old building has been remodeled in keeping with its turn-of-the-last-century look. Recycled lighting came from an old Detroit factory and new counters were built from lumber dating from 1904.

We sit down at benches and tables inside Supino Pizzeria and fill up on its signature Red, White and Green pizza made with spinach, capers, roasted red peppers, mozzarella and ricotta cheese. The restaurant uses local and organic ingredients whenever possible.

Down the street, we pop into Gabriel Import Co., which was founded in 1914 and is now run by fourth-generation descendants of Greek and Lebanese immigrants. The Mediterranean grocery takes pride in its extensive olive and hummus bar. At Germack Pistachio Co., one of the oldest roasters of pistachio nuts in the U.S., our tour guide passes out samples of nuts, chocolate and dried fruit, and he makes sure everyone gets a scoop at Mootown Ice Cream & Dessert Shoppe.

A stroll through the sheds helps walk off a few calories. The red brick façades go back a century or more. Inside, vendors on our Saturday-morning tour display buckets of flowers, produce arrayed on benches and in baskets, jars of honey, rows of baked goods, eggs—you name it. On summer Sundays, we're told merchandise shifts toward artwork, clothing and craft items. Today we're content to sniff the blooms and sample edibles. We stop to watch a musician playing tunes on a fancy electronic xylophone. In Shed 5, a chef is in the midst of a cooking demonstration in a commercial kitchen that was added during the structure's \$8.5 million renovation.



Outdoor murals mimic the bright colors of produce inside the sheds. The annual Murals in the Market street festival draws local and international artists who add to the collection by creating street art every September. We admire a 2015 work by muralist Hebru Brantley depicting brown and black children in old-fashioned aviation goggles, an homage to the African-American Tuskegee Airmen who fought in World War II.

Diversity in food, art and people: Eastern Market embodies the spirit of Detroit.

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