

Hogtown HomeGrown

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An extraordinary food tour

A trip to Baltimore meant two things to me—crab and the Lexington Market. I know there are other sights to see, but the Lexington Market's been there since 1782 and evolved into a ready-to-eat food fest as the city grew around it. Today's marketplace of stalls features international food, customers and workers. It differs greatly from the original plot of land where farmers parked their wagons and sold their wares.

David, our Charm City Tours' guide, rescued us outside Lexington Market (yes, we were lost already!) and with Darlene Hudson, the Market's Marketing and Promotions Manager, we began our tour. First stop was Faidley's, known for their seafood and a fixture at Lexington Market since 1886. Fourth generation owner Nancy Faidley Devine took the time to teach us the finer points of buying, cooking (steam, don't boil) and cracking crabs. Forgoing the traditional hammer in favor of a sharp paring knife, Nancy reduced a crab to its essentials in no time, leaving us sucking on the claws and wondering if we could do it at home.

After a quick talk about soft-shell crabs, we were off to Nancy's corner of the open kitchen where she makes all the crab cakes by hand. I was thrilled to be invited behind the counter for a personal lesson, but understood completely when she politely refused my request for the ingredients in the sauce she uses to bind the cakes. All I can say definitively is it includes heavy duty mayonnaise and a spicy mustard—the rest is a secret! The real surprise was the shape—crab cakes the size and shape of a baseball that held together when flash-fried, yielding a creamy center with a lightly crispy browned exterior.

After Faidley's, the tour was a tasty blur. While we talked, Elliot Bodner from Mary Mervis Deli, famous for his house-made roasted meats and deli salads, provided generous samples of their seafood salad and delicious shrimp salad. The Deli provides employment for many, but it's the catering business that helps them stay afloat during tough times.

Sabrina of Blue Island Malaysian Cuisine let us sample her lower salt and fat entrees which adhere to the new Baltimore Healthy Carryouts campaign. The sautéed grouper dish was full of flavor and just one of many lighter alternatives she was proud to offer.

Charles Barrington Gordon, owner and chef of Gordon's Restaurant, placed a high priority on flavor—specifically full rich flavors from his native Jamaica. Most of his menu was meat-based with goat curry and jerk chicken, but his veggie pattie made me want to learn how to make the flaky pastry crust filled with seasoned veggies.

Other highlights included Baltimore's own Berger's Cookies—shortbread cookies covered in a chocolate fudge icing—an incredibly addictive treat. After a quick stop at a fruit and vegetable vendor (produce from everywhere but Baltimore), we were off to learn all about roasted peanuts from Larry Brenner at Konstant's. Just outside the market doors, we watched the 1905 barrel-shaped metal machines roasting Virginia peanuts, only steps away from the Baltimore Ravens stadium and the Orioles' home field, Camden Yards. Guess who's peanuts go to lots of games every season?

Although Lexington Market no longer provides a place for farmers (there are large farmers markets in other areas) the combination of fresh and ready-to-eat food works for their customers. Our food tour was a great success and we ended it with a crab cake at Faidley's. What a great way to spend a morning in Baltimore!

What's Fresh Right Now?



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Beans—green, roma, long

Beets

Blueberries

Cabbage—green, savoy

Cantaloupe

Carrots—orange

Celery

Corn—silver queen, bi-colored

Cucumbers—mini seedless, kirby, slicers

Eggplant—large purple italian, small white/purple italian, purple/white asian, green thai

Garlic—chives, heads

Greens—malabar spinach, callaloo

Herbs—parsley, dill, rosemary, spearmint, oregano, lemongrass, tulsi basil, italian/purple basil, chives

Honey

Microgreens—assorted

Mushrooms—shiitake

Okra

Onions—green/red scallions, yellow

Peas—creamer, white acre

Peppers—red/green/yellow/orange sweet and various hot

Potatoes—red, sweet, fingerling

Radish—daikon

Shoots—pea, sunflower, corn, mix

Sprouts

Squash—yellow, zucchini, butternut, acorn, spaghetti, delicate, pattypan, calabasa, crenshaw

Tomatoes—red beefsteak, grape, green, cherokee purple, green zebra, sun gold

Watermelon

**Look for a variety of foods
at the different markets—
breads, tempeh, seafood, meats, eggs,
cheeses, pastries, candies and more.
You can find a complete meal
in one place!**

Local and Fresh—

Yellow Squash

Yellow squash is a staple in our diet while it is in season. We eat it for breakfast in scrambles and omelettes. At lunch we grate it into our salads. For dinner we often serve it simply—steamed, roasted or sautéed. But squash likes to get dressed up, so we feature it in casseroles too. Don't forget it's the secret ingredient in last month's Summer Coffeecake!

Look for small squash with no blemishes—their skin and flesh are sure to be sweet and tender. Store squash in a plastic bag in the refrigerator and use within two weeks.

Roasted Yellow Squash

INGREDIENTS

4 cups chopped yellow squash
1 Tablespoon olive oil

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cover cookie sheet with parchment paper.

Toss squash with olive oil until coated. Place on prepared cookie sheet and place in oven. Bake 20-30 minutes, until edges are lightly browned and squash is fork-tender.

Refrigerate leftovers.

Squash Custard

INGREDIENTS

4 cups roasted yellow squash
3 eggs
1 cup milk
1 cup (4 ounces) shredded cheese (optional)

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly butter an 8 x 8 baking pan.

Place squash in prepared pan. Beat together eggs and milk until completely mixed. Pour over squash, place in oven and bake 20-25 minutes until custard is set. Top with cheese and bake until cheese is bubbly.

Refrigerate leftovers.

Baked Crab Cakes

INGREDIENTS

- 1-2 teaspoons unsalted butter
- 3 inches white part of leek, finely diced
- 1 pound lump crab meat
- 4 Tablespoons unsalted butter, softened, but not melted
- 1 egg room temperature, lightly beaten
- 1 cup fresh bread crumbs, processed from a crustless piece of ciabatta or country bread

DIRECTIONS

At least three hours before serving, sauté leeks in butter over low heat until tender. Spread on a plate and refrigerate until chilled.

Prepare a cookie sheet by covering with foil, lightly butter and set aside.

Pick through crab meat to feel for shell and cartilage pieces. Set aside cleaned crab.

Beat together egg and butter until completely combined. Stir in crab meat, chilled cooked leek and bread crumbs.

Working quickly, use hands or ice cream scoop to form cakes into mounds or patties. Press as firmly as needed to create a cohesive shape. Place on foil-lined cookie sheet.

Refrigerate at least one hour before cooking—the softened butter will harden to keep cakes together.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Bake chilled crab cakes for 8-10 minutes, turning patties after 5 minutes if desired. Allow to sit 1-2 minutes before removing from cookie sheet.

Braised Potatoes and Beans

INGREDIENTS

- 1 Tablespoon olive oil
- 1/2 onion, diced
- 1 pound fingerling or small red potatoes, cut into small chunks
- 1 pound green or pole beans, snipped and snapped
- 1 cup vegetable broth
- salt to taste

DIRECTIONS

In a large lidded pot, sauté onion in olive oil until translucent. Add potatoes and cook over medium heat until edges begin to turn brown.

Stir in beans and stock, bring to boil, reduce heat to simmer, cover and cook until potatoes are tender. Taste for seasoning and add salt as desired.

Serve warm. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

NOTE: The potatoes will take on the flavor of the broth, so be sure to use something very flavorful. “No-chicken” broth is one of my favorites for this dish.

My Perfect Crab Cake

Our recent trip to Baltimore was preceded by my vow to eat a crab cake a day. I can proudly say that not only did I eat one every day, but one day I had them for breakfast and lunch and then managed to take a bite of one at dinner. And the winner is...? I'll never tell, but I did discover what I liked about each one and put it all together in my own version. First butter and egg in place of mayonnaise—softened butter helps hold everything together. Instead of crackers, fresh bread crumbs from the interior of a ciabatta loaf—these crumbs are most like the cooked crab in texture. Since I prefer to taste the crab, I add no condiments, such as mustard, or spices like Old Bay.

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Tricks and Tips

Have you ever eaten dried apricot paste? It is very much like fruit leather. Made in Lebanon from fresh apricots, it is dried in large sheets, folded into neat rectangles and wrapped. Dad's mom, Sitto, would cook it in water to create a thick apricot jam she ate with her homemade yogurt. When it is available, I buy mine at Falafel King in Butler Plaza.

Mango Apricot Jam

INGREDIENTS

- 6 cups chopped ripe mango
- 2 cups dried apricots, quartered or 2 small packages dried apricot paste
- 1 cup water
- 1 orange, juiced
- 1 lemon, juiced
- 1 cup raw, turbinado or demerrerra sugar

DIRECTIONS

In a large heavy-bottomed pot, combine mango, apricots, water and juices. Bring to a simmer, reduce heat and cook uncovered until thick and mostly smooth. A potato masher really helps break up the lumps.

When fruit has cooked down, stir in sugar. Once sugar has melted into mixture, taste for sweetness. Add more sugar or more lemon juice, depending on your taste buds. Continue to simmer over very low heat until jam reaches desired thickness.

Place into prepared jars, seal and process according to recommended guidelines—I place full jars in a boiling water bath for 10-12 minutes. Allow to cool. Place any unsealed jars in the refrigerator and use as soon as possible.