

"Europe's loveliest weekly market"

Lucerne is unimaginable without Pilatus, the Kappellbrücke or the Lion Monument - or without its weekly market. A stroll through the "Märt" shows you why.

By Regula Schweizer

It's early. Very early. Shortly after 6 in the morning, to be precise. In the Neustadt, the last of the night's partygoers are trying to get a Saturday morning taxi. For them, Friday is coming to a close. The picture is somewhat different by the Reuss. Here there's hustle and bustle. Vans are driving up, tents are being assembled, and even before the bells of the Jesuitenkirche have struck half past six, the first bunch of yellow-red tulips is sold. It's market day in Lucerne.

Nils Hofer, a professional fisherman from Meggen, has already been on his feet for two hours. He is putting the finishing touches to his stall on Unter der Egg - not satisfied until the filets of Albeli, burbot and perch are perfectly arranged on his chilled display. He works with a sure and practised hand. That's not surprising: the father of three has been here at the Lucerne weekly market every Tuesday and Saturday since the 1960s. "When I was a little boy, my father let me help him in my school holidays", he remembers, and his smile shows it made him as happy

then as it still does today. Asked how long his family has been coming to market in Lucerne, he hesitates briefly and says: "My family started fishing in the 15th century. We've been coming to market for ... ever." The Tuesday market has been held for more than 750 years. Nils Hofer's great-grandfather, and his grandfather, used to row their wares to the market stall themselves. Then, the most important thing was to clear up in good time. The reason? The fruit and vegetable dealers from Weggis and Vitznau used to arrive in a large freighter, and the Hofers could tie their rowing boat to the freighter and let themselves be towed back to the island in front of the Meggenhorn. Despite this energy saving scheme Nils Hofer now says, grinning: "I'm glad of my van."

Seeing and being seen

Not in vans, but equipped with bags, baskets and shopping trolleys, the locals flock to the market, which they call the "Mart". For the people of Lucerne, from theatre



Der schönste Wochenmarkt Europas.

The most beautiful weekly market in Europe.

Photo Michaela Eicherlscharfsinn.ch

director Dominique Mentha to the local eccentric Radio Müsli, it's a social event. They stroll, they gossip, and here and there they sample the wares. There's usually something new to try - coppa from woolly pigs, star aniseed, or cold-smoked trout, which can be found on the stall run by the Spielhofer family on the right bank of the Reuss. Edy Spielhofer is famous for his trout, which you can also catch yourself on his very special farm in Römerswil. "I even have a customer who comes all the way from Munich to the Lucerne market once a month, just to buy my trout", recounts the president of the Lucerne market syndicate. It's no coincidence that he is committed to the weekly market: "The market is a part of our existence. We depend on its flourishing." Edy Spielhofer is as unconcerned about competition from the big supermarkets as his colleague Nils Hofer. Like most of the Lucerne market traders, they can count on a large number of regular customers, who appreciate the high-quality products as much as they value being close to the producers. And last but not least, there can be no more attractive location for doing one's weekly shopping.

Long tradition, unique setting

As much as its long tradition, the biggest attraction of the Lucerne weekly market is its extraordinary setting. It's not just the uninterrupted view of Lucerne's own mountain, Pilatus, that makes it special. The Jesuitenkirche, the Kappellbrücke and the Rathaus (town hall) also draw the gaze of visitors. And the visitors come from all over the world. Edy Spielhofer sees a new opportunity for promoting the Tuesday market among the tourists. For, he explains, while 30 years ago local

people mostly did their weekly shopping on Tuesdays, Saturday is now the day for the major shop. Together with the Lucerne market syndicate he wants anxious to give the Tuesday market a new impetus - perhaps as a tourist attraction, since as he says, "our motto is that our market is the most beautiful weekly market in Europe".

The "Lozärner Märtfürerer" (Lucerne market guide)

If you're looking for a particular product at the "most beautiful weekly market in Europe", a helpful guide is available. The association Verein KulturGut, founded specially for the purpose, published the first "Lozärner Märtfürerer" last December. Distributed free of charge from all the stalls, it lovingly portrays the over 70 market sellers and the products, with stunning pictures and engaging short texts. Here you can read, for example, that Therese Merz-Rohrer - who together with her sister Simone Baumgartner runs the organic bread stall "Uriginal" by the Rathaussteg - once sold a custom-



Ausserordentliche Kulisse für den Markt.

Extraordinary setting of the market.

Photo Michaela Eicherlscharfsinn.ch



Garantiert frische Produkte.

Guaranteed fresh produce.

Photo Michaela Eicherlscharfsinn.ch

er a pair of wellington boots when the Reuss burst its banks in the floods of 2005. If the stories whet your appetite, the traders can give you more information. For example, where the name "Uriginal" comes from. "The name is composed of the two words 'urig' (rustic) und 'original'", explains Simone Baumgartner. She adds: "That describes what we make very accurately. We bake our bread by hand in the traditional way." Each market day, the two women from Wolhusen bake 200 to 240 kilogram of bread. They've been doing this for almost 20 years.

More than 80 different varieties of tomato

If you stroll on from the Uriginal bread stall, across the Rathaussteg you encounter the colourful stall of Stefan Winiger. The native of Lucerne, who wrote the plan for the market guide, has been selling fruit, vegetables, flowers and decorative articles here for four years. The tomatoes especially are hard to overlook. There appears to be no limit to the diversity of their shapes

and colours - more than 80 varieties, to be precise. Cultivating these diverse tomato varieties came about following an enquiry from a customer. "If one of my customers wants something particular, I take it as a challenge to find out exactly what he's looking for and then to get it produced locally." The tomatoes have long been among the market's star turns, and Stefan Winiger is already concentrating on a new project: cultivating long-forgotten or unknown varieties of potato. "There are about 5000 varieties of potato in the world. But only about 20 in Switzerland. I want to change this", he explains. As a peripatetic chef, the weekly market is an opportunity to have his finger on the pulse of tastes in food. He often takes the time to go on a voyage of discovery around the market himself. "Some gourmet chefs even come to me for advice about produce, because they don't have time to go to market themselves."

Guaranteed fresh produce

Stefan Winiger isn't the only cook at the Lucerne weekly market. Charly Kolly, who together with his brother Roger offers fresh pasta, potato gnocchi and special sauces for sale: is also famous for his excellent cuisine. In addition, he's known as an early riser. He and his stall neighbour, the vegetable dealer Jakob Niederberger from Kastanienbaum, are always the first to put up their stalls. "Afterwards we have a coffee together before I go back to our production facility to produce the fresh pasta that I then sell at the stall." The products of the Lucerne weekly market really are guaranteed fresh.

And a final thought: Nils Hofer doesn't know whether his children will take over the firm and contin-

ue the centuries-old family tradition. "I'd be happy if one of my children wanted to do that, but if not, that's fine by me too." In any case, despite the many long standing market sellers on the Lucerne weekly market, we can't tell what the future may bring. But nobody is actually worrying, as Lucerne without its market is unimaginable. Or as Charly Kolly puts it: "The weekly market belongs to Lucerne just as much as the carnival."



Luzern und sein Markt.

Lucerne and his market.

Photo Michaela Eicherlscharfsinn.ch

When?

The Lucerne weekly market is held every Tuesday and Saturday, from 6:00 to 13:00.

Where?

On both sides of the Reuss, on the Rathausquai and Unter der Egg (right bank), on the Jesuitenplatz and in the Bahnhofstrasse (left bank).