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# WHAT A DIFFERENCE A DAY MAKES

## A Day Trip Exploring Des Moines's Ethnic Markets

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RIKI SALTZMAN

Members of the Sac (Sauk) and Fox tribes, French explorers, monks, and missionaries first arrived in the Des Moines area in the early 1800s. While some of the first non-Indian settlers of Des Moines were military regiments and their families (many originally from New England), those who contributed to the city's growth during the second half of the nineteenth century included people from the upland South via Missouri as well as Germans, African Americans, Norwegians, Swedes, Danes, and Czechs (known then as Bohemians). Russians, Mexicans, Greeks, German and then Eastern European Jews arrived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of these immigrants came to the region to work in coal mines and in meat packing plants, though by the 1920s, mining was in decline.

During the middle years of the twentieth century, Des Moines's population growth came from employment in the insurance and service sectors and not from any one ethnic group. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, Des Moines has welcomed Southeast Asians (primarily Tai Dam, Vietnamese, Lowland Lao as well as Cambodians and Hmong), Chinese, Thai, Taiwanese, Korean, and Filipino, Asian Indians, Pakistanis, and an increased Latino (largely Mexican) population. Bosnians, Nuer, and Somali came in the 1990s, and, most recently, refugees from Burma have started to settle in Des Moines.

Now, there a variety of ethnic markets scattered around the city—each offering culinary traditions to savor. In a day, it's easy to eat your way around the world without ever leaving town at some of these stops.

### THE NEW ORIENTAL FOOD STORE A WORLD AWAY

For just about any food from Southeast Asia, India or central Africa, the East Village's New Oriental Food Store is *the* place to go in Des Moines. First stop should be the refrigerator case, stocked with traditional Southeast Asian cold coffee, loaded with sugar and Thai tea, a strong black tea also flavored with milk (sometimes sweetened condensed) and sugar. Canned and bottled fixings for curries (red, green, yellow, massamun) and several kinds of fish sauces, soy sauces as well as teas, cookies, and candies are also at the ready. But the store's real delights are in its perishable departments: with produce like small and round Asian eggplants, lemongrass stalks, ginger, galangal, coconuts, limes, cilantro, parsley, fresh duck and chicken eggs. The refrigerators and freezer cases also contain dumplings, tofu, prepared foods, seafood and fish, chicken, beef, pork, and gluten. Ready to go

treats include homemade prepared foods available at the check-out counter: Lao beef jerky, batter-fried bananas or yucca, tasty pork and cilantro stuffed baguettes.

### JUNG'S (THAI MARKET) A SOUTHEAST ASIAN STAPLE

Owned by Bonary Macvilay, Jung's (Thai Market), feels like the inside version of an outdoor market in Laos. There are refrigerator cases of coffees and teas, bubble tea, coconut drinks, and more as well as fresh produce from greens of various sorts to long beans, snow peas, onions, and coconuts. Fresh and frozen fish, chickens, soy products, frozen dumplings, beef, and chicken can be found in the freezer and refrigerator compartments. A huge variety of fish and soy sauces, curry pastes, pepper sauces, hoisin sauce, coconut milk and cream, line the shelves. Browse for sweets (cookies, candies), savorys (chips made from plantains or taro, wasabi peas), and a huge variety of rice, beans, flours, and soup mixes. If Ms. Macvilay is available, she can lead you on a guided tour of the shop, and offer tips on how to make a variety of Laotian dishes with what Jung's has available. Utensils, cooking pots, spoons, mats, steamers, ladles, teapots, strainers, or just about any other equipment needed for an Asian inspired kitchen are available too. Near the register, there are also some fresh made, ready to eat foods as well as packaged moon cakes and such.



Everything and more can be found at Jung's



Fresh baked pan dulce at La Tapatia's bakery

## LA TAPATIA

### A LATIN FAVORITO

East of 14<sup>th</sup> Street along East Grand are several of Des Moines's primo Latino markets. La Tapatia is a bit further north on east Des Moines Street. Since 1993, the Mora family has owned and operated this Latino food store, which started out on East Grand. The business grew from a Spanish-language video store to a full-service *tienda* (shop) that provides a variety of Hispanic products including fresh tomatillos, habanero chiles, cast-iron tortilla presses, freshly made tortillas (flour and corn), an array of *refrescos* (sodas and juices), as well as a variety of ripe mangos, papayas, avocados and more displayed in colorful bins. A special feature of La Tapatia is fresh pan *dulce* (sweet bread), fresh-made

croissants and rolls—all made on site by Javier Hernandez, La Tapatia's experienced baker. Skillful butchers are at the meat counter, and can slice and prepare a variety of traditional meats such as *carnitas* (small pieces of deep-fat fried pork) and *carne adobada* (pork in a special marinade). If you're lucky, it might be a fresh homemade *tamales* day at the shop, which are perfect for eating right away or storing in the freezer.

## GRAZIANO BROS. ITALIAN FOODS DES MOINES'S SAUSAGE AND OLIVE SOURCE FOR NEARLY 100 YEARS

Family owned and operated Graziano Bros. Italian Foods on South Union opened its doors in 1912, and has been filled with the pungent smell of garlic and other seasonings ever since. It is the only south-side Italian grocery store to survive in this one-time stronghold of Des Moines's southern Italian (*not* Sicilian) community. Originally a full-service grocery store serving the south-side, Graziano Bros. today is largely a wholesaler of Italian specialty foods, as well as a retailer of such Italian staples as fresh parmesan and other cheeses, imported pasta, bulk spices, condiments, and an array of olive oils and balsamic vinegars. Frances Graziano Parrott, who grew up in the store comments "People love to tell stories here. They can come here and hang out or chew the fat with somebody. This store is a very strong symbol of the Italian community."

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Graziano's however, is famous citywide for its tasty home-made Italian sausages and unique spiced green olives, neither of which are like any other in town. Served in many Italian restaurants throughout Des Moines as well as in HyVee and Dahl's, the sausage, and the home-cured and spiced green olives (as well as black, wrinkly, and earthy tasting calamata olives) are more fun to buy right from the source. Don't miss the *cavatelli* (inch-long little "rolls" of pasta, homemade by Mrs. Sitoneto a local community member famous for her home-rolled pasta) conveniently frozen or ready to serve with a red sauce.

## HILAL GROCERY

### MOUTHWATERING MIDDLE EASTERN

Betty and Mohammed Khan run Hilal Grocery in the Drake neighborhood. Like the rest of these markets, this one manages to pack an amazing range of foods on its shelves. While the freezers contain *halal* meats (butchered and processed according to Muslim dietary rules), the refrigerators contain hummus, yogurt, pita bread, and pastries. An array of beans, rice, and spices and dried fruits line the shelves as well as canned stuffed eggplants, grape leaves, vine leaves, chutneys, honeys, jams, and jellies. Ankeny's Adriatic bakery delivers fresh pita bread every other day. Also available at the checkout counter is fresh spongy *yot-yot* (Nuer) or *injera* (Ethiopian) flat bread (made from a fermented batter of corn flour and milk and used as a both a plate and utensil to hold and pick up the savory stews that Des Moines residents from the southern Sudan make).

## EUROPA MARKET A BOSNIAN BOUNTY

The Bosnian owned and operated Europa Market stocks a large variety of Bosnian specialty items. In 1999, the store opened in Beaverdale; within a few years, it had outgrown its walls and moved to its current location on Merle Hay. Imported cheeses, hard sausages, pepper & eggplant spread, fine chocolates and pastries, crème fraîche, herbal and black teas, vanilla sugar, baking supplies and spices fill the shelves of shops, providing the tastes of home for Des Moines's Bosnian population, which topped 6,000 in the past decade. Also available are specialty pans for baking pita (a strudel-like pastry filled with meats, vegetables, or fruit) and coffee services for serving fragrant and strong coffee—a staple in every Bosnian home.

## EUROPEAN FLAVORS AND MACCABEES

### TWO TASTES OF THE OLD WORLD

European Flavors, offers a huge range of cheeses, smoked fish, dried sausages and cheeses and is the only market in Des Moines that sells whole smoked white fish—excellent for just eating or for mixing with cream cheese to make smoked white fish salad (an Eastern European Jewish favorite). There is also an amazing variety of teas—black, herbal, flavored—as well as European chocolates galore. Check out the freezer case for pirogis and other specialties.



The flavors of Eastern Europe at European Flavors

Meanwhile, Maccabees, on the west side of Polk Blvd., just south of University, also features a wide variety of *glatt* (strictly) kosher frozen Jewish meats as well as halvah, a sesame paste confection (sometimes flavored with chocolate, almonds, vanilla, or pistachios), two kinds of frozen gefilte fish, ritual objects, and the knowledgeable commentary of Rabbi Yossi Jacobson.

## NAMASTE

### A TASTE OF INDIA

Just west of Windsor Heights in Clive is Namaste which features the foods of southern India, many of which are available nowhere else in central Iowa. Namaste's kitchen staff is primarily from Hyderabad, which is known for its *biryani* (a traditional and popular mixture of rice, spices, vegetables and yogurt). There are shelves full of chutneys, beans, rice, and spice powders in front and fresh fruits and vegetables in the back of the store. The first aisle in the front has a range of teas and snacks and even the prepared foods are ready to be filled out with *naan* bread and mango ice cream for a complete meal. Namaste also serves homecooked meals to order, on every day but Monday.

## Details:

### **New Oriental Food Store**

515 E. Grand Ave. Des Moines. 515.243.3911

### **Jung's (Thai Market, Inc.)**

1140 East 9th St. Des Moines. 515.262.1663

### **La Tapatía**

1440 E. Des Moines St. Des Moines. 515.262.8097

### **Graziano Bros. Italian Foods**

1601 South Union St. Des Moines. 515.244.7103

### **Halal Groceries**

1163 25th St. Des Moines. 515.274.8943

### **Europa Groceries Inc.**

3839 Merle Hay Rd. Des Moines. 515. 277.5524

### **European Flavors**

1150 73rd St. Windsor Heights. 515.279.1431

### **Maccabees Deli**

1150 Polk Ave. Des Moines. 515.277.1718

### **Namaste Groceries and Kitchen**

7500 University Ave # A. Clive. 515. 255.1698