

Tsukiji Market: Past, Present & Future

By the Tokyo Metropolitan Central Wholesale Market

TSUKIJI Market, which boasts the longest history of all the central wholesale markets in Tokyo, is an extensive market that carries both seafood and agricultural products. More seafood transactions are conducted here than at any other market in Japan, a fact which explains why this quintessential Japanese market has long been known by the name "Uogashi," meaning "riverside fish market."

The Origins of the Market

Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616), who established the shogunate government in the early Edo period (around 1603), brought fishermen in from Tsukuda Village in Osaka to manage the kitchens of Edo Castle and granted special rights to the Edo Bay fishing industry. The fishermen delivered fish to the government, and then sold the remainder at Nihonbashi. This market became known as Uogashi, and ultimately developed into the Tokyo market that exists today.

A monument commemorating the origins of the fish market is erected at the foot of the Nihonbashi located in Chuo Ward, Tokyo. The inscription on the monument states that the area of what is now Nihonbashi-Muromachi has "always been a fresh fish market," and describes how the bustling round-the-clock Uogashi market was set up in this area, selling fresh fish carried from nearby fishing

grounds throughout the day.

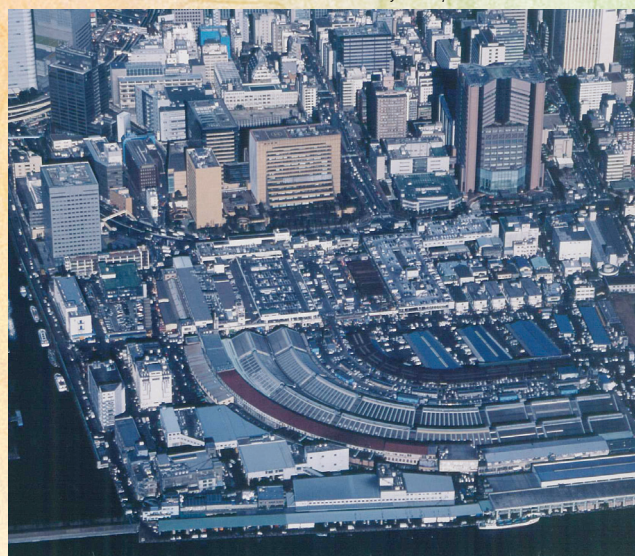
Vegetable markets are said to have spontaneously cropped up in the area around the shrine grounds at about the same time, and today's markets can be traced back to those markets that began in Edo Yatsujigahara (today's Kanda-Sudacho).

The History of Tsukiji Market

In September 1923, the Great Kanto Earthquake rocked all of Tokyo, starting fires that destroyed the city. The longstanding Nihonbashi Uogashi market, as well as other seafood and vegetable markets, sustained unprecedented damage. A temporary market was established in Shibaura immediately after the quake, but it proved to be inconveniently situated and too small. The City of Tokyo thus moved the city-established fish market to Tsukiji in December 1923. Hence began the Tsukiji Market.

The market began operating formally as Tokyo's central wholesale market in February 1935. The fresh products sold at the market were transported by cargo train via a service line from the old Shiodome Station or via ship from a pier of the Sumida River. The buildings of the Tsukiji Market were built in a fan shape to enable long cargo trains to stop there more efficiently.

In 1941, along with the start of World War II, a food



Photos: the Tokyo Metropolitan Central Wholesale Market

Panoramic view of the Tsukiji Market from 1945-54 (left) and today (right)



Wholesale market (salted and dried seafood, fresh seafood)

rationing system was established. This system continued even after the war, and for a little while the market was unable to play its traditional role. However, the trading volumes handled by the market began to increase once the food controls were abolished in 1950. After that, cargo trains were replaced with trucks for the shipment of perishables, and the number of buyer vehicles increased. Crowding inside the market increased, and the issue of facility development became one of the urgent importance.

■ The New Market in Toyosu

From around 1985, the market became increasingly crowded, and issue of facility development became urgent importance. Later, however, momentum behind the idea of moving the market to a new location grew, as the Tsukiji Market industry submitted a petition asking for an investigation into the possibility of moving the market to a coastal area. After looking from all angles at both options of redeveloping the current site and moving the market to a new site, investigators came to acknowledge the difficulty of redeveloping the current site and decided to move the market instead. In 2001, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and landowners in the Toyosu district reached a basic consensus regarding the relocation of the Tsukiji Market to Toyosu. The 7th Tokyo Wholesale Market Redevelopment Plan, established in December of the same year, included stipulations for moving the Tsukiji Market to the Toyosu district.

The Tsukiji Market, which saw the transformation of Edo into Tokyo and shaped Japan's food culture for generations, will reemerge in FY 2012 in the Toyosu district of Koto Ward, where it will continue to play a central role in the distribution of perishables throughout the capital region.

Photos: the Tokyo Metropolitan Central Wholesale Market



■ Requests for Market Tours

In conjunction with the recent boom in the popularity of Tsukiji, the number of participants in market tours, including foreign visitors, has increased. The desire to experience the vibrant Tsukiji market presents a great opportunity for educating people about the functions of the central wholesale market and the current perishables distribution system, but the wholesaling area is a busy place during the early morning hours.

At the early morning auction held in the tuna wholesale area, various problems have arisen in association with the increased number of tourists (including sanitation management problems such as temperature control issues caused by the entry and exit of large unauthorized groups, and problems with visitors impeding the auction and other trading activities). For these reasons, a path for tourists has been created in the frozen tuna wholesaling area, one of the market's many tuna wholesaling areas, to (1) ensure that the market can maintain proper sanitation, and (2) improve the flow of trading activities. (Tourists are not allowed to enter the other tuna wholesaling areas.)

To prevent any impediment to the market trading activities and to ensure food safety, visitors are asked to refrain from visiting these areas during the early morning hours.

Also, since the market is busy in other areas and other time periods, with trucks, special vehicles, and small vehicles moving around the market, guests are asked to be especially careful and vigilant when they visit.

Reservations for public tours of Tsukiji Market for groups of 10 or more may be made after 9:00 am. Visitors can also watch a video (available in English) explaining the market tour and the way that trading and business transactions are conducted at the market. Groups of foreign visitors need to bring an interpreter with them. **JS**