



PHOTOS: MARK CHEONG, DIOS VINCOY JR FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES
Vendors vary at Loewens Garden Market so you might find toffee apples one time and home-made cakes the next.



Loewens Garden Market, which started three years ago, is one of the first on-going farmers' market here.

LOEWEN GARDENS MARKET

Where: 75 Loewen Road, off Harding Road, Tanglin Village cluster
When: Every first and third Saturday of the month, 9am to 2pm. The next one will be held on Feb 16.
Info: Call 6474-0441 or e-mail thepantrychef@gmail.com

The Saturday market at Loewen Gardens was one of the first on-going farmers' markets here, when it started almost three years ago.

There are about 15 to 18 vendors at each instalment of the now fortnightly market, which remains popular with locals and expatriates.

Offerings can vary, depending on the month or time of year.

Over the years, vendors have sold everything from fresh seafood and gluten-free breads to handmade tamales and tortillas made with corn milled from scratch to freshly cooked paella.

Every trip here is a surprise, because shoppers do not know what to expect.

One week, there could be Earl Grey tea cakes and raspberry-pistachio financiers, while in another week, they might be able to pick up toffee apples, freshly made Mexican salsas such as pico de gallo (a tomato salsa) and spices such as pink peppercorns and Madagascar vanilla pods.

Mrs Katherine Thomson, 32, the market's co-ordinator, says: "We really want to keep the consistency going so that customers see our market as a go-to place at the weekend."

One regular vendor here is Mrs Cynthia Wee-Hoefer, who brings in items from farms in Nepal. These can include Himalayan rock salt and organic rice as well as fresh produce such as kale, sweet potatoes and cauliflower. She has been part of the market since it began in 2010.

Mrs Wee-Hoefer, 61, says: "I like the atmosphere here. Selling directly to customers is a good way for me to understand their reactions to the produce, as well as for customers to get to know more about the source."

Other regular stall holders here include Momo Rice, which sells different types of Japanese rice, as well as brown rice that can be polished on site; wine supplier Wine Guru; fine foods purveyor Little Provence which offers gourmet products such as olive oils and vinegars; and Pasta Mama, which sells freshly made pastas and sauces.

Some stall holders from the market, such as Windowsill Pies, have even gone on to open shops of their own.

Mrs Thomson says: "This is a great outlet to test the market. There are very few places where you can do that, where you can address people and get their feedback."



Nature's bounty for sale

The farmers' market scene is shaping up nicely with new entrants and loads more fresh produce on offer



Rebecca Lynne Tan

To market, to market, to buy all things gourmet.

The farmers' market scene is becoming increasingly exciting, with new entrants and more offerings, adding variety and dynamism to Singapore's food landscape.

These days, there are not only vendors offering organic fruit and vegetables but also ones selling pies and cakes, home-made pastas and sauces, and imported olive oils and vinegars not readily available in supermarkets.

The one to watch is upcoming PasarBella (right) at The Grandstand (formerly the Turf Club) in Bukit Timah. It opens next month.

PasarBella – pasar is Malay for market while bella means beautiful in Italian – will be the first multi-vendor gourmet farmers' market that will be open seven days a week, from 9am to 7pm.

The 30,000 sq ft market, its walls painted with murals of gourmet produce, is inspired by some of the world's most beautiful markets.

These include Mercat de Sant Josep de la Boqueria in Barcelona, New York's Chelsea Market and Queen Victoria Market in Melbourne.

Also in the works is the Circle Of Life farmers' market and creativity hub, which will also offer accommodation. The project, slated to launch next year, is being put forth by the Kranji Countryside Association, a group of agricultural and horticultural farms here. It hopes to secure an empty building at the corner of Lim Chu Kang and Neo Tiew Roads. Negotiations with the authorities are on-going.

These add to a handful of other foodie markets including the new monthly weekend Rochester Market at Rochester Mall that starts today, the fortnightly Loewen Gardens Market in Tanglin Village and the monthly John's Premium Market at myVillage mall in Serangoon Gardens.

Over the years, there have also been a few ad hoc fairs and markets, as well as one that used to take place at Robertson Quay, which has since fizzled out.

At PasarBella, shoppers can look forward to about 50 vendors, some of whom have opted for more than one unit to better showcase their wares.

There will be a fruit and vegetable section, as well as a seafood area – Oceans Of Seafood – where shoppers can buy imported fish and seafood from areas such as Japan, Scandinavia and Australia, and even have it cooked to be consumed at the market. The seafood section will also double up as a wholesale market for trade customers who want to purchase fresh catch for their restaurants. This will take place each morning, before the farmers' market opens to the public.

Partners who will be taking up stalls here include the Da Paolo Group, which will showcase Italian deli

items including fresh pastas, sauces, antipasto and other Italian products; fine foods purveyor Little Provence that offers everything from olive oils to vinegars; and Huber's Butchery, which will offer a selection of hams and bratwursts that can be cooked and eaten at the market.

Other things to look forward to are: The Cheese Ark, a walk-in 500 sq ft cheese "cave" offering cheeses from Italy and other parts of Europe; Le Patio, a stall selling French crepes and Spanish paella; wines from The Merchant; local coffee roastery Dutch Colony Coffee Company; and a stall dedicated to tea by Clipper Tea.

More vendors are still being recruited locally and overseas, but marketgoers can also expect vendors offering charcuterie and more cooked food as well as other complementary services such as a barber. Food can be consumed at used Spanish wine barrels that will double up as tables.

Behind the \$4-million market is entrepreneur Clovis Lim, 23, a co-founder of the Sugar Daddy Group, which is behind patisserie-restaurants Antoinette and Pique Nique. He has since sold his shares in the venture. The finance graduate made his own money with other F&B ventures and investments, and is also a shareholder of a new nightclub, Dom Lounge, at Marina Bay Sands. There is also another silent partner behind the market.

The fact that a Western-style gourmet market did not yet exist in Singapore, was one of the reasons why Mr Lim was keen to start one.

On the decision to open at The Grandstand, a spokesman for PasarBella adds: "We decided to open here because it is a family-centric enclave – the whole idea of PasarBella is to create a happy, fun experience for the whole family."

Its owners had been hunting for a 50,000 sq ft space for about three years to no avail. When a large space at The Grandstand became available, they jumped at the opportunity.

Bukit Timah's more affluent catchment area, the spokesman says, is also a plus, though the plan is for PasarBella to be a destination for everyone, not just Bukit Timah residents.

He adds: "There are not many places where you can get all your gourmet needs from a gourmet market, then head downstairs to a hypermarket to pick up other items such as toilet paper."

Well-travelled foodies say they are looking forward to the opening of more farmers' markets.

Bukit Timah resident Brenda Ong, 35, a sales consultant, says she is keen to see a local interpretation of markets such as Mercado San Miguel in Madrid or The Farmers Market in Los Angeles.

She says: "It is about time we see more farmers' markets here. I love the Loewen Gardens one for its cosy vibe and interesting things, but one that you can go to any day of the week will be a big help."

"There are gourmet shops here, but many do not sell raw produce, seafood or meats. A one-stop market will meet a lot of consumers' needs."

Mrs Gladys Lim, a housewife in her 50s, adds: "The little weekend markets we have now remind me of the ones in Australia. The atmosphere is very homely – there is a sense of community."

"Sometimes there are things that you can find only at these types of markets, and those items are real treasures. I hope we will have more of these markets."

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Last year's vendors at John's Premium Market included Sarah's Loft (above), which sold homemade confectionery, and Teddy Bears by Esther Lee (below), offering artisanal teddy bears.

NEW MARKETS

Rochester Market
Where: Rochester Mall, 35 Rochester Drive, ground floor
When: Today, 9am to 2pm. Every first Saturday and Sunday of the month, starting next month
Info: Call 6684-6733

A supermarket-cum-retailer of gourmet and organic products, also called Rochester Market, is behind this new monthly event. The supermarket is partly owned by Four Seasons Gourmet Market.

Mr Joe Tan, general manager of Rochester Market, says there will be 15 vendors today offering items such as organic rice and baked goods, while the supermarket will set up a stall selling natural and organic produce, as well as condiments such as olive oil.

He adds that the market, which takes place on the first weekend of every month, also has plans to bring in farmers and their produce directly from countries such as Australia, so that customers can have that special first-hand experience of meeting the people who grow the produce they eat.

Mr Tan, 28 says: "There has been increasing interest from customers, keen to find out where their produce is from."

John's Premium Market
Where: Location to be decided. Previously held at myVillage in Serangoon Gardens
When: The next one will be in March. Venue and date to be finalised.
Info: Call 9004-1800 or e-mail jpm90041800@gmail.com

Aside from Rochester Market, there is also John's



PHOTOS: JASON QUAH FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES

Premium Market, a monthly gourmet, home decor and accessories market, that has been taking place at myVillage since October last year.

The market takes a break this month, and is likely to open at another venue from next month.

It is organised by Mr John Chan, owner of Western stall Pasta J at Moonstone Coffee House in Opal Crescent in the Woodville area.

This market usually has about 10 stalls each time, including a stall run by Mr Chan, where he sells his home-made pesto, soups and other sauces.

Other stalls there include cakes by Abby Loves Cakes, The Korea Food Company which sells Korean condiments and products, and a stall selling hand-crafted artisanal teddy bears.