



Inside Japan's Incredible Fish Markets

Early morning view of the harbour at Okinawa Local Wholesale Fish Market, Naha.

They are unbelievable – spanking clean, totally free of odour or clutter. A tour of fish markets and fishing harbours in Japan is almost like touring swanky shopping malls. Hygiene and sanitation are just about perfect.

This photo feature provides glimpses into the Central Wholesale Market of Tokyo at Tsukiji and the fish landing centers at Naha and Nago in Okinawa Prefecture, which I visited in September 2006. The occasion: a field trip during the Training Project for Promotion of Community-based Fishery Resource Management by Coastal Small-scale Fishers. The International Cooperative Fisheries Organization of the International Cooperative Alliance is implementing the project. BOBP-IGO is one of the partners.

The Tokyo Central Wholesale Market of Tokyo is the world's largest – in terms of quantity of fish as well as value. It has 114 staff for day-to-day management. Now 71 years old, the market survived bombing during the Second World War. A separate section in Tsukiji also markets vegetables and fruits.

Seven fish wholesalers (mainly companies) have been permitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to conduct business from the Central Wholesale Market. Goods are sold by auction. The market's commission is 5.5 percent of the wholesale price for fishery products.

The market offers approximately 480 kinds of fishery products. Auctions for fresh fish generally start at 4.40 a.m. and proceed for different categories of fishes. The auction hours change marginally from season to season. Open from Monday to Saturday, the market closes on Sundays and national holidays, also on Wednesdays of the second and fourth week of every month.

The fishery products division has 850 intermediate wholesalers approved by the Governor of Tokyo. They run 1 650 shops, each 7 sq. metres in area. They buy from the wholesalers, display products in their shops, and sell to retailers including restaurants. The market also has some 350 authorized buyers such as retailers, processors and supermarket agents, who buy products in bulk. These buyers too have been specially approved by the Governor of Tokyo. They buy from intermediate wholesalers as well as wholesalers.



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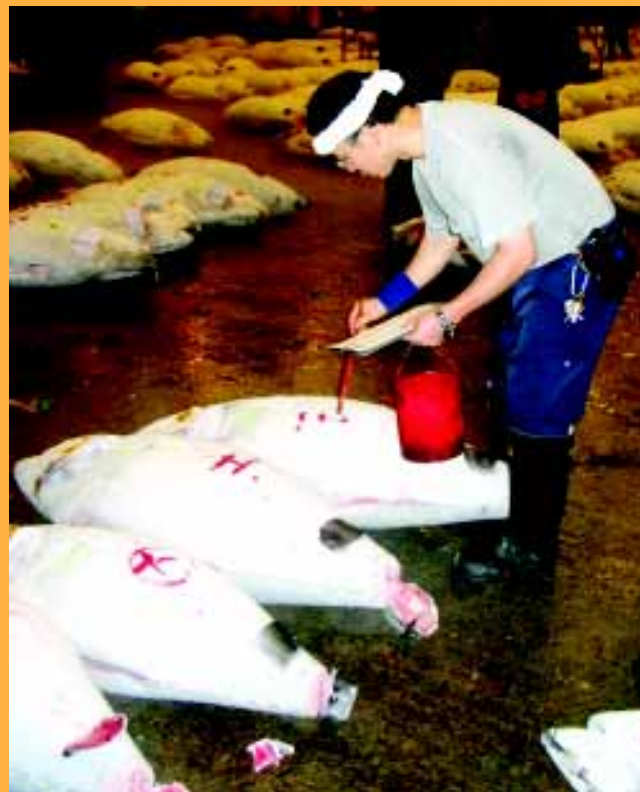


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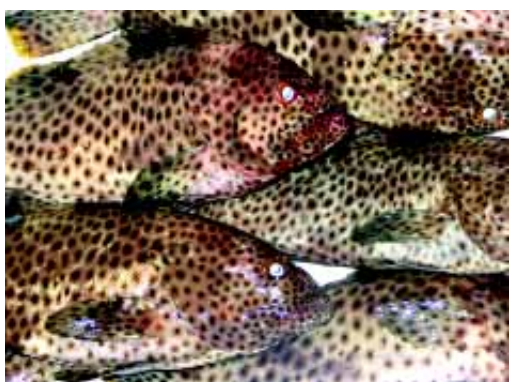


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1. Aerial view of the Central Wholesale Market (CWM) of Tokyo at Tsukiji (Photo courtesy: Tokyo Metropolitan Government).
2. Packaging hall of the CWM.
3. Fresh tuna auction hall at the CWM.
4. Auction in process at the Okinawa Local Wholesale Fish Market, Naha.
5. The intermediate wholesale section at the CWM.
6. Frozen tuna being coded after auction at the CWM.
7. Filleting of tuna after auction at the Okinawa Local Wholesale Fish Market, Naha.



Some vital statistics: The Central Wholesale Market of Tokyo

Parameters	Values
Total area of the market (sq. meters):	230 836
Area allocated for fish wholesalers (sq. meters):	25 003
Area allocated for intermediate fish wholesalers (sq. meters):	118 79
Area allocated for offices of companies and for storage of products:	10 000
Capacity of cold storage facilities (metric tonnes):	26 400
* Total quantity of waste generated (tonnes per day):	60
(i) Combustible waste:	33
(ii) Non-combustible waste:	15
(iii) Polystyrene waste:	12
* Total usage of water (cubic meters per day):	8 100
(i) Water from tap sources:	5 000
(ii) Filtered sea water:	3 100
* Total usage of electricity (Kilo-watt-hour per day):	134 000

* Information pertains to the year 2005.

The most commonly traded fin and shell fishes in the fresh fish category at Tsukiji are yellowtails, jack mackerels, tunas, squids, skipjack, snappers, cod and cod like species, salmon and trout, sardines and flatfishes. In the frozen category, the prominent varieties are tunas, salmon and trout, shrimps and prawns, squid, flatfishes, crabs, billfishes (marlin), snappers and sharks. In FY 2005 (April 2005 to March 2006), 2 140 metric tonnes/ day of fishery products valued at 1 750 million Yen/ day changed hands.

I also visited two fishing harbours and their auction centres in Okinawa Prefecture. This is Japan's southernmost Prefecture, and consists of hundreds of islands in a chain over 1 000 km long. Okinawa's climate is tropical and the Prefecture is famous for its tuna fishery. The first market was located at Tomari Fishing Port in Naha city, also the capital of Okinawa Prefecture.

The Okinawa Local Wholesale Fish Market deals only with fresh fish. It has separate areas for auction of tuna and tuna-like species and for species other than tuna. The Wholesale Fish Market takes a commission of 5 percent from the auction. A retail fish market attached to the wholesale market caters to the needs of local consumers.

The fishing harbour of the Nago Fisheries Cooperative Association (Nago FCA) has an auction hall where catch landed by FCA members is auctioned. This market too deals only in fresh fish. The FCA also charges a commission of 5 percent to maintain the auction hall and provides members with other support facilities.

The hygiene and sanitation standards at both the harbours and the quality of fish landed is very high. Each fish or a batch of similar species is coded to give details of the source of capture, size, etc. Sellers and buyers in the auction are differentiated by the colour of the caps they wear. The FCA staff records all transactions; this information is useful for fisheries management. The FCA staff also ensure that no banned or undersized species are traded by fishers. Stiff penalties are imposed for violating Prefecture Laws.

– Y S Yadava

Some important varieties of fin and shell fish species displayed for auction at the fish markets.