

“Maach-ey bhaat-ey Bangali” – a significant proverb that every Bengali grows up hearing, representing our inborn love and need for fish as a complement to a staple of our meals. Be it khichuri and hilsa fry on a rainy afternoon or koi er jhol with steaming rice for dinner, our meal is simply incomplete without a fish dish!



Surviving in a fish market

‘Maach-bazaar’ or fish markets can be found in almost every small and big locality of this lush riverine land. Besides its rich nutritious components, ease of availability is another factor that makes fish an indispensable part and parcel of every Bengali's life. In fact, whether you have actually ever been within a metre of a fish market or not, a Bengali will always be expected to somehow have a wholesome knowledge of the nitty-gritty of fish shopping.

So, if you are trying to impress your parents, spouse, friends or in-laws, then this is a must-read for you.

Get ready to dress down. Don your least expensive clothing and casual slippers and get your nose prepared to step into the lively buzz of a local fish market!

DON'T BE A FISH IN TROUBLED WATERS

Mornings are the busiest time of the day at any fish market. You should still spend some



time making small talk with the fishmonger before getting down to the real business talk. To start off, ask him when and where the fish was caught and then move on to prices.

“When you get to know the price, don't give in immediately,” advised Sayla Pervin, a homemaker who knows the ins and outs of most local fish markets. She added that going

around the market and checking out the price for the same fish at different fishmongers is a smart move that helps to understand the original market price.

Besides, you can sneakily wait around and overhear other customers' negotiations with the seller to form your estimated budget.

SOMETHING SMELLS FISHY

When you are out choosing the fish that will grace your next meal, there are certain

factors that you need to keep in mind. Visible physical appearances can tell you a lot about the freshness of the fish.

Meekail Kamal Mugdho who often visits the Purbachol and Karwan Bazaar markets for fish said that it is quite easy to determine the freshness of the fish by examining its gills, flesh and belly.

“The redder the gills and firmer the belly, the fresher the fish,” he explained. The eyes have a lot to give away as well – clear bulgy eyes signify that it is a freshly caught fish.

When you are about to buy the fish, you should check the weighing scale and stones to get the accurate weight of the fish. All in all, always remember to look through your ‘fish-eye’ and walk away as soon as you smell something fishy.

FISH VS FOE

There is another crucial reason why you need to be a more ‘fish-friendly’ person before you head to the fish market. A couple of years ago, vicious piranhas were being openly sold in the market disguised as Thai Rupchanda. Many buyers who could not distinguish between the two were deceived into buying this carnivorous impostor.

Khokon Miah has been selling fish at the bustling bazaar of Mohammadpur Town Hall for about a decade now and readily

offered to share some tips on this. “Look out for razor sharp teeth under the lips,” he warned. Moreover, he furthered that the puffer fish (with a bloated throat and polka dotted torso) is another toxic fish that you should avoid when you are fish-shopping.

HAVE SOME DRY FISH (SHUTKI) TO FRY?

No matter how much they stink, nothing tops the exquisite taste of dry fish curry or bhorta with hot chittoi pitha or rice! There is a vast variety of dry fish in the local market – rupchanda, loitta, lakkha, churi and chapa are some common favourites.

Having over 40 years of experience in fish market shopping, A M Amanullah admitted that although all shutkis have an acrid smell, there are still effective ways to identify the good from the bad. “It is best to ask the monger if the shutki is a fresh fish one and check if the colour is a bit darker than usual,” he recommended. Besides local markets in Dhaka, Cox's Bazaar is a great place to go hunting for all kinds of fish, including shutki.

Shopping for the freshest fish can surely be a tedious task. But if you have the little titbits in mind, you can be a big fish (pro) at fish shopping any day.

By Nafisa Faruque

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