

# All those Portuguese go to market

By Edward Iginio Placidi  
*Special to The Inquirer*

BARCELOS, Portugal — They start arriving the night before — in their vans loaded with merchandise, or by bus, some on foot — to be assured of a good spot. The huge Campo da Republica is transformed into a gypsy-merchant campground. Dinners are cooked over small fires, music from radios drifts through the city on the evening's breeze and tales and gossip are exchanged in the artificial glow of lanterns.

On Thursdays, before the rooster's crow, people stir throughout the area making ready for the great dawn-to-dusk, open-air market of Barcelos. Perhaps the grandest holdover of a fading life-style on the continent, it is certainly the largest and most outstanding market in Portugal.

Barcelos is a tiny but majestic city,

typical of northern Portugal. No more than several hundred feet down any street brings you to a small park, an esplanade, a stone square with a fountain or statue, or one of numerous flower gardens. Here on quaint cobblestoned streets are old stone or granite houses painted in pastels and with white-lattice windows and colorful patterned-tile facades.

It is in the very center of the Minho, Portugal's northernmost province and the gayest, most colorful and folkloric. Long gold earrings dangle from the lobes of the women dressed in bandanas and smocks, either in bright colors and patterns or head-to-toe black. Oxcarts rumble down paving-stone roads, and fairs, festivals and religious processions are almost daily happenings.

They are people with strong, time-

worn roots. Most tend their small ancestral plots to supply basic family needs and a few sacks of grain or produce for the cash trade. Like it was for their forefathers, Thursday is the most important day of the week, looked forward to by all. Today's hawkers offer modern wares but it's still yesterday's scene.

The Campo da Republica is over a quarter of a mile square, and yet on Thursdays the merchants, artisans and shoppers that descend upon Barcelos from its 89 parish districts spill over into all the streets. It becomes more fair than market; a social and cultural as well as commercial affair.

The merchants erect a tent city under the Campo's avenues of trees that converge on a granite fountain, conjuring up images of a nomadic oasis encampment. For many, the

proceeds of the day provide their only income for the week. And friends and acquaintances eagerly seek each other out to exchange news, chatting in little groups in that mysterious, clandestine, Portuguese way.

If it is sold in Portugal you'll probably find it at Barcelos' market — from everything needed to equip a household to a new unpainted oxcart to haul your purchases away.

In one eye-ful you'll see a gaunt old lady struggling under a sack of potatoes — balanced on her head as the women carry everything here — threading a myriad of her colleagues in search of a good place to do business, and a row of bright-colored vans under tents fronted by tables piled high with wheels of cheese, breads and pastries and plastic kitch-

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It gets crowded in the open-air market in Barcelos

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en items. The bellowing calls of "fresh strawberries!" or "ripe tomatoes!" are overpowered by blaring loudspeakers, working off the batteries of their vehicles, that lure buyers with their bargain prices on clothes and phonograph records.

Thursdays are also a bonanza for the craftsmen and artisans of the region — the borough of Barcelos is considered Portugal's richest for arts and crafts — who create everything from baskets and wine barrels to hand-made tablecloths and rugs, copper and crochet work, distaffs and spindles, wood carvings, furni-

ture and the ceramics and crockery for which Barcelos is renowned.

Rosa Ramalho, 86, sometimes called the "Grandma Moses of Portugal," began modeling clay when she was 11 years old. The bizarre figures she came to create with her talented fingers — and continues to create with the aid of her large family, her pieces all signed on the bottom — that depict the life and times of her country through the years have received wide acclaim. She was largely responsible for spawning a great revival and blossoming of the now-important pottery industry.

There are a number of shops in Barcelos selling these masterpieces of popular art, including Ramalho works, but the fun and cheaper route is bargaining at the Thursday fair. You will find ceramic demons, biblical figures, country peasants, cute little marching soldiers and the most abstract of Mardi Gras-type characters in wild color schemes, as well as typical items for kitchen and home use.

Barcelos gave Portugal its national symbol, the cockerel, and few visitors leave Barcelos without a multi-colored ceramic cockerel — along

with a chuckle over "the tale of the cock."

According to legend, a pilgrim passing through Barcelos en route to the shrine of Santiago de Compostela was accused of theft and condemned to death. But just before his execution he was granted permission to be taken to the presence of the judge — who was dining on roast capon with some friends. Pleading his innocence again, to the amazement of all, he pointed to the table and exclaimed, "As surely as I am innocent will that cock crow if I am hanged!" And as the rope was tightening around his neck the cock did miraculously stand up and crow. The judge then rushed to the gallows in time to save him, and he ordered a cross to be erected to commemorate the miracle.

On the rise of Barcelos' spur, where the 15th century bridge with its water-wheel mill spans the Cava-do River, stands a collection of medieval stone monuments and buildings: the 13th and 16th-century Collegiate Church, the old walls that encircle the Ducal palace, which is in ruins today but is an open-air museum housing statuary and ancient artifacts uncovered in the region, a 15th century mansion called "Solar dos Pinheriso," plus the "Cruzeiro do Senhor do Galo," the "Cross of the Gentleman of the Cock." Claim is made that the very existence of the ancient stone cross is evidence enough that a miraculous event indeed took place.

By the time dusk turns to darkness, the Campo da Republica has emptied, the streets have been swept clean again, the cabbage and lettuce leaves and discarded fruit that carpeted the produce area of the market have been gathered up, and Barcelos settles back into its normal quiet peacefulness leaving behind Thursday's clamor and bustle.

After the flurry of the day you may want to relax in the cool evening in one of the outdoor cafes of the main square and, after a good night's sleep, meander down the ancient streets of noblemen's mansions and sunbathe on Barcelos' river beach.

Accommodations include the four-star Albergaria Condes de Barcelos, two-star Pension Arantes and one-star Pension Bogaiera. Barcelos is only 30 miles by bus, train or rented car from Porto, Portugal's second city.

After checking into the Arantes I had approached the polyglot receptionist to ask a few questions about Barcelos, and he took my curiosity to task. I suddenly found myself on a whirlwind tour of the city with him in his car, including a quick four-mile climb up to the high "mirador" of Franqueira with its magnificent panorama of a long stretch of coastline and sea and miles of rolling hills, green fields and twisting rivers. As he told me, "You come to a new place . . . you must learn about it and get to know it before you can enjoy it."