



SHOPPING IN EUROPE

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I am no stranger to shopping in Europe. But when walking through the Centre Commercial in Lyon, it finally struck me. Much of Europe shops just like North America. The Centre Commercial is in the Part Dieu section of the city, conveniently located near hotels and the railroad station where high-speed TGV trains can be boarded for the north or the south. The Centre is a three storey enclosed mall that would be at home in any American or Canadian suburb. The store names are different, but the selection and environment virtually the same.

Tourists and transit dependent urban planners from North America can often miss this. The small shops along the tourist corridors, near the tourist attractions can lead one to believe that retail development in Europe is of another age --- an age before the coming of enclosed shopping centers and big box stores. It is not.

Lyon's Centre Commercial has two large anchor stores. One is the Paris department store, "Galleries Lafayette," which like Macy's in New York, Marshal Field in Chicago and the Hudson Bay Company in Toronto can be found both in the core and in enclosed shopping centers. Somewhat unlike the American experience, the other anchor store is a multi-storied "Carrefour."

Carrefour is the Wal-Mart of Europe. Indeed, Carrefour may be the Wal-Mart of the world. Carrefour is not to be found in America, but has established a strong presence elsewhere. As the second largest retailer in the world, Carrefour does approximately 40 percent of Wal-Mart's gross revenue. But outside the United States, Carrefour is more dominant, accounting for twice

Wal-Mart's volume. Carrefour stores tend to be larger than Wal-Mart stores, usually approximating the size of a Wal-Mart Supercenter.

Europe also has its Targets and K-Mart's. Smaller Carrefour wannabes include Auchan, Casino, E. Leclerc and others. These stores are just as big as the Carrefour outlets.

Tougher land use regulation means that there are fewer of the hypermarkets than would be expected in the United States. The result is far more crowded stores, more crowded parking lots and often local constables directing traffic in the free parking lots.

Large enclosed malls are located throughout Europe, usually anchored by Carrefour or one of its Wal-Mart type competitors. For example, Barcelona, Lisbon, Geneva and Milan have large shopping malls.

What surrounds these malls looks typically American. There are the "category killer" big box stores. Sporting goods can be purchased at rock-bottom prices at Go-Sport or Decathlon. Leroy Merlin, Bricorama and Bauhaus fulfill the "do-it-yourself" role played by Home Depot and Lowe's. Boulanger specializes in kitchen appliances. Media Markt plays the role of Best Buy or Circuit City. Toys-R-Us and Office Depot star in the roles of Toys-R-Us and Office Depot. Then there is IKEA --- the mother of all big box stores, with the largest stores 1.5 times the size of large Carrefours or Wal-mart Supercenters. These biggest box stores, of course, are not of American lineage; rather they were born in Scandinavia. Perhaps most surprising of all, there are the auto dealership malls.

And, one of the world's largest central city enclosed malls is in the core of Paris. This facility, Les Halles, is easily missed by tourists strolling along the Palais Royale just a few blocks away. But here are four underground floors of shopping. The same category killers and smaller chains are here. FNAC is a multi-storied, multi-category killer, with books, computers, office supplies and music.

And the benefits of large scale shopping are not limited to Western Europe. Eastern European nations are now seeing large stores built, such as the Carrefour store illustrated below in Bucharest.

Whether in the far reaches of the suburbs, under Paris or in redeveloped cores, these Western European versions of the American shopping center are also surrounded by a complete array of fast food outlets, from the international MacDonald's to European and national chains.

Paris, Copenhagen and Barcelona might be more than 3,000 miles from America, but its suburbs and smaller urban areas are right next-door.





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