



Residents in Wanli Subdistrict line up in front of Carrefour's Wanli store.
— Zhou Shengjie



Customers shopping at the Carrefour outlet bring their own trolleys and baskets. — Zhou Shengjie



Residents return from the supermarket with full bags. — Zhou Shengjie

How a trip to the local supermarket became such a privileged treat

Zhou Anna

Going to the supermarket used to be part of the rhythm of daily life — so mundane that it was taken for granted. But after weeks of lockdown in Shanghai, shopping in a store is a new-found luxury.

In some areas of the city where new cases of coronavirus are near or at zero, residents are being allowed out of their compounds on a limited basis to go to designated supermarkets and pharmacies.

To date, Putuo is the only downtown district that has “essentially achieved zero community transmission of COVID-19,” according to the government, and residents there are reaping the rewards of a health battle victory.

Chen Chonghou, who lives in the Zhenxinyuan neighborhood in Putuo’s Wanli Subdistrict, waited in line more than 30 minutes in front of a Carrefour store.

“It doesn’t matter if the line is long,” he said.

“It’s been far too long since I was able to go out and shop.”

Chen has been working to help distribute government passes for residents in 20 neighborhoods to get out and about a bit. The passes are limited in days and hours of usage.

He directs residents of his neighborhood to the local Carrefour supermarket along a designated route. After a long day of that duty, he finally entered Carrefour to do his own shopping — picking up items rarely bought in group buys, such as curry, cookies and plastic food wrap.

“The residents returning from the supermarket with full bags are very happy,” Chen reported on WeChat when he returned home.

“We can finally get out of our compound!” said an elated woman in her 30s surnamed Li, who lives in Wanli. “It was such a pleasure to shop again in a supermarket.”

The “pleasure” is not without its own set of protocols.

Customers enter Carrefour in carefully controlled groups. They are required to show their passes, “invitation cards” from the store and negative nucleic acid test

results. They have to scan a “location code,” then pass temperature and mask checks. The store doesn’t provide trolleys or shopping baskets; customers have to bring their own.

Shopping time per group is limited to 40 minutes, with 20 minutes of disinfection before the next group is admitted.

The outing was a bit stressful, Li admitted.

“The time was so limited that I had to rush, and that made me sweat with anxiety,” she said.

Carrefour restricts purchases of boxed pork, eggs and vegetables to two boxes per customer. In addition, no person is allowed to spend more than 300 yuan (US\$45) to ensure that there is enough stock for all customers.

This caused difficulties for Li at the checkout. Her bill was approaching 300 yuan when her basket was still half full. After some hesitation, she forfeited beer, Coke and potato chips.

“I’ve wanted to buy these things for a long time,” she said. “They are usually hard to get in group buying. But after all, they are not necessities.”

A purchasing manager at the supermarket, who identified herself only by the surname Wang, told Shanghai Daily that the store is currently well-stocked and prices haven’t changed.



Deliveryman Jiang Cheng waits in front of the FamilyMart store on Xincun Road. The door is open just wide enough for staff to hand out plastic bags. — Zhou Anna