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Raw herring offers taste of adventure

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Seattleites don't normally come to Pike Place Market to eat a cup of raw salted herring.

"That was disgusting," Zack Kirsch said as he finished choking down the last morsel of fish at The Fish Market. "It was so salty. I was just shocked."

Raw fish was just one of many challenges Kirsch and teammate Katie Speake were asked to face Saturday as participants in the citywide scavenger hunt known as City Chase.

Like the television show "The Amazing Race" – after which the event is modeled – the tasks are designed to be both physically and mentally different.

And that, participants said, is what makes the race worthwhile.

"You get to do lots of stuff you never get to do otherwise," Speake said.

Urban Dare, a similar event, also took place Saturday, although it avoided the raw fish. It kicked off in Pioneer Square, just a few blocks away from City Chase's staging area at Westlake Park, sending contestants racing on foot around downtown and nearby neighborhoods.

While City Chase is a marketing juggernaut that actively includes promotional opportunities for its sponsors, Urban Dare is a more traditional scavenger hunt, with clues that lead contestants to landmarks or famous pieces of art around the city, like the walrus on the Arctic Building.

Missing at Urban Dare was the glitz of prizes donated by corporate sponsors. But participants didn't mind.

John Zobel said his teammate – his son, Eric – was just excited about trying to win.

"He's a big fan of medals and trophies," he said.

In place of congratulations, City Chase offers its participants chances to win smart phones and trips to its national and international competitions. Those prizes make prime marketing opportunities for its sponsors.



All that corporate input helped make City Chase a bigger event than Urban Dare, which boasted only 14 participants Saturday, a number that organizers said was well shy of the around 150 two-person teams fielded by City Chase.

"We don't really see it as a competition," said Corina Holtby, director of City Chase's U.S. series, when asked about Urban Dare.

"Their race is a training run for City Chase. Our teams are actually going somewhere and completing something."

For participants, the marketing isn't a particularly important part of the experience, which also includes kayaking on Portage Bay, taking an SAT-like standardized test and learning to walk a tightrope at the University of Washington.

"People don't know what to expect and their reaction is my same reaction," said Seattle Works volunteer Ana Mondragon as she handed out raw fish to another City Chase contestant. "You can tell it's just fun. Everybody's suffering."

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