

Cheese Experiences Across Cultures

Francesc Fusté-Forné (Ed.)



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Universitat
de Girona


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Cover image: A loaf of rye bread in Roquefort, France.

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The editor would like to express his gratitude to all the cheese enthusiasts, or turophiles —from Greek *tyros* (cheese) and *philos* (loving), for generously sharing their stories. Your experiences have brought this book to life and reflect the diversity of cheese cultures around the world.

The editor would also like to thank Anna Cabañas and Marta Roldan from Oficina Edicions UdG for their kindness and patience, and for their work on the administrative, creative and technical aspects of the book.

Presentation

This book is not about bread —or, in a way, it is. It is about bread and about other products that shape the stories of cheese. They pair with cheese, they flavour cheese or they are accompanied by cheese. Rye bread is one of the secrets behind the production of Roquefort cheese. It is in this bread that the *Penicillium Roqueforti* mold grows, giving the cheese its unique colour and flavour. Rye bread transforms the cheese into Roquefort. Cheeses are dynamic by nature, through their making process and the people who make them possible. Cheeses reflect the landscapes they come from —from alpine pastures to coastal caves, from desert caravans to urban cellars. Cheeses are nomadic travelers. They cross borders. They connect generations. Each cheese carries within it a dialogue: between farmers and land, makers and tradition, eaters and culture. As a source of change, cheeses also bring people together. Cheeses invite conversation, encourage curiosity and challenge our senses. As this book aims to, cheeses become a shared language through personal narratives. Each cheese story is a reminder that identity is not static. It adapts, learns and reinvents itself with every encounter, with every cheese and, even, with the same cheese but in a different moment or from a different perspective. Cheese is a powerful agent of intercultural dialogue.

This book, *Cheese Experiences Across Cultures*, features 120 contributions from 127 experts with diverse academic and professional backgrounds in tourism. Each contribution includes two facing pages, with an image on the left-hand page and a text on the right, to tell cheese experiences from different cultural and territorial contexts. These experiences are based on cheese as a product, spaces of production, landscapes,

places of consumption, markets, and other forms of experiences which happen in diverse places. As readers, you will travel through home kitchens, mountains or prisons, and you will engage in discussions about climate change, ethics or migration.

With contributors from 45 countries in North America, South America, Europe, Central Asia, East Asia, Middle East, Africa and Oceania, the book aims to offer a global and plural perspective on cheese, not only as a food product but as a key element in shaping the cultural identity of different individuals and societies, and the relationship between culture, nature and tourism through gastronomy. *Cheese Experiences Across Cultures* provides a perspective on cheese as an element that highlights territorial resources (both physical and human environments) and contributes to cultural exchange. This ethnographic and experiential perspective offers a broader understanding of how cheese acts as a vehicle for the exchange of knowledge, facilitating learning and interconnection between people and societies. The book also co-creates awareness of the role of cheese in the sustainable development of primary sector activities and their relationship with tourism, as well as the value of cultural and natural heritages and local traditions.

We invite you to enjoy this collective project *Cheese Experiences Across Cultures*, a free, open-access digital book promoted by the Social Council of the University of Girona on the occasion of Catalonia’s designation as the World Region of Gastronomy 2025.

Francesc Fusté-Forné
Universitat de Girona (Catalonia, Spain)

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Cheese Experiences Across Cultures



A large terracotta clay pot filled with Mtindi, with a wooden ladle resting inside, set outdoors in a rural setting with a thatched-roof hut and greenery in the blurred background.

Image generated by ChatGPT based on the author's description.

Abel Ansporthy Mamboleo | Saint Augustine University of Tanzania (Mwanza, Tanzania)

Sacred milk in sacred land: golden cheese trails of Tanzania



Tanzania is one of the best safari destinations in the world with exciting wildlife and rich cultures, but the country also provides an outlet for tourists to experience the agricultural traditions and culinary cultures. It is one of the initiatives to push farm-to-fork experiences that showcase what the local dairy industry and cheese-making traditions will look like. These cover classes of cheeses produced by dairy farms and cooperatives, including specialty traditional Tanzanian productions, such as Mtindi, a gently fermented yogurt. It includes a tour where the person can visit the Kilimanjaro Dairy Cooperative Society and watch the entire cheese-making

process, experience life on a milk cow, and taste fresh dairy products for an earnest rural experience. Cheesemaking allows tourists to sample and buy authentic products appropriately accompanied by other local favorites. Cheese tourism in Tanzania has very bright prospects, notwithstanding the many challenges it is currently facing. The emerging environment for development would, therefore, create a possibility for Tanzania to be transformed into an upcoming culinary and agritourism destination for tourists in search of authenticity by means of farm experiences combined with the glamor of nature and cultural heritage.



Image of a cheese toastie made from Gallybagger cheese being heated in a frying pan.

Adam Jones | University of Brighton (UK)

Gallybagger: a cheese with character from the Isle of Wight



Gallybagger is an unpasteurised, full-flavoured, hard-pressed, handmade artisan cheese from the Isle of Wight, UK. This award-winning cheese, recipient of a Gold Award at the British Cheese Awards in 2015, is produced in such small quantities (between 50 and 100 kg per week) that very little ever leaves the island, making it a rare and sought-after delicacy. Much can be inferred from a cheese's name, whether through a conventional geographical indication (as in France) or by referencing the producer (as is common in the UK) (West et al.¹, 2012). Gallybagger, however, is not directly linked to either location or producer, making its name particularly intriguing. The pronunciation, *Gally-bagger* is distinctive,

and so is its association. "Gallybagger" is a local Isle of Wight term for "scarecrow" (Lavers², 1988), a figure deeply embedded in the island's rural and agricultural identity. Scarecrows are not only symbolic of the island's farming heritage but also celebrated through one of its most popular events: the award-winning Scarecrow Festival. Interestingly, the word "gally" also has roots in Middle English, meaning "sharp" or "bitter" —qualities that aptly describe the cheese's flavour profile. These characteristics make Gallybagger an excellent choice for a cheese toastie (or "cheese dream"). Its firm texture allows the bread to crisp up beautifully, while the sharp, cheddar-style flavour cuts through the richness, creating a perfectly balanced bite.

1. West, H.G., Paxson, H., Williams, J., Grasseni, C., Petridou, E. and Cleary, S. (2012). Naming cheese. *Food, Culture and Society*, 15 (1), pp. 7-41.

2. Lavers, J. (1988). *The Dictionary of Isle of Wight Dialect*. Dovecote.



"Spicy Gidotyri", a special goat's milk cheese with a rich aromatic palette and less calories, made from milk collected on Mt. Pelion, the mountain of the Centaurs.

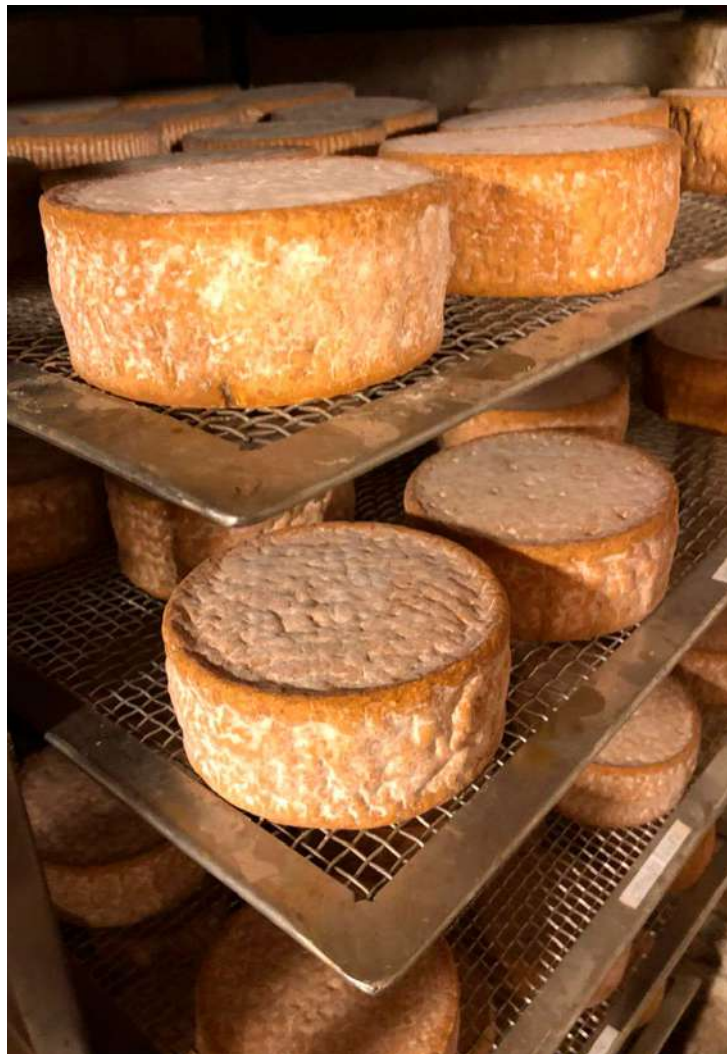
Afroditi Kamara | Time Heritage, Cultural Heritage Consultants (Greece)

Gidotyri: "spicy" goat cheese from Volos



Between March and June, when goats roam freely on Mt. Pelion, grazing on grass, tender plants and flowers, herdsmen collect milk and make a special "goats' milk cheese" (gidotyri). Thickened with a special yeast, usually stems of artichoke or milk thistle, the cheese matures in a month or two. It looks like the famous (and much-contested) feta, but it's lighter and more suitable for a diet. This particular cheese stands out for its "spicy" taste, not due to added pepper but to its special fermentation, which gives it extra acidity and a sour taste. Mt.

Pelion, known since antiquity for its flora and herbal variety, is responsible for the aromatic palette of this special cheese. When eating Gidotyri, either on toasted bread or with a nice, cold white wine on a summer evening, I always remember Aristotle's "αἰγίος τυρός", the much-praised goat's cheese which alludes to the myth of Zeus and Amaltheia, the goat who fed him as a baby in a cave on Mt. Ida. This age-old taste is revived and highlighted with a drop of extra virgin olive oil and maybe a touch of oregano, for extra flavor.



Cheese aging in a traditional dairy in Alt Urgell, Catalonia, where cheeses rest and mature honoring age-old craftsmanship.

Aida Llavall Batalla | Catalan Tourist Board (Barcelona, Spain)

Savouring Catalonia through artisanal cheesemaking



I believe places reveal their culture and history through gastronomy. In my case, I had the chance to visit a small artisanal cheese dairy in the Alt Urgell region, nestled in the heart of the Catalan Pyrenees. In that modest yet welcoming space, I grew familiar with the art of cheesemaking, closely observing how milk is transformed into a unique creation, steeped in tradition and know-how. The visit culminated in a long-awaited tasting, where I savoured a variety of cheeses

made from cow's and goat's milk, and even "tupi". This local specialty, with its creamy texture and bold, intense flavour, originally emerged as a way to make use of leftover cheese, and it reflects the creativity and wisdom of traditional cuisine. It was an experience that went beyond taste: it was a way to connect with the territory, grasp its essence, and appreciate the passion of the people behind it, such as the farmers and artisans who keep this tradition alive.



A slice of Finnish bread cheese served with home-made jam and black coffee near the river Kiiminki, Finland.

Alberto Amore | University of Oulu (Finland)

New home, new traditions: *Leipäjuusto ja marjahillo*



Leipäjuusto (tr. bread cheese) is probably the most famous cheese experience that can be associated with Finland. When I moved to Oulu a couple of years ago, one of the recommendations was to try this soft cheese for breakfast, preferably with cloudbberries and a cup of coffee as a drink. Coming from a country —Italy— with a myriad of types of cheese and the culture for the *espresso* in the morning, getting used to the *leipäjuusto* was quite

straightforward. Like other types of soft cheese (e.g. *saganaki*) the *leipäjuusto* is best served warm straight from the pan. I usually have it during the weekends with some home-made jam my partner makes with the berries we picked from our backyard (another very Finnish tradition). This cheese experience was a way to familiarize myself with the Finnish culinary traditions and it helped me to settle down in a new place I now call home.



Munkeby cheese is produced near the Trondheim fjord, close to the small city of Levanger.

Albina Pashkevich | Nord University (Levanger, Norway)

Migration journey toward one of Norway's best cheeses



If only I had known that the next step in my professional career would lead me to an exciting discovery—one of Norway's finest cheeses. A year ago, I moved to province Trøndelag, to a small town Levanger with 22,000 inhabitants, to begin my position as Senior Lecturer in Geography. More than a decade ago, Catholic monks from France serving at Munkeby—the Maria Abbey located in just three kilometres from new

hometown—made a similar journey (Løvaas¹, 2023). While settling in the area, these hard-working (and prayerful) French nationals introduced the idea of cheese dairy using local milk. The result was an award winning washed-rind cheese made using unpasteurized milk. I came across this cheese by chance, as a souvenir to bring back to my family from one of the self-service shops that have become so popular across Norway.

1. Løvas, M. (2023). A monk for his cheese: The story of Munkeby and the Maria Abbey. *Trøndersk mat og drikke AS*, October 25.



Eros, Katerina and Alessio, with the “Broken Hearth” cheese, Marche Region, Italy.

Alessio Cavicchi | University of Pisa (Italy)

“A broken hearth”: a blue cheese as a symbol of resilience and hope



I’m Alessio Cavicchi, currently a professor at the University of Pisa and formerly a long-time faculty member at the University of Macerata, in Italy’s Marche region. In 2022, a colleague from the University of Kyiv reached out to me, sharing the story of Kateryna Prikhodko, a Ukrainian cheesemaker who had been forced to abandon her farm near Kyiv due to the war. She was looking for a place where she could continue her work with dignity and safety. Knowing the Marche region well and the authenticity of the people who live there, I decided to write a post on Facebook sharing Kateryna’s story. Among the responses, one stood out: Eros Scarafoni, a friend and collaborator in various co-creation projects between universities and local communities, replied

with great generosity. He offered to host Kateryna at his farm, Fontegranne. From that encounter, a beautiful collaboration was born. Kateryna resumed making cheese, bringing with her the knowledge of Ukrainian traditions and contributing to the development of new varieties. Together, she and Eros created a blue cheese called *Broken Hearth*, symbolizing both the tragedy of war and the hope that encounters with hospitable communities can restore. Seeing her integrate into the local community together with her family, and rediscover a sense of peace and purpose through her work, was deeply rewarding. It’s proof that even a simple social media post can build bridges between cultures and breathe new life into stories that seemed broken.



Vegan Nutella
cheesecake at Okashi
Sanda, Madrid:
dairy-free, cruelty-
free and gluten-free.
It is a politically
conscious dessert
that celebrates taste
and texture without
animal suffering
or exploitation.

Alicia Orea-Giner | Rey Juan Carlos University (Madrid, Spain)

Cheese without cruelty: a vegan revolution through a cheesecake



Nestled in the heart of Madrid, Okashi Sanda is not just my favourite restaurant, it is a sanctuary for anyone with dietary restrictions, especially celiacs, lactose-intolerants and those embracing vegan or vegetarian political and ethic diets. Among its treasures is a dessert that defies expectation: a vegan Nutella cheesecake. Free from dairy, gluten and animal products, it is a revelation for anyone who has ever felt excluded at the dessert table. Eating this cheesecake feels

like a sensory journey: one that travels from the elegance of Japan to the sweet depth of Italy, all through the lens of a rich, chocolate-laden bite. This cheesecake is not just delicious, it's political. Vegan and vegetarian diets, like the one this dessert represents, are not only ethical, they are helping to reduce environmental impact and protect the planet. In this sense, each forkful is a quiet act of resistance: a vote with your fork against the exploitation of animals and a step toward food systems rooted in justice and care.



Nelson Calderón and his goats in Cajón del Maipo, Chile.

Photo: Calderón Family.

Amalia Castro San Carlos | Universidad Mayor (Santiago de Chile, Chile)

Transhumant cheeses



I heard about Calderón and his cheeses while visiting the O'Higgins Region. But it wasn't until I visited his land in the inland drylands of the region that I understood the depth of his story. Nelson, a third-generation goatherd, welcomed me with a desire to share his love for the craft. His goats, raised through transhumant grazing, roam valleys like Catemu and Cajón del Maipo, feeding on fresh pastures. The milk they produce is milked by hand, with respect and patience. There is no torment for the animals here.

The seasonal rhythm allows him to seek out fresh grasses in different meadows and care for his herd with sunlight, soil and skilled hands. I watched as the milk was filtered, curdled and salted. Then pressed and aged with precision. His cheeses, made from pasteurized milk, raw milk or with spices, are treated with care from milking to their final form. And that's why, more than just a product, his cheeses are the memory of a craft. Each bite carried with it a family story, respect for the land and a passion for nature.



La Cumbre cheese dairy, Nueva Helvecia, Uruguay.

Amalia Lejavitzer | Universidad Católica del Uruguay (Uruguay)

A cheese in danger of extinction, a Creole dessert, and a Swiss tradition



Can there be a cheese in danger of extinction? Yes, there is one in Uruguay: the Yamandú. It was once a highly appreciated cheese, used mainly in the preparation of a traditional rural dessert called *queso y dulce* or *Martín Fierro*. The name, evocative of gaucho customs—recalling the character from José Hernández’s poem—in gastronomy refers to a slice of cheese topped with an equal-sized piece of quince paste (although there are also versions with pumpkin or sweet potato preserves). This simple, easy-to-make dessert offers a perfect balance between sweet and salty, between the fruit’s acidity and the cheese’s sharpness, and today it is served

with Colonia cheese. This is Uruguay’s most distinctive cheese, originating in Nueva Helvecia, also known as Colonia Suiza, named for the origins of its founders, who settled in 1861 on the eastern shore of the Río de la Plata. The Yamandú cheese that once accompanied the *Martín Fierro* ceased production in the second half of the twentieth century. Today, La Cumbre cheese dairy, run by the descendants of one of Nueva Helvecia’s founding families, has begun producing it again in an effort to recover the gastronomic heritage and memory of the region and the country. Past and present, tradition and innovation in one slice of *queso...* and *dulce*.



Charcuterie board featuring a mix of local cheeses by Rosalie, and imported varieties.

Photo: Maira Niode.

Amanda Katili Niode | Omar Niode Foundation (Jakarta, Indonesia)

Local cheese, global insight



Growing up in Indonesia, cheese was a rare luxury —expensive and unfamiliar in daily life. I only discovered its diversity in adulthood while traveling for work. The Netherlands introduced me to Gouda and Edam, while Italy revealed Grana Padano, Parmigiano Reggiano, and fresh mozzarella. Hard, aged cheeses with bold flavors, and soft, fresh varieties with delicate textures —each offered something new. Indonesia's tropical climate doesn't naturally support cheese-making, but we have dangke from Enrekang, South Sulawesi. Made from buffalo or cow's milk curdled with papaya leaf sap, it is usually grilled or fried and has a soft, firm texture, much

like cottage cheese. Today, Indonesian artisans are expanding the possibilities of local cheese. Rosalie Cheese in Bali crafts camembert, feta, halloumi, blue cheese, and many more varieties crafted from local cow and goat milk. Similarly, Mazaraat Artisan Cheese in Yogyakarta offers an evolving selection, including blue cheese, cheddar, gouda, and colby —alongside other creations made with Indonesian milk. In my sustainability work, I often highlight local solutions and reducing food miles. Cheese, once foreign to me, now symbolizes climate-conscious innovation. Eating locally made cheese in Indonesia connects tradition, craftsmanship, and the pursuit of a more sustainable food system.



Tender slices of Livno cheese gently bathed in golden olive oil, garnished with a single olive, served on a pristine white plate at Konoba Luka Sarajevo.

Amra Čaušević | University of Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

A taste of home: Livno cheese and moments that matter



There's something about Livno cheese that feels like home. This full-fat hard cheese from the south of Bosnia and Herzegovina isn't just a local specialty. It's a comforting presence at the table, whether during a laid-back evening with friends or a festive celebration. Aged with care and time, Livno cheese brings a depth of flavor that pairs beautifully with a glass of crisp white wine, inviting you to slow down and savor the moment. Often served as part of a meze, shared, passed around, enjoyed together,

it speaks of connection, hospitality, and tradition. It's more than taste, it's feeling. The kind that brings back memories of childhood kitchens, family stories, and the sunlit Herzegovinian hills. After a long day at work or when the weekend finally begins, Livno cheese becomes a small ritual, a slice of something familiar and real. It's a quiet celebration of patience, craft, and culture in every bite. In a fast-moving world, Livno cheese reminds us where we come from and how good it feels to simply sit, share, and enjoy.



The image shows an experimental environment designed to simulate a cheese tasting. It features spoons containing cheese and various biometric measuring tools that are used to carry out experiments.

Ana Moreno-Lobato | Universidad de Extremadura (Spain)

Say cheese!, and creating smiles: sensoryscapes as marketing tools



I belong to a research group (markeTUR) with extensive experience in studying gastronomic tourism marketing. Through various projects, we have focused particularly on cheese tourism. Due to the local nature of cheese production and its popularity as a food product, this is a key topic for academia, businesses, and local development. My doctoral thesis aimed to analyze the elicitation of emotions in cheese-related activities. Using psychophysiological methodologies, we analyzed implicit reactions in terms of sweat (arousal) response to sensoryscapes. These were created using images, smells, and music accompanying a simulated cheese tasting. Our findings revealed

that images of nature produced the most positive responses, that incongruent smells enhanced the experience due to the unpleasant odors of some cheeses, and that the inclusion of music (regardless of genre) heightened the emotional intensity of the experience. We also analyzed explicit results at real cheese fairs. Furthermore, these studies demonstrate the long-term relevance of this type of sensory experience in terms of improvements to quality of life, learning and memory, among others. The results also highlight the importance of the cheese product itself in achieving positive marketing outcomes. Taking part in cheese-related activities strengthens the inclusion of cheese in our daily lives.



Artisanal Rabaçal
Cheese: raw local sheep
and goat milk aged
in wooden shelves.

Ana Paula Becker Pinheiro | University of Coimbra (Portugal)

Artisanal cheesemaking in the Rabaçal village (Portugal)



Rabaçal cheese is an intangible cultural heritage (ICH) of Central Portugal with protected designation of origin (PDO). It is made with raw milk from pasture-fed sheep and goats from Serra da Sicó, where the Santa Maria herb imparts its aroma to the cheese, expressing its territoriality. In the Rabaçal village, artisanal cheese permeates history and socioeconomic development, intertwining with the identity of locals. In the accounts of elderly artisanal cheesemakers, until the 1990's, "everyone had livestock and made cheese; rich or poor, everyone made cheese to eat or to sell". The learning process began as a child, through the watchful eye of their

mother or grandmother. As adults, they incorporated the practice into their routines as a complement or a primary source of income, balancing double or triple shifts. Currently, few families keep livestock because the management is arduous, and younger generations didn't learn how to make cheese, or they have learned but don't make it due to the convenience of industrialized products. In this context, existing protection initiatives (PDO certification, cheese fairs and gastronomic routes) are ineffective as they primarily benefit factory-scale producers. Thus, local pastoralism and artisanal cheesemaking remain a critical risk factor in the region.



Latxa sheep grazing at a farm in Idiazabal, Spain, after being milked earlier that morning. Spring 2021.

Andrea Wintergerst | Food travel writer (USA)

When curds collide



Growing up surrounded by the likes of Quesillo, Cotija, and Panela, I always knew I liked cheese. What I didn't know was how much I would come to *love* it. From the moment I stepped into that small, family run cheese factory up in the Pays de Herve, pungent aromas assaulting my senses, I knew my path in life had taken a new direction. The rest of the summer of 2014 was spent learning the history of cheesemaking, observing every part of the process: from the milking of the cows, to the production and aging of the cheese, to

the transport to *Le Herve du Vieux Moulin* (the cheese shop belonging to the same family, located at the front of their home). And in the moments in between bites, we learnt how to identify and understand the nuances brought on by the terroir of each one. Many years later, it would be my turn to work at a dairy farm where I could share this art with others. Through all of the delicious morsels I've been lucky to try, though, the one that has stayed with me the longest has been that first Herve, and all the historical and culinary richness contained within that one little square.



Quesillo producers, officers from the Government of Oaxaca, and myself receive the Protected Geographical Indication for *Quesillo de Reyes Etlá, Oaxaca*, from the Mexican Institute of Industrial Property.

Photo: Emmanuel Castellanos.

Angélica Espinoza Ortega | Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México (Mexico)

Quesillo de Reyes Etlá, Oaxaca: first cheese with Protected Geographical Indication in Mexico



What a festive atmosphere! Multicoloured *china* paper fluttered on the ceiling to the rhythm of the band, contrasting with the ochre greens of the rustic stalls built with reeds typical of the region. The cheese shops displayed fresh cheeses seasoned with *chapulines* (grasshoppers) and *chillies*, *requesón* and, of course, '*Quesillo*', the reason for such excitement. Fourteen years before, I first arrived in *Reyes Etlá* as part of a research project on Mexican cheeses. The cheese makers shared me their interest in promoting *Quesillo* to protect it from unfair competition, a concern that matched my own. That dream came true on 19 June 2025, when the 'Protected Geographical Indication of *Quesillo de Reyes Etlá*' was awarded to producers and the Government of the State of *Oaxaca*, the first

cheese with this distinctive seal in Mexico. Behind us lay years of joint work, interviews, workshops with producers to characterise the *Quesillo*, blind tastings with consumers, laboratory analyses, visits to libraries, long sessions with the cheesemakers, and later with my wonderful team of students to organise the information. It is impossible to forget the last meeting when we finalised the Protected Geographical Indication application document. Don Lorenzo, the leader of the cheese makers' group, said with tears in his eyes what this achievement meant for them: "*It is the love we feel for our product, for something inherited from our parents and grandparents. It is a struggle to preserve it, not to lose it*". My infinite gratitude for the trust placed in me to lead and be part of this endeavour. There is still a long way to go, but the first and necessary step has been taken.



It's not just what we eat, but the roots, the time, and the passion that bring each cheese to life.

Arantxa Rey García | eDreams ODIGEO (Barcelona, Spain)

A sensory journey to Xerigots



My first cheese tasting took place at Xerigots, a unique space located in Vilafranca del Penedès, where cheese becomes art. From the beginning, their philosophy amazed me: they are not simply cheese refiners, but authentic caretakers of time and flavor. The visit began with a presentation of their project, which combines tradition, innovation, and absolute respect for the product. We toured their facilities, passing through the workrooms and reaching a small underground cellar where the

cheeses mature in silence, as if breathing at their own rhythm. The tasting was the cherry on top: an exquisite selection of local, national, and international cheeses, paired with carefully chosen wines. Each tasting was a story, a place, a unique texture that stirred unexpected emotions. It was a complete sensory experience, enriching and deeply delicious. For any cheese lover, and even for the curious, discovering Xerigots is like opening a door to the soul of cheese. An experience I still treasure, with the flavor of discovery.



A man churning milk inside a goat hide with limbs, seated on a patterned rug in a rustic stone-and-wood dwelling. A small fire burns in a stove nearby, with a woman tending it. On the side, a wooden bowl holds round white balls of qurt cheese, representing the end product of the tharingi crafting process.

Asif Hussain | Sustainability and Resilience Institute (Christchurch, New Zealand)

Cheese of the Silk Road: how kurt, qurt or burtz sustained generations



If you travel to Gilgit, in the magnificent Himalaya, Karakoram and Hindukush ranges of Gilgit-Baltistan, you may come across something that looks like white chocolate truffles. At first glance, it seems a sweet treat, but you'll soon discover these are hardened balls of salty, sour cheese. Known locally as qurt, kurt, or brutz, this dry cheese is made from fermented milk and has long been a symbol of indigenous and nomadic ingenuity. Packed with calcium and protein, it sustained generations on the move. Its many names reflecting a long journey; kashk in Iran, chortan in Armenia, and aaruul in Mongolia. As indigenous person from Gilgit, I believe the origin of qurt lies not in one place, but on the Silk Road itself. Nomads carried yak, horse, sheep, or camel milk in animal-skin bags

called Tharingi (in Shina Language). As my ancestors travelled across the vast steppe, heat and motion fermented the milk. The rhythm of horses or marching feet churned it into curds. Once drained, dried, and salted, these became solid, portable nuggets of nutrition, ideal for life in isolated communities. For centuries, this humble by-product of milk, born of necessity, became a staple of strength and resilience. Fresh, qurt is soft and mild, but with time it hardens, gaining a sharp tang and long shelf life. In my family, my mother, aunties and grandmothers shaped qurt by hand, leaving fingerprints that helped it dry evenly. Today, in markets, some appear as perfect spheres, perhaps to meet tourist expectations, but those with fingerprints still carry the taste of memory.



Homemade Turkish sourdough bread and dry Chechil cheese with Turkish tea.

Bendegul Okumus | Rosen College of Hospitality Management, University of Central Florida
(Orlando, FL, USA), **Omer Aras** | St Clare's (Oxford, United Kingdom)

Chechil Cheese (Cecil Peyniri)



Chechil Cheese (Cecil Peyniri), also known as “string cheese” (Tel peyniri) in Turkish, embodies the spirit of Türkiye’s eastern regions (e.g., Ardahan, Kars, Erzurum). The cheese is also popular in Armenia and Georgia. Traditionally made from the finest cow’s or sheep’s milk—or a harmonious blend of both—Çeçil is a testament to artisanal craftsmanship. Skillfully kneaded by hand, the cheese is transformed into long, delicate strands, braided or rolled to create its signature stringy texture. This age-old technique not only cultivates the cheese’s captivating appearance but also elevates its delightful texture and rich flavor, offering

a truly inspiring culinary experience. This cheese, cherished in both its fresh and dried-aged forms, embodies the essence of breakfast in the eastern regions of Turkey. Paired with warm, homemade bread and a perfectly brewed cup of Turkish tea, it transforms any morning into a delightful experience. Fresh, it radiates a bright white hue, while its dried version showcases a remarkable gray-green color, believed to offer natural antibiotic properties. With its unique flavor and captivating aroma, this centuries-old cheese stands as a testament to tradition and is an essential presence on Turkish tables.



A place worth visiting
because of a cheese.

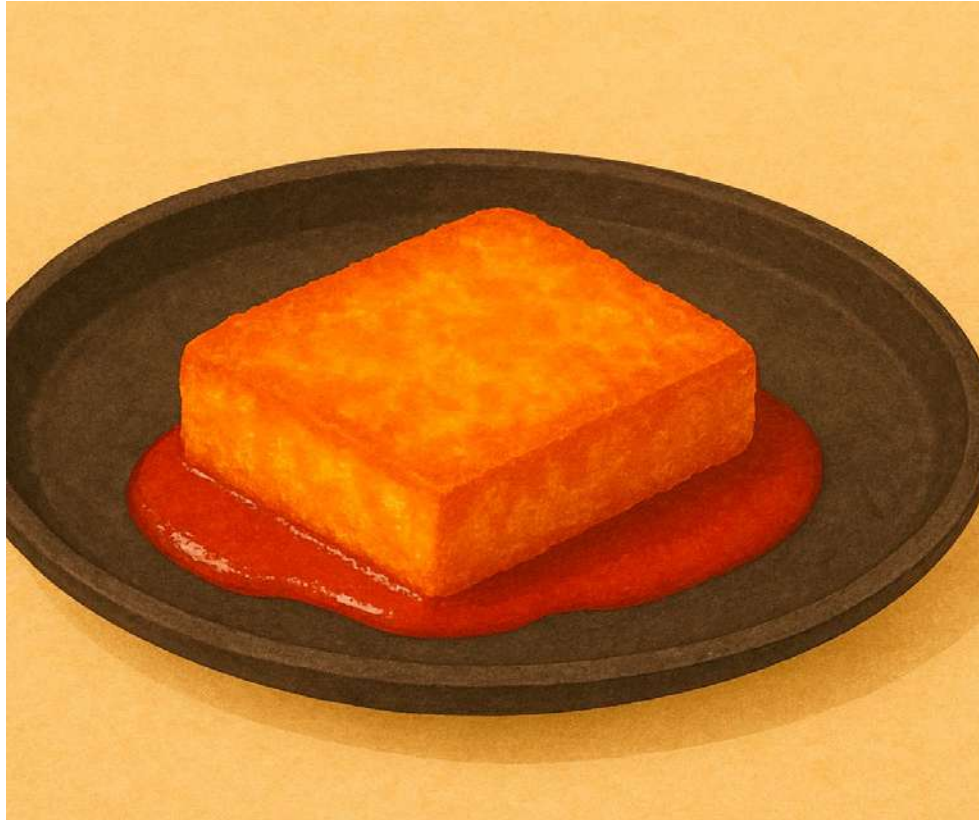
Berta Ferrer-Rosell | University of Lleida (Spain)

From local to global



The name of the cheese “Serrat Gros” strongly resonates to me. I was born in the same small village, located in the Catalan Pre-Pyrenees, at 1250 meters above the sea, as this cheese brand in the early ‘80s. When I was young, and living in the village, I worked at the cheese factory helping the founder to clean, to wrap the cheeses to be sold or to produce one of the most delicious and local varieties of cheese (the “tupi”). After many years, my future husband also worked at the factory, but at that time it was the excuse for him

to move from Barcelona to the village, to start a new life in the village. “Serrat Gros” cheeses have been awarded in several international competitions, so we can affirm that one of the best Spanish cheeses born in that very tiny village has been recognized worldwide. Many visitors came to the village to see the goats and to buy cheese (and other handmade products). I feel really proud of that achievement as well as grateful to the founders for making our village a place that was worth visiting.



A golden-brown fried cheese square served on a dark round plate, resting on a pool of rich red guava sauce.

Image generated by ChatGPT based on the author's description.

Brenda G. Mejia | Traveleira (San Juan, Puerto Rico)

Sweet and savory: the Caribbean's relationship with cheese



In Puerto Rico, the relationship with cheese recalls rituals of the past and blends with other elements to turn it into an experience. One of the classic beverages served during funerals is hot chocolate. This is usually paired with Queso de Papa, which is simply the local interpretation and variation of cheddar cheese. Typically, the queso de papa is dipped into the hot chocolate to create a contrast of flavors. A few months ago,

Bad Bunny mentioned that this cheese was one of his favorite cravings. Another classic pairing features the country's fresh cheese—a porous-textured cheese ideal for frying— together with guava paste or quince paste. This combination is a classic in its raw form, or occasionally, the cheese is fried and paired with a guava sauce. In conclusion, for us in the Caribbean, there is no better pairing for cheese than one that brings a sweet flavor.



The inland landscape of the South Island of New Zealand, source of the milk of some of the best artisan cheeses in the country.

C. Michael Hall | Massey University Business School, Massey University (Albany, Auckland, New Zealand)

Reira whenua: the experiencescape of the cheese of Aotearoa New Zealand



Aotearoa is a place of cheese. Long a producer of colonial influenced cheddar and European style cheese the country is coming expressing its own landscape in the production of cheese. Although cheesemaking is an imported tradition, cheesemaking along with the bacteria and the animal breeds that produce it is slowly adapting and taking onboard local influences and innovations providing new flavour profiles and directions in taste and style. Cheesemaking is therefore mirroring the story of New Zealand wine and what is now happening with gin and spirits where what is produced becomes an expression of place. Not terroir, as this is the colonialism of the Old World, but reira whenua an expression from Māori,

the Indigenous language of Aotearoa. We know that cheese expresses place but what is underappreciated, especially in times of protectionism, is that cheese is also part of a food diaspora in which ideas, tastes, and making, travel internationally, each finding their roots in different locations to be then commoditized. So it is here. Because of European protectionism, many of the diasporic cheeses of Aotearoa cannot be called by the names of their European forebears. Local names are therefore now being adopted. The identity of cheese is therefore of place but related to its whakapapa (forebears) and to the experiences we have with it. To experience New Zealand cheese is therefore not only to experience the country but also to dine with your history and taste the future.



Oscypek cheeses displayed for sale in a Zakopane tourist market.

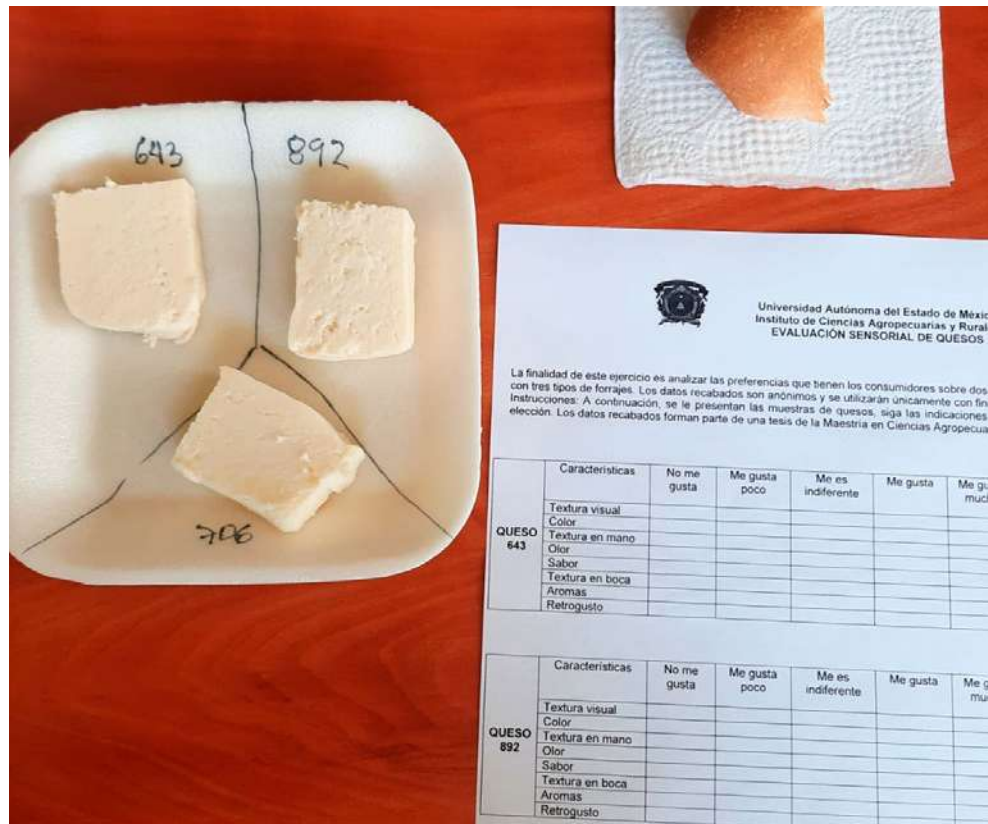
Carina Ren | Aalborg University (Denmark)

Tourism cheese – how cheese builds destinations



In 2006-2007, I conducted fieldwork on destination development in Zakopane, an iconic mountain destination in Poland, talking to local and foreign tourism actors about their work. During my stay, I became fascinated by oscypek, a smoked sheep cheese offered on sale along the streets of Zakopane. While I saw it as a distraction from research at first, I became increasingly interested in understanding what this cheese could teach me about Zakopane. By retracing how the cheese was produced, sold, marketed and priced and how different actors supported or challenged how this took place, I was able to show that different 'versions' of oscypek

was part of building the destination. Sheep farmers, insisting on ancestral modes of production and ingredients to produce a traditional cheese, were challenged by national requirements of hygiene and storage of a more modern cheese. A third authentic version of the cheese emerged as oscypek became AOC certified, which entailed strict rules and labeling and higher prices. In that sense, the three cheese 'versions' and how they came about served as a gateway to also understanding Zakopane as both a traditional village, an international tourist destination and a heritage site, co-existing side by side.



Sensory evaluation of Molido cheese produced with small-scale farmers in the municipality of Aculco, State of Mexico.

Carla Ivonne Ortega González | Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Tianguistenco (Mexico)

“Molido Cheese” saved my career (and my love for gastronomy)



We all question at least once whether the career we’ve chosen is truly what we want. That was my case. After graduating in Gastronomy, I completed internships and worked in high-end restaurants like Azurmendi, Eneko, Regueiro Restaurante, Tetelán, and Masala y Maíz. Though surrounded by exceptional products, including artisanal cheeses, something didn’t fit. I felt the pace of professional kitchens wasn’t my path. In 2022, I nearly walked away from it all. But a professor encouraged me to explore gastronomic research. That’s how I arrived at the *Instituto de Ciencias Agropecuarias y Rurales*, where Dr. Carlos Manuel Arriaga Jordán, my *cheese savior*, proposed a revelatory project: to analyze the physicochemical and sensory properties of *queso molido* (ground

cheese) made from the milk of cows fed sorghum silage. “Molido” cheese is a traditional product from northwestern Estado de México. Its name comes from its production process: the curd is air-dried for 12 to 48 hours before being ground and pressed. Simple yet deeply meaningful, this was the cheese that brought my family and me together every Sunday after buying vegetables at the local market. My father never missed the ritual amid the groceries, there was always room for that cheese, which, unbeknownst to us, would years later become the heart of my research. During my master’s journey, I discovered how cattle feeding methods influence the texture, acidity, and aroma of this unique cheese and I realized that cheese research had led me to my true passion: the science behind flavor, and to dedicating myself to what I am now.



La Val “Cincha” with rosemary: Raw white paste and intense but mild flavor with penetrating aroma and pleasant taste of rosemary. Made in Mezquita de Jarque, Teruel (Spain).

Carmina Fandos Herrera | Universidad de Zaragoza (Spain)

Quesos Artesanos La Val: my childhood memories



Teruel is a land of ham with Protected Designation of Origin, no one doubts that, but in cheese it is not far behind. There are very famous artisan cheeses such as Tronchón, Sierra de Albarracín, Zariche de Celadas, Patamulo de Fambar, cheeses infused with wine, made with sheep, goat or cow milk, for all tastes and with many awards. But for me one of the most special is the rosemary cheese made by Quesos La Val in Mezquita de Jarque. It is a very special cheese, because when you eat it, the rosemary transports you to nature and also brings

back memories of when I was a child. My grandmother was born in Mezquita de Jarque, my father in Cuevas de Almudén and my mother and her parents in Jarque de la Val, villages in a small region north of Teruel, characterized by its stunning landscapes, traditional architecture and rural atmosphere, where I used to go as a child to spend my vacations and was very happy. That fusion between the enjoyment of a rosemary flavor and the emotion that evokes you to the past, to your childhood, is the true reflection of happiness. Long life to the cheeses of Teruel!



White Modenese cows, renowned for the Parmigiano Reggiano cheese made from their milk, at Stefano Fogacci's farm in Tizzano Val Parma, Reggio Emilia, Italy.

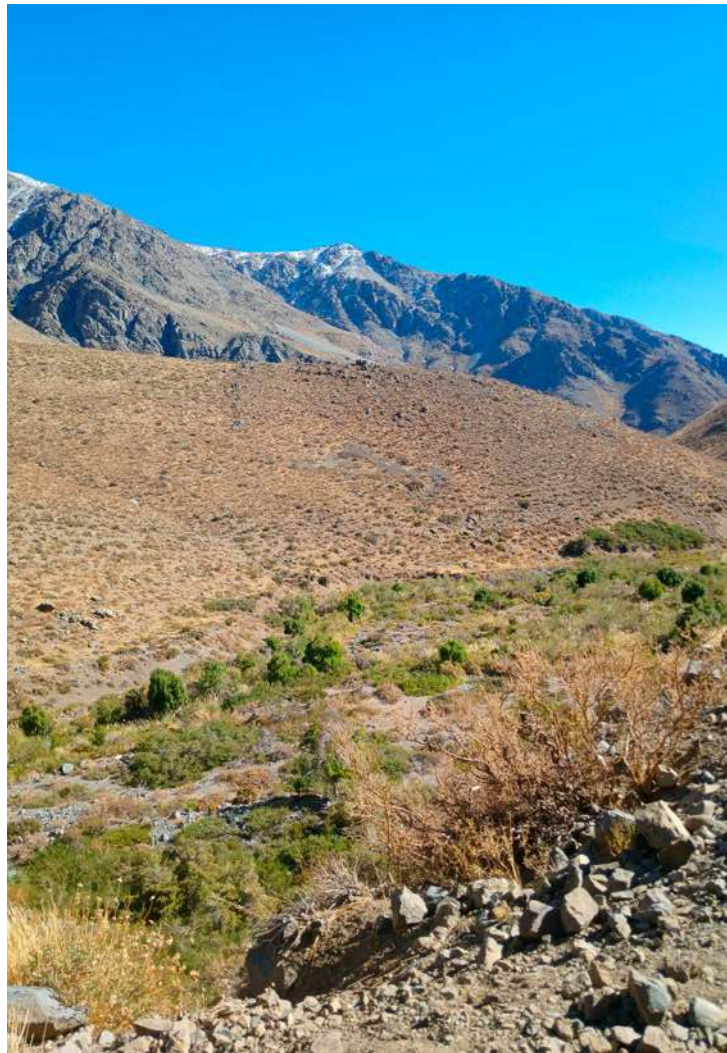
Carole Counihan | Millersville University (Pennsylvania, USA)

Come eat cheese at the farm



eagerly gazed at the plate of cheeses made from the valued milk of White Modenese cows, whom I had just met in their stalls. There were five kinds and ages of cheese, including a piece of prized Parmigiano Reggiano. I was at Stefano Fogacci's agrotourism farm in Tizzano Val Parma, in the Apennine foothills of Emilia Romagna, Italy, as part my ethnographic fieldwork on the Slow Food movement. Before going to his farm, I had spent the day with Stefano at the Bologna Slow Food farmers market where he sold cheese and meat sauce made from his heirloom White Modenese cattle. This breed was long favored in the region because it provided

dependable work, good meat, and ideal milk for Parmigiano Reggiano cheese, which was branded with Protected Designation of Origin and Slow Food Presidium certifications. But White Modenese cattle had become almost extinct in favor of the more productive Friesian breed, and some small farmers like Stefano were bringing them back. He invited me to his farm to meet these sturdy little white cows because he believed that interaction with farm country—*la campagna*—was crucial to the survival of traditional regenerative farming culture materialized in its delectable cheeses and their cows, people, and land.



View of the path to the mine. Panoramic view of the road to the lapis lazuli mine among the mountains of the Andes range, Alto Limarí, Coquimbo Region, Chile.

Carolina Cofré Silva | San Sebastián University, Santiago de Chile (Chile)

The soul of Alto Limarí in every bite



Traveling the winding roads of Alto Limarí is like tracing the heartbeat of the land. Each curve reveals something: lapis lazuli workshops, ancestral pisco distilleries, and mountaintop trails that echo with the footsteps of herders —untouched nature, thriving biodiversity, and deep cultural resilience. There, hidden along the path to the lapis lazuli mine, I found one of the most delicious goat cheeses I've ever tasted: a white, creamy cheese with a pleasantly salty, smooth flavor. Each bite made me think of the long hours herders spend in isolation, accompanied only by

their flock and the vastness of nature. I thought of all the work they put in to bring us the fruits of their effort and patience —wonders like that cheese I tasted, or the *charqui* I saw when I visited their shelter. I thought about how that flavor comes from goats that still graze freely, and from ancestral knowledge passed down through generations —now at risk of fading away. And I thought about the importance of valuing those gifts of nature and human ingenuity that, however simple, nourish the soul. Each bite is a testimony to a living cultural mosaic that deserves recognition, celebration, and protection.



Japanese sakura cheese and leaf at Cheese no Koe, Tokyo.

Author: Jonathan Deamer, *Wikimedia Commons*, under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.

Caroline S.L. Tan | University of Tsukuba (Japan)

The cheese that blooms: tasting the spirit of sakura in cheese



Say “cheese” and most think of smiling for the camera or classic favourites like Brie, Feta, Mozzarella di Bufala, or Pecorino di Pienza. But I think of Sakura (Cherry Blossom) cheese, not just for its flavour, but for what it symbolises. Made at Kyodo Gakusha Shintoku Farm in Tokachi, Hokkaido, Sakura cheese is soft, seasonal, and uniquely Japanese. It’s crafted from the milk of Brown Swiss cows bred on the farm, fermented with sake yeast, and matured for just 10 days. Each round is adorned with a salted sakura blossom and wrapped in a sakura leaf. Available only from mid-January to mid-April, it’s as fleeting as the

cherry blossoms themselves. Despite Japan not being known for cheese, this one won gold at the Mountain Cheese Olympics in Switzerland twice, a testament to its exceptional quality. What makes Sakura cheese so special to me isn’t just its delicate, nuanced taste. It’s the way it captures what it represents: transience, renewal, and transformation. It’s more than cheese. In every bite, it also captures the spirit of spring, the beauty of impermanence, the grace of seasonal living, and the harmony of East meeting West. And like sakura it’s named after, it reminds us to savour the moment because it won’t last forever.



The image depicts Camembert being conserved at room temperature on my family's fridge in the Calvados region of Normandy.

Cécile Chauvat | Icelandic Museum of Natural History (Reykjavík, Iceland)

The taste of home



Growing up in Normandy I assumed that having a full cheese aisle in the supermarket dedicated to all the different kinds was simply the norm. Cheese was part of daily life. Most memorably, a Camembert set on its side on top of the fridge was a constant throughout my childhood, placed there to achieve perfect ripeness at room temperature. Then, I moved to Iceland and had to adjust to a world where cheese is often reduced to a serviceable yellow block. A few months in, my family tried mailing me some Raclette to tide me over;

but after a customs misunderstanding that left me cheeseless and, I imagine, an Icelandic office somewhere dangerously smelly, I had to accept that this would not be an option. These days, I have bland cheese on pizza and sandwiches, and not much more. That's why it means so much to me that when I come back to my parents' house about once a year, I am always welcomed by a Camembert on the fridge. The cheese is creamy and still slightly crumbly in the middle, the fridge is covered with family photos and postcards, and I know I am home.



Tourists gather around cows and a farmer in front of a mountain malga, learning about alpine cheese production through direct, hands-on experience. The initiative was developed through an action research process curated by the author, whose work on food heritage and community practices inspired this form of storytelling.

Chiara Massacesi | Free University of Bozen-Bolzano (Italy)

Adopt a Barn: where cheese becomes a story



In the Italian Dolomites, within the Valle di Primiero, in Trentino, the initiative Adopt a Barn invites hotel guests to engage with the alpine cheesescape through a direct connection with local farmers. Each hotel adopts a specific barn, offering guests the chance to visit “their” farmer. The farmer becomes more than a milk producer, a narrator of everyday life, guiding visitors through spaces of production and care, showing how hay is dried, how animals are fed, how milk

is collected. This encounter, set among meadows and forests, allows guests to experience the rhythms and materialities of mountain life. Children interact with the cows, adults ask questions, and everyone begins to understand the knowledge embedded in the taste of the cheese. Back at the hotel, the tasting of cheese becomes more than pleasure. It is the end of a relational journey. The cheese now has a story, a landscape, and a name, a shared narrative of place, people and practice.



A plate with a round of fresh ricotta and pasta dressed with ricotta, set against the backdrop of the sea in Santa Caterina dello Ionio, Calabria.

Claudia Franzè | American University of Beirut Mediterraneo (Paphos, Cyprus)

Pasta with ricotta: a Calabrian taste of home



The taste of pasta with fresh ricotta is my heart's home, Southern Italy. Though humble, this dish carries the weight of memory and tradition in my family. Ricotta has been made since the 1930s, when my grandfather Nicola tended his cows in Santa Caterina dello Ionio, a hilltop village in Calabria nestled above the Ionian Sea. This is a place where olive trees grow wild, fig branches stretch across stone walls, the land rewards those who respect its rhythms, time moves slowly, and traditions remain rooted in the earth. Ricotta is made only after the cow gives birth, as that's when

milk becomes available. Cheese is made first, and then the leftover whey is gently heated until soft white curds rise to the surface, carefully scooped into baskets to drain, capturing the delicate essence of milk, season, and craft. From March to May, when cows graze on fresh grass, the flavor is sharper, more intense. In summer, as they eat hay, the taste softens. Yet always, the flavor is unmistakable. This dish is shared at the family table, rich in memory. With leftover ricotta, we make *scarpetta*: cleaning the plate with fresh bread to savor every last taste of home.



Huerna Valley
(Asturias, Spain),
where my father's
family come from.

Covadonga Ordóñez García | Universidad de Alicante (Spain)

Between tradition and modernity



Some years ago, during one of our visits to Asturias, we bought, with some excitement, a cheese we had once tasted before: *Afuega'l Pitu*, a cow's milk cheese, recognized with Protected Designation of Origin since 2003. To my surprise, when we brought it home, it brought back memories to my father, an Asturian born in a mountain village during the postwar years of the Spanish Civil War. The taste carried him back to childhood: a sheepskin bag hanging in the kitchen, where his grandfather would pour in the curds from leftover milk, day after day. It was almost ceremonial, with a ladle, the curds were gently stirred inside the bag, so they would take on the flavor of what had

come before. You could take out as much as you had put in. No more, no less. Only when there was a little extra, the cheese was tied in a *fardela de trapu*, a cloth bundle, and taken to the attic to dry. It was a cheese meant to be shared. If yours turned out well, you gave a piece to a neighbor, to mix into theirs, or to help start a new sheepskin bag. Today, *Afuega'l Pitu* rests proudly on cheese boards, carrying medals, a PDO seal, and gathering guests from far beyond these valleys. But it was born from humility, from families gathered around a table, making the most of what little they had, and creating, without knowing it, a flavor that would last across generations.



Cheese Koththu, the top choice that delights the taste buds of thousands of Sri Lankans and foreign tourists. Enjoy the hospitality that is unique to Sri Lankans and become a fan of *Cheese Koththu*.

D.Chaminda Deepal Jayawardana | Independent researcher (Kadawatha, Sri Lanka)

A Sri Lankan culinary icon



Now officially recognised as *Koththu* by the Oxford Dictionary. *Cheese Koththu* is a beloved Sri Lankan Street food sensation that ignites the senses, especially when savoured under the warm glow of bustling restaurants at night. Picture a hot griddle where chopped roti dances with crisp vegetables, aromatic spices, and gooey, melted cheese, all while the rhythmic clang-clang of the cook's metal blades orchestrates the preparation. Every mouthful is a celebration of bold, addictive flavours, fiery chilli, earthy spices, and the luscious creaminess of cheese

melding into perfection. The contrast of crispy edges and soft, chewy roti, drenched in rich, molten cheese, creates an irresistible harmony. Whether relished at a lively roadside stall, a humble local joint, or a chic hotel paired with cocktails, *Cheese Koththu* delivers pure, unapologetic glee to whoever is tasting this delicacy. More than just a dish, it's an experience, a taste of Sri Lanka's vibrant street food culture that lingers on the palate and in memory. For those who crave bold, comforting flavours, *Cheese Koththu* is a must-try, leaving you longing for just one more bite.



Zlatibor region cheese from Naša Zlatka dairy.

Photo: Naša Zlatka dairy.

Darko Dimitrovski | University of Kragujevac (Vrnjačka Banja, Serbia)

Nature on the table – Zlatibor in the heart



At Zlatibor Mountain, I encountered a story as much about people and territory as it was about cheese. Zlatibor Mountain lies in Western Serbia and it is known for its spacious plateau intersected by mountain streams and covered by thick grass and conifer tree forest. Naša Zlatka Dairy is an excellent example of how organic production can contribute to the local economy and the preservation of tradition, creating milk products in which nature, community and tradition intertwine. Their organic production without artificial additives and pesticides is not just a trend —it is a sincere commitment to a healthier life of local community. Cheese was made from milk taken from small family-run

farms scattered across the pastures of the mountain of Zlatibor, where farmers were perceived as guardians rather than suppliers. Cheese was prepared on the basis of traditional recipes that have passed from one generation to another, including authentic local herbs. Cheese was served on rustic wooden boards as heart and triangle-shaped slices of paprika-dusted cheese and blue-veined wedges together with garlic, tomatoes and oven-baked bread, mirroring the shapes and colours of the Zlatibor landscape. Eating this cheese is a deeply cultural experience as every bite submerges you in the land, people and stories, and highlights the authenticity and slowness of the experience.



Greek Feta cheese atop a vibrant summer salad, bursting with juicy tomatoes, crisp cucumbers, peppers, onions, olives, and a sprinkle of oregano, glistening with golden olive oil.

Dimitrios Buhalis | Bournemouth University (United Kingdom)

When Feta cheese met Greek salad at the Naxos Island seaside



After a refreshing swim in the turquoise waters of Agios Prokopios beach in Naxos, Greece I made my way to a traditional seaside taverna, drawn by the aromas of olive oil and wild herbs. Under the shade of a pergola, I ordered a horiatiki —the classic Greek village salad, a cornerstone of Greek gastronomy. It arrived in its rustic glory: sun-ripened Naxian tomatoes, crisp cucumbers, thinly sliced red onions, and green peppers, all tossed with local olives and topped with a thick slab of PDO-certified Feta cheese. The Feta —made from sheep and goat’s milk and matured to perfection— was creamy, tangy, and

slightly crumbly, offering a salty contrast to the juicy vegetables. A generous drizzle of extra virgin olive oil from local groves and a sprinkle of fragrant oregano brought the dish to life. Every bite echoed the island’s culinary traditions —simple ingredients elevated by their purity and provenance. Greek gastronomy celebrates the land, the seasons, and shared moments. That lunch, enjoyed barefoot by the sea with the Aegean breeze around me, embodied the heart of the Mediterranean diet. Light, nourishing, and deeply rooted in culture, it was the perfect summer meal, steeped in the timeless flavors of Greece.



Emotions shared
with the cows in the
Sicily region, Italy.

Photo: Grazia Cassarino.

Donatella Privitera | University of Catania (Italy)

Differently cheese: an experience for an inclusive society



Everything begins with a project called “Differently Abled and Inclusive Trekking”, where nature, walking, and agrotherapy become tools of inclusion, solidarity, and shared well-being. Amid the gentle hills of the Iblei, where the air smells of wild thyme and the clouds look like sheep on holiday, a group of special young people arrives at a small social dairy farm in Monterosso Almo (Ragusa, Italy). They are welcomed by Valentina and Palmira, their faces dusted with floury smiles and voices made for storytelling. Here, the skilled hands and expertise of the cheesemakers form the very soul of production. “Today we’ll all become cheesemakers!” they exclaim, leading the group into the barn, where curious cows and goats peek out of nowhere. The

younger pet the animals, observe and try the milking, and laugh when a sheep sneezes. In the dairy, each participant receives a little gift—an honorary badge for budding masters of taste. Their hands dive into the curd, and their eyes sparkle at the magic of milk turning into cheese. Between one explanation and the next, they taste warm *Ricotta*, fragrant *Caciocavallo Ragusano*, and aged *Pecorino Siciliano* with flavors of sun and stone. The afternoon ends beneath a carob tree, with music, storytelling, and a large wooden table overflowing with flavour. The younger write thoughts on postcards scented with basil: “Today I learned that cheese is made with heart”. And in the golden light of sunset, everything feels possible. Emotions given, and emotions received.



An Orkney farmhouse cheese on a wooden board surrounded by local biscuits with a sprig of rosemary in front of a small standing stone.

Donna Heddle | UHI Institute for Northern Studies, University of the Highlands and Islands (Orkney, Scotland)

A bite of history: Orkney farmhouse cheese



Far away to the north, set in stormy seas, is a green and fertile archipelago which nonetheless has appeared on maps of the world since they first emerged. Travellers have come here since the dawn of time. Orkney is populated by ancient and resourceful people whose ancestors created the mighty Neolithic monuments which are recognized the world over. There are everyday wonders too. One of these is Orkney farmhouse cheese. This is a lightly salted white cheese traditionally made on every farm. It is eaten fresh or after drying by the prevailing

Orkney winds. It has fed Orcadians for generations as a staple but has also adapted to the modern era in delicious recipes like deep fried Orkney cheese with fruit sauce. This is now a recognised delicacy offered in our restaurants and part of the canon of Orkney fare along with seafood, fudge, lamb, beremeal, and clapsnot. Orcadians like it best in its natural state with Orkney butter and local biscuits. To me, it is a distillation of the Orcadian spirit, adaptable and yet a constant part of Orcadian identity as long lasting and significant as our standing stones.



Fresh sheep's milk *recuit* setting in a terracotta pot in the Empordà region, Catalonia.

Eduard Vidal Portés | Universitat Ramon Llull (Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain)

Recuit: a connection with my ancestors



Every time I open a jar of rosemary honey and pour some over a shaky spoonful of *recuit*, I'm back in the Empordà countryside with my grandparents. Their neighbours —old friends with a small flock of sheep— made this fresh cheese the traditional way: warm evening milk, a little rennet and a linen cloth so the curds could rest overnight. At sunrise they stopped by our house and left a bundle that was still warm and gently steaming. Opening that cloth was a family

moment. We sat around the kitchen table, joked about who would taste it first and then fell silent when the *recuit* touched our tongues —cold, creamy, slightly wobbly. One quick swirl of our cousins' thick rosemary honey made it taste like pure Empordà sunshine. I love *recuit* because it's more than food; it's a shortcut to shared mornings, local stories and the feeling that the best things in life are enjoyed together —ideally before the coffee is even ready.



Cheese souvenirs of Old Amsterdam Cheese Shop at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam.

Eerang Park | Edith Cowan University (Western Australia)

Take-home Gouda, take-home flavour of the Netherlands



Today's travellers are so passionate about food that they journey to taste the flavours of other cultures, eager to bring key ingredients home to continue the experience. For these travellers, and for a food enthusiast like myself, a local supermarket can be a shopping paradise. While the quintessential image of a local cheese experience is often one of freshly made cheese on a picturesque farm, the reality is that food is an integral part of daily life. Therefore, convenient, everyday access offers the most authentic way to appreciate a region's culinary identity. My encounters with the cheese scene in the Netherlands—in supermarkets, street shops, and

farmers' markets—proved this to be true, immersing me in the countless varieties of Dutch Gouda. Surrounded by so many cheeses, each telling a different story, I wondered how locals made their everyday choices. "We're born with cheese", a Dutch acquaintance told me. "Our instinct knows what to choose". Her words echoed in my ears every time I shopped for cheese during my short stay in the Netherlands. When it was time to return home, I roamed the shops at Amsterdam airport, hunting for a symbol of the Netherlands. There was only one option for me: cheese. It was a showcase of Dutch foodways, a beautifully packaged, take-home identity ready to fly anywhere in the world.



The rough beauty of Serra da Estrela landscape where the *Bordaleira* and *Churra Mondegueira*, two distinct breeds of sheep native from the area of Serra da Estrela and inland Centre Region of Portugal, graze and whose milk is used to craft *Serra da Estrela* cheese, and where the thistle that flavours it grows.

Elisabete Figueiredo | University of Aveiro (Portugal)

Serra da Estrela Cheese – a memory made solid, a taste of my roots



Both of my parents were born and raised in small villages in the *Serra da Estrela*, where what is perhaps Portugal's most famous cheese —*Queijo da Serra* ('Serra da Estrela' Cheese)— has been made for generations. After moving to Lisbon, and during my childhood, they never failed to return 'home' each summer, taking my sister and me with them. From those visits, I carry vivid, cherished memories —the flavours of family and tradition that time has only made more precious: my grandmother's bean and cabbage soup, the peaches from her small orchard, tasting like no others ever have or ever will, the lamb, goat and pork meat, the *Bravo de Esmolfe* apples from my cousin João's orchard, and those slow, quiet breakfasts at Aunt Otília's, where there was

always a wheel of young, uncured *Queijo da Serra* —utterly impossible to find in Lisbon. For me, even as a child, going 'home' meant returning to those flavours, to the ritual of eating bread and cheese beneath the dappled shade of my grandmother Berta's vine-covered pergola. Back then, this cheese wasn't yet protected by any PDO certification. But it was *Queijo da Serra* in its truest, full of the spirit of the raw, untamed soul of those harsh and beautiful mountains. A cheese shaped by the slow rhythm of those villages and endless summers, by the hands and hearts of people who still remembered how things had always been done. To me, this cheese is memory made solid, a tradition passed from hand to hand, and a taste of a home that, in so many ways, no longer exists —except in me.



Manual treatment of the cheese after curding, draining the whey with clean cloth.

Photo: Sofia Serra.

Elisabeth Kastenholz | University of Aveiro (Portugal)

Queijo da Serra – Central Portugal



Queijo da Serra is a renowned Portuguese cheese from the Serra da Estrela mountains, crafted for centuries using milk from the Bordaleira Serra da Estrela sheep. These sheep graze on nutrient-rich mountain pastures throughout the year, contributing to the cheese's distinct flavor. The transformation of the milk using cardoon thistle results in the cheese's creamy texture and special taste. Maturation occurs in carefully controlled curing chambers, where each cheese is turned by hand over weeks or even months. Beyond its culinary significance, Queijo da Serra is central to immersive cultural and tourism experiences in the region, which preserve and share traditional methods of cheese production, such as 'Production Workshops', where visitors learn to make cheese alongside local women. These workshops offer deeper

insights into traditional cheesemaking, culinary customs, and the ancient practice of Transhumance —the seasonal movement of livestock between lowlands and high-altitude pastures. They are also hands-on experiences permitting meaningful social interaction with locals. Such interaction is also possible when participating in a 'Transhumance experience' for a day. It is not just about accompanying the herds, but about experiencing the shepherds' routine and understanding their deep connection with the mountains. Tourists are invited to walk side-by-side with the sheep and goats and listen to the shepherds' stories. Such experiences offer more than a taste of cheese —they create lasting memories through meaningful engagement with the region's heritage, landscapes, and people, generating emotional ties and making visitors loyal to both Serra da Estrela and its unique cheese.



Norvegia® cheese and local butter placed on my grandmother's cheese plate with her finest cheese grader on top. In front, newly baked rolls with melted butter and cheese.

Ellen-Johanne Kvalsvik | UiT The Arctic University of Tromsø (Norway)

A Gouda memory of Norwegian everyday life



I put bars of butter and cheese on my grandmother's old cheese plate. The word "Ost" (eng. cheese) sparsely decorates the plate in golden letters. As I lay her finest cheese grader on top, I remember the smell of newly baked rolls that once lured us towards her kitchen. A spread of lightly salted homemade butter quickly melted under large sheets of white cheese. The soft, but not creamy, sweet and salty tasting cheese, easily melted on warm rolls. It was better than candy and still brings out memories of a comfortable childhood surrounded by caring grandparents. In my childhood, Norvegia® was the only

white cheese available in my grandparents shop at Sørøya in Northern Norway. It arrived in carton boxes containing large blocks of cheese. The name Norvegia® covered the box in large red, white and blue letters, but adults strangely referred to it as gouda. Later, I discovered that the original name was Norwegian Gouda. After exporting the Norwegian cheese to other countries, the Dutch claimed the rights to the name Gouda in the 1950s. Today Norvegia® is the most popular cheese in everyday households in Norway, but it is my memories that makes me serve it to my child.



An assorted basket with various cheeses, including a pistachio-flavoured pecorino, found at a small street market in Sicily.

Image generated by ChatGPT based on the author's description.

Emme Vall | Independent researcher (Italy)

The flavors of pecorino



Walking through the small streets of an Italian city early in the morning created a special atmosphere to start the day with lots of energy. We found some spectacular markets and shops selling fresh and high-quality products. I couldn't resist tasting some of the products they kindly offered—including, of course, the cheese. In this case, it was pecorino, made from sheep's milk and very healthy, especially due to its high protein content. It is also one of the dairy products consumed in the Blue Zones, particularly in Sardinia, one

of the Blue Zones of the planet. Pecorinos come in many flavors: truffle, pepperoncini, wine... and much more, depending largely on the natural area where they are produced and the creativity of the artisan. Artisans to power! One variety I fell in love with was pistachio, a product also from their land, which, to me, fits perfectly. The contrast of pistachio integrated into the cheese gives it a delicious taste and makes for a good appetizer. This cheese was made for me. *Buon appetito*, taste it if you haven't yet. It's truly delicious!



Enjoying local Brač cheese and olives paired with Pošip wine while watching the sunset over the Adriatic Sea from the *riva* in Supetar, Brač.

Ena Jurić | University of Split (Croatia) and University of Girona (Spain)

Cheese, wine, and Adriatic sunsets: a taste of the Island of Brač



Brač cheese is a hard sheep's milk cheese from the island of Brač in Dalmatia, near the city of Split in Croatia. It is made from the milk of the indigenous Brač sheep breed *Pramenka*, which gives it a distinctive flavour and high quality. The production of Brač cheese began as early as 1934, but was interrupted during the Second World War. Today, the tradition is maintained mostly by small-scale local producers. Due to the limited quantities, the cheese is usually sold directly by the producers and sells out quickly. As Brač cheese is difficult to

find outside the island, you should take the opportunity to try it when you are on the island. After a long summer day and with an appetite fuelled by the sea, you can enjoy this locally produced cheese together with a handful of local olives and a glass of Pošip —a white wine from the Brač winery Stina. As the sun sets over the sea and the *riva* glows in the evening light, you can't help but reflect on the generations of dedication and tradition behind every bite and consider yourself lucky to experience such a genuine taste of Dalmatian life.



Civil cheese served with lavash bread and tea, which has an important place in Erzurum culinary culture.

Erkan Denk | Bitlis Eren University (Ahlat-Bitlis, Türkiye)

The story of Civil cheese, which received the first Geographical Indication registration in Erzurum Cuisine



Erzurum Civil cheese is the city's first Geographical Indication registered type of cheese. This special cheese is a cultural heritage that is the symbol of the city, produced and consumed both industrially in factories and traditionally in rural areas, villages and farms. This cheese, made from cow's milk, is recommended for dieters as it is salt-free. During the visit to the village, an interviewee stated that he learned cheese making from his mother and that he continued this traditional production, and that his mother also learned it from her grandmother. Therefore, this special cheese has been produced in these lands for at least 200-250 years. In production, the fat from cow's milk is separated with

the help of a machine. When the milk placed on the stove in the cauldron heats up, it ferments and is mixed to obtain curd. Curd wrapped around a wooden spoon is placed in a separate basin and kneaded. When the desired consistency is achieved, it is stretched and hung on a hanger to cool and drain the water. The cheese is waited here until it cools down, then it is cut into 15-20 cm long slices and collected in a bucket. After waiting in this bucket in its own water for 2-3 days, it is taken out, salted and placed in drums for the winter. It is stored in a cold place away from sunlight. When it is ready to be eaten, it is taken from the bucket in pieces, separated into thin wires, and served on a plate.



Mató from the Vall de Camprodon with honey and walnuts from Can Musiques, my family's restaurant in Setcases, the oldest in the village, which operated from 1945 until September 2024.

Ester Noguer-Juncà | Universitat de Lleida (Spain)

Mató and the taste of a beautiful childhood



When I was a child, I spent every weekend, holiday, and religious feast day with my grandparents, as my parents worked in the hospitality industry and had little time to care for me. My grandparents lived in a farmhouse and kept dairy cows, which they milked every morning and evening. Quite often, my grandmother would boil several liters of milk to make *mató*, a fresh cheese that only she and I enjoyed, the rest of the family didn't care

for it. I remember it had a strong flavour, with a slight aftertaste reminiscent of the cow, but with honey, it was excellent. Now, nearly 30 years later, every time I visit the Vall de Camprodon, we have *mató* for dessert at my grandmother's house. It has become a food that brings us together and, for me personally, a way to relive the beautiful childhood I was fortunate to have—and to remember the time spent with my grandfather, a deeply cherished person.



Tirozouli cheese on display beside jars of local thyme honey at a farmer's market stall in Heraklion, Crete.

Evangelia Papoutsaki | SICRI Co-convenor – Associate Professor UNITEC (New Zealand)

The taste of Crete



I grew up with the sharp, tangy bite of *tirozouli* on my tongue—my Cretan grandmother's hands shaping this quintessentially island homemade cheese, her knuckles rough from years of work, as the family goat bleated nearby in the village garden. Early morning, before the Cretan sun grew too fierce, she would milk the goat, her movements steady and fast, practiced—she came from a long line of island shepherds. The milk, still warm, would be transformed—curdled with *pithia* (natural rennet), strained in *touloupani* (gauzy cheesecloth), pressed into *toupi* (molds made of cane and hemp tree that gave the cheese a distinctive aroma), then left to dry hanging in the

shade of the yard's grapevine trellis. The scent of salt and earth clung to the cheese as it hardened, its texture turning crumbly, intense, unforgettably Cretan. We ate it with *paksimadi*, the dry rusk bread that cracked between our teeth, the flavors merging—earthy, sharp, perfect. On special occasions, we would grate it over steaming *makaronia*, the cheese melting just enough to coat each pasta strand with its rich, peppery bite. Even now, far from Crete, I close my eyes and taste it—the *tirozouli* of my childhood, my grandmother's hands, the sun on the olive trees and vineyards. Some flavors never leave you. They become memory. They become home.



An ordinary day in the life of Sally Morales Orellana (Malloa, O'Higgins Region, Chile).

Photo: María Francisca Orellana Fernández.

Fernando Mujica Fernández | Escuela de Sommeliers de Chile (Santiago, Chile)

Salsipuedes: where cheese tells a story and time stands still



In the rural town of Salsipuedes, to the rhythm of mooing cows and the taste of fresh cheese, a magical scene unfolds. On 2,000 square meters of land, Sally runs a small dairy farm with about 20 mixed-breed cows and their calves, whom she cares for as part of her family, allowing them to live peacefully and grow old. Every morning at dawn, she responsibly milks her cows, taking only what's needed to fulfill her orders, without affecting the calves. She uses the creamiest milk to produce one of the best artisanal fresh cheeses in Chile. For every kilo of cheese, she uses six liters of

milk, cooking it for 40 minutes over a wood fire, then adding sea salt and rennet. She then pours the curd into round molds and presses it. At 8 a.m., she leads the cows to the pasture known as "El Paraíso", where they graze after walking through beautiful alleys of wildflowers and natural springs. Before that, they must cross a stretch of the town's main road. As if in a sacred procession, the cattle stop traffic, and vehicles yield to the slow and steady pace of the herd. The same scene takes place again at 5 p.m., when they return home.



Caciocavallo from Palermo is a food that comes from peasant tradition and has established itself over time on consumers' tables as a combination of agricultural and livestock culture, a distinctive feature of a product of 'local' origin, whose promotion makes the territory competitive.

Filippo Sgroi, Federico Modica | University of Palermo (Italy)

Caciocavallo cheese from Palermo: a product of Sicilian food and wine tradition



In Palermo's food and wine tradition, Caciocavallo cheese plays a fundamental role as it is made from the milk of *Cinisara* cows, bred in the province of Palermo and in some municipalities in the province of Trapani, which graze freely in the hills and woods. It is a fatty, semi-matured or matured cheese, made from raw, stretched cow's milk. It is produced all year round and matured for 1-4 months (semi-matured) or over 4 months (matured). It has a square-based parallelepiped shape, with sides measuring 12-18 cm, a length of 30-60 cm, and a weight of 8-12 kg. In the kitchen, the fresher product is often cooked on the grill *all'argentiera*, while the more mature product is grated to flavor many traditional recipes, including: sarde a beccafico, meatballs with almonds, red macaroni

timbale, rustic pizza, eggplant cake, rice arancini, omelet with chicory, Sicilian meatloaf, pepper and onion flan, *sfincione*, in *anelletti timballo*, in the so-called pasta *ncasciata*, in eggplant *mbuttunata*, and many others. It is traditionally paired with red wines from the region. In peasant families in the province of Palermo, it was very common to find it both because of its low price per kilogram and because it was linked to the local tradition of which the peasants were proud. It was always present on the table and even in the meals that farmers ate in the countryside, which were based on 'bread and Caciocavallo' cheese, accompanied by olives and wine, on special 'holiday' days, all in strict accordance with local tradition.



My children posing to take a photo with the toy sheep at the museum.

Francesc González Reverté | Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Barcelona, Spain)

Idiazábal: much more than a cheese



The experience took place during a tourist visit to the Basque Country, when we decided to enter the Idiazábal Cheese Interpretation Centre, located in the village of the same name. Although many years have passed, over a decade, I still have vivid memories of certain moments from the visit: watching the cheese-making process live, participating in the tasting, and listening to the explanation about the economic importance of this activity for the local community. I also recall how the cheese was presented as a symbol of collective pride, a

product that embodied the identity of the village and helped put it on the map. The way the story was told made you feel closer to the producers and to the land that gives life to this product. Overall, the experience conveyed a strong sense of authenticity, as if tasting that cheese was a way of connecting directly with the place. It could be said that the visit to the centre was one of the highlights of the day, leaving us with the feeling that we had gained a deeper understanding of the local culture and way of life of the region that welcomed us.



A misty view of the Andes Mountains with terraced green hills, scattered trees, and a small village nestled in the valley below.

Frida Marie Omma | Independent researcher (Tromsø, Norway)

Choclo con queso in the Andes



In 2014, during my early years as a student, I traveled from Lima to Chanchamayo in Peru on a local bus. The ten-hour journey revealed Peru's striking diversity, beginning on the arid coastline, climbing through the Andes, and descending into the humid jungle valleys. These landscapes are not just dramatic but are home to communities whose lives are shaped by the land. At a stop in a mountain village, a woman boarded the bus carrying a basket of *choclo con queso*, a pairing deeply rooted in Andean traditions. *Choclo*, a large-kernel corn native to the region, is cultivated on ancient high-altitude terraces, or *andenes*,

which reflect the resourcefulness of Andean agriculture. Its creamy texture and mild sweetness are complemented by *queso fresco*, a soft, crumbly cheese with a tangy, salty flavor. Often made from cow's milk, it can also come from goat or sheep milk, depending on local practices. Eaten together —*choclo* in one hand, cheese in the other— it is a practical and satisfying food that connects people to their environment. *Choclo con queso* embodies the Andes' agricultural heritage and the enduring relationship between communities, their traditions, and the land they cultivate.



Cheese production at Unit 14 of the General Alvear Prison, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Gabriela Magri Harsich | Universidad Nacional de Quilmes (Argentina)

The making of cheese as social inclusion



In the town of General Alvear, in the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, at Penitentiary Unit No. 14, people deprived of their liberty produce cheese alongside prison staff. This production technique is part of the region's inherited gastronomic heritage, passed down through training at the Don Bosco Agrotechnical School in Cañuelas and the renowned dairy factory "La Martona", also located in the same place. Although the factory ceased operations in 1978, its know-how, combined with the school's teachings, has left a lasting mark on local cheesemaking. Today, those who

possess this knowledge lead the production within the penitentiary. The different types of cheese are sold by family members at local markets, fairs and food festivals. The money from these sales helps to improve conditions for the cheese producers within the prison. This case was part of my recent doctoral research. I believe that offering training, creating a sense of belonging and providing a trade to those deprived of their liberty allows them to stay active, earn income and keep a living culture such as local gastronomy alive, in this case through the making of cheese.



The kitchen table with the ingredients for the preparation of Keshi Yena.

The author would like to thank Hector F. Ramirez and Papiamento Restaurant.

Gerald Kock | Independent researcher (Oranjestad, Aruba)

Keshi Yena: from survival food to cultural treasure



Keshi Yena (also spelled Keshi Yena) is one of the most iconic dishes of the islands Aruba and Curaçao. The name derives from the Papiamento word ‘keshi’, meaning “kaas” (in Dutch), or “cheese” (in English), and ‘yena’, meaning “gevuld” (in Dutch) or “stuffed” (in English), so literally, it means “stuffed cheese”. The dish traces its origins to the 17th and 18th centuries during the Dutch Colonial era, when enslaved Africans on the islands were forced to make it. Dutch settlers, fond of Edam and Gouda cheeses, would often consume the interiors of cheese wheels and discard the leftover rinds. Enslaved cooks imaginatively repurposed these hollowed-out shells, filling them with a mixture of spiced meat scraps, tropical vegetables, and dried fruits, then baking or steaming the

whole to create a nourishing and flavorful meal. This act of culinary improvisation transformed waste into sustenance and eventually into a national treasure. Over time, Keshi Yena evolved from a dish of necessity into a symbol of cultural pride and resilience, now served at family gatherings, holidays, and national celebrations. Today, Keshi Yena is a culinary narrative of survival, adaptation, and identity. It embodies the spirit of the Afro-Caribbean communities who, through resourcefulness and resilience, transformed oppression into cultural expression. My sincere hope is that its continued presence on menus and in homes across Aruba and Curaçao remains as a testament to the enduring legacy of those who first created it.



A selection of some of the cheeses produced by Veghu: the cheeses are displayed on a wooden board and surrounded by other local products (olives, olive branches, and jam).

Photo: Marcello Contu, Veghu.

Giovanna Bertella | UiT-The Arctic University of Norway (Tromsø, Norway)

Plant-based cheese innovation as a revival of Sardinian traditions and communities



Veghu is a plant-based cheese enterprise drawing inspiration from traditional Sardinian recipes. Located in the Barigadu area of Sardinia (Italy)—an area facing severe depopulation, Veghu is based in the small village of Bidonì, home to just 120 residents and officially declared the poorest town in Sardinia in 2016. Founder Marcello Contu is fully aware of the challenges of launching a business in such a context. Yet, he also sees it as a place of cultural richness, with access to excellent local ingredients, including almonds, rosemary and laurel. He considers himself a dreamer and firmly believes that *“food is one of the most effective tools for social transformation,*

capable of changing the destiny of this planet and its animals.” Beyond producing cheese, Veghu offers toolkits to self-produce cheese and courses for both amateurs and professionals interested in contributing to this transformation by experimenting with and reimagining cheese-making traditions. The company employs three people and has established strong networks and collaborations with both local and international partners. Through these connections, Veghu offers customers, including residents and tourists, high-quality cheese rooted in Sardinian heritage and reinvented in line with the innovative trends of plant-based cuisine.



Freshly baked *pão de queijo* prepared by the author himself.

Guilherme Ferreira Rodrigues | Universitat de Girona (Spain)

Cheese, tradition, and memory: the taste of the gastronomic heritage of Minas Gerais, Brazil



Cheese has been part of my emotional memory since childhood, as I grew up in Minas Gerais, the Brazilian state where this food is fundamental to the gastronomic tradition. This state, the largest milk producer in Brazil, has a strong cheese culture, and cheese is widely consumed in daily life. I remember that fresh cheese was never missing from my home, especially to accompany a freshly brewed coffee, a typical combination to start the morning in this region. This sensory experience is linked to the sound of boiling water for

coffee, its aroma, and the taste of fresh cheese shared with my family. Moreover, one of the most iconic dishes from Minas Gerais is *pão de queijo* (cheese bread), a small ball that is crispy on the outside and soft on the inside, made mainly with cheese and *polvilho* (fine cassava flour). The artisanal cheese production in Minas Gerais has been recognized as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Brazil and, more recently, UNESCO has declared it a World Intangible Cultural Heritage, due to the traditional techniques of small rural producers.



Fresh *ranchero* cheese, handmade in central Mexico, lies on a wooden board. On the plate, a cheese *taco* wrapped in a corn *tortilla*, a reminder of tradition and memories.

Héctor Yair Fernández-Sánchez | Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México (Toluca, Mexico)

A cheese taco, the origin of my passion



The cheese came quietly into my life without asking. It came in the form of fresh *ranchero* cheese wrapped in a corn *tortilla*, a warm *taco* served on a colourful embroidered cloth. My grandmother *Juanita* offered it to me in her kitchen, amidst the smoke rising slowly from the grill and the smell of roasted corn, damp earth and quiet waiting. She sliced the cheese calmly, like someone who knows that everything has its time. I simply ate without realising that something was taking root inside me. Every weekend she served tea with freshly sliced cheese gently

placed on a cloth. And as I ate, I watched the smoke soften the air and fill my family with joy. It was then that I began to feel that cheese was like an invisible thread connecting me to roost that I couldn't name, but felt with every bite. This cheese ignited something in me, a passion born out of the everyday, out of human warmth and out of a hunger not of the body but on the soul. I have followed that thread: visiting producers, listening from women who preserve memories with cheese. Today, cheese is the way I listen to the world. In it I find time, hands, doubt and silence.



Red caquelon on a burner, keeping the melted fondue cheese mixture warm. A hand is dipping a piece of bread into the cheese mixture with a long, thin, two-pronged fork. In the background, a selection of bread, grapes, cornichons and pickles.

Image generated by Google Gemini based on the author's description.

Hennie Fisher | University of Pretoria (South Africa)

Fondue in the bush: *la religieuse* at the bottom of the *caquelon*



Growing up in the mid-1970s on an isolated farm halfway between Marite and Bushbuckridge, within the apartheid regime's 'homeland' of Gazankulu, meant spending hours outside, learning not to be mortified of snakes, and depending on neighbours for company. As a classic Afrikaner of mixed lineage (English paternal grandfather; Dutch paternal grandmother, Lighthelm; French maternal grandfather, Hugo; and German maternal grandmother, Wiesner), my parents were not traditionalists, but found some entertainment in European traditions. Their close friends were a childless couple on the neighbouring farm, who worked at a Swiss Catholic missionary hospital in Bushbuckridge—in all likelihood where their Swiss Cheese Fondue habit emanated from. We were too young to partake

in the ritual of the fondue, with its base of dry white wine, into which a mix of Gruyère, Emmental, and Appenzeller cheeses was melted and served in a communal casserole, the *caquelon*, over a methylated spirits burner to keep the mixture warm and amalgamated. Individual long, thin, two-pronged forks are used to spear bread that is dipped into the Kirsch-flavoured cheese mass. I remember a blood red earthenware *caquelon* which created the most wonderful caramelised layer of cheese at the bottom of the pot, which the adults nicknamed the Sunday leg-of-lamb roast. And even if I cannot remember their chair-standing antics to sing a song if someone had lost their bread in the cheese, I fondly remember the jostle for that delicious caramelised layer of cheese at the end of the meal called "*la religieuse*" or "*the nun*" in French.



Jabaíno is handcrafted with raw goat's milk. Along with its exquisite flavor, it offers a soft, creamy and tender texture. Its edible rind is made from vegetable ash.

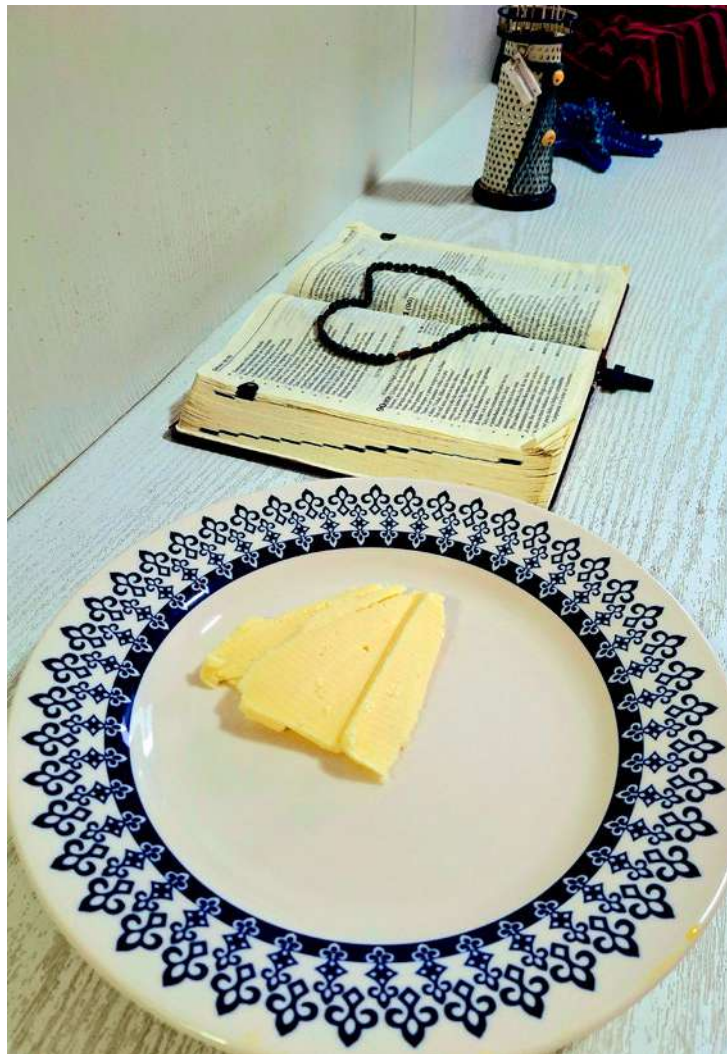
Jaime Clara | [Delicatessen.uy](https://delicatessen.uy) (Uruguay)

Jabaíno, from Zafra, Extremaduran identity



nma Rodríguez, my friend from Extremadura, took me to the artisanal cheese shop Jarropa y Sita, located very close to the iconic Arco de Jerez, a landmark in the city of Zafra. Remedios Carrasco serves customers through a small window to those of us waiting outside the

shop. We asked for her star cheese, the one that won the grand prize of the year, which she creates with passion and patience. El Jabaíno fits in one hand. It is small, subtle, flavorful and smooth. Its carbonic rind protects the jewel hidden inside.



Queijo Minas served on a plate in the Nordeste region, Brazil.

Jessica Aquino | Hólar University (Iceland)

Queijo Minas, passing on cultural history and stories



The earliest memory I have of eating cheese was with my father. He was making me breakfast of fried egg, fresh cheese, and polenta. "This is how we used to have breakfast on the farm". Born on a farm in Brazil, my father would tell me stories of how it was like growing up. His stories sometimes came with recipes and tips for cooking traditional foods. In July 2025, my husband and I were able to take our children to Brazil to visit family and to pass on our cultural history and stories. "This is Queijo Minas. It is from

the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais". I told my children. It is like the cheese I make at home using the same recipe my father taught me. However, cheese has its own distinctive flavor depending on the species of cows, the region they are raised in, and the cultural history of the place. That is why cheese tastes different depending on where you make it. Nature, history, and culture creates the cheese flavor. Queijo Minas was a way to preserve milk for long travel. It has a simple recipe that can be passed on from parents to children.



A cheesemaker shaping a round wheel of cheese on a wooden table. On the left, a wicker basket holds several cheeses, and on the right, a rustic wooden bowl filled with milk has a spoon resting inside.

Image generated by ChatGPT based on the author's description.

Johanna Mendelson Forman | American University School of International Service
(Washington, DC, USA)

A longing for local cheese



A taste of home can transport a person fleeing conflict. Unlike other tangible possessions, food memories are portable. This was the case for a Syrian refugee, Muhammed Bakkar of Damascus. An educated man with a university degree and a government job, his dreams were shattered when civil war broke out in Syria. He and his family left for Türkiye where he began a new career as a cheesemaker. He missed the taste of regional cheese, so he decided to learn how to make it and sell it to other Syrians who craved it. His enterprising spirit paid off as he started to sell various cheeses he produced to local Syrian-owned stores in Istanbul. He wanted to

expand this business but feared he could not do this without some help. Our paths crossed in 2018 when he enrolled in the LIFE program, a United States Government partnership with a Turkish business consultancy that promoted social cohesion through gastrodiploamacy. It encouraged both refugees and Turkish communities through workshops and training how to grow their businesses. When a local Istanbul paper asked Muhammed about his cheesemaking career he said that his name was on a "blacklist" in Syria so he could not return. He told the reporter "Here, at least, we can sense the smell of Syria". It sums up the power of food to restore memories and culture.



A nice piece of Vesterhavssost served at home where everybody loves when it comes on the table.

Jonatan Leer | Örebro University (Sweden)

Vesterhavssost: finally, good cheese in Denmark



Denmark has for centuries had an important dairy sector and production of cheeses based on cows' milk. However, as with many things in Danish agriculture, it has been quantity over quality and the only language used to describe cheeses were strong or mild. So, I had a true revelation in 2008, when I tried for the first time the Vesterhavssost from the organic cooperative dairy These Mejeri. The name of the cheese literally means "Western sea cheese" and is produced by on the west coast of the Danish main land. It is a hard cheese said to be inspired by Dutsch Gouda cheese, but in expression it reminds me much more

of a young comté which still has a certain fruitiness as well as saltiness that comes from the sea as the cheese was matured in a facility close to the Western sea and the ventilation system would transmit the salty brise from the sea into the storage room. The key in the cheese is balance between the fruitiness, the saltiness and the potent depth from organic milk. No sweatiness or caramelized finish that would kill the balance. Simplicity and balance like in a true French comté. First time I was a proud Danish cheese eater. Some cheese makers felt the same and today we have numerous high-standard cheeses in Denmark.



Bread with tomato,
olive oil and steak with
Roquefort sauce.

Jordi Serra Simón | University of Girona (Girona, Spain)

Roquefort: a particular love-hate story



Cheese is part of my daily life. When I want to have a hearty breakfast, I like to eat bread with tomato, cold meat and cheese with quince. If I want to make a quick meal, especially during the weekend, I really like to cut two types of cheese, a cured goat cheese and a soft one, and put them to cook on low heat. Then I add beaten eggs and make a good omelet. However, I have a rather peculiar relationship with Roquefort cheese. I can't stand eating it raw, I don't like the look of it

and I find the texture unappealing. I guess it must be because of its green fragments. I hardly ever have a cheese like that at home. I don't want other foods in the fridge to come into contact with it. However, if I go to a restaurant and there is a steak with several sauces to choose from, I usually order the Roquefort one. If there is a dish with a sauce that I don't know, especially spicy, I ask if we can change it to the Roquefort cheese one. This is a contradiction that, for now, I haven't changed.



Golden-baked cheesecake in parchment paper, resting on a ceramic plate with blurred pink geraniums in terracotta pots in the background, creating a soft, rustic spring ambiance.

Jorge Calero-Sanz | Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (Spain)

Tradition without gluten: LAIB's cheesecake



Imagine now a classic cheesecake made with organic whole-milk cream cheese, free-range eggs, natural yogurt and totally gluten-free. This hypothetical dessert would not be a departure but a deepening of LAIB's narrative, one that respects the ingredient, the method and the body. Placed on Paseo de la Reina Cristina in Madrid's Retiro district, LAIB is a bakery committed to gluten-free craftsmanship, natural fermentation, and alternative grains. Everything is made in-house, from sourdough breads to

muffins, cookies and focaccias, using flours like rice, millet and buckwheat (without gums, additives or shortcuts). LAIB works seasonally and prioritises traceability, partnering with local producers and small-scale mills. The bakery is more than a place to buy bread, it's a project rooted in sustainability, nutrition and slow food values. In this context, a traditional cheesecake made their way would be not only delicious, but aligned with their ethos: honest food, well made.



Arandas ranching landscape.

José de Jesús Hernández López | Centro de Estudios de Geografía Humana,
El Colegio de Michoacán (Mexico)

Adobera cheese from Arandas: landscape and memory



I was born and raised on the Arandas plateau, in the Altos de Jalisco region of Mexico, an area whose vegetation—despite its thin soils and scarce water sources—has sustained the cattle-raising tradition brought by the Spanish since the 18th century. In my childhood, dairy products were common because backyard corrals often had cows. Over time, hygiene regulations led to the confinement of dairy production in stables and family-run farms located on nearby ranches. Even so, for local residents, traveling to the countryside to buy cheese directly remains a normal, almost ritualistic, activity. Adobera cheese has always been my favorite. Its name

comes from the shape of the mold used to press it, which resembles those used to make adobe bricks. Beyond being a rustic and artisanal product made by family units, I have always enjoyed the experience of leaving the city, traveling thirty minutes down the road into the landscapes where Holstein cows graze freely, feeding on a mix of grasses and wild plants, giving the cheese its unique flavor. The appreciation of the landscape, the close contact with the producers in their environment, the smells of the countryside and the farms, and the memory of so many trips all come together in my enjoyment of adobera cheese as a complete experience.



Tupí cheese accompanied the progressive disappearance of the shepherds' world. However, in the decade of the 1980s the artisan producers of the Pyrenees recovered this type of cheese for commercialization.

Josep Boyra Amposta | Escola Universitària Formatic Barcelona, University of Girona (Barcelona, Spain)

Tupí cheese: an authentic cheese of Catalan origin, a formidable legacy of the shepherds of the Pyrenees



Many emotions come to me from the memory of that first bite... I was already grown up and had never tasted any cheese like this. From the first moment I opened that small earthenware jar, called *Tupí* in Catalan, an intense and powerful aroma hit my senses to take me to a place unknown to me until that date. My eyes and my nostrils discovered an unctuous paste with an intensity of concentration of sweet and penetrating scents. Stabbing the knife into that wonderful unctuousness, I spread it on a slice of fresh bread which immediately after bringing it to my lips, I

put it between my teeth in my mouth. The palate experience of tasting and swallowing that first bite will always remain vivid in my memory. What a delight! What great fruition! Over the years, legacies tend to disappear, but luckily for everyone, *Tupí* cheese is a gastronomic delight recovered from the priceless legacy of the Pyrenean shepherds. They did this by harnessing and reusing other cured cheeses, by grinding them up and mixing them with other ingredients. Today, *Tupí* cheese returns to the palate as the shadow of those anonymous shepherds who shaped our past mountain landscapes.



Olavidia cheese with its characteristic line of vegetable ash, world champion.

Photo: Silvia Peláez, Quesos y Besos.

Juan Ignacio Pulido-Fernández | University of Jaén (Spain),
Cristina Barzallo Neira | University of Cuenca (Ecuador)

Olavidia, before the legend



Before the whole world knew its name, we already did: Olavidia had something different, something extraordinary. During that visit to the small but vibrant Quesos y Besos cheese factory, in Guarromán, in the north of Jaén province, we witnessed a story told through flavor. It was one of those experiences that confirms the power of gastronomic tourism as a way to discover the most authentic identity of a place. During the tasting, while chatting with Silvia and Paco (the creators of this delicacy) about natural fermentations and the artisanal care that goes into every piece,

the moment came to try it. Its delicate rind, its creamy texture with the thin line of vegetable ash, and above all, its elegant intensity on the palate, made us instantly realize we were tasting a special cheese. This was not just another cheese; it was a sensory experience that spoke of the land, of passion, and of unpretentious innovation. That day, we knew we were in the presence of something unique, long before international juries would proclaim it the best cheese in the world. Because Olavidia isn't just tasted: it's remembered. And we had the privilege of experiencing its magic before it became legend.



Thuringian Forest goat ram in Thuringia regions orchard with farmers daughter Dorothea, Germany.

Photo: Sabine Rübensaatz.

Katja Peter | Ziegenhof Peter (Greussen, Germany), **Arno Todt** | Nova-Institute (Hürth, Germany)

Saving traditional Thuringian Forest goat breed by enjoying “Hot Goat” cheese



Katja: The first goat to arrive at the Mühlenhof farm 25 years ago was a Thuringian Forest goat, an endangered breed of livestock. We began with just ten goats in our inaugural year and slowly built up our own farm cheese dairy, focusing on direct marketing. Today, our farm is home to over 100 Thuringian Forest goats. For me, this is above all a passion: artisanal cheesemaking, preserving a beautiful traditional goat breed, and earning the appreciation of our customers. Last year, our “Hot Goat” cheese won first place among grilled cheeses at the German Cheese Contest organized by the Association for Artisan Dairy Processing, and it was also awarded the “Bronze

Cheese Harp” among all participating cheeses. I am incredibly proud of that.

Arno: I absolutely love the “Hot Goat,” especially during relaxed evening barbecues with friends. Paired with white wine, green olives, and a fresh, crispy baguette, it’s the essence of summer enjoyment for me. These gatherings are also a wonderful opportunity to share the fascinating story of the Peters family’s mill farm and their efforts to preserve the Thuringian Forest goat. What makes it truly remarkable is how the family has created their own value chain—from production to processing and marketing—ensuring complete control over the quality and exceptional taste of their cheese.



Feeling the cool Atlantic wind softly caressing our faces and a little warmth from the sun, Hollywood movie style beaches, surfing waves slowly making its way to the beaches, noisy Portuguese bike riders and a passing seagull, what a beautiful dream it was.

Lionel Chee | The Singapore Food Tour Company (Singapore)

Portuguese Cheese: a curious encounter



In my most recent trip to Portugal, I was having a seaside lunch at this charming little restaurant on the edge of the cliff called O Croa, overlooking the beautiful Praia Grande surfing beach. We were served two types of cheeses with some bread. Serra da Estrela and Queijo Sao Jorge. I didn't really take much notice about it until the first piece landed on my tongue followed by a little piece of bread provided with some olives. Coming from Asia, these cheeses were interesting. Queijo Sao Jorge cheese which is made from cow's milk tasted firm, chewy and has a pinch of nutty flavor to it, almost tasting the very land that it was made on Sao Jorge island, very different from the

French cheeses that we have in Singapore. I don't think Singaporeans will like it but to a chef, this cheese was really like village homemade cheese. Nice. The Serra da Estrela caught my eye the first time when it was served opened from the top, revealing the slushy soft texture inside, reminds me of butter but from a cheese block. The flavor is different as this is made from sheep's milk. We do not have this in Singapore. The cheese was obviously microwaved to soften the cheese which is perfectly fine with me. But what made it so beautifully memorable is having that little it'sy bitsy piece of cheese with olives, butter and two of my best friends.



The three expressions of Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ, fresh, dried and peppered, together showcase Malta's culinary identity. Author: Brian Cassar. The Public Abattoir within the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights (Malta) and the association Xirka Produtturi Nagħag u Moghoz.

The author would like to thank the Xirka Produtturi Nagħag u Moghoz for their support.

Luca Nguyen | Islands and Small States Institute, University of Malta (Malta)

Malta's iconic Ġbejna tan-nagħaġ: heritage, flavour and recognition



Gbejna tan-nagħaġ is more than just a traditional Maltese cheese. It is a living piece of rural life, shaped by local shepherds, producers and the island's seasons. Made from the raw milk of local sheep, it reflects a way of life that still values simplicity, resourcefulness and flavour. Fresh ġbejna is familiar to many: a soft, mild cheese often eaten with bread or olives, whether at home, in village bars or on a quick lunch break. The dried version, hardened by the sun on flat rooftops,

carries a deeper, nuttier bite that speaks of long summers. The peppered type, ġbejna tal-bżar, has a bold kick to it, great with tomatoes, olive oil, or just Maltese bread. Recognised in 2025 as Malta's first product with Protected Designation of Origin status, ġbejna tan-nagħaġ has stepped onto the European stage. But its roots are still local. Each bite tells the story of the wind, the land, the Mediterranean setting and the people who have always made the most of what they have.



Artisanal fresh cheese
from Chapa de Mota.

Luis Felipe García-Rodea | Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México (Toluca, Mexico)

Traditional fresh cheese from Chapa de Mota (Mexico)



Chapa de Mota is located in the north of the State of Mexico, in the center of the country. Its economy is primarily agricultural, though it has recently begun to shift toward industry. The region has a temperate climate, and much of its geography is forested. This municipality has been producing artisanal fresh cheese since the last century, as historically, large ranches and dairy haciendas were established here. Initially, this cheese was sold in local markets and transported to Mexico City for distribution.

Today, it can be found in the main markets and *tianguis* (open-air markets) of the region and is a staple in family diets, often purchased every Sunday at the traditional *tianguis*. This cheese is used in *quesadillas*, *tostadas* and tacos. It is important to highlight the cultural and symbolic value, as well as the traditional know-how, associated with this product, which has been passed down through generations. For many farming and producing families, it is also a vital part of their livelihood.



Various kinds of cheese and a bottle of local wine in Ulten Valley.

Magdalena Falter | University of Iceland (Iceland)

Hut-to-hut trekking in Ulten Valley



The experience I'd like to share took place in the remote Ulten Valley, located in South Tyrol. This area is a hidden gem, particularly known for its traditional hut-to-hut trekking routes. The "huts" are mountain cabins situated at altitudes of up to 2,000 meters above sea level and are only open during the summer months. They serve local food —mainly dairy products made directly on site from the milk of cows the hut owners care for themselves. The atmosphere

is truly special: hiking at high altitudes with stunning views over the Ulten Valley, all while having a cozy mountain hut to look forward to as a rest stop. The photo shows a selection of local cheeses I bought at a tiny convenience store that gave me strong late-1990s nostalgia. One of the hut owners recommended the place during a walk, mentioning that she supplies her cheeses there. What made the experience even more special for me was that the local red wine shared my name.



Polish cheese oscypek
—a smoked sheep's
cheese made in the
Tatra Mountains.

Image generated by ChatGPT
based on the author's description.

Małgorzata Bartosik-Purgat | Poznań University of Economics and Business (Poland)

Cheese consumption in Poland: types and traditions



The tradition of cheese consumption in Poland dates back centuries, with its roots in rural and pastoral culture. As early as the Middle Ages, cheeses made from cows', sheep's, and goats' milk were produced and formed an essential part of the daily diet. One of the best-known traditional Polish cheeses is oscypek —a smoked sheep's cheese made in the Tatra Mountains according to strict recipes, protected by law in the European Union. Two main types of cheese have a special place in Polish cuisine: white (cottage cheese) and yellow. Cheese was present on both peasant and aristocratic tables —often served with bread, vegetables or as a side dish. Many regions of Poland have developed local varieties of cheese, such as bryndza, bundz, and Korycin cheese.

The consumption of cheese also had a cultural dimension —cheese was part of Christmas Eve, Easter and harvest festival dishes. White cheese, or cottage cheese, is the basis of many traditional dishes, such as Russian dumplings, cheesecakes, pancakes and Easter pascha. On the other hand, ripened yellow cheese, such as Gouda, Edam or Podlaski, is very popular as an addition to sandwiches, casseroles and hot dishes. Nowadays, Poles are increasingly keen on a variety of cheeses, both traditional and foreign, such as brie, camembert and Parmesan. Despite globalisation, there is also a growing interest in artisanal and organic cheeses, which influences the development of local dairies. The tradition of cheese consumption in Poland thus remains alive, combining the past with modernity.



Enjoying artisanal cheese served by Aatica under a mulberry tree, with peacocks roaming freely in the background at Borj Lella, Béja, Tunisia.

Manel Hakim Masmoudi | Higher Institute of Commercial Studies (IHEC) (Sfax, Tunisia)

Borj Lella: the art of traditional ewe's cheese in the heart of Béja's Hills



Nestled between golden wheat fields and the clear Mediterranean sky, in the gentle hills of northwestern Tunisia, lies *Borj Lella*, a truly unique guest table. For more than ten years, its story has been shaped by the dream of Aatica and her husband: to safeguard their family heritage while sharing their agricultural know-how. Their project began with the breeding of a Sicilian sheep breed, whose milk is transformed on-site into traditional ewe's cheese. This activity, firmly rooted in artisanal methods, celebrates a dual culinary heritage, Tunisian and Italian, reflecting the geographic and cultural proximity between the two shores of the Mediterranean. Initially, the guest table welcomed visitors only for cheese tastings. Gradually, the experience evolved to embrace the Tunisian culinary culture. Guests

start usually with a selection of artisanal cheeses accompanied by fresh salads, before enjoying *Borzguane*, a regional couscous marrying sweet and savory notes with dried fruits. The culinary journey continues with *ftet*, a typical rural dish of lamb slow-cooked using ancestral techniques. These meals can be served outdoors, under the shade of a large mulberry tree, in the company of graceful peacocks roaming freely among the guests. Beyond its culinary offerings, *Borj Lella* invites guests to explore the surrounding countryside through hikes and horseback rides. More than just a guest table, it is a place of memory and transmission, where local agricultural and culinary roots with a Sicilian Mediterranean touch, and where heritage, nature, and hospitality come together to create an experience that is both flavorful, soothing, and deeply authentic.



Tasting of three cheese varieties from Celler La Vinyeta, originating from Mollet de Peralada (Girona).

Mar Pineda | M.A. in Tourism Management and Planning (Girona, Spain)

A sensory journey through three cheeses from Celler La Vinyeta



One of the gastronomic —and specifically cheese— experiences I remember most fondly was attending a corporate event with a guided cheese tasting. We sampled three specific cheeses —Tossut, Cunya, and Borratxo— from Celler La Vinyeta. Each had a distinct personality: Tossut was firm, slightly salty, and lingering; Cunya was gentler and creamier, a welcoming opening bite; and Borratxo, a wine-washed cheese, offered fruity aromas and an evocative rind.

Small pairings —spices, nuts, and jams— opened new paths on the palate, while a thoughtful selection of wines paired with the cheeses, highlighting nuances without stealing the spotlight. The atmosphere felt warm and inquisitive: colleagues who usually talk deadlines and deliverables spent the evening discussing textures, length, and childhood memories. I realized that cheese is more than food; it's a language that speaks of land, craft, and time. That shared sense of discovery is what I still cherish most.



"Queso de Chiapas"
at a street stall in
Mexico City.

Marco Covarrubias | Universidad del Claustro de Sor Juana (Mexico City, Mexico)

Memories of a yellow or red cheese



I'd like to take this opportunity to talk about "Queso de Chiapas". This product is made in southern Mexico in a small town on the Chiapas coast called Pijijiapan. This cheese is made with 100% cow's milk from the state of Chiapas. It has a characteristic brick-like shape, and its wrapping consists of three layers of aluminum foil, waxed paper, and cellophane paper, which serve to protect the cheese and prevent damage to its delicate texture. Its shiny red or yellow wrapping makes it easy to identify. I confess that this fragile

product has been present in my life since my earliest memories. The memory comes from the family of Blanca, my maternal grandmother, who was born in Tapachula, Chiapas almost a century ago. The powerful, acidic flavor and pleasant mouthfeel of this cheese remind me of my family's history, their voices, their laughter, the music of the marimba, family afternoons, and difficult times. So whenever I want to go back to them, I just add it to beans or a tortilla and suddenly I'm in the family home where time has not stopped.



Wandering through markets is one of the most enriching gastronomic experiences, as markets tell stories about local culture, idiosyncrasies, and ultimately, identity. In a fresh food market, it's impossible not to stumble upon amazing stalls dedicated entirely to cheese: goat, cow, sheep, smoked, infused with herbs, aged, semi-aged, you name it. These stalls are infinite showcases for cheese lovers.

Maria del Pilar Leal Londoño | CETT-Barcelona School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy (Spain)

Cheese encounters: authentic market experiences



Thinking back on one of my own experiences as a devoted cheese enthusiast, a vivid memory comes to mind: a trip with friends to Venice.

While exploring the market on the island of Lido, we came across a fantastic stall devoted to cheese. It might have gone unnoticed if it weren't for the vendor—a typical *signore italiano*—who kindly offered us a taste of his prized parmesan. The moment we tasted it, it was as if our taste buds had ascended to heaven. What he described as one of his finest cheeses wasn't just a sales pitch—it was truly exceptional. Naturally, we all bought a piece to take with us on our way back to Venice. As tourists who didn't speak Italian, we hopped on a vaporetto for the return trip. While enjoying our cheese

onboard, we suddenly noticed a ticket inspector making his way through the crowd. That's when we realized: had we bought the right ticket to return? Panic set in, but unsure of how to deal with the situation, we collectively decided to focus on the cheese. Each time the inspector came closer, one of us would take a bite, as if to say, "we're far too captivated by this parmesan to be bothered". With every stop, we nervously nibbled away, trying to mask our fear of being fined. Little by little, we neared our final destination—still holding our cheese, still avoiding eye contact—and somehow made it without any confrontation. To this day, parmesan always brings me back to Venice and its people. A beautiful memory of friends, markets, and extraordinary cheese.



Sfakiani pita: pancake with cheese kneaded into the dough served with honey, the signature dish of Chora Sfakion in Crete.

Maria Hnaraki | Drexel University (Philadelphia, USA)

Cornucopia



God Cronus (Chronos), ruler of the world, was afraid that one of his children would take the throne from him. Therefore, every time one was born, he swallowed it. Desperate Rhea, his wife, to save Zeus, her sixth child, from his father's voracious rage, gave birth to it in the cave of Mount Ida, on the tallest mountain of the island of Crete. Nymphs fed the little god also with milk from the goat Amalthea, the "Nourishing Goddess". In playing with his nursemaid, strong baby Zeus accidentally broke off one of her horns, which then had the divine power to

provide unending nutrition, as the foster mother had to the god, hence the name "cornucopia" or "Amalthea's horn", namely the horn of plenty, a symbol of abundance and nourishment. Amalthea is also perceived as a nymph who cared for Zeus, the daughter of King Melisseus of Crete. Her sister, Melissa, namely "Bee", fed him honey either directly or by guiding bees to provide it. She is credited with teaching humans the art of beekeeping and the use of honey. No wonder then why Cretan-style desserts are timeless, dough and goat's cheese based, served with honey!



A sample of the food that is offered at the cheese and deli buffet at Falbygdens Osteria, Sweden.

Photo: Falbygdens Osteria.

Maria Månsson | Lund University (Sweden)

A visit to a cheese lover's paradise



Falköping in Sweden is a municipality with a long tradition of cows; it has the second-highest density of cows in the country. It is not surprising that this has led to dairy farms starting their businesses already in the 19th century. One of them was Falbygdens Ost that started as a dairy farm to develop with the import of cheeses, to later also open Falbygdens Osteria with a deli and a restaurant. The Osteria is now a popular destination to visit. The restaurant offers a buffet with products that are on sale in the deli, a range

of cheeses and dishes made with cheese, to other accompaniments, for example, pickles, crackers and jams. It is a cheese lover's dream to be able to taste as many new cheeses as possible, as well as to sample some old favourites. At my first visit, I fell in love with Gruyère. I was in cheese heaven! I was so in love, or maybe it was just eating too much cheese, but afterwards, the last thing I wanted to do was buy cheese in the deli. It is better to return for another visit and maybe find a new love.



Cheese board from a family gathering with Portuguese products (cheese, regional bread, prosciutto, smoked sausages, pumpkin jam, grapes and red wine).

Mariana Carvalho | Coimbra Education School, Polytechnique University of Coimbra (Portugal)

Embracing the gastronomic Portuguese culture on a cheese board



For the Portuguese, having cheese on the table is a synonym of celebration since it is a must-have product in every festivity or social gathering with family and friends. Cheese stands out around the table for its unique, vibrant and diverse flavours and also for how well it pairs with core products of the Portuguese gastronomic culture, such as prosciutto, smoked sausages, bread, pumpkin jam, grapes, nuts and also wine. Including a cheese board in any type of gathering means immersing yourself in sensorial and emotional experiences that lead to evoking special memories but also creating

new ones. This is why having cheese has always been more than simply tasting this product for me. Beyond sensing its strong flavours, having cheese takes me to family and friends' gatherings around the table where a sense of joy and gratitude is present by the opportunity to spend time together, sharing stories and tasting the finest products of our culture. The picture shows a cheese board created for one of those gatherings. The cheese displayed is *Queijo de Azeitão*, a Portuguese PDO from Palmela, Setúbal and Sesimbra. It includes raw sheep's milk and is cured with a semi-soft buttery texture. It tastes wonderfully!



Princess Moo
and Pirate having
a cuddle.

Marie Haley | The Seventh Generation Tours Akaroa (New Zealand)

Cheese cannot be made without the animals that give the cream



Our heard began with Princess Moo. A tiny white Friesian calf that was bought in exchange for a box of beers. Hand raised and bottle fed, she quickly showed her personality and spark. Two years later Little Dancer was born, Princess' daughter, who was brown and splotchy white. This was my chance to have a house cow, to milk and make cheese. It was not as easy as I had dreamed. Princess kicked, she stomped, she strained at her harness. We run a regenerative farming operation, aiming to restore the soil biodiversity using cattle to rotationally graze and add nutrients in alignment with the long-term seventh-generation principle. Cattle that are easy to handle and moved often is a key element of rotational

grazing. Princess was the matriarch of our heard, able to lead and calm other cows. Due to being hand raised Princess would happily stand while I cuddled her, koe knuffelen has become trendy, leading to health benefits to humans, slowing our heart rate and bringing calmness. But ultimately easy to handle stock is better for the entire heard, which benefits the soil and biodiversity on the land they graze. Mindful animal handling can lead to multiple health benefits, including better food. This follows natural principles where life begets life. The more trees we plant that cattle can browse, the more stable the soil, the better water retention and microbiome. Cheese can be made aligned with nature.



A cow posing on green fields in the Asturias region, north of Spain. Say “Cheese”!

Mario Izquierdo Gascón | Universidad Rey Juan Carlos (Madrid, Spain)

Tasting Asturias: from green hills to blue cheese



At a cozy cheesery, in Arenas de Cabrales, in the region of Asturias, north of Spain, I experienced how cheese and territory become deeply intertwined. I walked among goats and sheep, surrounded by Asturian meadows and the refreshing moisture of the Ríbeles river. Later, on the terrace by the water, I tasted their mixed blue cheese (goat and sheep milk), marbled with green-blue veins and a clean, deep flavor. Its semi-fat, firm texture carries the memory of the limestone caves where it matures slowly. I was struck by how the landscape —the rock, the Atlantic

climate, the local knowledge— speaks through each bite. Just like the routes of other local products such as honey or wine, which can offer intense pairings with this cheese, a sensory story of the place unfolds. These kinds of experiences support regenerative development by valuing traditional crafts, strengthening the bond between producers and their land, and reconnecting visitors with the living identity of rural territories. A cheese —like honey— can tell the story of a place, its people, and traditions. It is fascinating how something so small can hold so much.



Flor de Alfalfa porous cheese purchased at the 2025 Harvest Festival in Colón, Querétaro, Mexico.

Marisa Morales Loya | M.A. in Cultural Tourism (Querétaro, México)

Flor de Alfalfa Cheese, a driver of gastronomic tourism: 1st Harvest Festival 2025



Flor de Alfalfa, a ranch located in Colón, Querétaro, has established itself as an organic cheesemaker for over 25 years. The “soul of the ranch” is its Jersey cows, and together with its vineyard, they create the perfect pairing of cheese and wine. This project has undoubtedly taken advantage of the region’s rich soil and favorable climate to grow a vineyard that has yielded exquisite wines —perfect companions for its cheeses. As a pioneer in sustainable gastronomic tourism and in search of experiences aligned with this approach, I could not

have found a better example than the 1st Harvest Festival of Flor de Alfalfa, where the visitors enjoyed their cheeses and wines through guided tours of the vineyards and cheese cave, a parade of cows through the meadows, tastings of dishes prepared with Flor de Alfalfa cheeses, live music, and a local market. It was a family event full of learning, connection, and celebration —a milestone for the producers after a fruitful year which marked the beginning of a new service and tradition for the ranch, leaving a legacy that will support its sustainability through regional tourism.



Kylemore Cheese, Galway, Ireland served by Chef Mark Murphy at the Little Cheese Shop, Dingle, Kerry, Ireland... perfect for your Raclette.

Mary Rose Stafford | Munster Technological University (Ireland)

'Now, this is a cheese experience'



At the Dingle Food Festival, I'm drawn by a nutty, deliciously comforting aroma. And I'm far from the only one —there's a queue outside the Little Cheese Shop where Chef Mark Murphy is working hard to keep up with demand for his speciality dish, Raclette. I can't pass by this marvellous old rustic tradition experience. Sliding the half wheel under the grill to heat the top layer, Mark expertly scrapes the melting cheese and allows it to flow seamlessly onto a waiting slice of Bacus Bread. Served with pickled local carrots, it's a work of art. Then, the taste! I find a

quiet spot to stop because there's no easy way to eat this amazing food; all you can do is savour every memorable morsel... out of this world. Mark is the owner of The Little Cheese Shop in Dingle, County Kerry, specialising in Irish made cheeses. Every cheese here is his pride and joy. But the raclette...! Raclette is common in Switzerland, where it is made with a hard Alpine-style cheese. To bring raclette to Dingle, Mark worked with Kylemore Cheese in Galway to create a similarly nutty product. And it works perfectly —this raclette is a cheese experience.



A tasting tray placed on the table.

Maximiliano E. Korstanje | University of Palermo (Argentina)

The crisis of tourism education: PANCOE and the importance of emotions and wellbeing



Tourism education can be understood as a liminoid (learning) process aimed at training the next generation of practitioners, policymakers, and scientists in new skills to address the industry's problems. This learning process enables efficient interaction with all stakeholders involved. PANCOE is a new experiential project oriented to reduce the students' dropout rates as well as enhance students' performance in tourism-graduate careers. Based on gamification theory, the technique encouraged students to get pleasurable moments which included baking pieces of bread, cheese testing, drawing, painting and cooking, and tasting traditional dishes. Students have been invited to employ digital platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to share their culinary products with their followers. By competing directly to have more followers, participants

organized different culinary events inviting important local chefs. Students received further scores according to the number of followers and interactions. Both groups have been subject to standardized tests and exams in the fields of history, sociology, economy, tourism management, geography, tourism marketing, and statistics (all these courses have taken part of the curriculum homologized by the Ministry of Education). It is noteworthy that PANCOE is oriented to use the five human senses: smell, taste, touch, sight, and hearing. Participants not only engage with other peers but also liberate endorphins through pleasurable events. Per the preliminary results, participants have notably experienced better academic performance than their peers. At a last stage, students participated in integrative meetings where they expressed their emotions, challenges and problems during the experience.



Hand holding a single piece of kurut in front of a market stall in Uzbekistan, highlighting its compact form and chalky, sun-dried texture.

Michael Shamshidov | Tourism Development Consultant (Tashkent, Uzbekistan)

The journey of kurut: from Silk Road nomads to the modern pub



Kurut, a humble, salty cheese ball, holds a remarkable place in Central Asian life. Traditionally made by women in the highland pastures of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, kurut is crafted by straining yogurt made from cow or goat milk, shaping it into dense forms, and sun-drying it until rock-hard. While often round, it also appears in cube shapes and sometimes includes herbs, red pepper, or wild mountain grass, adding bold flavor to this minimalist dairy product. Its durability and intense saltiness made it ideal for nomadic travel —easily stored without refrigeration and endlessly shelf-

stable. On the road, a piece dropped into water yields a tonic drink similar to ayran, providing hydration after long treks across the steppe or desert. First-time visitors to Central Asia often encounter kurut at local markets or roadside stops along mountain passes, where vendors sell it in sacks —chalky white and sun-hardened. Biting into one is no casual affair: it's a legacy of survival. Yet kurut is not frozen in time. Today, it's a beloved bar snack across Central Asia, pairing naturally with beer for its sharp, umami punch. From nomadic trails to modern pubs, kurut continues its journey —connecting generations through dairy, sun, and tradition.



Dish with different sliced cheese and cold meats, with a bowl of oil with a spoon ready to serve.

Montserrat Crespi-Vallbona | Universitat de Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain)

The pleasure of sharing



Cheese, for me, is an element that creates personal experiences. Cheese reminds me of a table, preferably round or square, around which it is shared and enjoyed in good company: family, friends, my couple, work colleagues. Cheese is the traditional food of our Mediterranean tables that always appears in the pantry and serves as both an aperitif and a dessert. Its smell never leaves you indifferent, its flavour is remarkably varied, its texture is also rich in form, and it is always craved, whether it is morning, noon, or night; spring, winter, autumn, or summer. It always appeals, it

always enriches a meal, it always evokes a good memory, it always is part of the pleasure of sharing special moments with significant people near you. Furthermore, in any trip I use to have a “cheese moment”, just for tasting specific cheese variety in this destination. And whenever you close your eyes, you are instantly transported back to that sunny square, that rainy place, eating a bit of delicious cheese. Definitely, cheese is not just food when traveling or sharing the table among your loved ones, it is a diary of emotions, it is an expression of cultural values, it is part of personal memorable experiences.



A golden-baked knafeh dessert topped with pistachios, filled with creamy Mató cheese, served on a traditional ceramic plate in Girona, blending Middle Eastern flavors with Catalan ingredients.

Mousa Al-Sheyab | University of Petra (Amman, Jordan)

Knafeh in Girona: a sweet fusion of cultures



During my stay in Girona in 2023, I had the idea to recreate a beloved Middle Eastern dessert —knafeh— using Catalan available ingredients. The classic version is a crunchy semolina or katahfi-based crust filled with soft white cheese and swimming in syrup. But Girona added its own flavour to my culinary memory. I found Mató, a traditional Catalan fresh cheese, made from either cow's or goat's milk and with a delicately creamy texture and slightly sweet flavour. It also made for a great alternative to the normal Nabulsi or Akkawi cheeses used in Jordan. That combination of the golden,

crumbly exterior with the creamy Mató was a perfect harmony, and the syrup tied it all together in a sweet embrace. Sharing this dish with European colleagues opened a dialogue about the emotional connections we form through food. It was no longer just a dessert, but a conversation between cultures, shaped by place and memory. Cheese, in this case, became a bridge between Girona and Jordan —between personal tradition and regional adaptation. This simple experience highlighted how food transcends borders, with cheese as a key ingredient in both cultural preservation and creative exchange.



Production of Paipa cheese wheels in a family-run factory in Paipa, Colombia.

Nancy Rocío Rueda Esteban, Juan Fernando Sansón Rosas |

Universidad Externado de Colombia (Bogotá, Colombia)

Paipa Cheese: a cultural expression and an opportunity for economic sustainability and network creation



In Paipa, Colombia, surrounded by the green Andean landscapes, Paipa Cheese is produced from cow's milk. Considered a cultural expression passed down through generations since colonial times, it has held a designation of origin since 2011 due to its unique characteristics and significance. Here we find "Queso Paipa Factory", a family-run business dedicated for over 60 years to its production and the safeguarding of this tradition. For them, this gastronomic product is not only a marker of identity but also a means of family economic sustenance. In their words, the cultural value they assign to

this cheese is evident – they see it as a part of their culture, worthy of protection to ensure its authenticity and to reflect the distinctive traits of the region that gives it its name. Local networks have been built around its production, involving farmers, dairy workers, transporters, producers, and others. Without a doubt, exploring the production of Paipa Cheese through the lens of a family that survives thanks to this tradition reveals how a gastronomic product can be a symbol of cultural expression, network creation and economic sustainability.



My signature salad: pesto base, tomato, burrata, tomato jam, microgreens, and dehydrated onion flakes.

Natalia Daries Ramón | Universitat de Lleida (Spain)

The art of the cheese salad: my personal signature



As a Valencian who has resided in Lleida (Catalunya) for the past twenty-five years, my closest circle—my chosen family—consists of my friends. Perhaps for this reason, my home is always open. As a researcher specializing in high-level gastronomy, I delight in authentic gourmet experiences. I thoroughly enjoy hosting guests, and there is one dish that is always present and eagerly anticipated: the salad. Yet this is no ordinary salad. What elevates it to something extraordinary is the careful selection of cheeses—always the protagonists—sourced both from small local producers and from renowned international varieties that I

have discovered throughout my academic career. I am passionate about combining intense flavors and diverse textures, with a distinctive touch emerging when I integrate them with artisanal jams crafted from local fruits—figs, berries, citrus, and more. This sweet-and-savory contrast, combined with fresh vegetables, fruits and nuts, transforms a traditional dish into a culinary creation that surprises, delights, and sparks conversation. For me, a well-prepared salad with cheese, dressed with a sauce made with homemade jam, is not merely a main course; it is my way of making those around me feel special, and of expressing, through taste, my love for haute cuisine and the culture that inspires me every day.



Kneaded cheese from the traditional Carchi region of Montúfar, accompanied by corn, ullucu tuber and cooked beans.

Nataly Andrea Cáceres-Santacruz | Universidad de Especialidades Turísticas (Quito, Ecuador)

Kneaded cheese from Carchi: flavor that provokes memories



As a research professor, I have had the good fortune to travel through many corners of Ecuador with my students, in search of those cultural expressions that give identity to each place. It was on one of these tours, in the canton of Montúfar, where I rediscovered the Carchi cheese. I had tasted it many times in my childhood, in family breakfasts, but this time it was different. The simple tasting, in a modest place, without accompaniments or pretensions, allowed me to understand its true value, because the kneaded cheese is not only a food, it is

a living memory. With a history of almost 500 years, its sandy texture and salty flavor evokes the cuisine of grandmothers and the daily rhythm of Carchenses homes. It is part of the local identity, to the point that its producers fight today for the recognition of its denomination of origin, not only for a seal, but because they know that this cheese represents who they are, what they have lived, and what they want to preserve. In this way, the kneaded cheese is a symbol of cultural resistance, territorial pride, and a way of life that clings to the land, tradition, and flavor.



Romanian polenta with fresh cheese made of cow milk and sour cream.

Nela Filimon | Universitat de Girona (Spain)

Cheese with polenta and a touch of Romanian rural culinary tradition



Polenta, made from boiled corn flour is, together with cheese (*brânză*, the generic term), a staple food in the Romanian cuisine, being also known as Romanian polenta or *mămăligă*, in the local language. Its high versatility allows for many combinations of foods, going, for example, from dishes with eggs, meats, fish, cheeses or milk, to some soups. A traditional dish combines *mămăligă*, fresh cheese made of cow milk (*brânză de vaci*), and sour cream (*smântână*). The image illustrates this traditional dish. In many rural areas, these ingredients are still genuine

and homemade, following a traditional elaboration process: the raw cow milk, stored in either clay pots or glass jars, is left undisturbed to curdle, and during this natural process the milk fat (*smântână*) rises to the top of the containers. After retaining the *milk fat*, the remaining curdled milk is used to make the fresh cheese (*brânză de vaci*). This dish shows that rural areas are playing a significant role in ensuring not only the preservation of traditional culinary recipes but also of intangible ancestral knowledge about production processes, which are thus kept alive.



The deep-fried bananas are first drizzled with condensed milk and layered with a generous amount of grated cheddar, then topped with another layer of condensed milk and cheddar. Some sellers add Oreo crumbs or chocolate sauce as a finishing touch.

Nur Aliah Mansor | Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (Kampar, Perak, Malaysia)

Put cheese on it = viral foods!



The smell of homemade pizza filling my mum's kitchen is one of the fondest memories of my childhood. Malaysia is not a cheese-producing country, so cheese is expensive here, and that pizza was a special treat. More recently, however, cheese has begun seeping into our food scene. Malaysians' affinity for cheese spans from Western foods to Asian fusion dishes like South Korean *buldak* (Korean-style fire chicken), whose highlight is the stringy mozzarella wrapped around the chicken. We also have our own local snacks, like *keropok lekor* cheese (fish finger snacks topped with spicy cheese powder). But the best of all, the most successful marriage of cheese and local flavor, is *goreng pisang* (crispy deep-fried banana). This afternoon snack, a staple of roadside sellers, is now being 'upgraded'

with 101 sweet variations. The freshly deep-fried banana melts the cheese, creating a "dripping" effect known as *leleh*, the buzzword used to describe cheese-related dishes sold here. Cheese is here to stay, but there are limits to the extent to which cheese should be added to Malaysian foods. I enjoy garlic cheese *naan* (Indian flatbread with grated garlic filled with sliced cheese), but *nasi lemak* (a fragrant rice cooked with coconut milk and pandan leaves and served with spicy sambal, fried peanuts, anchovies, and sliced cucumber) with cheese? No, thank you. Cheese does tone down the spiciness, but I think it's ruining our national dish. Rather than enjoying cheese on its own, I'd say Malaysians treat cheese as another kind of MSG. Not sure what to do with a dish? Put tonnes of cheese on it!



Wooden board with a round fresh cheese cut open, slices of bread with Queixo do Castelo cheese, quince and blueberries, next to walnuts, seeds, and dried fruits.

Photo: M. Carballado, courtesy of Queixo do Castelo.

Nuria Louzao Belmonte | CETT Barcelona, School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy (Spain)

A taste of Galicia



I taste Queixo do Cebreiro, and for a moment, I feel like I'm back in Galicia, where the green mountains meet the fresh, clean air that gently touches your face. It's a soft cheese, shaped like a small chef's hat, made from the milk of cows that graze freely on the mountain fields, cared for by families, with so much love, who protect this tradition, one that was close to disappearing. I remember family summers, the table full of laughter, sharing Queixo do Cebreiro with quince paste, blueberries, and nuts, while the scent of wet grass came through the window. This cheese is more than a taste; it feels like

a warm hug from home, a reminder of the people who have kept its production alive with care and dedication across generations. Each bite takes me back to those calm afternoons, to long, unhurried conversations after lunch, to the Camino de Santiago, and to those landscapes that fill your soul. Queixo do Cebreiro reminds me that some flavours bring us home, to our family, to our land, and to those simple moments that stay in our hearts forever. It is a small piece of Galicia you can taste, full of stories, memories, and the quiet beauty of sharing a table with those we love, anytime and anywhere.



Open torta cheese with bread, figs, traditional cork, holm oak wood, and rush tools once used in rural Extremadura.

Olga I. Mancha-Cáceres | Complutense University of Madrid (Spain)

Extremaduran “tortas”: the heart beneath the rind



In Extremadura, we call “torta” a type of cheese with a hard rind that must be opened at the top to reach its creamy, sometimes almost liquid interior. What was originally a limitation—a cheese shaped like a loaf of bread that collapses under its own weight—has become its defining feature and, also, a source of conflict. Two Protected Designations of Origin (PDOs) compete for the use of the term “torta”: La Serena (Badajoz) and Casar de Cáceres (Cáceres). They produce nearly identical cheeses, shaped by the dry climate, the milk of Merino sheep, and the use of *Cynara cardunculus* flower as rennet. The conflict is more emotional and symbolic than technical. But can a word

born from the land be reduced to a brand? Can a single gesture—opening the “torta”, accessing its interior, and spreading it on bread—be subject to usage rights? When I do it, I think about the paradox inherent in protection schemes: while they safeguard a product, they also create exclusive spaces of use, and profit, from a cheesemaking “savoir faire” embedded in broader frameworks of traditional knowledge, like that of my father, who knew how to make “cucharros” and “horteras” from cork, “machadores” from holm oak wood, or rush baskets—regenerative knowledge we must recover to sustain ways of life aligned with the rhythms of the earth.



"Quesos & Besos" goat cheese, soft and artisanal, ideal for enjoying at home drizzled with a good olive oil.

Pablo Juan Cárdenas-García | University of Jaén (Spain)

The day I discovered that Jaén also tasted like cheese



I have always been proud to be from Jaén, a province traditionally associated with olive oil. So until recently, if someone had asked me about cheese, I would have made a slight grimace, since I never thought a cheese made here could compete with the great ones. Everything changed when I read that a cheese from Jaén had been chosen as the best cheese in the world: 'The goat cheese Olavidia, from Jaén, named the best cheese in the world at the 2021 World Cheese Awards'. It was a cheese made by the creamery *Quesos y Besos*, located in Guarroman, a village I

had visited hundreds of times and never would have imagined was connected to the cheese industry. After hearing the news, I made a point of visiting the town to get my hands on the cheese and try it at home, in a sort of ritual that involved the whole family. Its creamy texture, elegant flavor... everything was perfect. But beyond the taste, what truly left a mark was the thrill of discovering that my homeland, in addition to having the best olive oils in the world, could also surprise me with something so different and exquisite.



Herd of free-roaming goats in the Andes Mountains, Limarí Province, Northern Chile.

Photo: Alexandra Kann.

Pablo Lacoste | Universidad de Santiago de Chile (Chile)

Norchilean goat cheese



After cycling from the beaches of La Serena to Paihuano, in the heart of the Andes Mountains, a goat cheese empanada with tomato and basil becomes a unique delicacy, with the deep flavor of five centuries of history. The arid mountains of Chile's Norte Chico region are the birthplace of traditional goat cheese, made by herders from the milk of their goat herds. This nearly 500-year-old tradition began with the arrival of Spanish settlers and their small livestock. Goats adapted well to the mountainous landscapes of the Andes and became companions to the herders,

shepherds, winemakers and small-scale miners who populated the region from the 16th century onward. Goat cheese gave rise to a distinctive gastronomic tradition, with emblematic products like the goat cheese, tomato, and basil empanada, highly appreciated in the Limarí, Elqui, and Huasco Valleys. Goat cheese, along with pisco (a traditional local spirit), dry-stone walls, arid mountains, the aguaribay tree (molle or pepper tree), cacti and the adobe architecture with roofs made from totora plant fibers, form the pillars of a cultural landscape with a singular identity in Chile's Norte Chico.



In the culinary landscape of Odisha, cottage cheese, known as *chhena*, is associated with the region's tradition and culture. It plays a crucial role in the preparation of delicate sweets. By using the *chhena*, we used to make lots of local sweets such as *rasagolla* (cheese balls in sugar syrup), *cheenapoda* (burnt cheese cake), and *chennamududki* (cheese chunks in sugar syrup) which are relished during festivals, and also offered to the local God.

Patita Paban Mohanty | Siksha 'O' Anusandhan Deemed to be University (Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India)

Cheese (*Chhena* in local language) in Odisha's culinary landscape



My personal experience with cheese is very pragmatic and insightful, as I have grown up in a vegetarian family, where milk and milk-based products are prominently used in daily cooking. Odisha, in India, is an agrarian state where lower middle-class households predominantly rely on agriculture and animal husbandry. As a result, cow farming and milking are common village professions to earn bread and butter, as well as fulfilling the nutritional gap among the children. Two decades ago, most countryside families were impoverished with low income and faced difficulties in fostering children's education and their upbringing. However, parents with a single income or no income depend on animal farming as a staple

source of income. Conversely, I spent my childhood with cows of different species, relishing pure milk and *chhena* all day. I remember that my mother used to look after the cows in cowsheds and milked them twice a day, in the morning and evening. She then prepared the *chhena* by curdling it with the help of whey water or lemon juice as a souring agent. The loaf was then covered with a muslin cloth to remove the excess water and make it softer and more pliable. The local village market is very close to our house, where I used to sell cheeseloafs to the sweet stalls, which made delicious sweets. On a monthly basis, the shopkeepers gave us the money, and I used it to buy cow fodder for them to improve milking.



Family workshop:
Grandma's bread with
Girona cheese, onion
and white wine.

Paula Ginés | Costa Brava and Girona Pyrenees (Girona, Spain)

Grandma's cheese bread



In our home, we've always loved cheese. In fact, a cheese board is a must at every gathering. Many years ago, my grandmother, always creative in the kitchen, came up with a recipe, that she saw somewhere, that was a real explosion of flavours. She began making a cheese-filled bread that quickly became a family favourite and even a friendly battle to see who could eat the most. She cooks some onion with a splash of white wine, then add a mix of whatever cheeses she has at

home. She takes a country style bread and cuts a circular opening at the top, hollow it out slightly and fill it with a cheese mixture. This became her signature dish, something she taught us how to make, something we've shared and enjoyed together over the years. It's now a tradition in our family to prepare it surrounded by the flavours of our land. We enjoy trying cheeses from other places, but the province of Girona has some truly exceptional ones.



Grilled lobster served on a hotplate, generously topped with melted cheese sauce, steaming and glistening, capturing a luxurious and indulgent cheese-and-seafood experience.

Pavitira Manogaran | Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (Malaysia)

Cheese with everything – including lobster



I've always been a big cheese lover, cheese with toast, instant noodles, roti canai, paratha, thosai, there's almost nothing I won't pair it with. But one of the most memorable cheese experiences I've had recently was in a restaurant that served grilled lobster topped with hot, creamy cheese sauce. The lobster was cooked just right, tender, not overdone and as the steamy, rich cheese melted over it, the flavors were indulgent, luxurious, and unforgettable. It was a beautiful blend of the sea and the dairy farm, right

on my plate. Cheese also changed the way I viewed other cuisines. The second memory comes from India. When I first tried paneer in 2018, I disliked its texture and flavor, preferring tofu as a Malaysian. But during a recent trip to Punjab in 2025, where vegetarianism is the norm, I had no choice but to rediscover paneer. It was prepared in countless delicious ways, grilled, roasted, simmered in buttery gravies and slowly, it won me over. Cheese is more than just food, it's comfort, curiosity, and connection across cultures.



Pedro Huitzilihuitl Ovando Flores | Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Huixquilucan
(Estado de México, México)

The ranchero world in a piece of Cotija cheese, protected in its region of origin



In the mountains of Jalisco and Michoacán, milk has been transformed into cheese for more than 400 years.

The ranchers of the region preserve a traditional know-how that gives life and continuity to Cotija cheese: a product transformed by hand during the rainy season each year, a time when free-range cows are cared for and given a place in everyday life: the butterfly, guava, spotted, and more are part of the coexistence of those who patiently craft a mature cheese, cared for from the moment the milk is obtained until, after three months under the care of the ranchero affineur,

a mature cheese is obtained. Life on the ranch is timeless. The industry produces large quantities of cheese for consumers, while on the ranch, the transformation is carefully monitored. Collecting 200 liters of milk for a piece that conveys identity, roots, and culture can only be achieved through continuous learning, which resists change against the tide. The biocultural food heritage shows that food expressions resist, are resilient, and give life to a little-known part of the gastronomic tradition: in this case, the ranchers who are found beyond the roads.

A cheese, a story.



Cheese during the aging process in an *obruk* cave.

Photo: Erdoğan Sağkaya.

Pembe Ülker | Erciyes University (Kayseri, Türkiye)

Divle Obruk Cheese



Divle Obruk Cheese is a special type of cheese made in Divle village of Karaman district, Türkiye. The cheese is made from raw milk and aged in natural caves called *obruk*. It is particularly made from sheep and goat milk and aged in the skin of these animals. The taste of the cheese retains and reflects many of the herbs grown over the pastures since the sheep and goats are fed freely over them; therefore, it reflects the terrain it is produced in through its taste and smell.

During aging, due to a naturally occurring bacterium in the caves in that specific geography, the surface of the cheese first begins to mold, then turns red over time as the process continues. The reddishness of the surface is a sign that it is aged. The cheese, which is aged for about 150 days in 36-meter-deep natural caves, reflects the terrain and geography, and maintains traditional knowledge and local culture. The production is arduous and limited, which makes each bite more valuable.



Christmas lunch with cured cheese, Iberian ham, red prawns, baby eels with garlic, and red wine on a traditional embroidered blue tablecloth in a family gathering.

Pere Mercadé Melé | University of Malaga (Spain)

Melting together: cheese as a bridge for family celebration



Every Christmas, our family comes together. Sometimes, we see relatives only once a year —and that makes these moments even more meaningful. We talk about trivial things, laugh at old jokes, and eat slowly, savoring the company as much as the food. What truly matters is being present, knowing that in a few hours, we will return to our separate lives— but with a shared memory. Among the flavors that mark this moment

is cured sheep cheese, firm and aged, with a taste that lingers like the warmth of a good conversation. That cheese, rich and authentic, becomes a metaphor for what we want to leave behind: a trace, a presence, a flavor that endures. The image was taken during Christmas lunch on December 25. For us, cheese is not just food; it's a bridge across generations, a symbol of continuity, and a way to melt together, again and again, each year.



Recreating the memory
– Port Wine Derby in
Spring sunshine in
Maclean (Australia),
Spring 2025.

Philip Hayward | University of British Columbia (Canada)

Regional cheese as lieu de mémoire



The strength of identification of food with place—and, especially—of cheese with place was confirmed for me one Spring lunchtime in a Sydney park, a year after moving there from the UK. Under luxuriant green trees my wife and I sat down for a picnic. On the way there she had stopped at a cheese shop to pick up something to go with our habitual sourdough baguettes. Anticipating our usual fare of feta or brie, I was surprised to unwrap a parcel containing chunks of Port Wine Derby and Ludlow Blue cheeses. In an instant, I was bilocated: on the grass

in Sydney and back in the UK. The colours did it for me: blue on yellow (*Penicillium roqueforti* running through the carotene yellow block) in the Ludlow and port-wine veining the Derby. I'm immediately in a gourmet pub in the Shropshire Hills and the taste of each was as heady as a cocktail—blackberry flavours bubbling in the Derby and a sweet-salty-tangy hit in the Ludlow. It was more than disconcerting. Food out-of-place. Sight and taste as virtual travel experiences. The surprise overwhelmed me and the memory is as fresh as ever as I recall it in this volume.



On the left, processed cheese slices wrapped in plastic. On the right, a wheel of artisanal cheese with a wedge cut out.

Image generated by ChatGPT based on the author's description.

Phoebe Everingham | Macquarie University (Sydney, Australia)

From plastic slices to artisanal wheels



Australia is not renowned for its cheese culture. As a white Australian settler descendent, my parents grew up on an English meat and three vegetables diet. Luckily for me my mother learnt the importance of good quality cooking, so we always had fresh food in our house and delicious home cooked dinners. Like most Australians of my generation, cheese is not something that our family grew up with. Some of my first memories of cheese is what might be referred to as 'plastic cheese' —plain cheese slices wrapped in plastic that doesn't even melt properly on a toasted sandwich. I remember my disgust when

as a 28-year-old I lived in a share house in Buenos Aires, Argentina, I found some mouldy cheese hiding in the back of the fridge. It stunk. Much to my surprise when my housemate, a French chef returned that night, a fit of outrage ensued when he found out I had thrown out his prize cheese that he had been cultivating for weeks! In recent years Australia's food culture has shifted dramatically, where a backlash against industrial food systems has led to an appreciation artisanal food —including great cheese, locally and ethically produced. I still can't say however that I enjoy mouldy cheese!



Enjoying cheeses, food and drink on the patio shielded from the sun under the live grape arbor at La Fromagerie near Essaouira, Morocco.

Robert L. Williams, Jr. | Mar-Kadam Associates (USA and Morocco),
 Helena A. Williams | University Mohammed VI Polytechnic (Morocco)

An idyllic cheese gastro-experience in Morocco



After a winding, picturesque drive south along the Moroccan Atlantic Coast from the city of Safi, as we neared the city of Essaouira we exited the macadam road to follow the rough-hewn dirt one which ended at a small clearing: La Fromagerie. After cautiously petting the watchful guard cat we knocked on the weathered & ornate heavy metal door. Was this the place we had heard about? Tucked away in the forest, focused on creating some of the most delectable cheeses? My wife Helena and I were greeted and ushered into a place where goat, cow and camel milk cheeses were lovingly and painstakingly made and aged. Next, while blissfully sitting outside,

breathing in the sea air, smelling the groomed flowers and greenery, listening to the delicate sounds of unseen birds, we were served a cheese board selection of their fresh cheeses made on-site to taste along with other local fruits and edible tidbits, complimented by a glass of Moroccan wine. Truly enchanting! Then inside for a delicious multi-course “home cooked” Moroccan meal, lovingly prepared and served. We had found a genuine host, raconteur, and chief cheese-maker, Abderrazzak, accompanied by attentive staff, within a kitchen culture preparing fresh, local Moroccan food and drink. A truly memorable and fun authentic gastro-experience.



Traditional alpine cheeses on display during Festunt, the cultural festival by the Strachitunt PDO Consortium celebrating local heritage, language, and flavors in the Bergamo valleys.

Roberta Garibaldi | University of Bergamo (Italy)

Reviving valleys through cheese: the story of Strachitunt and Festunt



From June 28 to July 20, 2025, the Taleggio and Brembilla Valleys hosted the first edition of *Festunt* (payoff *La terra, la lingua, la gente*). This cultural festival transformed the area into an open-air museum, celebrating a deep-rooted identity where landscape, language, memory, and taste are interwoven. At the heart of the event stood *Strachitunt*, the traditional two-curd cheese—more than just a product, it is a symbol of shared knowledge and cultural continuity. The programme featured initiatives linked to local dialect and cultural heritage, such as the exhibition of *Mythological Animals of the*

Land of Strachitunt and the presentation of the *Scotòm*—traditional nicknames passed down through generations to distinguish families and communities sharing the same surname but tracing different lineages. Highlights included the outdoor screening of *L'ultimo bergamino*, a documentary on transhumance; the experiential workshop *Mangiare Bergamino* exploring wild herbs and local myths; and *Bepi Quiss*, a quiz-style event celebrating the people and stories of Val Taleggio. *Festunt* is more than a celebration: it is an act of gratitude toward a culture that, like cheese, matures over time and reveals its richness when shared.



Facade of the shop and factory of signature cheeses and other goat milk-based products.

Rosa María Torres Valdés | Universidad de Alicante (Spain),
Ma. Consuelo Poblete Vargas | Ministerio de Agricultura (Chile)

Herencia de Campo: a round-trip goat cheese story



It happened in Marchigüe, Chile. Juan Fuentes is excited remembering his father goat's milk and his grandmother making cheese. "It's our history, our culture and a way of life". Juan traveled to the World Congress of Shepherds (2015) in Oñati-Arantzazu, in the Basque Country (Spain), and met milk and cheese producers, their organization and products. He returned to Marchigüe, inspired, but convinced that he could make signature cheeses, allying himself with fromelier Alejandro Thomas, "without the need to copy others work", because he had his cultural heritage from the countryside. He showed

us the corrals, milking parlor, factory and production process and the cozy shop in which, guided by him, we could taste and feel his country heritage in the fresh, semi-cured and mature cheeses, and a delicious cheese ice cream, corresponding to each one a sincere story. We understood through the palate his dream to create a museum in which the memory of this way of life is maintained and the youth see the potential of the rural world. An experience worth sharing with those we love, so we brought back to Spain those delicious signature cheeses remembering a special day in the land of Juan.



Swiss fondue prepared in a *caquelon* and shared between an international group of friends in a Swiss mountain's cottage.

Sarah Walter | Kontiki Reisen (Zürich, Switzerland)

Cultural integration through cuisine: a foreigner's experience of Swiss fondue



As a foreigner living in Switzerland, Swiss fondue represents more than just the national dish of the country I chose to call home.

Fondue is a vital part of Swiss heritage and identity. It's a ritual shared between and passed down through generations, encompassing everything from preparing the *caquelon* —the traditional earthenware pot used to melt the cheese— to selecting the right blend of cheeses and spices, as well as adopting the proper table etiquette and humorous penalties for those who accidentally drop their bread into the pot. Most families and regions have their own

recipe, preferred cheese combinations, and set of rules – such as “whoever drops their bread must run around the yard naked”. For an immigrant, learning about fondue, understanding how to prepare it, and mastering the associated customs offer an opportunity to embrace the culture of one's new home and become part of its community and traditions. When I shared my first self-made fondue with friends, it marked a significant milestone: a bubbling pot of melted cheese transformed into an emblem of “Swissness” and a vehicle for social integration, allowing to feel a sense of belonging in a new place.



Picnic made of La Vinyeta products.

Silvia Aulet | University of Girona (Spain)

A journey through tradition, land and shared moments



Cheese, like other elements of gastronomy, is part of an ancestral legacy and transmits a wide range of values and elements linked to the land and traditions. It tells us about the landscape where the herds have grazed, the paths that shepherds and animals have followed, the care of the environment, the different production processes and, also, how, with what and when it can be consumed. Cheese also relates to other elements of gastronomy. For example, during a visit to the La Vinyeta winery, cheese appeared unexpectedly since they explained to us that, in addition to making wine, they also make cheeses with

sheep's milk, because the sheep help them maintain the vineyards. I made the visit with my daughters, and after the visit we had a picnic with local products from La Vinyeta. It was a moment of sharing that transcended beyond the meal. We sat around a table, opening the cheese while enjoying the view of the vineyards and the sheep grazing peacefully among them. This moment was not only a gastronomic experience, but also an emotional one, which highlights not only the production but the value of sharing these moments with the people you love. The cheese, in this case, became a bridge that connected us with the land, tradition and coexistence.



The dish *molletes pirata*, accompanied on the left by the sauce known as *pico de gallo* and in front by a chocolate milkshake, at the Mexican restaurant Sanborns.

Image edited by ChatGPT based on the author's image.

Silvia María López Ruiz | University of Girona (Spain)

The childhood that never melts



My earliest experiences with cheese are connected to my happy childhood, my family, my parents and siblings. The week was filled with great enthusiasm and took on a different color as Sunday approached, dad would invite us to breakfast after church and we would delight in delicious *molletes pirata* at a traditional Mexican restaurant called Sanborns. It was a sacred moment: sharing time with my dearest ones at a special table and savoring this delicious dish made of bread cut in half, baked with butter and spread with refried beans. On top, a generous layer of “Mexican”

Manchego cheese, with the option of adding raw sauce or a salad known as *pico de gallo*, made with tomato, onion, cilantro, serrano chile, lime juice and salt to taste. As decoration, pirate pennants simulated ships loaded with adventures, and why not accompany them with a very cold, thick chocolate milkshake? More than 30 years later, if I want to travel back and remember the little girl I was and the sacred Sundays, all I have to do is go to the restaurant and order the dish that makes me happy. The flavors remain intact from that first moment, remembering the love and innocence shared at that table.



Cheese aged in a lambskin sack served with traditional fried dough (*uštupci*) from Sinj region, Dalmatian hinterland.

Photo: Monika Vrgoč, Sinj.

Smiljana Pivčević | University of Split (Croatia)

Cheese aged in a lambskin sack (*sir iz mišine*) – the quintessence of Dalmatian hinterland people



Strolling among the colourful stalls of the Split market “Pazar”, a sharp smell captivated me – it was cheese aged in a lambskin sack (*sir iz mišine*). Although I live in Split, my roots are in the Dalmatian hinterland, where this cheese originates and is more than just food – it is a precious, now protected food heritage, spoken of with admiration and respect, almost like a sanctity. I first heard about it from my grandfather Nikola and his family of 13 children (yes, 13!), but I had never tasted it. It was like a myth to me. So, when I stumbled upon it at the market, I had

to try it. When the vendor offered me a slice, a movie-like slow-motion sequence played in my mind. The strong, distinctive smell brought back childhood memories, and savouring it felt like a homage to my ancestors. Its flavour was raw, intense, full of character – just like the people who make it. It was a moment of honouring not only the long tradition of hand salting, sack packing, and patiently waiting for it to mature, but even more so the strong and dignified people of my region. Each strong, time-aged bite holds the spirit of generations and sparks my pride anew.



Grilled goat cheese on salad —restaurant in Barcelona, Spain.

Stefania Maci | University of Bergamo (Italy)

From Feta and beyond: a journey through the world of cheese



My cheese saga began at 25, with a life-altering introduction to Feta in Greece. Picture this: the sun beating down, the aroma of olives and herbs wafting through the air, and there it was, a block of Feta cheese on my plate, glistening with olive oil and sprinkled with oregano. The first bite was nothing short of a revelation —a salty explosion of flavour that was both tangy and creamy; it was love at first taste. That Feta cheese experience ignited a passion within me, transforming me into a cheese enthusiast. Almost thirty years later, I found myself at a quaint restaurant in

Barcelona, and as fate would have it, my order arrived: a salad topped with grilled goat cheese reminded me of my first Feta encounter. Its caramelised crust and creamy interior were a delightful blend, proving cheese's transformative power. This experience reinforced my conviction that I am indeed a cheese person. Whether it's the simplicity of a cheese board at home or a gourmet dish in a restaurant, cheese never fails to delight. It has become a symbol of my culinary journey, filled with rich flavours, diverse experiences, and a profound appreciation for the art of cheese.



Village festival in Italy with pecorino cheese, focaccia, and wine on a table, market stalls and dancers in a stone square.

Image generated by ChatGPT based on the author's description.

Stephanie Ashford | Baden-Württemberg Cooperative State University (Germany)

Chance encounter with Pecorino



It was a lucky accident that we found ourselves savouring pecorino cheese while watching locals whirl through a feverish tarantella in a small southern Italian village. My Italian relatives had planned to take us to a music festival in Melfi, but we arrived a day too early. On the drive back to their home in Potenza, we stumbled upon the *Sagra del Pecorino di Filiano DOP*, an annual festival dedicated to the region's prized sheep's milk cheese, protected under the European DOP label for its tradition and authenticity. At the heart of the festival was the Mostra-Mercato, where stalls displayed wheels of pecorino at every stage of maturation. We could resist

the samples. The younger cheeses were subtle, pale, and delicately tangy, recalling fresh milk and wild herbs. The older wheels were amber, firm, and crumbly, filled with aromas of hay, nuts, and mountain air. When paired with local focaccia and Aglianico wine, each bite was like a journey through Basilicata's landscape. My partner enjoyed it so much that my relatives now call him "Pecorino". What I'll remember most, though, is not the Melfi mix-up that led us to a feast of cheese, but the warmth and friendliness of the locals and the pride they showed in Lucanian traditions. This was not a tourist spectacle, but a celebration of food, culture and community.



Selling artisan cheeses in the Asturian East (*Oriente Asturiano*), Spain.

Susana Ramírez García | Complutense University of Madrid (Spain)

Preserving cultures and life through artisan cheese production and its commerce in the Asturian mountains (Northern Spain)



Market days. The same corner every week where the market takes place: cheeses, a table and an awning, for rain or sun, is the commercial setting of Caxigón artisan cheesery. Óscar, the third generation of this family cheesery or María Eugenia, his mother, go to another village's markets. They leave with their van from the village of Berodia, in the council of Cabrales, in the Asturian East. Their routes are short and their distribution includes cheeses they produce. Their products just have the cheesery name and the indication of *who* produces the milk (goat, cow or sheep).

Only the cave-ripened goat cheese is distinguished as a premium grade. They also distribute another cheese well-known by the public: "gamoneu" from L'Arbeyal cheesery. Producing cheeses in small villages of livestock farming sites, maturing them in caves managed as commons, shortening food chains. Common practices throughout history, acting today as seeds of resilience and offering us food to feed our bodies and our territories. Responses, aligned with local knowledge, that simplify food processing, preserve cultures and roll without accruing global environmental diseases. A matter of scales?



“Cretan Gruyere”: a hard cheese which requires 3 months of ripening before consumption. It has 38% maximum moisture, 40% minimum fat content in a dry environment and 2% maximum salt content.

Theodore Katerinakis | Hellenic Open University (Greece)

Of goats and sheep



Goats are sociable, curious, playful and intelligent. They are known for their climbing abilities and strong personalities, independent and assertive behaviors. At the end of the 19th century, Yannis Balantis, an educated native of the legendary “Constantinople” secretly flees to Chania. Due to the pressure exerted on him by the Ottoman rule, he escapes to the village of Theriso. The peasants offer him a house and land. Goats are emotional creatures bonding within their herd and can be reactive to perceived threats. After the end of the revolution, the Ottomans carry out a great persecution in the village of Theriso; the Balantinos’

sons ran away to a monastery. Sheep by nature are followers, docile animals. Since 1928, the Balantinos family creates history in the field of cheese with a modern factory and respect to tradition, relentless investment in technology and an optimized network for direct distribution of finished products. Today, the 4th generation aims to increase production capacity and innovate. Balantinos gruyere (graviera) is produced with fresh sheep’s and goat’s daily collected milk. On Crete, sheep and goats primarily eat wild grasses, herbs, and shrubs that grow freely on the island’s mountains and pastures, contributing to the unique flavor of Cretan cheese!



A symbol of Wangen im Allgäu: the land of hay-fed cow milk and cheese products.

Thuy Nguyen | Independent researcher (Hamburg, Germany)

The cheese heritage of Wangen im Allgäu, Germany



Breathtaking scenery with the river Argen, green meadows and hills rolling towards the snow-capped Alps. This is Wangen im Allgäu, a Southern German town famous for not only its beautiful landscape but also the authentic cheese and hay-milk products that we experienced in a visit in March 2025. Cheese has become a rooted artisan tradition of Wangen for more than a century with nearly 50 different varieties, from Mountain Cheese to Soft Cheese and Emmentaler with unique flavor from local hay-fed cows. Around Wangen, more than a dozen of dairies produce cheese from local milk like Emmentalerkäserei Leupolz and Bio-Käserei Zurwies. On a

hike, cycling or driving tour, visitors can experience such cheese heritage along the famous Allgäu Cheese Route (Allgäuer Käsestraße), a culinary tourism network of traditional hay-milk dairies, small cheese farms, shops and a cheese museum. We visited the “Käsehimmel”, a small fine shop in the heart of Wangen’s old town. The shop offers a large selection of cow, sheep and goat cheese with diverse flavors, originating from both local farms and neighboring countries. Thanks to the shop’s friendly service and hearted advice, we could distinguish different cheese types and excitedly bought some specialties featuring distinctive Alpine flavors.



Memories of Lyon in Auckland: Saint-Marcellin, Brillat-Savarin and Comte cheeses on a board with a baguette and cheese knife, with strawberries in the background.

Tracy Berno | Auckland University of Technology (New Zealand)

A slice of somewhere: travel, cheese and the art of remembering



The word souvenir is derived from the French word of the same spelling, meaning something to help one remember. Some people buy fridge magnets to remind them of their travels. I buy cheese. If a souvenir is to help one remember a place, then for me, nothing does that better than cheese. An artisanal cheese is redolent of terroir, the very essence of a place. Terroir is not just environmental aspects, but also agronomic, social and cultural dimensions of place and the relationship that exists between the land, people and culture. Terroir is both tangible —smell, taste, touch— as well as intangible —it also

affects an emotional response. In other words, cheese, through its terroir, evokes multisensory memories of place, which is exactly what I want a souvenir to do. Like destinations, each cheese is different. At every step of cheese-making the unique attributes of the location in which it is produced shape the final product. Through cheese, “culture” is uniquely co-created through the coming together of societal traditions and microbial cultures. Cheese tells a story about, and tastes of, the place from which it was derived. Cheese, more so than anything else, takes me back to a place, a time, a memory.



Generously filled cheese platter with extras. Vila Real, North Portugal.

Photo: Anabela, '100% SABOR'.

Veronika Joukes | Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro - UTAD and Centre for Transdisciplinary Development Studies - CETRAD (Vila Real, Portugal)

Two in one with cheese in the middle



When considering where people usually buy cheese in a town in northern inland Portugal throughout the year, large supermarkets, local grocery stores and the municipal market spring to mind. In Vila Real, in particular, there is no shop that exclusively sells cheese, but two stock a wider variety of cheeses alongside their range of regional products. I would like to highlight the shop '100% SABOR' (100% flavour), which is strategically located on Rua da Misericórdia No. 33, a pedestrianised street full of restaurants that are popular with tourists. In addition to selling wines, craft beers, olive oils, honey

and handicrafts, this establishment has Portuguese and foreign cheeses (e.g., from the Netherlands, Switzerland and Italy) that you can taste before buying. You can also eat them on site, either upstairs or on the terrace, where they are presented on boards with a selection of sausages and smoked meats, dried and fresh fruit, jams and honey, and a good Douro wine. It is one of those places that invites you in, where the space itself and the presentation of the food are pleasing to the eye and comforting to the soul. Here, the shop evolves into a tavern-like haven, where tradition and innovation come together over cheese.



Jenifer Santos at Aborigen, her goat farm in Arafo, Tenerife, in the Canary Islands, where she follows a no-slaughter philosophy. A memory shared with the author by Jenifer Santos, of the Aborigen cheesery, during the fire that swept through much of the forested crown of Tenerife in the Canary Islands in 2023.

Yanet Acosta | Rey Juan Carlos University (Madrid, Spain)

Before the cheese



That night, she went to bed at nine, just like always. Three days earlier, she had warned the town council that everything around her was a powder keg. They had already forced her to evacuate once because of a flare-up, and she'd had three miscarriages. But that night, she woke up at 11 pm to police in the street and two trucks. Fire behind them. That's when she knew. There wouldn't be time to get her goats onto the trucks. And she herself would have to take care of her dogs. She'd been asking for permission to graze them on communal land for two years, and no one had responded. She'd had to make her way down to a private mountainside 300 meters below, because she couldn't use the public land. The goats were for grazing and clearing the brush.

But no one replied. She makes cheese from the excess milk of goats, those that produce beyond the usual, after weaning their kids at two and a half months. With so much protein and fat that with little milk, she makes more cheese. No pressure, no sacrifice. Chispita is nine years old and has just given birth. And ten, fifteen, twenty minutes go by. Her mother arrives and takes her pickup with the dogs inside. Now, yes. Run with the goats. Their udders full. Run. Don't look back. And silence. Only the fire speaks. And it moves faster than we do. At six in the morning, we reach the ravine and take shelter in some abandoned pens. In seven years, she hadn't seen a single case of mastitis. In seven hours, half of them fell ill, and all of them aborted.



Wheels and wedges of Puđa *Livanjski sir* hard cheese arranged on a rustic wooden board with herbs.

Photo: Puđa family.

Zvonimir Kuliš | University of Split (Croatia)

Livno cheese: a taste of heritage preserved in the Dinaric Alps



Nestled in the Dinaric Alps of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Livno cheese (*Livanjski sir*) reflects a tradition that began in 1888 during the Austro-Hungarian period, when its production was modeled on Gruyère. By the early 20th century, small private dairies flourished, and by 1933, over twenty cheesemakers operated in Livno and its surroundings. Initially made exclusively from sheep's milk, its production shifted over decades to mixed sheep and cow's milk, and later to predominantly cow's milk by the 1970s. Nowadays produced in the Livno region, where Mediterranean and continental climates converge, Livno cheese combines specific environmental conditions with traditional techniques to achieve exceptional quality, recognized by its EU Protected Geographical Indication status. It is a premium hard cheese, with a compact, closed texture that melts in the mouth, it releases fine

crystals and a sweet, nutty flavor reminiscent of walnut kernels, developing into pleasant spiciness. While primarily enjoyed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Dalmatia (Croatia), it is also internationally recognized as a hallmark of Bosnia and Herzegovina's dairy excellence and a proud ambassador of its culinary heritage worldwide. Today, several producers make Livno cheese, and among the finest is the Puđa family, whose work exemplifies how tradition endures in modern times. Blending a centuries-old recipe, premium mountain milk, and generational craftsmanship with contemporary standards, they ensure that each wheel reflects both heritage and excellence. More than a celebrated cheese, Livno cheese remains a living expression of the Dinaric highlands. In the hands of makers like the Puđa family, it embodies the resilience and identity of its people, carrying forward the history, tradition, and spirit of its homeland.

