

# Chapter 2

## The Concept of Cheese Tourism

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### ABSTRACT

*Gastronomic tourism, which is a combination of food and tourism, has become a very popular form of travel. Cheese tourism, which is a part of gastronomy tourism, has recently emerged as a form of tourism that attracts the attention of tourists. Cheese tourism is a type of niche tourism where the travel motivation is to visit places where cheese is produced, especially in rural areas. There are many cheese tourism destinations around the world that offer different experiences. Regions where cheese tourism is carried out are significantly affected by the economic contribution of this tourism. Cheese tourism is a cultural identity and is important in preserving and promoting local heritage. Thanks to tourism, traditional cheese-making processes are transmitted from generation to generation and protected against modernization. These experiences enable tourists to have a deeper understanding of the history and cultural diversity of the region.*

### INTRODUCTION

Milk has been used in different ways by humans from the past to the present due to its high nutritional value. Milk and dairy products are important nutrients for people to have a balanced diet and lead a healthy life. Human beings have transformed milk, which is very difficult to preserve, into various products such as cheese, yogurt, and butter in order to increase its durability and make it easier to transport. Cheese has been consumed by every society in almost every part of the world for centuries and is one of the oldest cultural heritages of humankind. Especially in recent years, tourists have started to demand trips that appeal to all senses instead of trips that appeal only to the visual senses, making local cuisines important for the recognition and development of destinations. This trend has made cheese one of the most indispensable foods in terms of tourism and gastronomy, as well as its cultural richness and nutritional content (Keskin and Dağ, 2020). The role of cheese in tourism has recently been investigated within the framework of food tourism studies. Cheese tourism is a culinary tourism that requires special attention, defined as the process of attributing tourism value to cheese, and expresses the appreciation of milk production and cheese-making processes, especially in rural areas with a tradition of animal husbandry. In this section, where the concept of cheese tourism is explained, first the place of food in

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tourism is mentioned, and then the place and importance of cheese in tourism are mentioned. In addition, popular destinations for cheese tourism and cheese tourism practices in these destinations are mentioned.

## **FOOD AND TOURISM**

Food serves as more than just a basic means of nourishment; it also functions as a cross-cultural medium that incorporates cultural values and identity (Berno and Fusté-Forné, 2020). Only in its place of origin can one fully appreciate the true essence of food. The national foods of a country have a distinctiveness that is exclusive to that particular country. Food, as a legacy product, is closely associated with its place of origin (Fusté-Forné, 2020b). The correlation between food and tourism has recently garnered growing interest (Fusté-Forné, 2021).

Food can be experienced in several ways, depending on individual and social circumstances that can vary. The key sorts of experiences associated with food as a form of leisure in tourist consumption are enjoyment, health, social connection, and a sense of location. These motivations enable individuals to deeply engage in current culinary habits and gain knowledge about various cultural contexts (Berno and Fusté-Forné, 2020).

Tourism, as an economic endeavor, has the potential to enhance and distinguish the offerings of other sectors in terms of value. Tourism enhances the enjoyment and sales processes of agri-food products, improves service, and adds value to the agri-food offer. Similar to other industries, the tourist sector is transitioning towards the experience economy in order to enhance the quality of its offerings. Consumers in this setting have a specific desire for tourism items that offer certain experiential and emotional content. In order to enhance tourism activities, it is necessary to provide features that will provide a more immersive experience. While eating is a regular activity that fulfills our physiological nutritional requirements, in the context of tourism, the goal is to transform food consumption into an experiential journey by incorporating emotional and immersive elements that lead to satisfaction and lasting memories (Moreno-Lobato et al., 2023). Tourism in rural areas is an innovative technique that guarantees the economic viability of local small agri-food firms (Fusté-Forné and Cerdan, 2021).

The resources found in rural areas have traditionally served as the foundation for the primary sector. However, in recent decades, tourism has superseded agriculture as the predominant economic activity in the majority of rural communities. Tourism has a growing correlation with agricultural and livestock output. Considering the interdependence between agricultural production and tourism in rural areas, it is important to analyze this relationship beyond the sole impact of tourism on the agricultural sector. The core inquiry revolves around the potential synergy between tourism, agriculture, and animal husbandry in attaining sustainable objectives. Food tourism presents a viable option for local producers, particularly those in rural regions, to enhance the worth of their products by considering both the natural and social surroundings (Fusté-Forné, 2016).

A particular area's culinary customs mirror the culture and mindset of its inhabitants, intricately tying the concept of food heritage to a specific geographical and temporal context. When tourists consume a natural or traditional product, they not only benefit from the nutritional aspects of the meal but also experience the symbolic attributes associated with that product, such as the essence of nature, cultural significance, and the unique identity of the place. For instance, consuming just-harvested agricultural products signifies not only a biological attribute but also the acquisition of a temporary rural persona (Fusté-Forné, 2015). For the gastronomic traveler, food consumption entails not just savoring the cuisine

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