

# Chapter 8

## Cheese Aesthetics in Tourism

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter examines the aesthetics of cheese in the context of tourism, focusing on the cultural and environmental factors that contribute to its valorization. The objective of the chapter is to explore how cheese becomes a significant element in tourist experiences through the notion of aesthetics which still needs to be analysed in food tourism. The chapter shows that traditional cheese-making practices are juxtaposed with innovative approaches that reveal the role of cheese in tourism through experiences at restaurants. Results reveal the appeal of cheese, where cultural and environmental attributes create a unique aesthetic experience for tourists based on the relationship between people, places, and practices. The chapter also analyses the importance of recognizing cheese as a dynamic artifact that reflects both historical practices and contemporary innovations. Theoretical and practical implications, and opportunities for future research, are discussed.*

### INTRODUCTION

Cheese is a food made from milk that has been part of the world's culture for thousands of years (Dalby, 2009; Tunick, 2014). With the evolution of leisure and tourist practices, more and more destinations have developed their attraction around cheese, and cheese is also promoted as a destination landmark (see, for example, Fusté-Forné, 2020a). This is the case of Bra Cheese Festival in Italy or Dutch cheese markets, but also rural areas that have cheese as an identity marker (Magri-Harsich et al., 2024). Cheese tourism refers to the recreational visit to a place with a motivation to explore its cheese resources, which may include the farmers' facilities, the landscape itself, events, and also the restaurants (Fusté-Forné, 2015). Cheese traditions rely on both the environmental and cultural factors that identify and shape the personality of a place, and which are transferred to cheese production (i.e. cheese making) and consumption

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-3490-4.ch008

(i.e. cheese recipes) from generation to generation. The protection and promotion of the personality of a place is also performed through its aesthetics (Smith, 2015; Tribe, 2009).

The aesthetics of food have been primarily developed around the notion of *food art* and related to *fine dining* (see Korsmeyer, 1999). However, the interest of academics and practitioners in the aesthetics of food is growing looking at its cultural and social significance (Plakias, 2021). Previous research has focused on the aesthetics of food concerning traditional cuisines (see Miele and Murdoch, 2002). In line with Miele and Murdoch (2002), this chapter understands the ‘gastronomic aesthetic’ in the context of eating out, through the “aesthetic of ‘connectedness’ or ‘embeddedness’ in which the food is seen as a reflection of surrounding socio-economic and ecological relationships”. According to Nguyen (2020), “a life with food is a life full of process aesthetics”. This encapsulates the culinary heritages and also the source of the food, where agriculture is a prerequisite for the construction of the food tourism experiences (Berno et al., 2014). The environment where food comes from provides an aesthetic engagement (Adams, 2018) based on the notion of *terroir*. In this sense, knowledge about the product accentuates the aesthetics of food (see Ravasio, 2018). In this sense, cheese emerges as a relevant food with traceable cultural and natural connections (Miele and Murdoch, 2004) which facilitates the engagement of consumers not only with food but also with the meanings attached to food, creating *embedded relations*.

This chapter explores the function of food aesthetics in light of the cultural and natural elements of cheese as a product and how and why they are manifested in tourism. After the introduction, the chapter presents the literature review and the method. Later, the chapter analyses the results and presents the discussion and the conclusion. The chapter also includes the theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and opportunities for future research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In addition to its nutritional importance for human life, food is an important indicator of culture. Food is an element of intangible cultural heritage and has become increasingly important in tourists’ choice of a destination (Richards, 2012). Food is a component and driver of tourist experiences. Seyitoğlu and Ivanov (2020) suggest that destinations can build a differentiation strategy based on their unique food products to build a gastronomic identity (Harrington, 2005), which is also a source of competitiveness (Knollenberg et al., 2021). Using images of food is a powerful tool to attract consumers (Frochot, 2003), and providing quality food is equally important to create a satisfactory experience (Campo et al., 2017). From this point of view, food is also an important tool for marketing practices of both businesses and destinations (Du Rand and Heath, 2006).

Pine and Gilmore (2013) argued that we entered an experience economy where experiences take the place of services as the main economic offerings. Food has a significant place in creating a memorable tourism experience (Stone et al., 2018). It is particularly an important source of authentic experiences (Zhang et al., 2019) on the condition that it is consumed where it grows (Fusté-Forné, 2020b). The culture and nature, and a sense of place can be transmitted through a piece of food (Berno and Fusté-Forné, 2020). While food and beverage correspond to 25% of tourist expenditures, a tourist traveling with gastronomic motives can spend approximately 50% of the total budget on food and beverage (The World Food Travel Association, 2023).

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