

# Chapter 12

## Taste of Tradition: Examining the Connection Between Gastronomic Heritage, Cheese, and Tourism

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Cuisine is one of the most important aspects of any country, region, or culture, serving as a powerful expression of its identity. Cheese represents an iconic element of Balkan gastronomy, and Romanian cheese bringing a distinctive and authentic note to the culinary landscape of the region. With a long history, Romanian cheese stands out for its diversity, including varieties such as telemea, ca , urda, burduf, or brânză de burduf, each with its unique taste, texture, and traditional manufacturing process. Upon analysing the cheese production landscape in Romania, it becomes evident that the primary raw material utilized in the preparation of dairy products and cheeses is cow's milk. Local food and gastronomy makes a substantial contribution to sustainable tourism in rural areas, by increasing destination authenticity, boosting the local economy, encouraging ecologically responsible practices, and offering cultural richness to tourists.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Cuisine is one of the most important aspects of any country, region, or culture, serving as a powerful expression of its identity. Cheese represents an iconic element of Balkan gastronomy, and Romanian cheese bringing a distinctive and authentic note to the culinary landscape of the region. With a long history, Romanian cheese stands out for its diversity, including varieties such as telemea, ca , urda, burduf, or brânză de burduf, each with its unique taste, texture, and traditional manufacturing process. Upon analysing the cheese production landscape in Romania, it becomes evident that the primary raw material utilized in the preparation of dairy products and cheeses is cow's milk. Local food and gastronomy makes a substantial contribution to sustainable tourism in rural areas, by increasing destination authenticity, boosting the local economy, encouraging ecologically responsible practices, and offering cultural richness to tourists.

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## Background

Many rural areas in Central and Eastern Europe have substantial issues in terms of employment, career opportunities, and urban migration. In such cases, tourism appears as a potential option for capitalizing on local resources economically and responsibly, attracting external investment, and promoting local development. Rural tourism comprises a wide range of tourist lodgings and uses events, fairs, and cultural festivities to highlight the countryside's natural and human tourism potential, with active participation from the local community. As tourists seek more authentic experiences, rural tourism enterprises must work with the local community to creatively utilize the area's cultural and spiritual identity. Rural tourism is characterized by three core components: people, space, and products, all distinguished by their authenticity and traditional essence. The local inhabitants provide rich narratives and cultural traditions, while the surrounding natural landscapes showcase the area's beauty and environmental significance. Additionally, the products offered are intimately tied to the region's agricultural heritage, further enhancing the authentic experience for visitors.

In Romania, rural areas cover nearly 90% of the country's landmass, with rural inhabitants accounting for a significant 46.3% of the total population, one of the highest proportions in Europe. The primary touristic rural destinations with higher performance in Romania (Davidescu, Strat, Grosu, Zgură, & Anagnoste, 2018) are concentrated in the Central region (see figure 1.), characterized by picturesque mountainous and hilly landscapes found in counties like Braşov (including Bran, Moeciu, and Fundata), Harghita (including Tuşnad, Praid, and Zetea), Alba (including Arieşeni, Râmetea, and Garda de Sus), Sibiu (including Răşinari, Sadu, and Tălmăcel), Mureş (including Corunca and Saschiz), and Covasna (including Arcu and Bixad). Notably, the number of overnight stays in rural accommodations has surged from around 8.5% in 2014 to surpassing 18% by 2022. Cozma et al. (2021) suggest that “community-based tourism” is one of the most appropriate types of tourism development in Romanian communities. In this context, agro/agritourism emerges as a promising avenue for development. It involves expanding farm activities to generate additional revenue alongside agricultural income, thereby offering favourable opportunities for rural and local development (Coroşan et al., 2021).

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