

# Chapter 19

## Cheese Tourism in the Italian Dolomites: Learnings From the Gastronomic Landscape of Malga

Chiara Massacesi

*Free University of Bolzano/Bozen, Italy*

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter analyses a cheese-making and a butter-making demonstrations occurring in malga, a gastronomic landscape of the Italian Dolomites. The data informing this chapter arises from a lengthy ethnographic study carried out over eight years, from June 2015 to August 2023. The ethnographic account presented here illustrates the places, people, cultures and practices surrounding the cheese and thus the underpinning relationships, cultural beliefs, values and knowledge involved in these cheese tourism activities. The study wants to advance knowledge on cheese tourism by showing how cheese is the combination of the product, its place and its people and thus introducing the categories of encounters, experiences, performances and stories in the analysis of cheese tourism.*

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter illustrates a case study from the gastronomic landscape of mountain summer huts for farm animals, called in Italian *malga* (see key terms and definitions) in the Italian Dolomites area and shows how this gastronomic landscape creatively expresses the foodscape of the alpine cheese, constituting a ‘cheesescape’. A cheesescape is made up of the cheese-makers, the factories, the farmers, the markets and cafes (Fusté Forné, 2016). This statement illustrates that the cheesescape is connected to the land, to the historical and cultural context of the place and to the identity of the people. By presenting the different cheesescapes arisen from the gastronomic landscape of malga and defined by the geography of the *Valle del Primiero* and *Vanoi* in Italy, this chapter wants to enrich the conversations on cheese tourism.

Cheese tourism is described as “visiting areas of cheese-making and milk production” (Fusté Forné, 2015, p. 92). The author proposed a wheel to identify the activities associated to the cheese tourism. I look at this wheel from the concept of the cheesescape since the intricate network of the cheesescape

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-3490-4.ch019

emerges from the interplay between cheese, place and people and enables us to get to the essence of cheese tourism.

The data informing this chapter arises from a lengthy ethnographic study carried out over eight years in Valle del Primiero and Vanoi (Dolomites - Italian Alps) composed of three long periods of fieldwork from June 2015 to August 2023. Observations, informal conversations were employed to analyse two cheese making demonstrations in malga (Tuesday at *Malga Juribello* and Sunrise in *Malga Fossernica*) that are here conceptualised as different cheesescape.

The analysis of these cheesescape suggests that cheese tourism promotes encounters, experiences and stories and this categorization might help to enrich the cheese tourism wheel proposed by Fusté Forné (2015) and deepen the conversations around cheese tourism. This study contributes indeed to knowledge and practices around cheese tourism in rural areas of the Italian Dolomites and it concretely shows how cheese tourism might facilitate the networking between different stakeholders in order to preserve the gastronomic heritage and to foster a sustainable approach for tourism development. The research is based on a case study and has limitations related to this method. The case analysed, however, is emblematic of a cheese tourism destination.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Cheese Tourism**

The growth of studies on gastronomic tourism establishes the need to review the ways in which it has been investigated, not only from the thematic point of view but also from its evolution. More attention needs to be paid to the study of the sub-typologies of gastronomic tourism: in this concern agrotourism, beer tourism, cheese tourism, coffee tourism, cooking learning tourism, wine tourism, oil tourism, and slow food tourism are identified (Barzallo-Neira & Pulido-Fernández, 2023).

Cheese tourism is a niche sector of gastronomic tourism since cheese as a product opens a wide range of local-global attractiveness for food tourists and food tourism (Ermolaev et al, 2019; Magri-Harsich et al, 2024). Cheese tourism involves places, often rural, mountainous or peripheral, with a large tradition on both milk production and cheesemaking (Fusté Forné, 2015). As for gastronomic tourism, cheese tourism can be considered both from the perspective of those who visit these areas and undertake cheese-related activities (guests/visitors) both from the perspective of those who create and deliver these activities (hosts /producers) (Everett, 2016; Everett & Slocum, 2013).

Cheese tourism stands out as a dynamic typology that has been gaining increasing popularity within contemporary tourism management and tourism academia. The relationship between cheese and tourism has been examined from various dimensions: cheese tourism is analysed as an integral part of tourism development (e.g., Ermolaev et al, 2019; Ermolaev et al, 2020; Magri-Harsich et al, 2024) with a subtopic about the impact of cheese tourism on environmental conservation (García-Hernandez et al, 2022); cheese tourism is investigated as an integral part of destination identity (e.g., Fusté-Forné, 2019; Fusté-Forné, 2020c; Fournier et al, 2022) and lastly cheese tourism is understood from the perspective of cheese tourists (e.g. Moreno-Lobato et al, 2023). This chapter addresses the first line of research and wants to enrich the conversation to one of the major gaps within this discussion: the relationship between cheese tourism, rural traditions and heritage tourism development.

20 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:  
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/cheese-tourism-in-the-italian-dolomites/363405](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/cheese-tourism-in-the-italian-dolomites/363405)

## Related Content

---

### **Inertia Stages and Tourists' Behavior: Moderator Effects of Zone of Tolerance, Switching Barriers and External Opportunities**

Zhiyong Li, Rui Cui, Li Li, Yingli Huand Ruwan Ranasinghe (2018). *International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management in the Digital Age* (pp. 1-17).

[www.irma-international.org/article/inertia-stages-and-tourists-behavior/201103](http://www.irma-international.org/article/inertia-stages-and-tourists-behavior/201103)

### **An Economic Analysis of Cheese Production in India: Challenges and Progress for Growth**

K. Sivasubramanian (2025). *Global Perspectives on Cheese Tourism* (pp. 313-328).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/an-economic-analysis-of-cheese-production-in-india/363404](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/an-economic-analysis-of-cheese-production-in-india/363404)

### **An Overview of Reproductive Tourism**

(2018). *Legal and Economic Considerations Surrounding Reproductive Tourism: Emerging Research and Opportunities* (pp. 1-17).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/an-overview-of-reproductive-tourism/192646](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/an-overview-of-reproductive-tourism/192646)

### **Inertia Stages and Tourists' Behavior: Moderator Effects of Zone of Tolerance, Switching Barriers and External Opportunities**

Zhiyong Li, Rui Cui, Li Li, Yingli Huand Ruwan Ranasinghe (2018). *International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management in the Digital Age* (pp. 1-17).

[www.irma-international.org/article/inertia-stages-and-tourists-behavior/201103](http://www.irma-international.org/article/inertia-stages-and-tourists-behavior/201103)

### **Recommendation System for Sightseeing Tours**

Ricardo Claudino Valadasand Elizabeth Simão Carvalho (2020). *International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management in the Digital Age* (pp. 34-54).

[www.irma-international.org/article/recommendation-system-for-sightseeing-tours/259006](http://www.irma-international.org/article/recommendation-system-for-sightseeing-tours/259006)