


# Chapter 21

## Creating Cheese Tourism from Scratch: The Case of Diaseli Traditional Cheesery on Ios Island, Greece

Dimitris Koutoulas

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5117-2705>

University of Patras, Greece

### ABSTRACT

*The Diaseli Traditional Cheesery was launched on the Greek island of Ios in 2020, constituting the country's first case of cheese tourism. What used to be a small, century-old traditional goat farm producing cheese by hand was reimagined as a modern food tourism experience aimed at attracting visitors. By introducing the Diaseli brand, the Haros family made the transition from the agricultural to the tertiary sector. A new section was added next to the cheese manufacture comprising a small museum and a cheese-tasting space, thus reinventing the farm as a visitor attraction. Despite the fact that this undertaking was made during the Covid pandemic, the launch of Diaseli proved to be highly successful by attracting a larger than expected number of visitors, generating new income streams for the family and making the farm far more profitable than before. The case study of Diaseli describes the steps taken, the success factors and the lessons learned during such a deeply transformational process.*

### INTRODUCTION

Cheesemaking has played an important role in agricultural societies for thousands of years. It has been not just a way of preserving milk and creating highly nutritious food, but also represents a key element of local identity and pride (Fusté-Forné, 2020a). This is especially true in the case of the Greek islands, with almost every island producing its own types of cheese and, thus, contributing to the overall kaleidoscope of the highly varied Greek cheese landscape (Pappa and Kondyli, 2023).

Interestingly, while dozens of Greek islands have witnessed intense tourism development over recent decades, their signature local cheese has not been a crucial part of their brand identity as tourist destinations. Inhabitants of these islands – food and hospitality industry professionals, in particular – may proudly recommend locally produced cheese to visitors, but marketing campaigns and tourist imagery

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rarely showcase dairy products in conjunction with tourist experiences (with the exception of feta cheese prominently sitting on top of countless Greek salad photos).

Until very recently, cheese tourism has never occurred in Greece, as cheese production facilities were not meant to also be used as visitor attractions. It was only in February 2024 that the Greek Ministry of Tourism issued detailed specifications for cheesemaking factories to be able to accept visitors (GTP, 2024). By introducing the country's first label for so-called "Accessible Cheese Dairies", the Ministry officially launched the era of cheese tourism in Greece.

The present chapter focuses on a rare case of cheese tourism in Greece that preceded the Ministry's intervention. It was back in 2020 when the *Diaseli Ios Traditional Cheesery* was launched on the Greek island of Ios. What used to be a small, century-old traditional goat farm producing cheese by hand was reimagined as a modern food tourism experience aimed at attracting visitors. By introducing the *Diaseli* brand, the Haros family made the transition from the agricultural to the tertiary sector. A new section was added next to the cheese manufacture comprising a small museum and a cheese-tasting space, thus reinventing the farm as a visitor attraction. Despite the fact that this undertaking was made during the Covid pandemic, the launch of *Diaseli* proved to be highly successful by attracting a larger than expected number of visitors, generating new income streams for the family and making the farm far more profitable than before. The case study of *Diaseli* describes the steps taken, the success factors and the lessons learned during such a deeply transformational process.

The present chapter aspires to contribute to Greek food tourism literature by expanding the very limited knowledge and understanding around cheese-related tourism activities. It represents the first original case study about cheese tourism in the country, thus adding to the bibliographical corpus about how cheese tourism is evolving in different parts of the world.

More specifically, the chapter aims at presenting the *Diaseli Ios Traditional Cheesery* operating on the island of Ios as an instructive real-life case study of successfully introducing cheese tourism in a place without any previous experience in such a type of hospitality and by overcoming any limitations in regard to resources and expertise. With the publication of this case study, the learnings from such an undertaking shall be made more accessible to people contemplating a similar move.

The chapter's analysis starts with an overview of cheese-related experiences within the context of farm tourism and food tourism followed by the chapter's objectives and the research methodology employed. A section has been dedicated to the history of the Haros family business leading up to the farm's transformation before detailing the new concept, the brand and the income sources of the *Diaseli Traditional Cheesery* following its inception in 2020. Performance and results from the farm's transition to its new era are being discussed in detail. The chapter's final section includes practical advice for businesses aimed at the cheese tourism market based on the lessons learned from the successful launch of *Diaseli*.

## **OVERVIEW OF CHEESE-RELATED EXPERIENCES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF FARM TOURISM AND FOOD TOURISM**

A literature review has been conducted for determining the framework within which cheese tourism and the case of Ios will be discussed herein. The case study presented in this chapter sits at the crossroads of food tourism and farm tourism in the sense that it explores the introduction of tourism-related activities within the setting of a working farm and food being at the epicentre of the aforementioned activities. According to Ellis et al. (2018), *food tourism* refers to the involvement of the tourist in food-

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