

Chapter 25

It's All About Cheese!

Gastronomic Routes Around Certified Cheese Products in Portugal

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ABSTRACT

Gastronomic routes have gained significant recognition as effective tools for promoting and showcasing local endogenous products. As a result, they contribute to the economic development of local communities, enhance cultural heritage preservation, and foster a sense of pride and identity among residents. The main objective of this study is to investigate and analyze existing gastronomic routes, around endogenous certified cheese products, in Portugal. Understanding the existing gastronomic cheese routes will not only contribute to the academic literature, but also offer practical implications for local stakeholders, including tourism authorities, destination management organizations. By identifying successful practices and potential areas for improvement, this study can guide the development and enhancement of gastronomic routes, leading to more sustainable and rewarding experiences for visitors and greater economic benefits. This work was based on a qualitative research approach (interviews with tourism promotion agents responsible for creating and implementing these tourist routes).

INTRODUCTION

Gastronomic routes have gained significant recognition as effective tools for promoting food tourism and showcasing local endogenous products. These routes offer visitors an immersive experience, allowing them to explore and indulge in the distinctive flavors, ingredients, and culinary traditions of a specific

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region. As a result, they contribute to the economic development of local communities, enhance cultural heritage preservation, and foster a sense of pride and identity among residents.

This study is motivated by the growing importance of gastronomic routes and the need for in-depth research on their development and impact. The studies by Niedbała et al. (2020), La Torre et al. (2022) and Sánchez-Cubo et al. (2023) served as inspiration. In the first work, the authors present the idea of 'The Best Pork of Wielkopolska' culinary trail in Poland, which focuses on a local product—the Złotnicka White pig, a native breed (Niedbała et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the studies by La Torre et al. (2022) and Sánchez-Cubo et al. (2023) explores ham tourism in Spain. The renowned traditional food product, Iberian ham, is endorsed by Protected Denominations of Origin and offers various tourist attractions, including gastronomic tours.

Cheese tourism has emerged as a significant segment within food tourism, attracting visitors eager to explore the rich traditions of cheese-making and tasting in different regions. Cheese is an important cultural and economic product in many parts of the world, including Portugal. The country is renowned for its diverse and high-quality cheeses, which are protected by geographical indications such as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and are central to the culinary heritage of their respective regions. The importance of cheese in Portugal's gastronomy cannot be overstated, as it not only enhances the country's culinary appeal but also supports local economies and preserves traditional cheese-making practices.

With this study we aim to shed light on the current state of gastronomic route initiatives centered around certified cheese products, in Portugal. To do so, a qualitative research approach was used, including document analysis and content analysis techniques and interviews to the route developers/managers.

By identifying successful practices and potential areas for improvement, this study can guide the development and enhancement of gastronomic routes, leading to more sustainable and rewarding experiences for visitors and greater economic benefits for the regions. Also, understanding these routes will contribute to the academic literature on food tourism and regional development and offer practical implications for local stakeholders, including tourism authorities, destination management organizations, and local producers.

The chapter is divided into several sections that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The background section provides a foundation for our study by exploring the concepts related to food tourism, gastronomic routes and cheese tourism. Subsequently, in the methodology section, we outline the research approach and methods used to gather data and analyze the gastronomic routes. The results section presents findings from the cheese routes that were found in Portugal and the results of the interviews conducted. Finally, in the conclusion section, we delve into the implications and significance of our results, engaging in critical analysis and providing insights into potential future directions for research. Also, we summarize the key findings and contributions of our study, highlighting the practical implications of our research and offering recommendations for policymakers, tourism professionals, and stakeholders to leverage gastronomy as a strategic asset for regional development.

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