

EDITION: INTERNATIONAL | U.S. | MÉXICO | ARABIC  
 TV: CNNi | CNN en Español



Home | Video | World | U.S. | Africa | Asia | Europe | Latin America | Middle East | Business | World Sport | Entertainment | Tech | **Travel** | iReport



# Cheese for all seasons: A Swiss master tells all

*Thought you knew Swiss cheese? Think again as one of Geneva's finest noses sets us straight*

By Savita Iyer-Ahrestani, for CNN 10 December, 2012

Like Send 20 people like this. Be the first of your friends. 2 Tweet 16



Look -- it's got holes in it, let's go home.

We all know what Swiss cheese is, right? That yellow stuff with the holes in, of course. And good old [Gruyère](http://www.gruyere.com/) is as familiar as the neighbor's cat, isn't it?

But what about some of the lesser members of the fromage family, like [Etivaz](http://www.etivaz-aoc.ch/)? Hands up if you can pick that one out of a police lineup.

This little known cheese from a Swiss Alpine village of the same name may not be as high profile as its internationally known cousin, but it's considered one of Switzerland's finest by the noses in the know.

It's also the very first Swiss cheese to have nabbed the prestigious [Appellation D'Origine Controlée](http://www.etivaz-aoc.ch/etivaz/laoc/) (AOC) certification.

## Geneva's big cheese

Creamy, not too hard and not too soft, an Etivaz is a handmade, raw milk cheese infused with the fragrances and flavors of the flowers and fruits of the Alpine pastures.

At least, that's according to Dominique Ryser, owner of [Fromagerie Bruand](http://www.fromage-bruand.ch/#/HOME-01-00/), a specialty cheese shop in the heart of Geneva.

It's not a commonplace cheese, he says, but one that cheese lovers visiting Switzerland shouldn't miss.

And he should know. Since 1982, Ryser has been a champion of under-the-radar Swiss cheeses

like Etivaz.



*Fresh, fruity and floral -- that's Etivaz all over.*

It's produced only from May to October in limited quantities, which Ryser sells for CHF31 (US\$33) a kilo.

"We like to have people try cheeses they wouldn't otherwise experience or come across so easily," he says.

This is a man who knows his cheese like a sommelier knows her wines.

He can tell you anything you need to know about the 300-odd wheels, triangles and chunks of the different types of cheese on offer at his booth in Geneva's indoor gourmet market, the Halle de Rive.

He can tell you that the two most famous cheeses of Switzerland, Gruyère and [Emmental](http://www.emmental.ch/en/index.cfm) (<http://www.emmental.ch/en/index.cfm>), and which most people assume are one and the same because of their texture and taste, are actually quite different.

"The Emmental is fermented twice and has holes in it," he says. Ah ...

**More on CNN: [Insider guide -- best of Dublin](http://travel.cnn.com/explorations/escape/destinations/insider-guide-best-dublin-989574)**

(<http://travel.cnn.com/explorations/escape/destinations/insider-guide-best-dublin-989574>)

## Older the better



*Carol and Dominique Ryser of Geneva's Fromagerie Bruand take their cheese seriously.*

He can wax on about the importance of the affinage, or maturation, of the Gruyère, which retails for anywhere between CHF21 and CHF33 a kilo depending on maturity.

Affinage is the most crucial step in the Emmental fabrication process and one that can make or break this very popular cheese.

And he'll tell you that the [Vacherin Fribourgeois](http://www.vacherin-fribourgeois-aoc.ch/home.php) (<http://www.vacherin-fribourgeois-aoc.ch/home.php>), a soft cheese from the canton of Fribourg that most people have unknowingly consumed as part of a cheese fondue, is actually "aromatic and creamy, and tastes just great on its own and uncooked."

Ryser also reckons there's a cheese for every season ...

## Timing it right

Winters are for swirling pieces of crusty bread around a cauldron of steaming fondue and swiping molten slices from a thick chunk of rich [Raclette](http://www.raclette-suisse.ch/) cheese onto boiled potatoes.

In spring, the huge range of goat cheeses is where it's at, since goat milk is richest then.

Summers are for fresh, young cheeses like the [Tomme Vaudoise](http://www.switzerland-cheese.com/en/home/range/tomme-vaudoise.html), a creamy soft cheese from the canton of Vaud that perfectly complements any salad and tastes great on crackers.



*Nothing like a bubbling fondue to heat up a cold winter night.*

And when the cold of fall comes back, it's once again time for the fatter cheeses like the Gruyères and the Emmentals, which are also ideal for melting over quiches and into casseroles.

## Passion for the craft

In his quest for cheese perfection, Ryser scales the peaks and hikes the vales of Switzerland, Italy and France to seek out partners who think and feel the same way about cheese as he does.

He looks to tie up with master cheese makers who live far from the madding crowd, who are dedicated to their craft and who believe that only the freshest of ingredients can create the best-tasting cheese.

These are independent producers, whose cows and goats wander free through the mountains, who will taste their animals' fresh milk each morning to make sure its flavor is just so, to guarantee a continuity of taste or allow a subtle enhancement in order to create the finest products.



*A feast made even better with a dollop of freshly melted Raclette.*

"The setting, the cows, the cheese maker and the affinage -- all of these are extremely important to how a cheese finally turns out," says Ryser.

"All over the world, people are becoming more conscious about the importance of going back to the source, and we need to be able to give them that choice."

But it isn't only about bringing little-known cheeses to the wider world.

Ryser also prides himself on casting tried and true cheeses in a fresh light to create new cheese experiences for lovers of the stuff.

### Strange bedfellows

Five years ago, he began a series of soirées in which he paired cheese with a partner that might as well have been chalk -- tea.

It may sound weird, downright unappetizing even, to some, but Ryser says it works.

"I didn't know the world of tea at all," he says. "But when I explored it, I realized that it's 80 percent the same as the world of wine, with the same principles and the same vocabulary."

So, if you can pair an aged Gruyère with a dry white wine, why not sample it with a cup of Japanese green tea that's grown by the seaside and infused with a saline, seaweedy taste that goes perfectly with the salt in the cheese?

Unlike wine, tea leaves the palate fresh, clean and light, Ryser claims, which is perfect for sampling lots of cheese, and maybe one of the reasons why the concept is so popular.

Clearly, a man who knows his onions -- sorry, his cheese.

**Fromagerie Bruand** is in the *Halle de Rive* at 29 Boulevard Helvétique, 1207 Geneva, Switzerland; +41 (0) 22 736 93 50; open early morning-7 p.m., closed Sunday; [www.fromage-bruand.ch](http://www.fromage-bruand.ch) (<http://www.fromage-bruand.ch/>)

Tea and Cheese Soirées are held March through December and can be booked by [email](mailto:admin@fromage-bruand.ch) ([admin@fromage-bruand.ch](mailto:admin@fromage-bruand.ch)).

More on CNN: [7 best eat-in wine shops in Paris](http://travel.cnn.com/7-best-wine-bars-paris-246236) (<http://travel.cnn.com/7-best-wine-bars-paris-246236>)



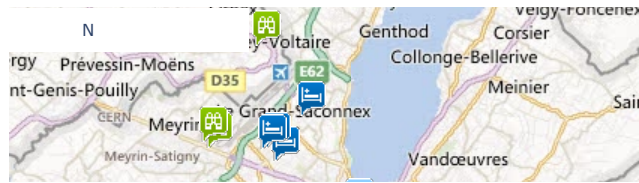
## What's Nearby?

- Map
- Stay
- See
- Eat

### NEARBY LISTINGS:

- Hotels
- Things to Do
- Restaurants

Click map pins for more information.



Tags:

## You might like:



10 hostel mates you meet in hell



Why the 'white tax' is perfectly acceptable



Bangkok street food: Historic



<http://travel.cnn.com/explorations/life/10-hostel-mates-you-meet-hell-425328>

<http://travel.cnn.com/why-white-tax-perfectly-acceptable-575406>

<http://travel.cnn.com/bangkok/eat/bangkok-street-food-historic-bang-raks-10-best-eats-279325>

0 comments



Leave a message...

Discussion

Community

Share



No one has commented yet.

Comment feed

Subscribe via email