



HEIRLOOM DAIRY PRODUCTS OF MONGOLIA

A LIVING TRADITION

The methods and techniques used to produce traditional Mongolian dairy products have changed little over the centuries. Cultural and culinary knowledge of dairy production has been passed down and preserved within herder families for generations, forming an authentic living tradition. The unique blend of probiotic bacteria used in dairy production is known as *khöröngö*, which means both bacterial starter and wealth or inheritance. Mongolian dairy products are the living heirlooms of millennia of steppe culture and tradition.

PREHISTORIC ROOTS

Dairying is an ancient tradition that has been practiced on the steppes of Inner Asia since prehistory. In Khövsgöl province, archaeological evidence of milk proteins in tooth tartar confirms that dairy products have been produced and consumed by nomadic herders since at least the emergence of the Deer Stone culture more than 3,000 years ago, and likely even earlier.

DISTINCTIVE FLAVORS

Mongolian traditional dairy products are unpasteurized and rich in probiotic bacteria that promote health and aid digestion. The flavor of Mongolian dairy products is distinctive and may seem unfamiliar to those accustomed to pasteurized milk and European-style yoghurts and cheeses. Mongolian dairy products have a rich and earthy flavor that results from the composition of the seasonal wild plants consumed by the animals and the natural probiotic bacteria that facilitate the production of yoghurts, cheeses, and curds.

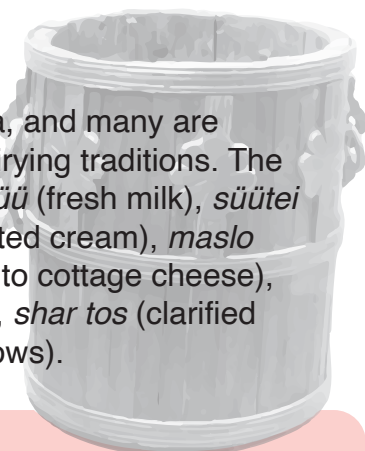


DAIRY LIVESTOCK

Mongolia produces dairy products from more animal species than any other country on earth. Mongolian dairy livestock include: reindeer, yaks, cattle, yak-cattle hybrids (*khainag*), sheep, goats, camels, and horses. These dairy livestock are adapted to different environments and are used to produce dairy products in different regions of Mongolia.

DAIRY PRODUCTS

Dozens of dairy products are produced in Mongolia, and many are unique to Inner Asia and not found in European dairying traditions. The most commonly encountered dairy products are: *süü* (fresh milk), *süütei tsai* (milk tea), *tarag* (yoghurt), *öröm* (similar to clotted cream), *maslo* (butter), *byaslag* (cheese), *aarts* (wet curds similar to cottage cheese), *aarul* (dry curds), *eezgii* (caramelized sour curds), *shar tos* (clarified butter), and *airag* (fermented milk from mares or cows).



WANT TO LEARN MORE?

The Sarlagyn Saikhan Khishig (Blessed by Yak) dairy cooperative consists of local pastoral herder families that produce handcrafted dairy products for Lake Khövsgöl visitors using traditional methods and inventing new recipes. Ask to try their dairy products for an authentic taste of Mongolian culture and cuisine. For more information about the dairy cooperative, visit the Khövsgöl Dairy Project webpage: <http://www.khovsgoldairyproject.org>.

DID YOU KNOW?

Most Mongolians are genetically lactose intolerant, but the traditional diet of nomadic herders consists of more than 30% dairy products. Digestion of dairy products is made possible by the daily consumption of powerful probiotic bacteria that aid digestion and prevent the symptoms of lactose intolerance.

ADVENTURE-O-METER

Ready to try a taste of Mongolia's distinctive dairy tradition but not sure which product is right for you? Use this guide to determine your desired level of culinary adventure.

Mild and familiar

Öröm (clotted cream) & Maslo (butter)

Creamy and mild. Spread on fresh bread like cream cheese and enjoy!

Byaslag (cheese)

Mongolian cheese is not made with rennet, but rather is curdled using sour whey. The result is similar to the soft Indian cheese paneer. Mild and crumbly, try it alone or with wild onions.

Eezgii (caramelized curds)

Dry and hard curds with a smooth, sweet note.

Tarag (yoghurt)

Thick, creamy, and mildly tart. This yoghurt is made with whole milk and is packed with live culture probiotics. Try it for breakfast, and for a treat, sprinkle in rhubarb-flavored eezgii.

Aaruul (dried curds)

Hard, surprisingly sour, and unlike anything you've tasted before. One of Mongolia's most important dairy products, it comes in every shape and size and is used as a litmus test for the skills of its maker. Stored by kilos for the long hard winter, this is the highly portable "hard tack" that sustained Chinggis Khan's cavalry as he conquered Asia and Eastern Europe more than 800 years ago.

Airag (fermented mare's/cow's milk) & Shimiin arkhi (distilled milk vodka)

Not for the faint of heart. Although relatively low in alcohol content, these beverages pack a powerful punch of flavor. Drink the airag fresh and try the vodka either hot or cold.

Potent and adventurous



This informational poster was produced by the scientists of the Heirloom Microbes Project at the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History in partnership with the Khövsgöl Dairy Project.