



Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:

**Cretan cheese: visit of a cheese factory in Anogia
 Almond (*Prunus dulcis*)**



Cheese is probably one of the oldest foods manufactured by humans. Nomads from central Asia already operated dairy farming with sheep and goats about 9000 years ago. Starting from 5000 BC Sumerian, Greeks and later the Romans won cheese from cow's milk. Its production is an art and requires very much intuitive feeling. Differently than the today pasteurized cheese is the so-called raw milk cheese, which is made in the village cheese factories on Crete still after old tradition of rawer, thus still “more living”, untreated milk. Only raw milk cheese has the taste typical for a region, from which it originates. For this the milk is only slowly light warmed up and cooled down just as slowly again. Thus taste and ripe promoting bacteria remain. Therefore time and work expended with the production of raw milk cheese are clearly higher than with pasteurized dairy cheese. On Crete the “national milk committee” is responsible for the “protected cheese production” and the appropriate criteria which guarantee, which the cheese is produced only in the region, in which the animals to also feast and are milked is fixed within the appeal. Production and aging likewise must correspond to the traditional kind of manufacture of the region; artificial and chemical additives as well as antibiotic substances are impossible.

It would give much to write about the different procedures of cheesemaking, its aging and storage, which would go beyond the scope of this leaflet by far; therefore in the following a small “ABC of cheese”, which probably describes the most important terms: “Affinage” = refinement process during the maturing and storage time; “Artisanal” = stands for cheese, which was predominantly manufactured in manual work; “Break” = gelatinous mass originates after the dairy-production, which is hacked with a so-called “cheese harp”. The fine-grained the break is, the more firmly and more dryly becomes the cheese; “Thick putting” = procedure, which separates the firm and liquid components of the milk; “Fermier” = cheese manufacturer, that uses only raw milk cheese from own production; “Casein” = a protein of the milk and a substantial component for the condense of the milk; “Lab” = protein-splitting enzyme, which lets the milk coagulate; “Penicillium” = a mildew, which develops during maturing on or inside the cheese; “White mould cheese” = a soft cheese, on whose surface a mould lawn forms, which results from *Penicillium candidum*.

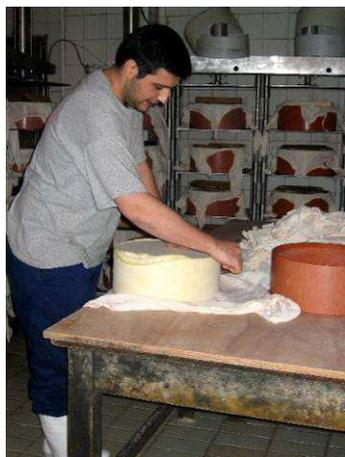


Who would like to see the cheese production on Crete “locally”, this can be done in the cheese factory of Anogia; in addition in the following some impressions.

The cheese factory of Anogia is located outside of the village and is reached from Iraklion over Tilissos and Gonies towards the Ida Plateau (see leaflet No. 017-04/E: “Excursion to the Idaean cave” from CRETE environmental info). Briefly before the local entrance of Anogia, at the fork, drive left towards the Ida plateau. After few hundred meters, the cheese factory is located at the left roadside, in front a sharp right curve.

Pictures below are showing the delivery, the weigh and sample of the milk and a view into the manufacturing hall of the cheese factory.





The illustrations above show work procedures to the storage and mature of the cheese; also the well known “Feta”, which can be tasted and bought also in the attached sales shop.

Almond (*Prunus dulcis*)



The almond tree (or - bush) has straight, bald with the wild variety (as common on Crete) thorny branches with grey bark and can become up to 4 m high. The sheets are oblong, lance-shaped, at the edge blunt sawed and shining dark green. From the shoulders of the previous-year sheets usually sprout 3 buds. The two laterals are blooms buds. They are arranged in pairs. The only carpel develops to a grey green, sulcate, velutinous, oblong flattened drupe with tough, fruit pulp usually adherent to the stone core. The stone core is strongly flattened. The cinnamon coloured seed contained in it is flattened and about 2 cm long. The stone cores or seeds released from the meat come into the trade. Thus the almond is botanical no nut! According to the fruit it differentiates 3 varieties: The sweet almond (var. *dulcis*), the bitter almond (var. *amara*) and the noise almond (var. *fragilis*).

Originally the almond originates from southwest Asia. Already starting from the Stone Age the almond is proven for the Near East and Greece. Whether the plants were purposefully cultivated or brought in unconsciously, is not well-known. However starting from the Bronze Age it seems to have a “almond culture”, with that the almond might be the oldest culture fruit in the old world.



Based on Greek mythology the Thracian princess PHYLLIS died with grief, because her loved AKAMAS was held back after the Trojan War due to heavy sea in Trojan and she thought he was killed. The Gods transformed her into an almond tree and when her loving finally came back and enfolded the tree with broken heart, the tree bloomed in full brightness. The Romans called the almond *nux graeca* =

“Greek nut”. For a long time the opinion of the DIOSKURIDES ¹⁾ was determinative in the naturopathy. He recommended fomentation with the liquid of bitter almonds for the cleaning of the face skin and against eczemas. Today the almond predominantly serves as basis for cosmetic and medical skin ointment; particularly in the organic cosmetics.

Sweet almonds are used predominantly for the consumption and as enjoyment raw material. Apart from the direct consumption the whole seeds or their pressed out oil become reprocessed as pastry or sweet goods (e.g. macaroons or marzipan).

¹⁾ *Pedanius Dioskurides* (40 – 90 AD, Greek Doctor and Pharmacologist) is the author of the 5 vols. "Materia Medica".