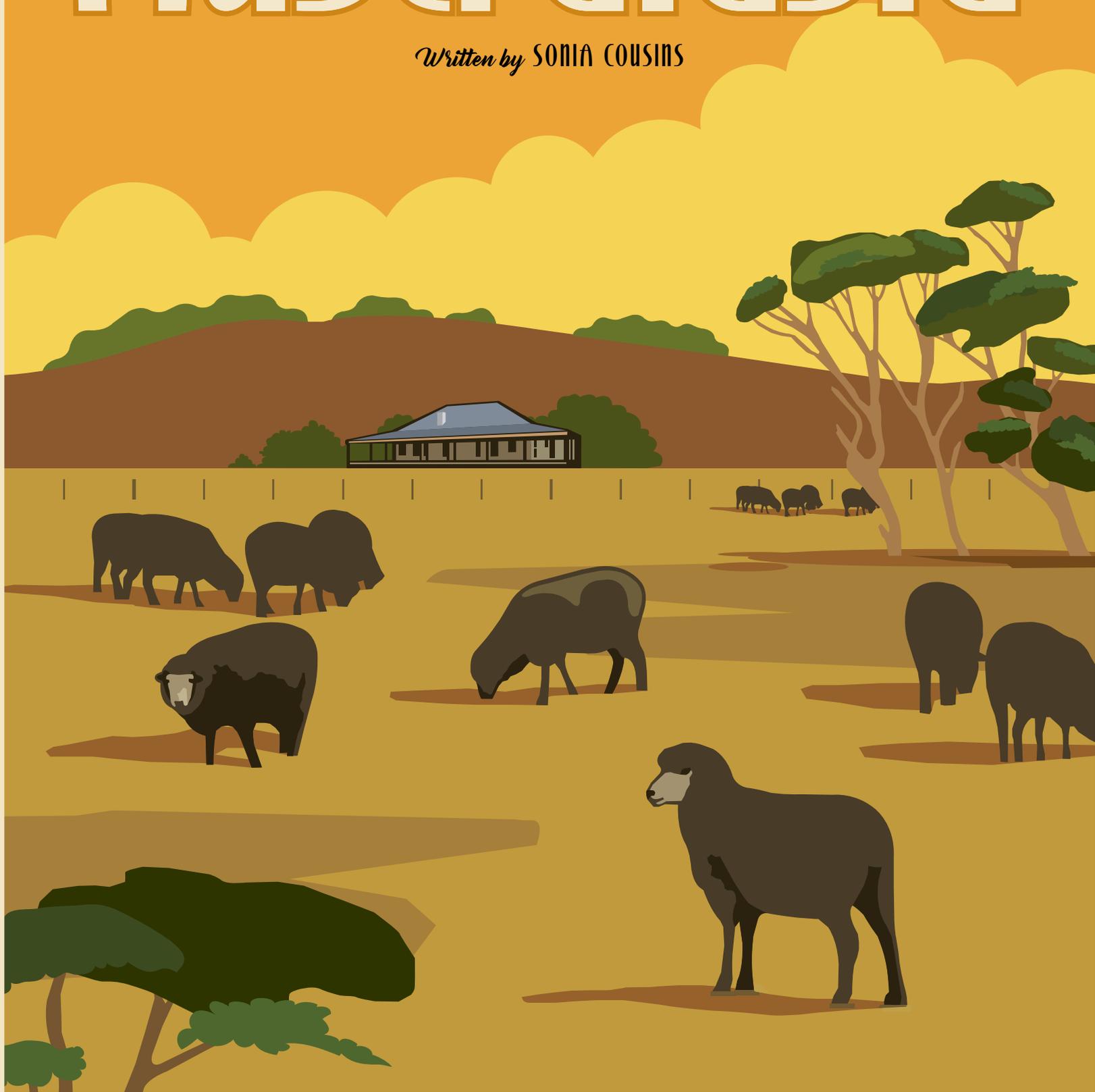


Australasia

Written by SONIA COUSINS



When you think of Australia, do you imagine golden sandy beaches, outback desert landscapes, or lush tropical rainforests? Sure, those are all present, but in between those extremes are verdant dairy pastures with cows, sheep, goats, and water buffalo grazing on green grass year-round. Across the ditch in New Zealand, similarly lush pastures fringe the South Island's glacial peaks and fiordlands, as well as the active geothermal zones of the North Island.

Until about 1980, most Aussies and Kiwis had a universal love of just one cheese: mass-produced cheddar, which was commonly enjoyed on sandwiches made with sliced white bread. But then something interesting happened: A wave of Dutch migrants landed in New Zealand, bringing cheesemaking traditions from their homeland, and some young, well-traveled Australians decided to recreate the traditional cheeses of Europe at home. There are now more than 100 varieties of specialty cheese being produced Down Under—by family-run artisanal and farmstead cheese businesses and large, global manufacturers alike. So no matter where you go, sumptuous wedges and wheels await.

SMOKED GOAT GOUDA

Meyer Gouda Cheese
Hamilton, New Zealand

 Brothers and second-generation cheesemakers Miel and Geert Meyer added two trophies to their (heavily laden) awards shelf this year for their Smoked Goat Gouda. It's a step away from the more traditional Dutch-style cheeses the company is known for, but it still managed to nab the Champion of Champions in the commercial division as well as Champion New Cheese at the New Zealand Champions of Cheese awards. The wheel offers a smooth texture and subtle smoky flavor that plays well with the underlying caramel notes from the goat's milk.

FIFTY FIFTY

Mercer Cheese
Mercer, New Zealand

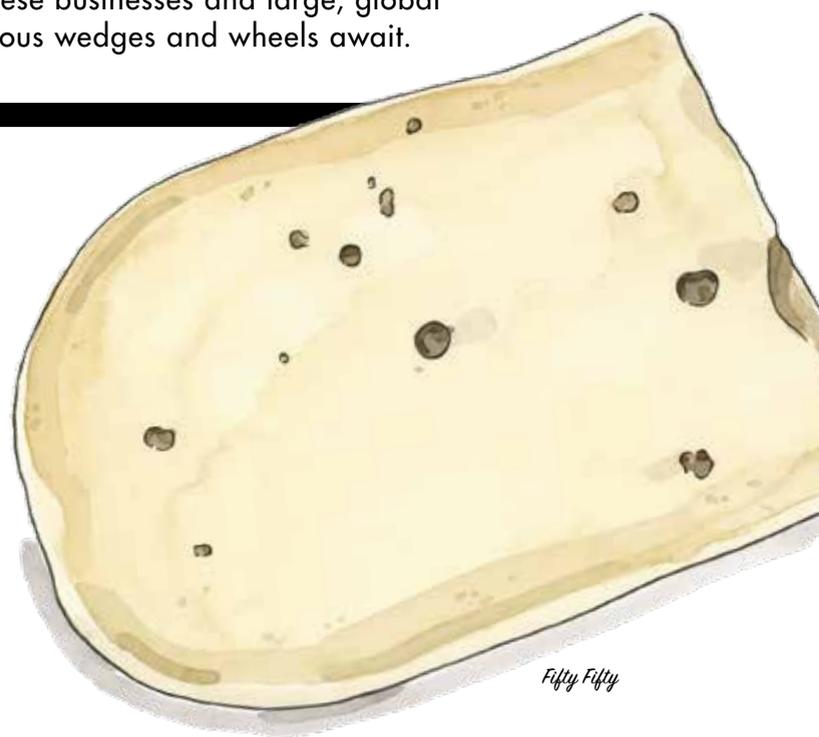
 If you're heading south of Auckland, be sure to take a detour off State Highway One to stop at

the quaint yellow tasting room and shop at Mercer Cheese. Fifty Fifty—an aged gouda style—has crowd-pleasing clusters of crunchy tyrosine crystals and a complex blend of sweet and savory flavors. If you see it, act fast: It's made only when the late-season milk is deemed just right for this type of cheese.

JUST EWE WINSAM FARMHOUSE

Winsam Farm
Kerikeri, New Zealand

 Cheesemaker and sheep farmer Catherine Oakley was named Champion Cheesemaker at the 2017 New Zealand Champions of Cheese awards after her debut entry, Just Ewe Winsam Farmhouse, achieved a rare perfect score. The semi-hard sheep's milk cheese—which also won the Champion Sheep's Cheese trophy—is inspired by Welsh Caerphilly and has a delightfully toothsome texture, with beautifully balanced savory flavors and a mildly piquant finish.



Fifty Fifty

FUN FACT!

The Māori name for New Zealand is **Aotearoa**, meaning "land of the long white cloud."



Grinning Gecko Brie

GRINNING GECKO BRIE

Grinning Gecko Cheese Co.
Whangarei, New Zealand

 While the Northland region may be better known as the cultural and spiritual birthplace of New Zealand, Grinning Gecko Cheese Co. is putting the area firmly on the country's curd map, too. Handmade from certified organic cow's milk, the voluptuously smooth brie won Champion Soft White Rind Cheese for the third year in a row, and head cheesemaker Zev Kaka-Holtz won the Aspiring Cheesemaker Award. No wonder: the round's earthy aroma and mushroomy flavor are hard to beat.



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Don't Miss

Vue de Monde: Take the express elevator to the 55th floor of Melbourne's iconic Rialto building for a drink at the Lui Bar, which offers spectacular views of the city, particularly at dusk. The adjoining Vue de Monde restaurant injects a sense of humor into its fine dining degustation menu, which features native Australian ingredients (think emu egg salad and kangaroo with muntari berries), and a cheese course served tableside. vuedemonde.com.au

Giraffe by Simon Gault: This celebrity chef's latest venture is a playful blend of contemporary New Zealand cuisine and culture, with some quirky twists. The smoked butter is spiked with turmeric and served on a volcanic stone, the availability of the fish course is "subject to appropriate fishing weather," and the menu invites diners to "shout" the kitchen staff (buy them a round of beers), which is a very Kiwi way of saying thank you. The restaurant also features a marble-topped cheese trolley that should spin any cheese-lover's wheel. girafferestaurant.co.nz

Great Ocean Road: One of the world's most scenic coastal drives happens to wend its way through the prime dairy country of southwest Victoria. Stop at Cheese World to taste cheeses from Warrnambool Cheese & Butter, one of Australia's largest dairy processors, and to explore the region's dairy heritage at the Cheese World Museum. But the reason most people come here is to gaze upon the Twelve Apostles, a series of towering limestone formations off the steep rocky coast, viewed from a network of walking trails and spectacular lookouts. visitgreatoceanroad.com.au

Hobbiton Movie Set Tours: If you're a fan of The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings, you know that hobbits love to eat, but did you know that cheese is a staple in any self-respecting hobbit's pantry? Explore the hobbit holes of Middle Earth on a guided tour of the original Hobbiton movie set, complete with a beverage at the Green Dragon Inn. Evening banquet tours are also available for travelers with more substantial appetites. hobbitontours.com

Hotel DeBrett: Auckland-based food blogger Bri DiMattina recommends checking into this contemporary boutique hotel, not least because it's located above a cheese shop (the Kapiti Store). The hotel showcases art and photography by New Zealand artists, and local wines and produce feature heavily on the menus and wine lists of its stylish bars and restaurants. It is also the ideal base for exploring the vibrant dining scene along the Auckland viaduct harbor. hoteldebrett.com

Promhills Cabins: For a rustic Australian bush experience, book a cabin or eco-tent at Wilsons Promontory, the southernmost tip of the Australian mainland. A bushwalk through Wilsons Promontory National Park, with its spectacular granite boulders and windswept beaches, is the perfect way to work up an appetite for some regional artisan cheeses. Visit the Prom Country Cheese farm to taste its award-winning sheep's milk cheeses and grab a bite of lunch. promhillscabins.com.au



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TRADITIONAL CHEESY DISHES

Jaffles and Cheese Rolls

A grilled cheese and tomato sandwich, or jaffle, is traditionally made in a jaffle iron, a hinged cast-iron mold that crimps the edges of the sandwich while toasting the bread and melting its contents. Jaffles are enjoyed all over Australia for breakfast, lunch, dinner, or a snack, and transcend all notions of age or class. Indeed, Aussies' love of the cheese and tomato toastie is so universal, you can even get one at McDonald's.

Cheese rolls are a popular after-school snack for children (who refer to them as "mousetraps") and a morning-after staple for university students following a big night. Take a slice of cheddar, place it on a piece of white bread, then fold it in thirds and toast it in a sandwich press—that's it. New Zealand cheesemonger Calum Hodgson says they're also ubiquitous at school fundraisers and similar community events—think of them as the Kiwi equivalent of corn dogs or Frito pies.

VENUS BLUE

Prom Country Cheese
Moyarra, Australia

 Burke and Bronwen Brandon are unique. Not only are they among a small handful of Australian farmstead cheese-makers who specialize in seasonal ewe's milk cheeses, they're also the only Aussie makers using indigenous cultures sourced from their own milk. The resulting Venus Blue is a stunning example of balancing subtlety with complexity. The striking veining contributes piquant and meaty notes to the underlying sheep's milk sweetness, while a bread-like finish lingers on the palate.

DIAVOLETTI

That's Amore! Cheese
Thomastown, Australia

 Meaning "little devils" in Italian, these cheeses are a reflection of the fun and good humor of their creator, Sicilian-born Giorgio Linguante. Sold in pairs that are tied with string like miniature caciocavallo rounds, these supple, stretchy handfuls are flavored with liquid smoke and stuffed with a chile-spiked olive. You'll banish any ideas of bland provolone-style cheese as you bite into one of these smoky, fiery mouthfuls—especially if you slice 'em in half and grill until browned and bubbling.



Venus Blue

LOCAL Lingo

no worries

Not a problem, you're welcome: *"Thanks for letting us taste that delicious cheese!" "No worries!"*

knackered

Exhausted: *"After milking 300 cows, I'm knackered."*

woop-woop

The middle of nowhere: *"We're not driving all the way to that creamery in woop-woop."*

arvo

The afternoon: *"We'll milk the goats again this arvo."*

sparrow fart

Very early: *"We get up at sparrow fart to milk the cows."*



Diavoletti

FUN FACT!



There are as many cows as humans in Australia (although more are utilized for meat than milk), and roughly 30 times as many sheep as people in New Zealand.

MIL LEL SUPERIOR PARMESAN

Warrnambool Cheese & Butter Factory
Warrnambool, Australia

 Unlike many Australian cheeses called “parmesan,” the Mil Lel Superior brand is made using traditional Italian methods and aged for 18 months, which lend it balanced fruity and umami notes plus a crystalline crunch. It’s also one of only a few Australian cheeses available both pre-packaged and cut-to-order. So whether you need a quick block to grate over a bowl of your favorite pasta or a rustic-looking chunk to serve on a cheese board, this Champion Australian Hard Cheese is at your service.

EMPORIUM SELECTION WASHED RIND

Unicorn Cheese Factory
Nowra, Australia

 This stinky, orange umami-bomb is made exclusively for Aldi supermarkets at the Unicorn Cheese factory south of Sydney. Frenchman Gilbert Pesenti founded Unicorn Cheese in 1977, making it the longest continuously running producer of French-style specialty cheeses in Australia. When fully ripe, this washed rind has all the gooeyness of a mature Époisses. Imagine a spoonable version of maple-smoked bacon—this cheese is it.

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