

Greek cheesemaker brings taste of Mediterranean to XM

三年前, George 从故乡希腊圣托里尼这个小岛来到厦门。在悠闲烂漫的希腊, 做酸奶是每个人都会的手艺, 然而要做正宗的奶酪却不容易。从小就对牛奶和美食感兴趣的 George, 无论做酸奶还是奶酪都是他的强项。厦门这座美丽的小岛让他想起了故乡, 他也将自己多年来保留的手艺带给厦门的朋友。

Article and photos by
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George Athinaios began training at the School for Processing of Dairy Products of the University of Athens at the age of 17. After a rich life well lived, he now has more than 35 years of experience making cheese and yogurt. His lifelong love of cheese and yogurt comes from his upbringing -- both items are essential parts of the Mediterranean diet, which is considered to be one of the healthiest in the world.

Mr. Athinaios started his Chinese adventure 20 years ago. "I first came to Xiamen in 1997 looking to buy stone material for my house in Athens," recalled Mr. Athinaios. "I fell in love with the city, the country and its culture," he added. "Since then, I have lived in several Chinese cities and I have now lived in Xiamen for three years."

Why Xiamen? "My favorite place in Greece is my hometown, Santorini," he said. "The weather is amazing and people get together to share a good meal, very much like in Xiamen," he added.

He noted that Xiamen has changed greatly over the past two decades. "Xiamen was a rural place 20 years ago and it is now a very modern and cosmopolitan city," he said. "People accept foreigners and make friends with us," he added. "They like to enjoy the good life, which is why I decided to develop and sell my products here."

His choice of cheese and yogurt was a strategic one. "Twenty years ago there was no coffee, bread, cheese or yogurt here," recalled Mr. Athinaios. "At first I made cookies and owned a salad restaurant but soon after I went back to making yogurt and cheese," he said.



He has also seen a trend toward new adventures and tastes among China's younger consumers. "Nowadays young people like the challenge of trying new products, they like to eat yogurt rather than drink yogurt," he said. "They like cheese and bread and are open-minded even as they push for good quality."

To reach customers, Mr. Athinaios relies on a variety of outlets. He has a physical retail presence in Huli District, at 233 Jiayuan Road (湖里区嘉园路233号之一) and also sells his products on Taobao and via his official yasascheese WeChat account.

To make his products, Mr. Athinaios sources local milk and invests significant amount of time into

the laborious process of cheese making. It can take more than seven hours and 60 liters of milk to prepare less than 6 kilograms of Halloumi cheese.

The process begins with Mr. Athinaios pasteurizing the raw cow milk himself. He adds animal rennet, bacteria that stimulate natural milk protein to produce cheese curd. He then separates and strains the bean curd before cutting the cheese and boiling the pieces until they float.

"You need patience to make this cheese, but when it is ready it feels like magic," marveled Mr. Athinaios. "We usually add salt or Greek mint on top of each piece of halloumi cheese to make it more aromatic and then it is vacuum-packed and refrigerated," he added.

Mr. Athinaios's most popular cheeses include feta, halloumi, queso fresco and ricotta. He seasons his cheeses with thyme or mint to suit customer's tastes, preserving the cheeses in natural brine or olive oil. He also includes homemade jam with his traditional Greek yogurt.

He enjoys both the process of making cheese and engaging with his patrons. "What I really like about my Chinese customers is their honesty," he said. "If they don't like the cheese they will tell me openly," he added. "When they do like it they are not afraid to show excitement and, just last week, a customer came and hugged me after she tried a piece of Halloumi cheese."

Mr. Athinaios seems to have found his place in life and in the market. "Every morning when I come to work it feels as if I am on holiday, I love this."

Upcoming Events 活动预告

Joe Hisaishi Animation Series, theme concert

Time: June 15, 8:00 p.m.

Place: Chinese Piano Hall (formerly the Xiamen International Conference Center Music Hall)



2018 宫崎骏·久石让动漫视听系列主题音乐会

时间: 6月15日晚八点

地点: 中国钢琴音乐厅(原厦门国际会议中心音乐厅)

Lily of the Valley, musical

Performers: Acting Family and Guangzhou Grand Theater

Time: June 16 and June 17, 7:30 p.m.

Place: Xiamen Cangjiang Theater

香港原创音乐剧《朝暮有情人》

表演者: 演戏家族和广州大剧院

时间: 6月16日-6月17日晚七点半

地点: 厦门沧江剧院

Xiamen Xing Chao Music Festival

Time: June 17 and June 18

Place: Jimei Citizen Square

2018 厦门星巢音乐节

时间: 6月17日-6月18日

地点: 厦门集美新市民广场

Percussion Elf Party, kids concert

Performer: Zhu Zongqing percussion ensemble

Time: June 16 and June 17, 2:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

Place: Banlam Grand Theater

豆类宝宝儿童音乐会《击乐精灵开Party》

表演者: 朱宗庆打击乐团

时间: 6月16日-6月17日, 下午两点半, 晚上七点半

地点: 厦门闽南大戏院