

# Covered in Snow

## To many (non-French) people

Brie and Camembert are synonymous, both referring to a French-style, mild, white mould cheese. While they are certainly closely related, there are a number of key differences between authentic Brie and authentic Camembert, most obvious being the region of production and size.

Brie is produced in the region around Paris, the Île-de-France, whereas Camembert is produced in the northwestern region of Normandy, famous for its apples, especially in the form of cider and calvados (apple brandy).

Brie is generally larger, from 20cm - 37cm in diameter weighing between 1kg and 3kg, and aged for longer (eight weeks), whereas Camembert is typically around 11cm in diameter and 150g and can be aged for just two weeks. Both cheeses are traditionally made from raw milk heated to no more than 37°C, the barely cut curd is hand-ladled into moulds, sprayed with *Penicillium candidum* (or *P. camemberti*, a strain of the same mould) and salted with dry salt.

### BRIE DE MEAUX (AOC)

The most well-known Brie was granted Protected Designation of Origin status in 1980, but has been produced around the city of Meaux just 50km east of Paris, since at least the 8th century.

It is made from raw cow's milk, 36cm - 37cm in diameter, 3cm - 3.5cm thick, weighing 2.5kg - 3kg. It has a velvety white rind that develops some reddish brown streaks as it ages. It has a mildly mouldy, smoky aroma with a mild, sweet, creamy flavour and smooth texture and is traditionally eaten rind and all. When fully ripe it oozes and won't hold its shape.

### BRIE DE MELUN (AOC)

This brie, traditionally made around the town of Meaux, south of Paris, was also awarded AOC status in 1980. It is stronger than the more refined Brie de Meaux, saltier, sour from lactic fermentation and more robust from longer ageing (up to ten weeks). It typically has more reddening of the rind and is smaller (27cm - 28cm) and thicker (3.5cm - 4cm) than Brie de Meaux, weighing between 1.5kg and 1.8kg.

### BRIE DE COULOMMIERS

Some say this brie (without an AOC status) is the original Brie. It is typically eaten quite young when it is still firm with a thick white rind and a strong mushroom aroma. It is smaller than other brie at around 23cm. An even smaller version, simply called Coulommiers, may be made from raw or pasteurised

cow's milk and is closer to a Camembert in size (about 14cm in diameter and 4cm thick).

### BRIE NOIR

Brie can be aged for up to a year, and is then called Brie Noir (or 'black' brie). The rind becomes brown and crumbly and the centre dark golden and dense with a thick velvety consistency. As it dehydrates, it shrinks to about 30cm diameter and 2cm thickness. It is rarely seen outside the region of Île-de-France, where the locals dunk it into milk coffee for breakfast.

**Brie de Montereau** has a robust flavour and aroma similar to Brie de Melun. It is smaller than most, weighing less than 1kg. **Brie de Nangis** is a traditional brie, which died out for some time but has now been revived (although it is no longer produced in the town of Nangis). **Brie de Provins** also disappeared for a brief time but has recently been resurrected. **Le Fougerus** topped with its decorative fern leaf (fougère means fern) is also a type of brie. Originally produced just for family consumption, it was first commercially produced in the 20th century. It is slightly larger than Coulommiers (16cm) and is slightly scented and flavoured by the fern leaf.

### CAMEMBERT DE NORMANDIE (AOC)

Camembert is named for a small village in the south of Normandy, but is today made all over the region and was granted AOC status in 1983. The first reference to the cheeses of Camembert dates from the early 18th century, but it only became widely known in the late 19th century when the wooden box in which it is now aged and sold was developed, allowing it to be easily transported over greater distances. It is a much smaller cheese than brie, 10.5cm - 11cm in diameter, 3cm high and weighing a minimum of 150g. It is also typically sold younger than Brie after just 2-3 weeks aging. The locals tend to prefer it *moitié affine* (half-aged) with a firm pale heart and edges that are soft and creamy, giving two different textures and flavours in each mouthful.

Some cheesemakers in Normandy have developed ways to combine their local cheese with Normandy's other famous produce—apples and their products. **Camembert Affiné au Cidre** is placed in apple cider when young and left to soak for about two weeks. Delicious with a glass of cider or a young Beaujolais, it smells of apples and has the taste of the cider. **Cœur de Camembert au Calvados** is young camembert peeled of its rind and soaked in calvados.

### BUYING & STORING

As a general rule, when buying white mould cheese look for a cheese which holds its shape and has an intact rind, unless of course, you prefer very ripe cheeses. The cut cheese should show a 'melting' texture, at least just under the rind, once again how firm or soft the centre of the cheese is depends on how ripe you like your cheese. At what degree of ripeness to buy and eat brie and camembert is a question of personal preference, as is the issue of whether or not to remove the rind. As the cheese gets older, the rind breaks down and develops a stronger aroma of ammonia, while many people enjoy the

runny centre of the cheese, at this stage many also choose to discard the browning rind. There's no right or wrong, eat it when and how you enjoy.

### USING

All cheese should be served at room temperature, but it is even more essential for a soft cheese such as camembert and brie, where the texture of the cheese is so important. Serve these cheeses with accompaniments that won't dominate their relatively mild flavour: thin crisp neutral crackers or thin slices of good sourdough bread, a few dried muscatels and a glass of Australian chardonnay or rich sherry (such as oloroso). This is the way to eat real Camembert de Normandie or Brie de Meaux, but if you feel like cooking with a white mould cheese, buy one of the Danish-made camembert in a tin and revisit the 1970s with the following recipe. **T**



### DEEP-FRIED CAMEMBERT WITH RED CURRANT JELLY

Serves 4 as an entrée

2 camembert  
1 egg, lightly beaten  
2 cups fresh breadcrumbs  
4 tbsp red currant jelly  
vegetable oil, for deep-frying  
handful of rocket or other small green leaves

1. Cut camembert into 6 wedges each. 2. Dip each wedge in beaten egg and then coat well with breadcrumbs. Repeat this process so that the cheese is well coated. Refrigerate until needed. 3. Heat oil to about 180°C and cook crumbed cheese wedges until golden. Drain well on absorbent paper. 4. Arrange greens on 4 plates, top each with 3 wedges of cheese and place a tablespoonful of red currant jelly alongside.