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International Media Production Zone

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When in Nairobi Crave cheese

Nairobi is easily accessible from a range of cities in the Middle East, only four and a half hours away from Dubai, but many people simply use Nairobi as a hub to go on to the bush for their safaris or to change planes to go to the beaches of Mombasa and Malindi. Stay awhile and do something different. Take a quick trip up country to Browns Cheese Factory. The owners Delia and Andy opened their home for cheese tastings and factory tours in March 2011 and currently run a maximum of four tours per week.

While the tours are relatively new, Browns Cheeses have been around for almost 30 years. Delia's parents pioneered the cheese making process in Kenya when Delia's father wanted to eat Brie, a few trials later, the Browns brand was born.

Currently the factory produces 17 different kinds of artisan cheese, many of which have won awards in South Africa and Europe. The factory now provides employment to 45 local people who help look after the 25 Friesian cows, two pigs (Bacon and Mildred) their 10 newborn piglets, two rabbits, numerous chickens and some roving guinea fowl!

The tours start with a welcome drink and the first cheese of the tour which on our trip was a plump halloumi delicately flavoured with thyme and shallow fried till golden brown on the outside and almost melty in the middle. A brief cheese making demonstration follows and you'll learn that the main ingredients of any cheese are milk, bacteria, enzymes and salt. Next lab coats and non-slip footwear are put on for a visit to the factory floor, which comprises of one large room where all the scientific processes required for making cheese happen, we lingered for a while in 2 maturing rooms where racks of cheeses sit in chilly temperatures, some for a couple of months others like the Parmesans stay put for almost 2 years. The Brie and other more mouldy cheeses are looked after by one person in an isolated area to minimize the risk of any contamination.

Returning to the main Tuscan style farmhouse for the cheese tasting is the highlight of the tour and places are already set out at the large farmhouse table. Guests are encouraged to try 10 types of cheese beautifully displayed from mild at one end to more mature at the other, going in an anticlockwise direction. The cheeses ranged from plainish Provolone to full



bodied Parmesans and creamy Bries.

Homemade bread and an impressive selection of crackers accompany the cheeses including an unusual (I found subsequently at Selfridges at £4.50 for a small packet) black charcoal cracker, apparently helpful for digestion. There is also a sophisticated range of homemade organic chutneys, I tried grape, mountain papaya jam, honey and caramelised onion.

But don't fill yourself up, as a sumptuous organic lunch follows, roasted duck salads, fresh tomato soup, fennel and cheddar cheese tart and spinach ravioli were just some of the things on the menu. Dessert was a fresh apple and mountain papaya pie with cream.

A fabulous walk around the organic farm and gardens is a perfect way to walk off lunch, and this part of the tour is a delight and great hit with children. The sheer variety of vegetables and fruits grown on the farm is very impressive and unusual, I particularly liked the cherry guava which we tasted as we went along learning about tomatillos, green beans, flowering courgette, sweet potato, cabbage and fennel.

While we traipsed around Hugh Fernley Whittingstall style, pre-ordered cheeses were being packaged up for our return. This is a fabulous day out and although it's not something you'd usually associate with Kenya, I'd say it was a must-do activity for anyone visiting Nairobi.

Delia and Andy don't aggressively promote the tours, you need to call them to book a tour or it may be easier to do via a travel agent who knows them. www.brownscheese.com.

Try Rahul at merlin@africaonline.co.ke or www.merlin-travel.com He can organise all your Kenyan trip requirements. For other great Kenyan Days Out, visit www.doindubai.com



Contributed by Monica Kapila. Photos courtesy of Anika Kapila and Browns Cheese Factory.