The Art of Raclette

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Raclette. You might have seen it before – a half wheel of melted cheese being scraped onto a plate. But what exactly is this cheesy specialty and where did it come from?

A semi-hard cow's milk cheese commonly cut in half and used for melting, raclette is an Alpine tradition that dates back to as early as the 13th century. It was originally enjoyed by peasants in the mountainous regions of Switzerland and France. Cow herders would carry their cheese with them as they moved their cattle to and from pastures through the mountains. Once the sun set, they would set up a campfire and use it to soften their precious cheese. Once it was melted, they would scrape it off onto bread. In fact, the name raclette is derived from a French word meaning "to scrape."

Since then, the tradition has stuck. Nowadays, many Alpine regions, including the mountainous slopes of northern Italy, prepare this cheesy specialty over an open fire. It is often paired with bread, potatoes, pickled vegetables, and cured meats. Various types of cheeses can be used, from Fontina to Gruyere, but usually a semi-soft cheese local to the Alps works best.

In Italy, raclette is also commonly found at Mercatini di Natale, open-air Christmas markets offering a variety of food stands and artisanal gifts, throughout northern regions like Trentino and Lombardia.

But the art of raclette doesn't end there! The dish is strongly rooted to a social atmosphere. Sometimes lasting for hours, a meal featuring raclette is meant to be enjoyed among friends and family, where everyone gathers around the fire, scraping off the oozing cheese bit by bit. Now that's a tradition we're all about!

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