

Traditionally Dried Aaruul

Ark of taste



Ааруул

Aaruul or Mongolian curd cheese is one of the main foods of Mongolian nomadic peoples. They prepare a sufficient amount of milk products in summer, when is the favorable time for pastoralists to get output of livestock, and they consume the products in other seasons. They make different dairy products depending on what type of animal they keep: sheep, goat, camel, horse, cow or yak. It is not common to produce aaruul or other cheeses from mare's milk or camel's milk because these are usually made into unpasteurized *airag* (fermented mare's milk) and *khoormog* (fermented camel's milk). The dairy products are also mixed with wild plants and fruits that add a unique taste. Aaruul can also be sweetened with sugar and fruit. So-called *xorxoi* ("worm") aaruul is produced by pressing the milk curds through the holes of a wide-eyed sieve; *bazmal* ("grabbed") aaruul is molded in the palm of the hand.

Aaruul is made by mixing cheese curds with sugar and wild berries and cutting the curds into different shapes and patterns. Milk aaruul is made of curds that are boiled in fresh milk and then sliced and dried. Aaruul made of airag curd has a very unique and strong taste. Western Mongolian aaruul is soft and oily due to the use of unpasteurized milk. The aaruul of Ajiin Bor is very popular for its milky taste and consistency. The products are preserved in natural ways that ensure their quality for long periods. Traditionally, Mongolians believe that hard aaruul is good for strengthening the teeth and gums.

Aaruul can be consumed in a variety of ways, other than chewing it and eating it solid. It can be used as a calcium-rich drink by placing it in water and letting it dissolve. The dried pieces can be stored almost indefinitely. However, they can get quite hard, so most people suck on them, rather than bite them. The taste may vary regionally and depending on the milk used, but usually includes a combination of sweet and sour flavors. Aaruul is a common travel provision and one of the core vitamin sources for the nomads. Traditionally dried aaruul, dried in the sun and wind, is a rare product today.

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