

World Cheese Awards in Oviedo rescheduled, with competition returning to Spain in 2021



The Guild of Fine Food has announced that the World Cheese Awards will not take place in Spain this year, amid ongoing concerns surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, instead opting to extend Oviedo's tenure as host city into 2021. Now set to take place between 3-6 November 2021, the 33rd edition of the competition will assemble the global cheese community at Oviedo's Palacio de Exposiciones y Congresos a year later than planned, as part of the Asturias Paraíso Natural International Cheese Festival 2021.

Following many months of discussions between the Guild of Fine Food, the Principality of Asturias, the City Council of Oviedo and the Instituto del Queso, the decision was taken in order to ensure the safety of judges, organisers and the general public, while preserving the unique nature of the competition and allowing the region to make the most of its moment in the global spotlight. Set to welcome judges from over 30 different countries, cheese from six continents and followers from every corner of the planet, Oviedo will be at the centre of the cheese world for four days like no other, so the organisers felt that the city should be given the opportunity to recover and use the event as a catalyst for the revitalisation of its restaurants, food producers and tourism industry.

Having explored all available options to hold the World Cheese Awards in some form this year and provide a much needed boost to cheesemakers everywhere, the Guild of Fine Food has determined that

the restrictions imposed by health and safety concerns would risk compromising the inimitable characteristics of the event. With people and place at its heart, including the face-to-face discussions between trained palates from over 30 nations, the decision has been reached to delay event's visit to Asturias and commit to staging the world's largest cheese-only competition, in all its glory, in 2021.

John Farrand, managing director of the Guild of Fine Food, organisers of the World Cheese Awards, commented: "It saddens me deeply to make this announcement, at a time when artisan cheesemakers could do with a lift, but looking at the bigger picture we've had to consider what's best for our hosts, the competition itself and by extension, the cheesemakers that rely on it to place their products on a world stage. Each year, we unite the global cheese industry in one city and leave a lasting legacy, but for obvious reasons it's just not appropriate to mobilise the cheese world on such a large scale right now. Furthermore, we feel that the unique nature of the World Cheese Awards would be compromised in the current circumstances. We're committed to educating our 250 judges and thousands of visitors about a new cheese region or country each year, while teaching thousands of consumers about artisan cheese during tutored tastings, so with limits on personal interaction, the very essence of the event would be undermined. This great gathering of cheese folk not only finds the world's top cheese, but they also do business, expand networks, catch up with friends and shine a spotlight on the host city and its gastronomic credentials. The COVID-19 crisis has made the World Cheese Awards all the more important to the people of Asturias, so we owe it to the region to do it in style."

Luisa Villegas, managing director of Instituto del Queso, organisers of the International Cheese Festival, added: "After analysing the pros and cons, we feel confident that it will be much more beneficial for the Principality of Asturias to delay the International Cheese Festival for a year and develop it as we originally planned, allowing us to meet the objectives that we set ourselves. Following the COVID-19 crisis, we now have an even bigger responsibility to the region to maximise the impact of our time as World Cheese Awards hosts and the postponement presents us with a fantastic opportunity to position Oviedo at the heart of the cheese world for a whole extra year. We'll be doing everything we can to keep the festival flame alive and have big plans for the coming months, aimed at contributing to the economic recovery of the agri-food sector. We have a year to work together for the good of Asturias, for the economic and social recovery that all business and production sectors need so much. We must take advantage of this opportunity."