



Say Cheese

The amazing view, crisp air, and scent of goats at Kibbutz Lotam in the Galilee provide a wonderful backdrop for Shirat Ro'im (Shepherd's Song) Dairy, which won gold and silver medals at the World Championship for Cheeses this year. Worth visiting / Yulik Prilik-Niv

One can quickly understand what brought cheesemaker Michal Mor Melamed to choose the Kibbutz Lotam community for her cheese enterprise; breathtaking views and the crisp, clean air mix with the scent of goats and of her artisanal goat cheeses. Named for the cistus ('lotem' in Hebrew) flower which grows in the vicinity, Mor Melamed, from Kfar Kisch, travels daily to Lotem, where she makes her prize-winning cheeses with the precision on par with a high-tech developer. Mor Melamed established

her dairy, Shirat Ro'im, based on traditional methods which she studied in Europe, mainly in Switzerland. Made without preservatives, food coloring, wax coatings, and other current practices, she uses skill and love, dedication and diligence, to gain vast international positive feedback. The Shirat Ro'im Dairy has represented Israel in two World Championships for Cheese (yes, there is such a thing, which each year surveys around 3,500 cheeses); Michal won gold, silver, and bronze medals for her cheeses, ranging from

Ein Harod (a hard cheese from goat's milk), truffle (cheese with genuine black truffle imported directly from Italy), Avner (in the style of Mutschli from Switzerland), and Nirit (soft goat cheese made with chestnut charcoal). "I remember how I was cleaning the dairy one day after work when I got the message that I'd been accepted as an honorary member of the Cheesemakers' Guild," says Mor Melamed, describing the unexpected process that led to becoming a certified international cheesemaker and international



Photo: Anatoly Michaelo

prize-winner, honorary member of the Sainte-Maure de Touraine cheesemakers association. This year, Shirat Ro'im was awarded a super gold at the World Cheese Awards, the industry's most prestigious competition, and reached the top 16, an especially high honor for someone from a country lacking a long-standing cheesemaking tradition, like France, Italy, England or Switzerland. Veteran clients, both locals and

in Israel selling them. A premium series of Emmental, in cooperation with the Strauss food company, was recently introduced, the first time her cheeses have reached the large-scale commercial market.

Mor Melamed, who sources goat and sheep's milk from other Galilee area producers, says that she always produces the identical cheese, only the process changes, calling it more precise than a bakery.

Happy cheese holiday

Oddly, it all happened by chance, after a 2005 visit to a dairy in the Swiss Alps. Michal had gone on a

captivated Michal. Returning to Israel, she studied academics and, in parallel, worked in cheesemaking facilities around Israel. Each summer she gleaned expertise from Swiss, French, and Italian cheesemakers; today, besides producing cheeses, she also teaches the fine art she loves. Visitors can enjoy kosher Shirat Ro'im cheese-based delicacies including platters, a range of other menu choices, view a short film about Michal and Shirat Ro'im, and sip – or purchase – wines from the nearby Lotem Winery.

[Shirat Roim, Kibbutz Lotem.](#)
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