

ORIGIN OF SWISS CHEESE FONDUE

The Swiss cheese fondue from which all the other fondues are derived is the traditional Neuchâtel Fondue and in the different cantons of Switzerland there are variations on this recipe. Fondues originally came into existence because of the geography and climate of Switzerland. In winter, when the mountains were covered with snow, the villages were cut off from the main towns. So fresh food was scarce and each village was forced to rely on its own resources. The locally made or produced foods – home baked bread, wine and cheese - were the main diet. As winter wore on the cheese became dryer and more and more unpalatable and so fondues were created in order to make the cheese more digestible – the melting of this dry, hard cheese in wine makes a most delicious meal. Many of you will already have experienced eating fondues in this very same atmosphere of a snowy mountain village, as it is traditional in skiing country to finish the day with a hot, creamy cheese fondue.

Fondues are cooked and served in one communal pot. This again is a legacy from Switzerland of long ago when the peasants were very poor and even cooking and eating utensils were scarce. Today we still use just one cooking pot and each person is given one fork to eat with – the style may have changed but the principle is still the same. The traditional fondue pot is made of earthenware, wide and shallow. It is called a ‘caquelon’ in Switzerland.