There are over 4oo types of Italian cheeses. I will talk about 9 of the most popular Italian cheeses.

Asiago To Ricotta

Where would the world's cooking and cuisine be without the luxurious and decadent cheeses of Italy? From pizza to pasta, the world relies heavily on the artisan cheeses produced and imported from Italy. Most of us are familiar with some of Italy's everyday cheeses, but there are other varieties of Italian cheese with an abundance of culinary possibilities.

Asiago

Made from cow's milk, asiago is a firm, cooked and pressed cheese that may be aged for up to one year. Many asiago cheese makers produce the mild, yet pungent and light-colored delicacy in the valleys of the Dolomite Mountains (also known as the Italian Alps) located in Cortina, Italy. Asiago is perfect for shredding, used as a table cheese to complement pasta, traditional risotto or soups, or thinly sliced and served atop a warm, crunchy baguette with fruit.

Fontina

A semi-soft, almost flesh-colored cheese, this buttery gem is a slightly nutty and mild delight. Valle d'Aosta, located in the most northwest corner of Italy, is home to the milk-producing cows grazing the high altitudes of the Italian Alps. Known for inclusion in gourmet recipes, Fontina is excellent as a fondue or a simple snack.

Gorgonzola ***

Named for a town outside Milan where it was originally made, Gorgonzola is basically the Italian version of Blue Cheese. Normally the Gorgonzola I find in Italy is quite more creamy than the one I could find in the US where a more dry version is preferred. Gorgonzola goes well with pears and grapes and is perfect for your wine and cheese party and as Blue cheese can be used on salads.

Mascarpone

Probably best known as the smooth and luscious highlight of Tiramisu, mascarpone is a triple creme cow's milk cheese with a texture often compared to American cream cheese. Mascarpone is a very tender and smooth, yet thick cheese but easy to spread. With a variety of serving possibilities, the traditional tiramisu of ladyfingers, liqueur and mascarpone is one of the most popular. The rich, velvety creation is also excellent lightly sweetened and thinned with a little cream to adorn fresh summer fruit and berries.

Mozzarella

Most everyone has heard of mozzarella. Yet another cow's milk cheese (although previously made from water buffalo milk) this is one of a few cheeses that really have two forms of "fresh". True fresh mozzarella is made from whole cow's milk, formed into balls and typically stored either in water, brine or whey to maintain its sharp white color and freshness. A delightful fresh mozzarella tasting experience is insalata caprese - a simple combination of fresh mozzarella, tomato, basil and olive oil. The second form of fresh mozzarella is typically mass-produced as a soft cheese with greater elasticity than true fresh mozzarella. This form of mozzarella is typically produced in a block form or pre-shredded.

Parmigiano Reggiano

Alongside mozzarella, Parmigiano Reggiano is one of Italy's most famous cheeses. This cow's milk cheese is a subtle blend of many Italian provinces including Parma and Bologna. Typically aged anywhere from 6 to 36 months, Parmigiano Reggiano is superb over fresh pasta or as a singular snack. Authentic Parmigiano Reggiano will contain a stamp bearing its name on the outer rind of the cheese. It's best to purchase the cheese whole, not grated, to maintain peak freshness and flavor. Most people will toss the rind aside, but within the rind contains abundant flavor and culinary options. The flavor of soups and stews can be greatly enhanced with a piece of Parmigiano Reggiano rind.

Pecorino ***

Cheese made from sheep's milk is known as *pecorino* (Pecora means sheep in Italian). If it is aged it can be used instead of Pamisan on pasta dishes and is sometimes preferable if a sharper taste is desidered. The best known is the Pecorino Romano but other popular pecorinos are from Tuscany, Sardinia and Sicily.

Provolone

This mildly smoky cheese is made from cow's milk. For provolone, enhanced color and flavor come with age although the cheese may be aged for as few as a month or two, or up to one year. The more yellow the color, the more ripe and flavorful. With a firm and slightly elastic texture, provolone is an excellent cheese for melting, or on sandwiches.

Ricotta

Used almost exclusively in classic Italian dishes such as lasagna and manicotti, ricotta (Italian for re-cooked) is actually not cheese, by a by-product of other Italian cheeses. The whey from these other cheeses are combined and re-cooked to create ricotta cheese. It has a grainy texture, but is very smooth when used in either savory or sweet dishes. Ricotta cheese is also used in classic Italian cheesecakes.