

THE LUXURY LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

# PRIME

LIVING

*Seasonal*  
STYLE

FASHION FINDS  
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RUBBER

*annual*  
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*summer*

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# CHEESE,

FOLLOWING THE ARTISAN CHEESE TRAIL

# PLEASE!

*Story* | ROBIN BARR SUSSMAN

*Over the past 10 years, America has embarked on a revival of artisan cheese making. The tasty phenomenon continues to improve and flourish every year with a cheese trail waiting for you in the East, along the West Coast and in the South. So, pack up the car with an ice chest, picnic basket and your favorite foodies, and hit the road.*





# CALIFORNIA





The Sonoma Marin Cheese Trail winds through redwood canyons, pastures and the oak-covered hills of Marin and Sonoma counties just north of San Francisco. This stunning stretch of Northern California links dozens of artisans who make distinctive cheeses using local milk from grass-fed cows, sheep, goats and water buffalo. Local cheese expert Vivien Straus, of Straus Family Creamery and founder of [cheesetrail.org](http://cheesetrail.org), supplied us with valuable tips on worthy visits. Prepare for an astounding array of cheese varieties in creative flavors.

### Ramini Mozzarella Farm

TOMALES, CALIFORNIA

Here's your rare chance to try handcrafted mozzarella made with fresh water buffalo milk. Audrey Ramini's very special ranch near Point Reyes National Seashore hosts tours and tastings every week. On the tour, you'll get to hand brush one of 45 water buffalo, and mozzarella lovers will find the Old World-style Italian mozzarella silky-soft, sweet and clean-flavored. Love fresh oysters? Cap off your day at nearby Tomales Bay Oyster Company. [raminimozzarella.com](http://raminimozzarella.com)

### Freestone Artisan Cheese

FREESTONE, CALIFORNIA

Located in the Sonoma Coast wine appellation between the coastal redwoods, the Pacific Ocean and San Francisco, this little bungalow is brimming with artisan cheeses from Sonoma, Marin and Napa counties (try the amazing Beecher's cheddar with green and black peppercorn). It also sells raw local honey, chocolates and local olive oils, plus hot crepes and coffee. For picnic provisions, stop by Wild Flour, one of the best bakeries in Northern California—a bread lover's fantasy. Nearby: Beautiful Bodega Bay, the local's getaway to the Sonoma Coast. [freestoneartisan.com](http://freestoneartisan.com)

### Toluma Farms & Tomales Farmstead Creamery

TOMALES, CALIFORNIA

Twenty minutes west of Petaluma (nestled in Tomales Bay Estuary) is this Marin county dairy, organic farm and creamery. Its farmstead cheeses, named after the native Indian land (Miwok) where the sheep and goats are raised, include Kenne, a mouth-melting soft-ripened goat cheese, and Arika, a tangy and dense aged sheep-goat mixed cheese. You'll see the popular cheese products in hundreds of restaurants, gourmet shops, resorts like Meadowood and wineries such as Ram's Gate. The farm has guided tours on the first Sunday of each month with a hike up to the pastures, a peek into the creamery and cheese tasting. [tolumafarms.com](http://tolumafarms.com)

### Marin French Cheese

PETALUMA, CALIFORNIA

Here's a great stop that's open daily in western Marin County with lush green pastures, gardens and picnic tables by the lake for lunch and sampling cheese. One of the longest operating cheese factories in the United States (1865), Marin French Cheese produces classic soft-ripened French-style Brie and Camembert. The opulent cheese also comes in other rich styles including Schloss (yellow and pungent; pairs great with wine and beer) and a swoon-worthy triple crème Brie with truffles that begs for Champagne. Pack up some 4-ounce "petites" for your purse or other selections from the cheese shop. [marinfrenchcheese.com](http://marinfrenchcheese.com)

### Cowgirl Creamery

POINT REYES STATION, CALIFORNIA

Famous for fresh and aged organic cheese named after California landmarks, this company owned by Sue Conley and Peggy Smith has been a smashing success since 1990. Visit the original Cowgirl Creamery shop and creamery in postage-stamp-size Point Reyes Station, which has a lunch café, cheese classes and tastings. The hundreds of artisan cheeses will make any foodie squeal with delight. You can find the wildly popular cheese across the Bay Area (farmers markets, Ferry Building Cheese Shop, gourmet shops and restaurants) and throughout the U.S. [cowgirlcreamery.com](http://cowgirlcreamery.com)

### Vella Cheese

SONOMA, CALIFORNIA

When visiting the many wineries in Sonoma near the San Francisco Bay Area, stop in for a classic taste or picnic at Vella Cheese factory housed in a historic circa 1904 stone building on the Sonoma town square. Known for dry Jack cheeses—quite popular in California—the company founded in 1931 also produces cheddars and Italian-style cheeses that are great to cook with. Don't look for a dairy farm or a tour, just lots and lots of delicious cheese. [vellacheese.com](http://vellacheese.com)

