

Explore West Marin’s Artisan Cheese Scene (With Free Samples)

By **Ben Davidson** on April 14, 2016 1:30 PM

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Fromage Blanc is just one of the tasty cheeses to be tried at Cowgirl Creamery. (Photo courtesy of Cowgirl Creamery)

Winter rains have left Marin's grassy hills a brilliant emerald green, a paradise for happy herds of grazing Jersey, Guernsey and Holstein cows who produce some of the finest milk in the country. Tucked here and there in this bucolic landscape, several cheese factories use the rich, creamy milk to craft a pungent assortment of award-winning artisan cheeses. To the delight of fromage aficionados, several producers offer free tours and samples at their retail shops and tasting rooms—a perfect excuse for a tasty road trip.

The Cowgirl Creamery

The Cowgirl Creamery, based in a former hay barn in charming Point Reyes Station, produces no less than 10 types of aged and fresh organic cheeses. Their most popular is the Mt. Tam, an aged triple cream cheese with a cultured butter flavor and hints of white mushroom. Their Red Hawk takes advantage of Marin's wild bacteria to make a bold, sumptuous triple cream cheese. Aged four weeks and washed with a brine solution to encourage its sunset red-orange rind, Red Hawk captures the true essence of Marin. The creamery has a retail cheese shop and a take-away cantina where you can buy sandwiches, breads, and wines to enjoy on their picnic tables or on an exploration of West Marin's nearby parklands. // *80 4th St. (Point Reyes Station), cowgirlcreamery.com*

Marin French Cheese Company



(Photo Courtesy of Marine French Cheese Company)

The Marin French Cheese Company, founded in 1865, is the oldest operating cheese company in America. It's a peaceful, old-fashioned place, a look back to West Marin's rural past when farms and pastureland abounded. The cheese company, located at Hick's Valley Ranch, uses fresh milk from six neighboring dairy farms to produce an array of mouth-watering, aged, soft-ripened and fresh artisan cheeses, from traditional Camembert and Fromage Blanc, to Triple Cream Brie and truffle-infused Brie. It's delicious, creamy stuff, aged in medium and petite rounds, and tucked into delicate wooden boxes—perfect for spring outings in scenic West Marin. A retail store and factory offers complimentary cheese samples with crackers and factory tours. Display cases are packed with rounds of fresh cheese, including some overstock usually on sale. To really experience Marin French Cheese's setting, add a loaf of fresh sourdough bread, marinated olives, and salami (also sold at the shop) and head out for an idyllic alfresco picnic at tables scattered around the property and along a nearby, tree-lined pond. // *7500 Point Reyes-Petaluma Rd. (Petaluma), marinfrenchcheese.com*

Nicasio Valley Cheese Company



(Photo by Ben Davidson)

Nearby, in the quiet old-fashioned burg of Nicasio, the Nicasio Valley Cheese Company offers organic, farmstead cheese from milk produced on adjacent pastureland owned by the local LaFranchi family. A small retail shop offers samples, including their aged, brie-like Formagella, washed-rind Tallegio, and award-winning Foggy Morning—a four time national award winner. In 2015, Foggy Morning was named the best Fromage Blanc style cheese made in North America. // 5300 Nicasio Valley Rd. (Nicasio), nicasiocheese.com

// Fancy yourself a true cheese tourist? Embark on a pilgrimage along the Sonoma Cheese trail or the California Cheese Trail.