

Farm Stays for Food Lovers

Jen Swetzoff reports on how to make a haycation while the sun shines



Photo: Philo Apple Farm

Farms, and the romantic notions they evoke, are at the heart of America's heritage. Forget the grueling realities of toiling the land and imagine the fantasy: Roosters crowing. Cows mooing. The smell of cut grass. Strawberries plucked off the vine. This fantasy can be had if you stay at a farm inn, an experience known in Europe as agritourism.

While common in Europe for years, "haycations," as they are sometimes called here, are becoming popular in the United States. According to Scottie Jones at [Farm Stay U.S.](#), more than 1,000 farms and ranches currently offer lodging to visitors, and that number is expected to rise steadily over the next few years. "For those open to the idea of hosting guests," Jones said, "it's a slam dunk to move into something that's not dependent on the weather or the price of corn." As financial struggles have prompted farmers to look for new ways to generate a profit, many are capitalizing on the locavore trend—offering luxurious

accommodations on their properties along with a variety of perks for foodies. “I think the increased interest in farm stays comes from a synergy of farms looking to diversify their operations and city folk looking to reconnect to the land,” said Jones.

In that spirit, we chose four of our favorite rural retreats, where you can pick vegetables from the garden outside your own private barn, collect eggs from the hen house next door, help corral grass-fed bison, or spend the day shadowing a master gardener or foraging for mushrooms. The highlight at all of these places is, of course, enjoying the literal fruits of your labor. And there’s no need to worry about extra calories: You’ll have plenty of opportunities to work them off the old-fashioned way, by helping out with daily farm chores. If you’d rather relax, that’s fine, too. Hey, you can always count sheep.

Philo Apple Farm

Farm-to-table dining is old news at the organic and biodynamic Philo Apple Farm in California’s Anderson Valley, where guests have been enjoying crisp apples and home-cooked meals for more than 15 years. To learn about agritourism from the experts, spend a weekend here with your hosts Karen and Tim Bates. Karen has some serious local-food credentials: She grew up on a farm and helped her parents open the famous French Laundry in Napa before they sold it to Thomas Keller.

Philo is a family affair, with the Bates’ daughters pitching in to help make the farm increasingly self-sustainable. Settle into your wooden cottage nestled among apple trees and enjoy a dinner at the farm. Saturday morning starts with a tour of the grounds led by Tim. He’ll show you Philo’s idyllic orchard with 1,700 trees and 19 varieties of apples, its flourishing gardens, and the rolling pastures that are home to sheep and goats. After you’ve been inspired by your surroundings, join Karen in the family’s kitchen to start cooking a simple, seasonal meal with ingredients found right outside your door. Recent menus have included a green garlic soufflé with a salad of mixed lettuces from the garden; rock cod with garden pesto over coconut rice and fava beans; and asparagus pasta with housemade goat cheese. *(18501 Greenwood Rd., Philo, CA; 707-895-2333; rooms from \$175 per night, weekends from \$1,200 per couple)*



Photo: Kinderhook Farm/Randy O'Rourke

Kinderhook Farm

For one of America's most intimate farm stays, cozy up in your own two-bedroom barn at [Kinderhook Farm](#) in the Hudson Valley, just under three hours north of New York City. This rustic-chic guest house opened recently, but the farm has been growing vegetables and raising cows, sheep, and chickens for several years. Its grass-fed beef is frequently served at popular restaurants including Diner and Marlow & Sons, both in Brooklyn.

During a stay, hike the property's 1,200 acres, cool off in a swimming hole, or take a tour with farmers Lee and Georgia Ranney. They'll show you how to bottle-feed baby lambs, herd sheep, feed the pigs, and box eggs. "Kinderhook Farm is not only a beautiful place but a process. It's where animals are nurtured and the environment is cared for simultaneously. This experience is invaluable in showing the link between the animals we care for and the food we eat," said owner Renee Iacone.

Starting in late July, the farm will host local chefs and butchers at its new demonstration kitchen. In the meantime, you can schedule private cooking lessons in the barn or make your own meals with whatever's in season during your visit. Gather eggs from your clucking neighbors, pull kale and tomatoes from your own garden, and purchase some of

the renowned meat from the on-site farm store. If you're in the mood to dine alfresco, fire up the grill on the barn's deck. Now *that's* eating local. (1958 County Rte. 21, Ghent, NY; 518-929-3076; from \$285 per night)



Photo: Zapata Ranch/Duke Phillips

Zapata Ranch

At Colorado's Zapata Ranch, owned by the Nature Conservancy and run by a third-generation family of ranchers, guests are invited to join in the daily business of raising cattle and bison (commonly called buffalo). On the property's 103,000 acres, which border the breathtaking Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, more than 2,000 bison are managed holistically, with no branding, hormones, supplemental feeding, or weaning. Seeing a herd of wild buffalo glide across the grasslands is an awe-inspiring experience, and probably the closest thing you'll find to a safari in North America. Even better, you're more than a spectator at Zapata. Prepare to get your jeans dirty and work up a hearty appetite while you ride horses, help the ranchers put up fences, and direct the animals from one pasture to another in order to preserve the grass. You'll also learn about important land-conservation management practices and handling techniques that emphasize minimal stress on the livestock.

Anytime of year, come hungry. You'll devour generous portions prepared by Mike Rosenberg, who previously worked as a personal chef for the Carnegie family and catered the wedding of John F. Kennedy, Jr. Nearly all of your meals will showcase grass-fed bison that's raised entirely on the ranch, served alongside San Luis Valley produce. Breakfast might be sage-and-fennel bison sausage and sweet potato hash with free-range poached eggs, creamed spinach, and fried green tomatoes. Homemade buttermilk biscuits come on the side. For lunch, try a juicy bison burger with avocado and chipotle mayo on a sourdough bun with barbecued baked beans and slaw. At dinner, savor a red wine-braised bison roast served in its own juices with new potatoes and glazed baby carrots. *(5303 State Hwy. 150, Mosca, CO; 719-378-2356; from \$985 per person for three nights)*



Photo: Blackberry Farm/Beall and Thomas Photography

Blackberry Farm

If you're intrigued by the romance of traditional farm life, but not one for roughing it, you'll love the luxurious [Blackberry Farm](#). This Relais & Châteaux resort—complete with a spa and fine dining room—is nestled on a working farm in the foothills of Tennessee's Great Smoky Mountains, less than a 25-minute drive from Knoxville's airport.

Spend a day shadowing the master gardener or the executive chef. Visit with the free-range sheep, chickens, and pigs. Learn how to make your own jam and harvest honey from the bees. Go for a guided walk deep in the woods with the mushroom forager. Depending

on the season, you can dig up wild ramps, morels, chanterelles, or black trumpets. Then, after all that strenuous exploring, put on your good jeans and have an elegant dinner at this luxurious spot. For a true foodie experience, late July's Smoky Mountain Table weekend celebrates heirloom gardening and the history of food culture in Appalachia with garden tours and hands-on cooking demonstrations. *(1471 West Millers Cove Rd., Walland, TN; 800-648-2348; from \$995 per night, including meals)*

Jen Swetzoff is a Brooklyn-based writer and editor. She is a coauthor of *Frommer's 500 Adrenaline Adventures*, the founder of Parenture.com, and a member of her local CSA.