



**Goat parade:** Bred for chèvre, dairy goats at the Fat Toad Farm head out to the pasture.

TASTE OF TRAVEL

## Charting America's Food Trails

Travelers seeking a taste of regional history can sample the local cuisine along these state routes. | **By DONNA TABBERT LONG**

**J**OINTS, SHACKS, diners, dives, farms, parlors, grills. Call it culinary character. Most road-tripping travelers seek out the places where locals go to eat regional specialties—a spicy link of Cajun boudin sausage, say, or a pile of homemade hot tamales. Many state tourism departments are designing culinary trails to make finding those places a whole lot easier. Documentary projects like the Southern Foodways Alliance are also recognizing the importance of preserving a region's culinary heritage—recording oral histories and at the same time providing interactive itineraries for travelers craving a real taste of

history. Trail routes range in scale from 50-mile-radius day-trips to 1,600-mile excursions. You can plan a weekend jaunt to compare Midwestern tenderloins as big as dinner plates or a month-long quest for crawfish and po' boys on the bayou. Ultimately, that's what a food trail is all about: satisfying hunger, tasting local fare, eating up the road.



**NEW MEXICO GREEN CHILE CHEESEBURGER TRAIL** Bite into a juicy meat patty, draped with melting cheese, heaped with a pile of roasted green chiles, and you're tasting a signature New Mexican specialty. Whether it's sizzled on a well-seasoned

griddle or grilled over an open flame, the gussied up burger is on menus all over the state. Thanks to the New Mexico Tourism Department, you can now compare the best 48 establishments (chosen from 185 nominees) serving it up. Mapped out along the state's most traveled highways and byways, they include nationally unsung places from **Michael's Mini-Mart** in Velarde (along State Highway 68 on the way to Taos) to the renowned mom-and-pop **Bobcat Bite Restaurant** (along old Route 66) on the outskirts of Santa Fe. ([www.newmexico.org/greenchilecheeseburger](http://www.newmexico.org/greenchilecheeseburger))

**NORTH CAROLINA HISTORIC BARBECUE TRAIL** If you smell pungently sweet smoke and hear the sound of a cleaver hitting a chopping block, you can bet you're walking into an authentic Tar Heel barbecue joint. This is pulled-pork-loaded-into-a-warm-bun barbecue, often accompanied by coleslaw and corn bread but always washed down with sweet tea. Starting at Ayden's **Skylight Inn** on the eastern end of the state, the trail meanders all the way to **Herb's Pit Bar-B-Que** in the small mountain town of Murphy in the west, traversing some 500 miles in the "Cradle of Cue." The 24 eateries chosen for the trail all still use the old-fashioned pit-cooked method (fueled by wood or charcoal), have been in business at least 15 years, offer sit-down dining, make their own sauce, and are held in high esteem by the local community and BBQ aficionados alike. ([www.ncbbqsociety.com](http://www.ncbbqsociety.com))

**LOUISIANA SOUTHERN GUMBO TRAIL** Ask a southern Louisianian what makes a good gumbo, and debates ensue. Should it be dark and smoky, loaded with duck, or chocolate-brown and spicy with sausage? Should you add shredded chicken, cracked crabs, turtle, shrimp, oysters? The Southern Foodways Alliance along with Tabasco have commenced an online documentary project that shares the spicy stew's past as well as the history of places on the trail. Start in New Orleans and sample a bowl big-city style at tables like chef Donald Link's **Cochon** then travel

### TASTEFUL SOUVENIRS

*Bringing home the local flavors from the road.*

**F**orget T-shirts and tchotchkes. Food lovers know the best keepsakes are the edible variety. Pick up bottles of local barbecue sauce (*right*), marinades, and dry rub mixes on the Texas BBQ

Trail ([www.texasbbqtrail.com](http://www.texasbbqtrail.com)) or bring home jars of New York-produced honey and jugs of maple syrup sold at the **Sunset View Creamery** on the state's Finger Lakes Cheese Trail ([www.fingerlakeswinecountry.com](http://www.fingerlakeswinecountry.com)).

For the candy aficionado, buy bags of peppermints, rainbow-hued candy fish, and bright red cinnamon squares still made the old-fashioned way at the 1917 **Mundt's Candies shop** on Indiana's Sweet Temptations Trail ([www.indianafoodways.com](http://www.indianafoodways.com)).



Louisiana's Southern Gumbo Trail leads to a variety of places to dig into a hearty bowl of gumbo.

across Cajun Country to Lake Charles. End up at the unassuming **Seafood Palace**, and you can order a spicy shrimp and crab gumbo with a side of creamy potato salad or choose a catfish po' boy, crawfish patty, or "fried gator" instead. ([www.southerngumbotrail.com](http://www.southerngumbotrail.com))

**SWEET 'N SALTY TRAIL** A handful of stops on this short and scenic route (put together by the Pennsylvania Dutch Convention and Visitors Bureau) give visitors a taste of Lancaster County's prized pretzels and the chocolate bits that preceded Hershey's famous Kisses. An easy day-trip excursion includes the pretty town of Lititz where you can sample salty pretzels and get a hands-on lesson in pretzel twisting at **Julius Sturgis Pretzel Bakery**, the country's first commercial pretzel bakery. Less than a mile away, at the **Wilbur Chocolate Co.** and **Candy Americana Museum**, you can taste another pretzel—this one coated in magnificent chocolate. Keep a look out for horse-drawn Amish buggies on Route 340 near the village of Intercourse (named for an intersection of two old highways) and its namesake factory—one of few in the country still twisting pretzels by hand. ([www.padutchcountry.com](http://www.padutchcountry.com))

**VERMONT CHEESE TRAIL** A hunk of cheddar, a wedge of blue, a log of goat, a wheel of maple-smoked gouda—on Vermont's cheese trail, you can sample more than 150 varieties from the Green Mountain state's 41 artisanal cheesemakers. Stop at small organic farms to watch the cheese-making process, sample the house specialty, pet some farm animals, then purchase and pack your aromatic loot in a cooler to take home. The farms, located throughout Vermont, range from small-scale family-run operations like the **Fat Toad Farm**, where they make creamy chèvre and sell jars of homemade goat's milk caramel, to the well-established **Cabot Creamery**, headquarters of a 1,250-dairy farm co-op, complete with a visitors center and factory tour. ([www.vtcheese.com](http://www.vtcheese.com)) ■

JEB WALLACE-BRODEUR (TOP); VERMONT CREAMERY/BECKY STANER (MIDDLE); DAN WESTERGREEN/NS (LOWER)

AMY EVANS STREETER/S.F.A.