



ARTISANAL CHEESE BOARDS AND GOURMET SHOPPING

Arranging an impressive cheese board begins with shopping for artisanal cheese, but deciding what cheese to buy can be challenging. The ideal cheese board will consist of cheese varying from soft to semi-hard, and finally hard cheeses. However, a creative cheese board will include berries, bite-sized bread, crostinis, crackers, Crudités, dried and fresh fruits, grapes, herbs, nuts, olives, preserves, and other spreads, sun-dried tomatoes, and table décor... We shop at **Capri Imports**, **Cardona's**, **Gabriel's**, and **The Cheese Traveler** for gourmet cheeses... However, we fell in love

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with a few **Vermont-made cheeses** while traveling. The essential nutrients that a cheese course and/or cheese board provide at a party, or while traveling, enhances a gourmet lifestyle. During a French-style dinner, cheese is served traditionally after the main course and before the dessert. Coincidentally, you may have noticed that fine dining restaurants will often offer on the menu a plate of cheese just before the dessert. **In Italy, cheese may be served as a pre-dessert plate with fruit and honey.** Antipasto cheeses tend to be fresher, and after-dinner ones more aged... Make your cheese board(s) the star of the show. BTW: You can attend cheese classes at **The Cheese Traveler • 540 Delaware Ave • Albany, NY.**

One of the best cheeses a bon vivant can serve is **burrata**, a fresh cheese often found in the **Apulia region** of southern Italy. When making burrata, the artisan cheesemaker uses the still-hot cheese and forms it into a pouch, which is then filled with **Stracciatella** (shreds of fresh mozzarella), and

topped off with fresh cream before closing. **Capri Imports Italian Deli** sells **Burrata** — they also sell a **Stuffed Burrata with pesto and seasonings** — placed on top of a **fresh tomato slice** — and topped with **fresh basil, drizzled with Balsamic glaze and EVOO**. The name burrata, is derived from the Italian word burro, which means butter. When the burrata is sliced open, the thickened Stracciatella and sweet cream flow out. The cheese has a richer, more buttery flavor than **Mozzarella di Bufala**, and should be served at room temperature... Even **Colombia** makes a buffalo milk and cow's milk burrata. Make sure that guests grab a fresh plate after eating creamy and juicy burrata.

An ensemble of mild soft cheeses should be the opening act to your **cheese board** — before tasting semi-hard, hard, aged, and more pungent blue-veined and funky cheeses last.

Make sure to offer your guests several beverage options to enjoy with at least six selections of cheese. In this article, we have chosen at least a dozen artisanal cheeses from local fromageries for our cheese board(s).

To keep things simple, we chose libations of **San Pellegrino** sparkling water, **Saratoga®** still water — and made our own **artisanal-flavored seltzer water infused with sliced fresh fruits**, and crushed ice. Alcoholic beverages that pair well with a barrage of artisanal cheeses are citrusy or **hoppy beers**, **champagne**, **sparkling wines** — and big, bold **red wines** with stronger aged and blue cheeses... Nonetheless, in order for your guests to taste the assortment of artisanal cheeses, it is essential to have the right slicing cheese knives, serving utensils, and cocktail forks or picks for tasting. **J.K. Adams** sells a 5-Piece Cheese Knife Set for approximately \$34.

