

sandwich surprise

Yep, the new San Fran must-have is a tuna melt, thanks to "Heated Rivalry"

Carson Mnarik (He/Him/His) February 12, 2026, 1:53 pm EST



Image Credit: "Heated Rivalry," HBO Max / Crave

The hottest menu item of 2026 is... a tuna melt?

Believe it or not, the working-class American diner staple — which combines tuna salad with melted cheese and toasted bread for a creamy, salty, and crunchy sammy — is experiencing a major cultural resurgence thanks to *Heated Rivalry*. You know, that steamy show about the gay hockey players?

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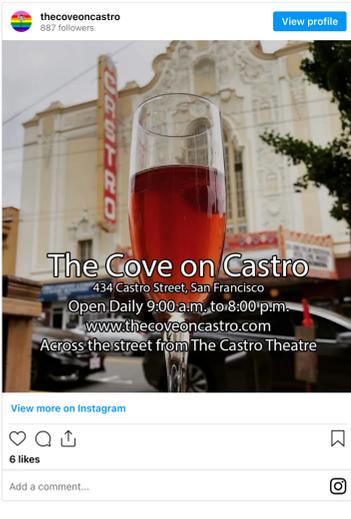
To be fair, it's a pretty *symbolic* tuna melt. In the series, Ilya Rozanov (Connor Storrie) offers to make one for his rival-slash-lover Shane Hollander (Hudson Williams) after a particularly saucy — and as-of-then, no-strings-attached — hookup. The moment represents a change in tone for their relationship, as the walls begin to come down and the two NHL all-stars start to fall in love with each other. ~~Don't get us started on the "cottage" scene.~~



It's ironic, considering that fragrant tuna, decadent cheese, and two slices of carb-heavy bread was probably the *last* thing you'd expect gay travelers to be searching for on a vacation.

But since the Canadian romantic drama premiered, the demand for tuna melts has seen a dramatic rise, especially in gay destinations like **San Francisco**, where three of our favorite lunch spots attested to the phenomenon in [an interview with The San Francisco Standard](#).

1. Cove on Castro



For over 48 years, this leather-friendly spot has blessed San Fran with homespun happiness. In-the-know locals will tell you **Cove on Castro** is like the neighborhood's dining-room table, where the faces of friends and family members appear in photos on the walls, regulars strike up juicy conversation, and a cup of coffee is just as tasty as a three-course meal.

And so are the tuna melts, according to co-owner Maurice Darwish, who told the *Standard* they've seen a rise in orders from "one a day to three or four." That said, the best part about the joint is its prime location and queer-friendliness; [according to its website](#), it's one of "the only places you can simply sit with a coffee, beer, or wine to watch the Castro neighborhood go by in all its wonderful diversity."

2. St. Francis Fountain



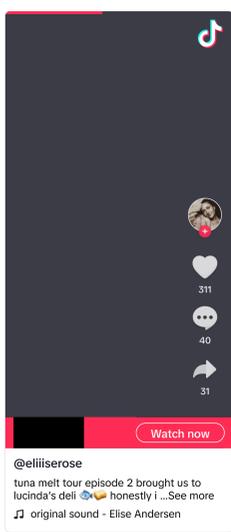
St. Francis Fountain bills itself as "the oldest, fastest, & most delicious diner in San Francisco." The **Mission District** spot, which is 108-years-old and under recent new management, saw an uptick in orders almost as soon as *Heated Rivalry* premiered.

"The owner and I were like, 'What is happening? This is so bizarre,'" restaurant manager (and the spot's fabulous Instagram correspondent) Raoni Washburn told *The Standard*. "Before, we would go full days without [selling] one, and now we're at 16 or 17 a day."

And just in time, too; "We were considering taking it off the menu," he added.

Aside from their delicious tuna melts, St. Francis Fountain also specializes in homemade ice cream, breakfast, burgers, and cocktails, including the must-order mimosa flight.

3. Lucinda's Deli



As far as Bay Area sandwich makers go, the team at **Lucinda's Deli** might be the absolute experts. According to a viral TikTok, the adorable datatessen boats a tuna melt that's one of the best sandwiches in all of San Francisco — and the data backs it up.

As the restaurant's Ryan Chinchilla told the *Standard*, the kitchen is cooking anywhere between 30 to 35 tuna melts a day and whipping up gargantuan tubs of tuna salad to meet the demand.

"People are coming on the tuna melt, now that it's on the hottest show in America," he explained. "By day three, we're out [of tuna salad]. For a place of our size, that's a lot."

Of course it helps that the homey-looking spot, which is right next to **Alamo Square Park**, also offers a ton of other yummy sandwich options for more meat and veggie-gear ed eaters.

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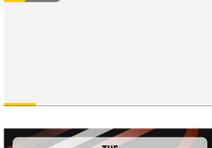
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Carson Mnarik is a gay New York-based writer and comedian who loves iced coffee almost as much as he loves traveling the world.

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