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What's a Fish Boil?



★★★★★ 0 RATINGS //

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Ever heard of a fish boil? Picture fire, fish and a full buffet of "poor man's lobster," and you have a rough idea of this Upper Great Lakes tradition.



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We've had a Low Country boil several times before. It's a traditional dish in the low country of Georgia, Louisiana and South Carolina—a variety of shellfish, potatoes and corn are thrown into a pot with water and seasonings and cooked until done, then served. And devoured. Quickly. Because it's delicious.

So, we thought we knew what a fish boil would be. Boil some fish in a pot and you are done. Obviously, we had never been to Upper Great Lakes country, where the fish boil is not just a meal but a work of performance art.

No one is sure precisely where the concept of a fish boil began, but it was more than likely just a group of people with a pot and some whitefish from the local lake. Instead of going to all the trouble of frying or baking the fish, someone decided to just toss it all into a pot and boil it. Traditionally, the fish is known as "poor man's lobster" and is covered with melted butter before eating.

When we arrived at the [White Gull Inn](#) in Door County, Wisconsin, for our first fish boil experience, most of the restaurant patrons were in back of the restaurant, admiring the roaring fire with a large, boiling pot of water perched on top. The chef gave a little talk about their fish boil, the history of fish boils, and explained what would happen next.

The pot full of potatoes and small chunks of whitefish is allowed to boil until the natural oil from the fish rises to the top of the pot. Then, with a flourish of showmanship, observers are asked to stand back as kerosene is thrown on the fire, which flares up, and the top skim of oil on the pot boils over into the flames.

The crowd oohs and ahs and the chef and his helper dexterously place a long stick into the handle of the pot's basket and lift it out. The fish and potatoes, along with cole slaw and bread, are then served buffet

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style. We fill our plates then return to our tables where there are small teapots full of melted butter to pour over the fish and potatoes.

Although the spectacle is quite an experience, I can't say the same for the ingredients of the fish boil. The whitefish served this way was full of bones—although they did lift out easily, much like salmon—and had a strong, fishy taste that we didn't care for. There is not enough melted butter in the universe.

It was definitely worth the money just for the experience—the boil over was a pretty amazing spectacle. But I'll take my whitefish fried or baked, thanks.

Fish boils are offered in several locations in Door County, but the [White Gull Inn](#) offers a very nice dinner for a reasonable price. In addition to the restaurant, the historic inn built in the 1890s also offers accommodations.

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JAN ROSS

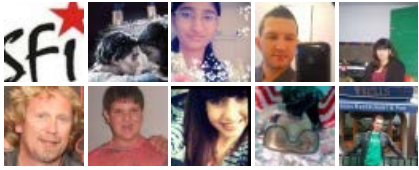


After a lifetime of travel, Jan Ross can pack a bag and hit the road with very little notice, although she will always have a little black dress and some snazzy shoes in there. She loves to travel with her husband of more than 35 years as he is a great photographer and she is often way too busy having fun to think about taking pictures. Active travel or relaxing, she is up for it all!

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