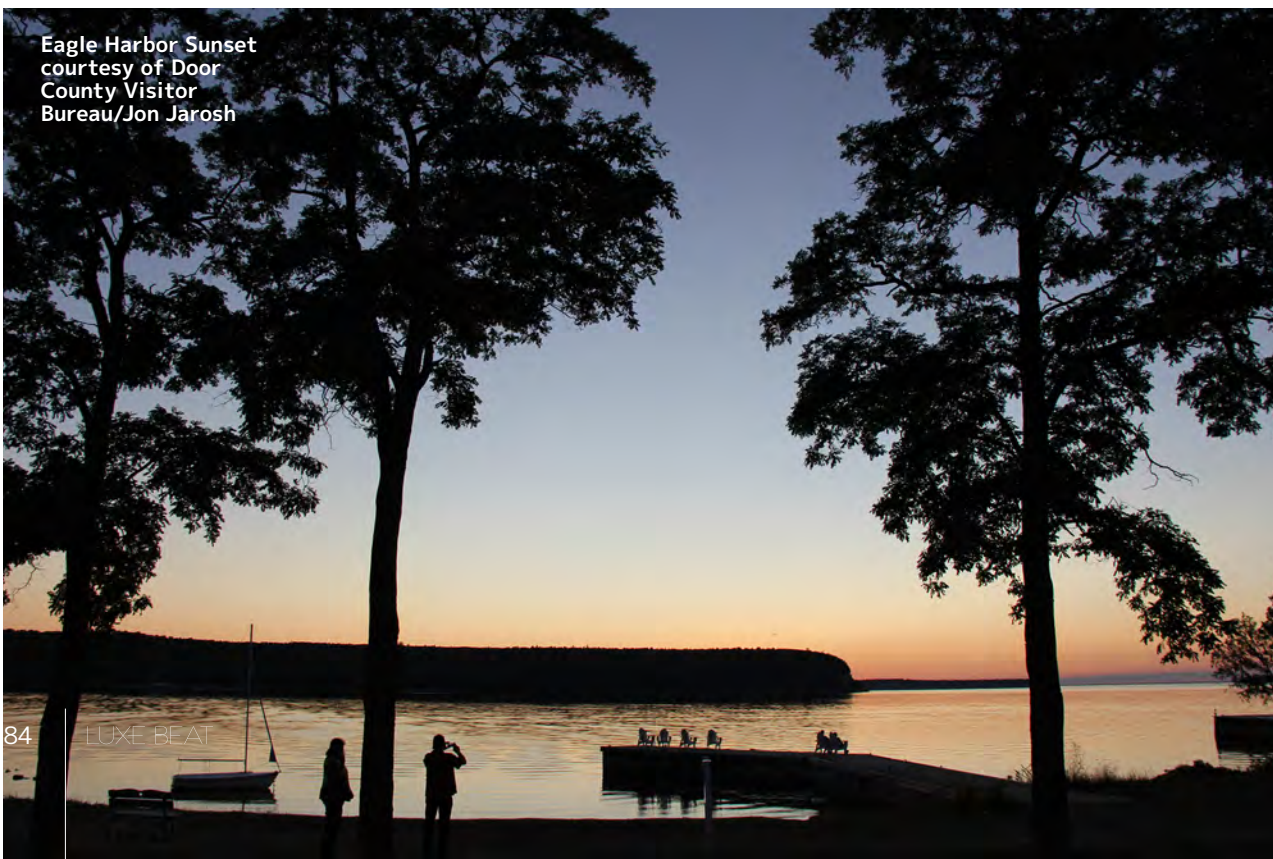


Door County Fish Tradition and Taste



Addition of Kerosene
to fire
LEFT
Fish Boil "Boil Over"
RIGHT
Door County Fish Boil

Eagle Harbor Sunset
courtesy of Door
County Visitor
Bureau/Jon Jarosh



Door County, Wisconsin is a pastoral peninsula with Prussian blue waters and verdant woodlands that seem to envelop your spirit and surround your soul. Peace and tranquility are its byproducts, with only the lapping of waves and sounds of seagulls interjecting their refrain. In between the forests and lakes are numerous orchards of Door County's famous cherry and apple trees — just begging to be picked at their ripeness. With its 298 miles of shoreline, the peninsula can be strangely reminiscent of New England; nevertheless, the county has its own traditions, largely emanating from a Scandinavian heritage, that make Door County decidedly distinctive.

The Tradition

Boil for ste

By Karin Leperi



Door County is reminiscent of New England



Master – a cook who knows the science and exact cook times for the boil, ensuring that both texture and taste are retained. Lake Michigan whitefish are caught by local fishermen, sometimes that very day, and cut into small chunks. Red potatoes and onion, with salt is the only seasoning, are used to raise the specific gravity of the water.

Behind the restaurant is where all the magic begins. The Boil Master starts by explaining his technique, along with the simple yet special ingredients he will use. Meanwhile, a huge black cast-iron kettle filled with water sits over a blazing wood-burning fire, waiting for the hiss, crackle, and pop of a red-hot fire to bring the water to a boil.

When the water comes to a boil,

the wire mesh basket containing potatoes and onions is slowly lowered into the pot. (Sometimes this is done in advance to save time). Meanwhile, the Boil Master entertains the crowd with sea stories and humor, all the while looking at his stop watch to ensure just the right cook time.

After just the right amount of time, determined by experience gained from countless fish boils, the Boil Master adds mild whitefish steaks into the boiling pot. The fish cook for about 9-10 minutes, while funky fish oils separate and rise to the top of the kettle.

What happens next is the apex of the fish boil. Be sure to have your camera or cell phone in hand for the upcoming Kodak moment – when kerosene or fuel oil is added to the fire. This incendiary addition causes

One of those traditions is the community fish boil, started by Scandinavian settlers more than 100 years ago as an economical way to feed the many mouths of fishermen and lumberjacks. Whereas trout or salmon was initially used, these days, white fish freshly caught from Lake Michigan is the preferred ingredient.

I was somewhat hesitant when I first heard we were going to a traditional Door County Fish Boil, as I am a reluctant eater when it comes to fish and bones. One bone and it is over for me. However, because the fish boil is a culinary tradition in Door County, I was anxious to see how it was done and to taste the results. Our group headed for the Old Post Office Restaurant, part of the Edgewater Resort, in the beguiling village of Ephraim. (Many consider

this to be the best fish boil.) Though the restored building is where Ephraim's post office was located in the early 1900s, these days, it looks more like a stately plantation rather than a restaurant. The interior is smartly done in cozy country, with hardwood floors and beautifully framed windows. The windows are important, because right across the street is Lake Michigan, where, if your timing is just right, you can watch the sunset over Eagle Harbor while you dine on traditional fare.

The Boil

It's important to arrive about 30 minutes before your set reservation time, so you can watch how a fish boil is orchestrated. Besides being a culinary event, it is entertaining as well as informative. First, ingredients are assembled by a Boil



View of Door County Peninsula from helicopter

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Door County fall foliage

RIGHT
Old Post Office
Restaurant Sign



Boil Master
inserting fish
steaks contained in
wire basket

a “boil over” – a process where smelly fish oils that have risen to the top now spill over the side of the kettle, sparking a flame burst worthy of many snaps. Left behind in the kettle are whole and firm fish chunks, mild and without a fishy flavor. After the flame dies down is when these tasty morsels are brought into the restaurant for serving.

The Taste

White fish steaks, potatoes, onions, and coleslaw are plated for you. Your server then asks, “Would you like melted butter drizzled over your fish?” (You can have it on the side as well).

As mentioned earlier, I was a tad worried about my meal because of my aversion to fish bones. However, my fears were quickly swept aside when the wait staff offered their service in removing bones from the whitefish. I quickly took them up on their expertise. After being presented with nothing but filet morsels, I proceeded to dip my

boneless fish into the drawn butter. One morsel in my mouth and I thought I was tasting lobster! I later found out that this is often referred to as a “poor man’s lobster.”

Choose from three types of homemade baked bread: lemon, pumpkin, and rye or have a taste of them all (My favorite was the lemon bread). A slice of freshly baked Door County cherry pie completes the meal. Though ice cream is extra, it is well worth it.

For those who just don’t like fish, alternatives are available. Just let the restaurant know when you make your reservation, but know that you are missing a special treat. Also, something to keep in mind is that the Old Post Office Fish Boil is located in Ephraim – a dry township.

Old Post Office Restaurant
10040 Water St, Hwy 42
Ephraim, WI 54211
920.854.4034



Cherry Pie a la
Mode at Old Post
Office courtesy of
Door County Visitor
Bureau/Jon Jarosh



Traditional Fish Boil
Dinner courtesy
of Door County
Visitors Bureau/
Jon Jarosh