

Feasting on potatoes while in Idaho



It's hard to find a menu in Idaho without some form of potato.
Photo/Kathryn reed

By Kathryn Reed

KETCHUM, Idaho – I can't move to Idaho. It's all because of the potatoes.

I have a problem with French fries. I think they are food group. I think they can be eaten at any time of day. I think they can be a meal unto themselves.

Not that potatoes can't be found in every state, but they do seem to be on the menu a bit more in Idaho – and in other forms than French fries.

“Idaho's growing season of warm days and cool nights, ample mountain-fed irrigation and rich volcanic soil, give Idaho potatoes their unique texture, taste and dependable performance,” according to the Idaho Potato Commission.



Fries and potato skins at
Whiskey Jacques in Ketchum.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Potatoes are Idaho's No. 1 crop, with 13 billion pounds harvested each year. The Idaho Farm Bureau says, "About 60 percent of Idaho's potato crop is processed into French fries, tater tots and other fried products, or dehydrated into flakes and various other forms. Statewide, the crop is valued at between \$550 million and \$700 million per year."

Russet, red, fingerling and gold are what this state grows. Most are grown in the southern half of the state, which includes Sun Valley. When I was there last month I tried to eat as many potatoes as possible.



Potato salad at Cristina's in Ketchum tastes almost as good as mom's. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Even on the mountain at Sun Valley ski resort baked potatoes are served for lunch. A loaded potato – sour cream, bacon, chives, sharp cheddar – cost \$11.50, while the chili cheese loaded potato was \$12.50. A side of fries was \$5, while sweet potato fries were \$6. All of these were available at Seattle Ridge Day Lodge.

At River Run Lodge, at the base, deli sandwiches came with two sides – choices included twice baked potato, mashed potatoes and gravy, and sweet potato mash. From the grill there were cheese fries (\$5.75), Idaho fries (\$4.50), chili cheese fries (\$8.50), and sweet potato fries (\$5.50).



Mashed potatoes complement the steak at Sawtooth. Photo/Kathryn Reed

At Whiskey Jacques it was time for potato skins. It had been years, maybe decades, since I last had potato skins. Cheesy good, but felt like I could be rolled out of there.

At Cristina's I ordered potato salad as a side with my sandwich. My sister and I are potato salad snobs, probably because mom makes the best, but we both admitted this restaurant in Ketchum got high marks. They used red potatoes and were light with the mayo.

At the Pioneer restaurant a baked potato with sour cream and chives was dinner – and only \$4.95. It was so big that I could not finish it. Those wanting a potato with dinner could pay \$2.95. Everyone passed on the Jim Spud – a filet inside of a potato with cheddar and sour cream. (\$12.95)



Fries for lunch on the slopes of Sun Valley. Photo/Kathryn Reed

I so wanted to have the homemade potato leek soup at the Sawtooth, but the bacon in it had me dining on a non-potato item. But those who ordered it said it was tasty. I did have a bite of the garlic mashed potatoes – wow – could have had that and wine, and called it a meal.

I'm not sure I could have endured such a highly intensive carb diet for more than a week. While potatoes are not super unhealthy, it's all the crap we put on them and then if they are fried that gives them such a deservedly bad reputation. Still, I'm not quitting my French fry habit, but I might start asking if they are Idaho potatoes.