

Sensational soups at Tahoe restaurants



Buffalo wing sauce is the secret ingredient at The Alpine Club's tomato soup. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

With the temperatures about to plummet in the Lake Tahoe Basin, it means soup is a good option for staying warm.

There are wonderful choices in the area. Here is a sampling:

It's a rarity to find chili on a menu – especially without meat. At Freshies in South Lake vegan tofu chili is a regular item. A bowl (\$4.75) is an outstanding bargain. It's super hearty. It has a good kick, but isn't too spicy. It could be a meal unto itself.

Azul in Heavenly Village also has veggie chili on the menu – \$4.50/cup, \$8.50 for a bowl. Sue called it an excellent bowl of chili with added texture from mini tortilla strips on the side. Spices were good without setting her mouth on fire. She tried to detect the sweet flavor, thinking it may have been

nutmeg.

Blue Angel Café in South Lake Tahoe regularly has more than one soup as a special. I've never been there when there was not a vegetarian option. On this particular night I had the cream of cauliflower and Sue had the Southwest black bean. Each cup was \$5.50. I had never had cauliflower soup. This was a tasty surprise. I'm not sure of the secret ingredient, but something that made it a little sweet. It could have been in the cream. Lots of chunks of the vegetable made it more substantive. The black bean was a little milder than expected, but Sue liked all the beans. My go-to soup that is often on the menu here is the tomato-basil. This is my favorite place for soup – year round.

The spicy lentil soup (\$7) at Artemis in South Lake Tahoe is another one of my favorites; it's on the menu year round. The consistent quality is outstanding – lots of lentils, and wonderful Mediterranean spices – and it is vegan. It can be a meal or a side.

Another lentil soup (\$8) worth trying is the one served at The Pub at the base lodge at Sierra-at-Tahoe. It is so thick, much more like chili than soup. Cilantro comes through as a distinct spice. Lots of chickpeas in it, too.

The only disappointment in the soup at Primo's was that I got a cup instead of a bowl. I had the soup/salad combo, which comes with a cup of the soup of the day. On this particular day it was vegetable pasta, which seemed so appropriate at an Italian restaurant. More veggies than pasta fill the cup – fine by me. They are perfectly cooked – not mushy, as can be the case with some veggie soups. Oregano and basil dominated the flavors. A cup is \$6, a bowl is \$8 at this South Lake Tahoe restaurant.

At the Loft at Heavenly Village two soups are always on the menu – tortellini in brodo (\$7/cup, \$10/bowl) and tomato

bisque (\$6/cup, \$9/bowl). Sue had the one with meat, noting the mini meatballs aren't so mini. "It was a bigger bite than I wanted, but I wasn't motivated to cut them in the cup. I could tell the meatballs were soaked in the light chicken broth that I would hardly call rich as the menu states." It was good, but could have had more flavor. The tomato bisque had a nice thickness, but didn't taste like the tomatoes were roasted as the menu states. It was also a bit on the sweet side for my taste.

A classic is tomato soup and grilled cheese. The Alpine Club at Northstar Village nailed it on both. This is a private restaurant for members of Tahoe Mountain Club. (I was a guest.) A common problem with tomato soup is that it's too sweet. This is because sugar is often added to cut down on the acidity, but that's really not necessary. But this was not a problem with this ski lunch. However, there was an ingredient in the soup I couldn't put my taste buds on. Come to find out it was buffalo wing sauce. Find a member – this \$10 combo is a bargain.