

Rowleys Bay Resort, Wisconsin: Fish Boil and More

As a New Yorker, I hadn't heard much about Door County before visiting this bucolic peninsula lying between Green Bay and Lake Michigan in the northeast of Wisconsin. I was first surprised to find that Green Bay is an actual body of water, not just a football team — and what a beautiful body of water it is.

En route to Rowleys Bay Resort, we traveled up the County — through picturesque cherry farms and apple orchards,

past wineries, artisanal Wisconsin cheese shops, barn after beautiful barn, rocky beaches and pretty little harbors and hamlets. Finally we arrived at the charmingly retro Rowleys Bay Resort where we'd reserved a spot at their renowned Fish Boil performance and dinner.

Rowleys is an affordable, family-owned complex strung out along a pristine, undeveloped bay that's actually part of Lake Michigan. The resort lays claim to 100 secluded acres, including



Rowleys Bay Resort has beautiful views and prices that won't break the bank.



I came to Rowleys Bay Resort for the traditional Door County Fish Boil, but found a whole lot more to like.

700 feet of shoreline — giving it the distinction of being the largest waterfront resort in Door County. With a friendly and relaxed feel, the welcoming staff hosts everyone from young energetic couples looking to take full advantage of the rustic outdoors and family groups large and small who want a place where all ages can be fed well and fully entertained.

What nature doesn't provide, Rowleys does with a restaurant, bakery,

pub, indoor pool, whirlpool, fitness room, and game room. Outside, guests enjoy a marina and a playground, along with courts for tennis, volleyball and basketball. There are miles of trails and even a zip line letting you fly through the dense, green woods. Want more? Choose from kayak rentals, bike riding, charter fishing or Segway rides along the wooded trails.

Fish Boil

Now back to the Fish Boil, an area tradition in which the local whitefish is cooked outdoors in a big kettle over an open fire, along with a few other ingredients to round out the meal. We arrived about an hour before our fish boil was set to begin on a Monday evening. (At Rowleys, they're also held on Saturdays.)

We headed into the bar where we could choose from wine, beer and "vacation drinks," as the tropical concoctions were billed. Although it was only early September, the air was chilly and a brisk breeze blew off the bay, diminishing my desire for a Mai Tai or Singapore Sling. I settled on a local beer and headed outside where the fire was already being stoked with logs and a hearty group was gathering on Adirondack chairs.

Right on schedule, a storyteller appeared to take us on a historic journey, including a humorous history of the hotel and the surrounding area. With a keen command of the facts, this gent kept us all interested while our dinner boiled away. Every time the cook (called the boil master) arrived to add an ingredient, the storyteller would stop and announce the latest addition with fanfare. Beginning with whole white onions, then plump red potatoes and finally chunks of Wisconsin whitefish, each ingredient was ceremoniously added to the cauldron.

The final step involved a huge flambé initiated by a slick of kerosene. Whooooh — and suddenly a huge orange fire grew to a great height and went out as soon as it went up. This is the final step and is said to burn off the fish oils right before everything is ready.



The traditional Door County fish boil contains generous chunks of local whitefish.



A traditional fish boil requires a big pot and flame to cook the whitefish, potatoes and other ingredients.



At Rowleys Bay Resort, the fish boil is a full buffet affair with plenty of sides and salads to accompany the tasty boil.

After that dramatic display, we headed indoors for the feast.

The overall quality of the food was a pleasant surprise. I didn't realize we were settling in for a full buffet dinner. In addition to the tasty Fish Boil, there were lots of other great choices. I first noticed the interesting and delicious breads only to discover they are all homemade and sold at Grandma's Swedish Bakery, right at the hotel.

Grandma's carries cinnamon rolls, pies, muffins, and more plus authentic Swedish breads and baked goods that reminded me of the ones my mother makes based on her Swedish grandmother's recipes. The cardamom-infused bread with a sugary topping was truly beyond compare, as were all the rich and delicious baked goods.

The buffet included tasty salads, mains and sides — all fresh and all homemade. The desserts, of course, are all made from-scratch and were truly superb, especially the little squares of cherry pie made from cherries harvested right down the road. Rowleys serves breakfast, lunch and dinner daily and they're famous for their Sunday brunch.

Rooms are surprisingly affordable — and with singles, suites, cottages, and spacious homes to select from, there's something for everyone. From November on, rooms are available, but the restaurant, bakery, pool and pub close until the end of May. The full resort is open from Memorial Day through October and it's never too early to plan ahead. With a setting like this, even a winter stay would be something to remember. While Rowleys Bay Resort is off by itself, restaurants, wineries and gorgeous scenery are all within easy reach.

– *Story and Photos by Leslie Long, RFT Contributor*

Rowleys Bay Resort

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All of the breads and desserts are home made at Rowleys.