



Vacation bliss

All you can eat PEI potatoes

Story and photography by Jan Napier

There are no potatoes left on Prince Edward Island. I think I must have eaten them all. Well, they may still have thousands of acres but my potato-loving appetite left a big dent in the last crop.

Besides being Canada's largest-producing province of the mighty spud, the island celebrates this glorious foodstuff by serving it every which way.

I'm a repeat holiday customer to the Island, for the red sandy beaches, parks, cycling, horses, shops and, of course, the food. And then there are new adventures to discover with every visit.

This idyllic province has tourism nailed with plenty to do, fantastic free guidebooks, and I love the little blue road signs assisting travelers to their destinations.

But the wonderment starts before you even get there. Arriving in PEI via the Confederation Bridge gets me every time—a wonder of the world. Once across I like to stop in Gateway Village and last summer discovered fine, local, takeout at Scapes. I gobbled a great wrap sandwich outside with a majestic bridge vista. At the fun store Shop and Play you can get any PEI-themed souvenir imaginable, many spectacularly tacky. They've got a slew of potato-themed ones; from suggestive postcards with a buxom woman on a potato background saying "I only have 'eyes' for you," to potato salt and pepper shakers, and more. For \$3 you can dress up in Anne of Green Gables garb and be photographed by the staff or your traveling companions.

Spud love

So we're talking the land of my favourite food here. You know the desert island you-can-only-have-one-food type food. Red, white, yellow, purple, peel on, peel off, anyhow, any way, give me potatoes. However you slice it, or mash it, or fry it, potatoes how many ways do I love thee?

On my last visit, I joined my daughter in Cavendish and then bellied up to a self-imposed every-way-you-want-to-eat-it provincial potato bar. What fun! Chocolate-covered potato chips. Check. Poutine. Check. French fries, hash browns and kettle chips. Check, check and check. And that's just the tip of the spud.

My favourite dish, simply good old French fries, was at The Chip



Above, from top: Dress up as Anne at Shop and Play in Borden-Carleton; fresh cut fries at The Canadian Potato Museum. Opposite page, clockwise from far left: Crispy fries with aioli at The Chip Shack, Charlottetown; The Canadian Potato Museum in O'Leary; potato souvenirs aplenty at the potato museum gift shop; Anne captivates her audience at Green Gables Heritage Place in Cavendish; dessert kettle chips at The Lost Anchor, Cavendish.

Shack, where the owner Caron Prins, self-proclaimed queen of fries, told me she's going for world domination. At this food stand, I munched on fabulous fries with aioli dip overlooking the Charlottetown Harbour.

Also in Charlottetown at Casa Mia, I enjoyed a potato hash with caramelized onions and maple on my breakfast plate. Yum!

It wasn't all about eating and we burned off just a few calories walking the Haunted Wood at Green Gables Heritage Place and enjoyed peaceful horseback riding in Brudenell.

Best ever

My top potato experience was at the Canadian Potato Museum café where I watched my Russet Burbanks being sliced, fried and served up so hot and crisp. Their blueberry bread pudding with caramel sauce taken home to hubby got a "best dessert I ever had" comment. On that busy day they sold out of everything except fries and some baked goods. I guess it doesn't hurt to be ranked one of the top food museums in the world by CNN!

My ultimate potato-themed meal was at The Lost Anchor in Cavendish, which started with warm kettle chips and house dip, then a potato salad (a green salad with potatoes), and for dessert more warm kettle chips, but this time dusted in cinnamon and drizzled with chocolate and caramel sauces. Oh yes I did! Afterwards my daughter said, "best chips I've ever had." And at the end of the trip she said, "Those were some of the best meals I've ever had."

▼ Mavor's Smoked Butter Potato Cakes

Makes about 12 potato cakes, depending on the size of the patties.

Recipe courtesy of Linda Schipper, food and beverage director at the Confederation Centre of the Arts in Charlottetown. This dish is on their menu, served as an appetizer, at the confederation centre restaurant, Mavor's Bistro and Bar.



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- 3 lb (1.5 kg) Yukon Gold potatoes
- ¼ lb (125 g) smoked butter (or substitute regular butter mixed with ½ tsp (2 mL) liquid smoke)
- 1 cup (250 mL) 18% cream
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) smoked paprika
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) summer savoury
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 egg, mixed with 1 tbsp (15 mL) of milk
- Flour and panko bread crumbs for coating

Peel and boil potatoes until soft. Mash with butter, cream and seasonings. Shape into patties. Coat lightly with flour followed by egg wash. Coat with panko bread crumbs.

In a large frying pan, heat oil to 350°F (180°C) and cook for 4 minutes.

Serve with chipotle aioli (store-bought or make your own with mayonnaise and chipotle paste to taste).

PEI potato facts and more

- Potato farming has been a Prince Edward Island tradition since the late 1700s. Currently there are about 330 potato growers with the majority being family farms. Some 90,000 acres are harvested annually, making this province the largest producer in Canada and worth more than a billion dollars to the province's economy each year.
- The Island's almost ideal potato growing conditions include the red sandy soil, warm summers, cold winters, and adequate rainfall. The surrounding ocean also provides a barrier that helps prevent airborne and insect-borne diseases from affecting the crops.
- The majority of PEI potatoes (60 per cent) are bound for processing with the remainder going to the fresh market (30 per cent) and seed purposes (10 per cent). Exports are shipped to more than 20 countries worldwide.
- The next PEI Potato Blossom Festival is scheduled for July 18th-24th in O'Leary.
- Alton W. Raynor was the first inductee to the PEI Potato Hall of Fame for his many achievements in the industry. A federal inspector in charge of the Field Inspection Office, he discovered and named the potato disease "Little Leaf" and played an important role in establishing the Elite Seed Farm.

More than 90,000 acres of PEI's soil is devoted to potato farming, on a three-year rotational basis. Fields of potatoes planted in rows and rows of white-flowering plants beautify the countryside. Driving past them on a sunny day with my hand in an Anne of Green Gables potato chip bag was glorious indeed. Don't judge me now! When there, pick up some spuds to take home at a roadside stand or, like I did, at the Charlottetown Farmers' Market. Or how about Prince Edward Potato Vodka as a souvenir?

But humankind cannot live by potatoes alone. At Terre Rouge, also in Charlottetown, I savoured an entrée of pork belly served with roasted Yukon Golds. Magic!

When you are surrounded by your favourite food it's difficult not to succumb to gluttony and I did. PEI, you had me at potatoes. 🍟