



Jackson Hole's quality convenience store worth a stop

Larry Olmsted, Special for USA TODAY Published 6:28 a.m. ET June 27, 2017



(Photo: Larry Olmsted, for USA TODAY)

f 25 | | **in** | | **1** | | | |
CONNECT | TWEET | LINKEDIN | COMMENT | EMAIL | MORE

The scene: Wyoming's Jackson is one of the few ski towns in the country that is busier in the summer than winter, thanks to its status as the gateway to both Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks, the latter being the country's first and most famous national park. It's always busy, but last year saw record tourism thanks to the Centennial of the Park

Service. This summer is also going to be frenetic in Jackson, since it sits directly in the path of the much anticipated and very rare total solar eclipse on August 21 -- an event that has already almost sold the town out completely.

Whether you visit Jackson for the eclipse, its twin national parks, its myriad outdoor activities and many golf courses, or wait until winter to hit the slopes at Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, repeatedly voted the nation's best ski resort, you should know about Bodega, one of the area's newest eateries.

Jackson, often called Jackson Hole, is split into two areas that are 12 miles apart, the main town of Jackson and smaller Teton Village at the base of the slopes of the ski resort. In recent years the amount of lodging and infrastructure in Teton Village had grown, but the availability and breadth of dining has lagged a bit behind. Great American Bites previously visited Wyoming's most beloved Asian eatery, Teton Thai, which sits in the parking lot at Teton Village, and now it is joined by another parking lot option, Bodega.

A locally popular restaurant operator, Fine Dining Group, which created several of the most successful spots in the area (Bin 22, Il Villaggio Osteria, Rendezvous Bistro, Roadhouse Pub) took over a former gas station and turned it into a unique gourmet grocery store, wine shop, bar and eatery, featuring both pre-made selections inside and a fried chicken sandwich food trailer permanently parked outside, which opened

last summer and immediately become a beloved local institution.

Bodega offers a 10-seat bar area in the back corner where the beer taps and slushie machines are, limited outdoor seating in winter, when après ski is wildly popular here, and far more outdoor seating in summertime. In warmer seasons, they add an outdoor grill serving bratwurst and other house-made sausages from the butcher counter inside. It's still a working gas station and convenience store, and looks like one, except where you'd normally find foil wrapped hot dogs, you get artisan burritos, homemade soups and chiles, and all over the place you'll find curated upscale prepared food, lots of blackboards listing specials, and an emphasis on Wyoming products. The pastries are from cult favorite Persephone Bakery in town, and it's one of just two retail outlets for craft ice creams from local Cream + Sugar. The freezers carry ready to cook gourmet pizzas from Il Villagio Osteria and other items from favorite local joints, there is a display of Wyoming-made spirits in the liquor section, and the butcher counter goes way beyond what you'd expect to find in a convenience store. All of this is geared at the many homeowners, renters, campers and RVers in Teton Village and Jackson looking for food to cook or heat up, but there's also plenty to eat and drink right onsite.

Reason to visit: Fried chicken sandwiches, burritos, steamed pork buns

The food: The chicken shack is the main attraction, especially from lunch onwards, with a huge après ski business in winter and all afternoon in summer. There's a variety of options and daily specials, but the three most popular choices are the Bistro Traditional, Buffalo and Banh Mi. For all sandwiches, the big, thick piece of hand-cut boneless chicken meat is marinated in pickle juice for two days, then marinated in buttermilk, then finally breaded and fried. Time and again we've seen that when proprietors pay a lot of attention to the quality of ingredients and the way they prepare them, it is hard to go wrong, even with the simplest of foods, and that is definitely the case here, as every single fried chicken "patty," an understatement for sure, is juicy, meaty, very crispy and delicious. The traditional takes this standout protein and adds pickles, jalapeno syrup and a delicious aioli made with Crystal hot sauce. Crystal is the favorite hot sauce of New Orleans and a favorite of mine, in the classic red variety like tabasco but with less in your face pure heat and more flavor. Even folks who don't love hot sauce tend to like Crystal, a brand I use regularly in my house, and it works great here.

Regulars absolutely love the Banh Mi, with a Vietnamese aioli-style sauce, pickle and fresh cilantro, and I thoroughly enjoy both of these styles, though my personal favorite is the Buffalo. It has bleu cheese dressing, shredded carrots, celery and hot wing

sauce, and it is just perfect, but if you like fried chicken – and who doesn't? – you really can't go wrong. All are big and served on tasty, perfectly toasted domed rolls in wax paper bags. The chicken shack also serves delicious steamed Asian buns, an oval of light chewy dough folded around a thick slab of succulent pork belly, and these are a tempting alternative to the chicken sandwich, or for big appetites, an addition. Sides are a choice of very good tater tots with cheesy dipping sauce or equally tasty sweet potato tots. This is après ski comfort food at its best, to be enjoyed any time of year. The shack serves six options of chicken sandwiches daily, along with a specialty brat of the day and burgers, always made with fresh grass-fed, drug-free beef from local Carter County Farm, and all are \$10 or less in an area where food tends to be quite pricey. It's sort of an elevated, homemade take on the classic ski resort base lodge cafeteria.

While the chicken shack is the big draw, there are a lot more varied options for eating and drinking. "Sloshies," adult frozen drinks, have taken ski towns by storm, and usually they are made with packaged mixes with lots of corn syrup and lower cost ingredients. At Bodega, a duo of sloshies are made daily from scratch and are so popular that up to 800 are served on busy days, along with local craft beers on draught and wine by the glass. Grab and go foods include "adult Lunchables," pre-packed individual charcuterie trays featuring high-quality cheeses and meats, and the pre-made burritos are excellent. The selection changes daily and might feature carnitas stuffed with big chunks of tender seasoned, roasted pork. Burritos and the two daily soups are all crafted in the kitchen of one of the parent company's Fine Dining Group eateries. It's basically a re-invention of the convenience store that keeps the convenience factor but adds a lot of fun, flavor, quality and value, all within easy walking distance of Teton Village lodging.

Pilgrimage-worthy?: No, but if you are skiing in Jackson Hole or visiting Teton Village, you should not pass it by.

Rating: Yum! (Scale: Blah, OK, Mmmm, Yum!, OMG!)

Price: \$-\$\$ (\$ cheap, \$\$ moderate, \$\$\$ expensive)

Details: 3200 West McCollister Drive, Teton Village, WY; 307-200-4666;
bodegajacksonhole.com