

A day trip from Baltimore: Our first time on Utz's factory tour

I don't remember when we first heard about the Utz factory tour, but we have been wanting to go for years. But because the tour is only offered Monday through Thursday, we have never managed to fit it into our schedule.

This summer, though, we were determined. My husband picked a day to take off during my staycation week with our sons, and we headed up to Hanover, Pa.



The factory is less than an hour from our house, and years ago I lived and worked in Hanover. But I couldn't have told you where the factory was, though I could definitely find my way to the factory outlet. I generally spend more time in outlets than factories.

My husband and sons, though, are fans of the TV show, "How It's Made," which shows how different products are created, and we're all fans of Utz potato chips. So, we were excited to see the process.

When we arrived at the factory, we found it wasn't crowded. The Utz employees were warm and welcoming. They seemed genuinely happy to be there—and delighted to see us.

There was a video to watch, and we each posed inside a Sally Utz cut-out, though some of us were more enthusiastic about that than others.



Then we headed into the factory viewing area. You aren't allowed to take pictures or videos in there, as I learned quickly from the 9- and 11-year-old boys who were suddenly at my side saying, "MOM!!! Didn't you see the sign?"

Oops. Still, even though you aren't allowed to take photos, you are encouraged to watch, and there is so much to see!

Mounds of potatoes move into a machine and come out sliced. They move on a conveyor belt through another machine as they are positioned for cooking. Then they come out nice and crispy and darker. It was fascinating. We watched the process unfold and the perfectly sealed bags of chips moving up conveyor belts toward boxes, then boxes stacked high in the final warehouse room.



What I loved the most was seeing that as the machinery ran smoothly, alongside the machines were men and women who were making everything happen. They waved at us from below, and we waved back. Everyone was wearing Utz shirts, and the whole process was so upbeat—not what I imagine when I think of a factory.

The variety packs were even put together by a team of women, not by robots. I learned later that that's because there is such a demand for variety packs in the summer when everyone is going to picnics and barbecues.

After the tour, we signed the guest book, and stopped to enjoy free bags of chips. The whole experience was free, in fact. Our children were surprised at the price.



The ladies staffing the counter seemed to have all the time in the world for our questions about the process, the history, how fresh chips are when we buy them in stores (no more than 2 or 3 days old), and their own time with the company (30-plus years for each of them). And no one seemed to mind that, as we talked, our children were bouncing around the room like chips rattling along a conveyor belt.

Then we drove to the outlet store and spent time selecting just the right snacks to take home. The cashier happened to have a coupon someone else hadn't used and threw in a free bag of crab chips. Maybe they do that for everyone. Maybe it's a sign that you've spent too much. Either way, we were happy. And I would definitely go again.

As the jingle says, "No ifs, ands, or buts, it's gotta be Utz."