**The Rise of Nordic Cuisine**

Arctic travel began in 2011 and continues in 2016 representing courage, adventure, excitement, isolation (signaling confidence), exploration, and shows consumers are making a turn away from crisis and toward recovery. Denmark, Norway, and Scandinavia are acting as poster children for travel and are also the leading ladies representing Nordic foods entering this country. More isolated countries such as Iceland, Finland, Antarctica, Nepal, Siberia, and Greenland are also top destinations under the Arctic umbrella due to their exotic nature. Their appearance signals exploration and movement away from the familiar — a strong sign of an economic recovery. Arctic travel is paralleling the swing back to more adventurous eating experiences and signals a return to individualism, risk taking, and leaving the pack. It is a move away from fear. This change is translated into food and flavors as more experimental and adventurous foods.

After birthing in travel, Arctic food made a splash in media with the opening of the restaurant Acme in New York City, which came from Noma fame (see below). It then moved to the bar and cocktail scene with the launch of Bacardi’s Arctic berry rum. It moved next to the family-casual scene with the national launch of Arctic bowls by Joe’s Crab Shack. Where it is strongest, however, is in the bakery category with the upper Midwest being home base. Why? Because that is where the United States’ largest “Arctic” population calls home — Norwegian, Scandinavian, etc.

Meeting in Copenhagen in 2005, the Nordic Council's agricultural and food ministers from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and dependent territories launched the "new Nordic Food Program.” They wanted to emphasize "purity, simplicity, and freshness" and increase use of seasonal foods. New Nordic cuisines explore the region’s fish, game, and produce from the Arctic tundra to the Norwegian fjords, and utilize more contemporary approaches to cooking. Restaurants were encouraged to develop traditional dishes using ingredients from the local region’s climate, water, and soil. The diet is rich in foods including apples, roots, cabbages, rye, oats, barley, grainy bread, low-fat milk products, rapeseed oil, nuts, fish, and wild game. And let’s not forget the many types of berries!

**Noma**

Noma es un restaurrante danés situado en Nordatlantes Brygge, una antigua bodega en Copenhague, ahora convertida en centro cultural para el área del atlántico norte. Considerado por Restaurant Magazine como el «Mejor restaurante del mundo» en 2010, 2011, 2012 y 2014 tiene también en su haber 2 estrellas en la Guía Michelin (2012). El nombre Noma es un acrónimo del danés "nordisk mad", que significa "comida nórdica". La base de sus menús son ingredientes locales y representa la cocina danesa moderna. René Redzepi es el jefe de cocina y co-propietario del restaurante.

**The Nordic Diet**

The Nordic diet is being compared to the Mediterranean diet due to its health benefits. Compared with an average Western diet, it contains less sugar, less fat, twice the fiber, and twice the fish and seafood, according to sources like Authority Nutrition. Some berries have been found to contain high levels of Omega-3 fatty acids, and diets rich in oily fish can lower cholesterol levels. There is also evidence that cold-pressed rapeseed oil is as healthy as virgin olive oil.

The Nordic diet emphasizes locally grown and sustainable food sources, with a heavy focus on foods considered healthy according to “mainstream” nutrition science. Pulled from Authority Nutrition:

* Eat often: Fruits, berries, vegetables, legumes, potatoes, whole grains, nuts, seeds, rye breads, fish, seafood, low-fat dairy, herbs, spices and rapeseed (canola) oil
* Eat in moderation: Game meats, free-range eggs, cheese and yogurt
* Eat rarely: Other red meats and animal fats
* Don’t eat: Sugar-sweetened beverages, added sugars, processed meats, food additives and refined fast foods

According to the University of Eastern Finland, a healthy Nordic diet had beneficial health effects close to those of Mediterranean diets. A healthy Nordic diet reduced abdominal inflammation.

The Nordic diet was also associated with better physical performance and a decrease in disability risk later in life, according to the National Institute for Health and Welfare, Finland. At the average age of 71 years, participants’ physical performance was measured using the Senior Fitness Test. Women with the highest score had 17 percent better result in the 6-minute walk test, 16 percent better arm curl, and 20 percent better chair stand results compared with those with the lowest score.

Grains often act as a great interpreter allowing consumers to enter a new flavor trend seamlessly. Some of the poster children for Nordic cuisine can be found in the bakery segment. Scandinavian pastries including the classic Kringle are not to be missed. Grain is also a key element of the øllebrød, a traditional Danish dish of rye bread stewed with beer that has a pudding-like texture. Another standout would be the yogurt called Skyr, which is a new competitor to Greek yogurt.

As long as the Nordic diet has sustained ties to clinical health research and travel, expect more regional specialties to surface and delight.

When Copenhagen's Noma was named the world's best restaurant a few years ago, it introduced a wider audience to the concept of New Nordic cuisine. A movement that swept Scandinavia (and, subsequently, the rest of the culinary world), New Nordic combines the oft-maligned and little known local ingredients with modern technique and playful vision. Reindeer and lichen, meet Thermomix and Pacojet. The resulting hay-infused oils and deep-fried mosses represent a new direction for Scandinavian cuisine. But amid the excitement of matching Viking produce with a post-modern kitchen, it's easy to lose sight of the basic facts: the old Nordic cuisine is pretty good too.

Although its praises are seldom sung, traditional Scandinavian fare — full of seafood, berries, roots and rye — has a lot to recommend it. To be clear, we're not talking fancy French technique or expansively layered spice palettes. We're talking about simple farm fare, hearty whole grain breads and rich seafood stews, food meant to sustain you during the winter. And according to some studies, it may actually be fairly healthy.

The region's miles of coastline have made seafood a bedrock of the cuisine. Although there are preparations that can be hard to embrace (including the ammonia-scented rotting shark of Iceland that routinely makes worst-thing-ever-eaten lists), much of the seafood is delicious, from pickled herring to gravlax to crayfish so beloved that they anchor seasonal parties.

Nordic food is often depicted as bland — admittedly, chili-like heat is entirely absent (and somewhat feared). But saffron and cardamom have graced baked goods since the Vikings first discovered them, and allspice, black pepper and nutmeg are also embraced (admittedly in more of a sweet-savory pairing than is common in America). And feathery fresh dill graces everything from shrimp salad to pickled herring.

And while this is not the land of crusty-yet-airy baguettes, the baked goods have their own charm. There are eggy sweet buns to dunk in coffee, scented either with cardamom or saffron. Rye, which thrives in the often-shallow glacial soils of Nordic countries, makes for a filling loaf. The whole grain flour adds a nubby note to flatbreads. When it's not paired with caraway seeds, rye reveals a soft, almost malty sweetness.

The short growing season means that the harvest is more limited, and there's more of an emphasis on root vegetables. But it also means that when other crops make their briefer appearances, they are celebrated with near-religious fervor. The first berries (currants, cloudberries, and strawberries), mushrooms, and tiny new potatoes almost become a holiday in and of themselves. And the heaps of always-in-season dairy — from cheese to yogurt to clouds of whipped cream — make a perfect accompaniment. It's an embrace of the products that flourish in this part of the world, and the culture of food that has developed to celebrate them. Thermomix blender and reindeer moss not required.