**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 many types of berries.

**Noma**

Restaurant Noma er en internationalt kendt københavnsk restaurant, der åbnede den 23. november 2003 på Christianshavn i København. Noma blev til i partnerskab mellem kokkene Claus Meyer, René Redzepi og Mads Refslund. Den tilbyder et udsøgt og originalt gourmetkøkken med nordiske råvarer og tilberedningsmetoder. Noma fokuserer på det nordiske køkken, og navnet er en sammentrækning af de to nordiske ord "nordisk" og "mad". Restauranten fik sin første Michelin-stjerne i 2005 og opnåede stjerne nummer to i 2007. Noma lukker restauranten på Strandgade 93 den 25. februar 2017, men planlægger at genåbne senere i 2017 i det tidligere Søminedepotet med adresse på Refshalevej 96, stadig på Christianshavn.

**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 (lingonberries and blueberries, for example), 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 (blueberries, 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.

**Types of Nordic Cuisine**

Smörgåsbord:

It literally means ‘buttered table’ – indeed, the Swedish word for sandwich is smörgås. An array of small dishes, both warm and cold, a traditional smörgåsbord starts with fish, moving on to cold meats, and then warm dishes.

Cheeses come at the end. In Sweden, the smörgåsbord is always laid out in advance; in Denmark (where it’s called det kolde bord, or ‘the cold table’), dishes are sent to the table throughout the meal. A traditional lunch can take hours, and aquavit is enjoyed at regular intervals, of course.

Popular dishes for a smörgåsbord include bowls of pickled herring served with rye and crispbread, beetroot and apple salad, meatballs, pâtés, and different types of cured and smoked salmon.

Fish:

You probably already know that our most popular fish is herring. We eat it pickled, but also smoke and fry it. Scandinavian varieties of pickled herring are less sharp than what you’ll find elsewhere in Europe, as the brine is sweeter.

Any kind of cured or smoked salmon is also loved. Gravadlax (dill-cured salmon) is probably the most famous of these. Smoked mackerel is also served, as are less commonly known fish such as Arctic charr.

Sweden celebrates the crayfish in August, with outdoor parties where we eat bowls of them washed down with aquavit.

Meat:

Pork is an important meat in southern Scandinavia. Flæskesteg pork roast, eaten with a heavy gravy and caramelised potatoes, is as Danish as roast beef is British – and is also the quintissential Danish Christmas lunch. Further north, game such as reindeer and elk is served – and it’s not difficult to find bear sausage in some places. Northern Norwegians eat a lot of smoked, dried lamb.

Of course, we can’t discuss meat without mentioning meatballs. There must be tens of thousands of different recipes – actually, that’s probably a vast underestimation.

In Sweden, a mixture of pork and beef is usually prepared, whereas Danes prefer pork and veal. In Norway, there’s more regional variation, but beef is popular. In Sweden, meatballs are small – and in Norway, they’re big. If you’re going to learn how to make meatballs, you’ll need to find a good, basic recipe and then put your own spin on it.

Across Scandinavia, meatballs are usually served with potatoes, either boiled or mashed. If you’re looking for a Swedish or Norwegian twist, add a dollop of lingonberry jam. But all leftover meatballs are great in sandwiches.

Sweets:

Scandinavian baking is getting a lot of attention in the UK right now, and you’re probably aware that cinnamon is an important factor in our cakes and buns. Cardamom is just as popular as well.

Kanelbullar – cinnamon buns – are massive in Sweden (and, of course, the dough sometimes has notes of cardamom). A cinnamon bun can be eating morning, noon and night – usually with coffee.

In Denmark, Danish pastries are the thing, you might be surprised to learn. But they’re called wienerbrød there – ‘Vienna bread’. If you’ve never eaten a Danish Danish pastry, then go to a bakery there on a Sunday morning and buy a smørsnegl. It’s a taste like no other.

Other favourites include kladdkaka, a sticky Swedish chocolate cake, and anything packed with fruit and berries.

Bread:

While we have the same word for bread as you do (brød in Denmark and Norway, bröd in Sweden), our loaves are quite different. We love rich, dark rye in any shape or form. Rye bread, rye buns, and rye grain thrown into many different dishes.

Crispbread is delicious and healthy – and not the same as what you buy in the supermarket here in the UK. Check out the vast variety that we sell in the shop.

Bread can also be a sweet treat – try vörtbröd, limpa or franskbrød.

The scary stuff:

Yes, we admit it. Some of those horror stories you’ve heard about Nordic food are quite true. And if you want to give them a go, we can help.

Surströmming is Swedish fermented herring, popular in the far north where crayfish aren’t as plentiful in the summer. It actually tastes amazing, but smells really bad. We advise you to open the tin outside.

Lutfisk is cod preserved in lye, and eaten in Norway at Christmas. To British eyes it looks a bit like tripe. It’s on sale during the festive season.

Hákarl is Icelandic fermented shark, buried for weeks and hung for months. It’s the very definition of ‘an acquired taste’, and not on sale in the UK. Sadly, or happily, that’s for you to decide!

The Scandinavian Pantry:

‘What can I use instead of…’ is probably the most common question I’m asked when it comes to Scandinavian recipes. ‘What is this spice called in English’ is the second (I’m also asked to translate from English to Scandinavian languages for plenty of homesick Scandis, too). Sometimes the answers are not that simple, so here are some of the most common ingredients we use for Yuletide cooking, along with their names in Danish, Swedish and Norwegian.

**Spices and Herbs**

Caraway:

In Denmark and Sweden, the word for caraway sounds similar to cumin, so it is often translated incorrectly in recipes (cumin itself is spidskommen or spiskummin). We use caraway seeds a lot in breads, as well as cheeses.

Cardamom:

It’s said that the Vikings first brought this spice back from Constantinople (now known as Istanbul), but there is little to support this idea. However, around 1300, a Danish monk used cardamom in a cookbook influenced by Moorish recipes (Libellus de arte coquinaria), which is the earliest evidence we have for the spice’s appearance in Scandinavian cooking. Today, we use cardamom a lot, including in the dough for our renowned cinnamon buns. I always buy the little seeds and crush them in a spice grinder for maximum flavor – it beats the pre-ground variety hands down, and really lifts the flavor of the buns.

Cinnamon:

Some cheaper varieties of cinnamon are made from cassia bark, which contains high levels of coumarin (not good for you in high doses). If you can, go for high-grade Ceylon cinnamon instead, which has lower levels of coumarin and a better flavor.

Cloves:

Cloves are used whole in aquavit and mulled wine, and sometimes on Swedish Christmas ham. Crushed cloves are common in biscuits and cookies. In Denmark at Christmas-time, windows are often decorated with fresh oranges studded with whole cloves – a great way to bring a wonderfully festive scent into your house! The word krydd (spice) sometimes prefixes the word for clove in all three languages.

Dill:

We use dill a lot to give a lift to salads, fish or chicken. Crown dill (where the herb has been allowed to flower) is used for its strong flavor at crayfish parties. That variety is quite hard to get hold of outside Sweden, but you can always grow your own or use fresh dill instead.

Fennel seed:

We use fennel seed mainly in bread, both for loaves and as a flavoring for crispbread.

Ginger:

Ground ginger is commonly used in biscuits, cookies and cakes. Whole dried ginger is essential in mulled wine, but fresh ginger is actually not that common in Scandinavia.

**Berries**

Cloudberries:

These orange berries, which look a bit like plump raspberries except for the color, are found in the wild and are almost impossible to cultivate artificially. They can’t be picked by machine, only by hand, and even that is tricky as the berries burst easily. Cloudberry season is around three weeks long, so that only adds to the cost and scarcity of the fruit. Frozen cloudberries are much easier to get hold of than fresh, but they are still expensive. Most Scandinavian shops stock cloudberry jam/preserves, which can be substituted for fresh berries in almost every recipe. In North America, cloudberries are often referred to as ‘bakeapples’. Cloudberries are very tart and pair very well with apples, strong cheeses and vanilla (the jam is particularly wonderful heated up and poured over vanilla ice cream). To replace this flavor in recipes is hard, and a tart raspberry is the closest ingredient in taste.

Strawberries:

We have two varieties of strawberries: the normal ones from the garden, available in all shops – and then the little wild strawberries. The latter can be found in Norwegian and Swedish forests towards the end of July. Wild strawberries are very sweet, small berries (often less than 1 cm/1/4 inch long). If you have ever tasted wild strawberries yourself, you will know that they are utterly delicious.

Lingonberries:

Northern Scandinavians have lingonberries in their freezers throughout the year, while fresh ones are picked in August. The berry is small, red and tart, and found in abundance in Sweden, Norway and Finland. From the same family as the cranberry, the tartness of a lingonberry lends itself well to being served with meat (it is most famously served with meatballs). Lingonberries can also be used in cookies and cakes – pair them with something quite sweet, as they are really quite sharp in flavor. If you can’t get hold of lingonberries, substitute with raspberries for sweet recipes, or cranberries for savory dishes.

Elderberries:

In Scandinavia, elderflower is used mostly in jams/ jellies, cordials and cakes. The Elderberry is also used a lot in Denmark to make elderberry cordial – a strong-tasting drink which is full of vitamins.

Blueberries:

The type of blueberries you buy in the shop are called blueberries, of course. The type of blueberries you find in the wild all over northern Scandinavia we also call ‘blåbär/blåbær’, but in English, these are actually known as bilberries. Wild blueberries or bilberries have a delicious sweet flavor and are a lot smaller. If you can get them then go for them – they are a deep blue color even inside. Bilberries can be bought frozen from specialty shops or online.

**Flavorings**

Saffron:

Like cardamom, the origins of saffron’s arrival into Scandinavia are unclear. Some say it came via ancient Asian trading routes, while others think it was brought northwards from France and Italy. Regardless, saffron in Scandinavia has always been used for special occasions only, most likely because of its high value (if you are shopping for it in Scandinavia, it’s probably kept behind the shop counter or till). However, it is an essential ingredient at Christmas time for Lucia buns. We commonly use ground saffron, but if you are using strands, grind them well first. To intensify the color, soak the strands in warm water before using.

Salt:

Scandinavians have been preserving food in salt for centuries, so it’s not surprising that we have a love for using it in anything from well-seasoned savory dishes to sprinkling it on biscuits or cakes. Not all salt is equal, but if you ever spot a brand called North Sea Salt Works, buy it.

Sea buckthorn:

Sea buckthorn grows wild across Scandinavia, parts of the UK, parts of Canada and as far east as China. It is quite unpleasant to eat raw, and some people find the smell of the fresh juice offensive! However, when sugar is added, the flavor complexities change. It is brilliant in jam and desserts. It’s also good for you, being rich in vitamin C and carotenoids.

Seville orange peel:

We use this in mulled wine and also in some Christmas breads and biscuits. You can substitute with normal dried bitter orange peel, but the flavor will not be as subtle.

Vanilla

Most Scandinavian cookbooks use vanilla sugar in recipes, which is a quick and easy substitute for whole vanilla pods/beans. You can buy this in Scandinavian food shops, or make your own by grinding 275 g/2 cups icing/confectioners’ sugar with 2 dried vanilla pods/beans in a food processor or spice grinder until pulverized. Sift to remove the woody bits and use as needed. You can normally just substitute with vanilla extract or vanilla pods/beans too. If you are buying, Tørsleffs is a great brand.

Licorice:

The Finns became hooked on the flavor of licorice, used in a lot of cough medicine, at the turn of the 19th century. Someone had the bright idea to add the flavor to sweets, and from then ammonium chloride began to be added in greater quantities (this is the salty flavor also known as ‘salmiakki’). The salty flavor in Scandinavian licorice is now so strong that most non-Scandinavians can’t eat it. Although, if you become hooked on the acquired taste, you will need the stronger stuff. Use as a syrup or powder in cakes, meringues or ice creams.