

Scandinavian food: Noma's dark Viking fights for Nordic cause

René Redzepi's moody Scandinavian concoctions are giving Mediterranean dishes a run for their money with a new repertoire of flavours.

By Rose Prince

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Among all five of my father's children, I am the only one who does not have blue eyes. A Danish great grandmother ensured four generations of blue-eyed, golden skinned, dark blondes, but not me, alas. "What colour is my hair?" I would ask these gorgeous Nordic creatures. "Donkey," my siblings assured me. Eyes? "Sort of pond."

Five years ago, following a tip-off from the Danish-born Telegraph photographer, Ditte Isager, I went to Copenhagen to eat at **Noma**

(<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/restaurants/7744153/The-worlds-best-restaurant-Noma-in-Copenhagen.html>),

René Redzepi's remarkable restaurant, now rated **the best in the world** (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/foodanddrinknews/7635378/Noma-in-Copenhagen-named-best-restaurant-in-the-world.html>). In Copenhagen I felt a rare, warm sense of belonging, like walking into a party with fewer strangers than usual.



Northern light: René Redzepi of Noma Photo: ANDREW CROWLEY

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Standing at traffic lights, I looked at my companions left and right. "These," I thought happily, "are my people." My Danish cohorts were not textbook Vikings, thank heavens. Many shared my Eeyore colouring. Redzepi has the darkest, dark brown hair – looks inherited from his Macedonian father. When the sultry Baltic gene met palmy Nordic, the Baltic pigment won. On taste, however, Redzepi's inner Viking roared.

Redzepi's triumph using only Nordic ingredients has put Scandinavia on the global food map. Now critics rhapsodise

over cloudberry, rather than tomatoes, and musk ox instead of pancetta. Juniper, rosehip, beech leaf shoots and sour milk are replacing rosemary, capers, basil and ricotta. For vongole, eat horse mussels, for durum wheat, rye.

Let's not get carried away. On the last point I have to take serious issue. Danish open sandwiches that consist of a soggy rye bedroll under defrosting prawns have no place in my lunch box. Nor does crispbread, though my fingers occasionally rustle around in a packet of **Dr Karg's German crackers**.

The Danish pastry is a very poor relation of the saucy pain aux raisins, and the wider, negative effect of the Norwegian salmon farming industry has much to answer for. Other than these not altogether minor grumbles, Nordic ingredients are great, as Redzepi has shown with his moody concoctions. But which food group is best? If we are going to slug it out between the nations above the "tomato line" on the map, and those that lie in the hotter sun below it, who will win?

There's plenty of evidence for the benefits of a Mediterranean diet - according to the latest study it even protects against asthma. And people who slake themselves with gallons of olive oil live for aeons. But the jury is still out on the positive effects of the Nordic diet.

Much is made of a diet rich in fish oils, but the science is far from proven. The Omega-3 fatty acids in fish oils are heart healthy but do not, contrary to claims made by companies marketing IQ-boosting foods, make your children more intelligent. The beneficial effect of plant-based Omega-3, found in many Nordic ingredients, is also controversial.

Last year, the University of Copenhagen did a study into the benefits of Nordic foods, seeking a "New Nordic Diet" to combat obesity in Scandinavian countries and encourage consumption of local food. Not everyone looks like Helena Christensen. The Finns, for example, have been naughtily unhealthy, with obesity rates touching 18 per cent.

The New Nordic Diet is not yet established but there is doubtless a diverse, beautiful, healthy Nordic cuisine. With Redzepi and Isager, I travelled overnight by train to Stockholm, catching a flight to the island of Gotland where I met a farmer who grew her leeks through the freezing Baltic winter. Their flavour was astonishing – and vital. There is a lot that's right about this food but the truth is that every nation will mix and match. I glance at my son. He has one blue eye and one tinged with green. Produce of more than one country.

Shopping basket

The Scandinavian Kitchen Deli, 61 Great Titchfield Street, London W1 (020 7580 7161; [scandikitchen.co.uk](http://www.scandikitchen.co.uk))
(<http://www.scandikitchen.co.uk>)

An emporium of the unfamiliar: Nordic foods of every type, smoked, pickled, baked, canned and fresh. The café, which is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, serves a Scandinavian smorgasbord every day for lunch.

Meyers Deli, Gammel Kongevej 107, 1850 Frederiksberg, Copenhagen. Anyone travelling to Denmark should seek out this beautiful café deli, opened by Danish food entrepreneur Claus Meyer, who started Noma with René Redzepi. Wonderful, creative modern Danish cooking, and superb ingredients to buy.

1 comments

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