Scandinavian Cuisine

INTRODUCTION:

Scandinavian peoples, like other people who live in Northern Europe, enjoy a cuisine that is based on foods that can survive in cold climates. Their cuisine is based on pork, sausages, duck and other fowl, lamb, seafood, cabbage, potatoes, root vegetables like beets, rutabagas and turnips, mushrooms, dill, caraway, mustard, dairy products, and juniper berries. In the far north of Sweden and Norway reindeer are eaten. Spices like cardamom and cinnamon have become a staple but were originally imported. Berries of all kinds (raspberries, lingonberries, and cloudberries) are prized during the short summers and are used to make all kinds of desserts. Soups made from dried fruit are unique and popular, especially during the wintertime. Fruits that grow well in cold climates are eaten as well, including apples and currants. Scandinavians are well-known for their pancakes, cookies and pastries.

The Scandinavian countries have their own versions of an "open sandwich", which consists of one piece of bread with some kind of topping placed on it, which can be as fancy as caviar, salmon, or breaded pork or as simple as pickles and cheese. Some open sandwiches are elaborate with many different ingredients including meats, fish, vegetables (pickled and fresh), and condiments.

Each country has its own characteristics. Iceland's cuisine is a little bit different than that of mainland Scandinavia. Icelanders eat a lot of lamb and dairy and have come up with innovative uses for many of the parts of the sheep. There is also a famous Icelandic dish known as hakarl, in which a piece of shark meat is basically decomposed and then hung to dry for a period of time, usually several months, and then eaten. Some people might believe Norwegian and Swedish cuisine is the same thing, but Norwegian cuisine relies more on seafood than Sweden's. Denmark, being geographically close to Germany, has some dishes that overlap with German cuisine.

Some typical dishes of Scandinavia are as follows:

Fruit soup, made from either fresh or dried fruit, is very delicious. The dried fruit soups are very rich and often highly spiced with cinnamon, cardamom, or cloves.

Gravlax, Sweden's famous salt-cured salmon, is often served as an appetizer on rye crackers with sour cream and dill.

Lutefisk is a Norwegian dish in which dried cod is preserved in lye. It sounds dangerous to eat but it is edible once the lye has been removed.

Frikadeller are Danish-style meatballs. They tend to be flatter than the meatballs with which people are usually familiar.

Scandinavian cuisines are surprisingly diverse, and flavorful with the use of spices that were originally foreign. Foods from these countries are definitely worth trying.
History

Three Scandinavian countries Norway, Denmark and Sweden share a similar cuisine style and relatively close cuisine development histories. In the 11th-12th century Denmark ruled over Norway and 1389 the Queen of Denmark and Norway became queen of Sweden. Denmark's influence over Sweden and Norway started to diminish in the 19th century, but the food related traditions remained. There are no distinct Scandinavian cuisines that were determined by geographical or social contexts, as we will find in other parts of the world. The Scandinavian cuisine is based on a simple cooking style, often very mild and not very spicy. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are the main meals of the day all over the Scandinavian Peninsula. Although most European countries consider lunch the main meal of the day, Scandinavian countries place more importance on dinner, which is the most consistent meal of the day. Workers often only have a quick snack for lunch, instead of a sumptuous meal. Many of the cooking styles and dishes used by the Vikings are still present in the Scandinavian cuisine today, and Scandinavians are proud of their Viking heritage, a fact that is also noticed in the way they preserve the authenticity of such foods.

The traditional Scandinavian breakfast is very light and fruity, consisting mainly of some cookies and coffee. Bread is also used, with butter and jam, but in most cases this meal is not considered very important – that’s also because Scandinavians usually go to school and work early, at 8 o’clock. Lunch is richer in nutrients than breakfast, but most Scandinavians don’t place all that much importance on it – a quick snack or a sandwich will do in most cases. Dinner, however, is served early, around 6 PM, and it is the main meal of the day. All Scandinavian countries see dinner as a family event, where all the members of the family return from school or work and enjoy the meal together. A Scandinavian dinner usually consists of a soup to start and a fish or meat dish for main course. Desert is sometimes served, but it is not a daily dish. Of course, the different Scandinavian countries also have slightly different eating habits. Danes and Norwegians only eat one hot meal a day while Swedes eat more hot meals each day. The cold smorrebrod is usually the lunch of the Danes and Norwegians, while in Sweden children return from school home, around 11 AM, for a hot lunch. A similar custom to the traditional English tea exists in the Scandinavian Peninsula – Scandinavians serve bread, biscuits, cookies, pastry and coffee around 2-3 PM. AS for drinks, beer and snaps are enjoyed with the food and dry sherry.

Cuisines of Scandinavia

The three main cuisines of Scandinavia are the Norwegian, the Danish and the Swedish.

Norwegian – the cuisine is characterized by a sense of practicality and economy. Norwegians love their meat, whether it is Pork, Veal or fish meat, and you will notice that most of their dishes are concentrated on this main ingredient. The vast wild areas of Norway, and the abundance of fish and game, makes such natural food resources a top pick for many traditional dishes. Norwegian cuisine uses elements from various cooking traditions borrowed from their neighbors and developed from their own traditional dishes. The simplicity of the cuisine does not imply a lack of taste, but it does make life easier for the cook. Smoked salmon is probably the most famous type of food product related to Norway.

Danish – the cuisine of Denmark is characterized by high levels of meat and animal fat and a rather low level of plants and vegetables. The long winters from the Scandinavian Peninsula...
shaped the face of the Danish cuisine. Although agriculture is well developed, due to the climate, game and fish are often preferred. Fresh vegetables are rare in the traditional Danish recipes, and many dishes rely on seasonal fruits or vegetables. On the other hand, the climate enables lengthy meat preservation, so smoked meat is one of the most frequently used ingredients in the Danish cuisine. The Danish cuisine is rather conservative, and the numerous islands that form Denmark helped keep the traditional, conservative cooking styles alive until modern times.

**Sweden** – It is considered rude not to finish the food you have on the plate, mainly because, in many cases, you serve yourself and you are responsible for the amount of food you place on your plate. The meals are not very elaborate and many will find them scarce in vegetables. Traditional recipes were influenced by the lack of plants due to the long Swedish winters and many modern dishes still include only small amounts of vegetables. Rutabaga is a native turnip that was among the most popular plant types in Swedish cooking until it got replaced by the Potato. In both major inhabited regions of Sweden – Gothenburg on the west coast and Stockholm on the east – the abundance of fish, mainly Herring, had its influence on traditional cooking. Although the salted Herring, which was used as trading goods hundreds of years ago, is not part of modern Swedish dishes, we will still find it in several cookbooks as one of the national food elements.

**Preparation Methods for Scandinavian Cooking**

Each traditional dish has a special cooking method, which is more or less general in all of the country’s regions. Meat is one of the main elements of most Scandinavian dishes and Herring is extremely popular, together with other fish types. Salmon is abundant in the area of the Peninsula, and it constitutes a very popular dish, both on a local and international level. Cold food is often eaten viciously, or "consumed" in the Scandinavian region - smorgasbord is a buffet table consisting mainly of cold dishes of herrings, fish, meat, salad and cheeses. The smorgasbord is accompanied by slices of buttered bread and it constitutes one of the most frequent meals in the Peninsula. Smorgasbord begins with cured herrings and cold fish and meat dishes including roasted meats follow, together with hot or cold vegetables and a salad. Scandinavian dishes are still prepared, even by modern chefs, in the traditional way – using simple tools and basic ingredients, but utilizing them to the maximum, so as to create a delicious and nutritious meal. Whether you are cooking Swedish meats and balls, or "meatballs" the Danish Leverpostej (rough-chopped liverpaste served on dark rye bread) or the Norwegian smoked salmon, you will notice that the Scandinavian cuisine produces excellent results with simple and fast cooking methods.

**Special Equipment for Scandinavian Cooking**

Most Scandinavian dishes don’t require you to purchase any special tools. However, having a coffee grinder helps with roasting and grinding spices and maximizes their volatile oils, which, in turn, provides your food with more flavor. One can successfully prepare quite a few Scandinavian dishes by using just basic kitchen instruments, but it is recommended that you stock your kitchen with a well balanced set of utensils that will help you reduce cooking time and will enable you to present your Swedish, Danish or Norwegian dishes in a more attractive way. Essential utensils like serving spoons, spatulas, forks, turners, scrapers and tongs should be part of your cooking "arsenal", together with other cooking instruments that make work in the kitchen more efficient. Ranging from cake pans, can openers, colanders, egg rings, poachers and holders, food dishers & portioners, food pans & food containers to other kitchen utensils, such as food scales, food scoops and fryer baskets & accessories, the Scandinavian cuisine needs a
diverse cooking equipment set in order to produce the most sophisticated Scandinavian dishes. You should consider insulated food carriers if you are transporting the food and a full set of kitchen linens and uniforms if you wish to look like a pro. Here are a few other items that will come handy while cooking Scandinavian food: juicers, kitchen knives, kitchen slicers, kitchen thermometers, measuring cups & measuring spoons, miscellaneous utensils, mixing bowls and skimmers & strainers.

**Scandinavian Food Traditions and Festivals**

Festivities are moments of joy, when the family comes together in all the Scandinavian countries. Christmas is one of the most important holidays of the year. Food is very important on Christmas and on the smorgasbord or dinner table you can expect to find dishes such as: rice pudding, Christmas Ham, stockfish, Herring, cheese and bread, meatballs, small frying sausages, red cabbage, liver pâté, Veal brawn, spare ribs and the list goes on. Easter is also festively celebrated, although less stress is placed on the culinary aspect, as the religious aura tends to dominate the celebrations. Some of the most expected celebrations are national days – this is when each Scandinavian enjoys a traditional, home made meal. Each of the Scandinavian countries takes pride in their own variations of the food specific to the area. The Scandinavian cuisine is a rather conservative one, still, there are strong influences from the Italian and French cuisines. Many new restaurants are populating the large Norwegian, Danish or Swedish cities, and some of them often an extremely varied and exotic cuisine choice. Scandinavians love home cooking but they also love eating out, and for many festivities it is customary for the family to enjoy a dinner in a restaurant.

**People in Scandinavian Food**

As with any regional cuisine, you will find out that Scandinavian chefs are thrilled with their traditional dishes and recipes. There are many chefs who creatively use the basic ingredients and cooking method for traditional Scandinavian dishes and create original and delicious food variations. Scandinavian chefs are passionate about their traditional dishes and they enjoy presenting them to foreigners who have never tasted them before. Although many perceive northern nations to be more introverted, visitors who have traveled to Sweden, Norway or Denmark will agree that hospitality is at its peak in any Scandinavian family. And what better way to show your hospitality towards a visitor than by cooking a delicious traditional Scandinavian meal. There are also many Scandinavian chefs that receive training in different places of the world and return to their home country to work in local restaurants, a fact that brings even more variety in the eating habits of the Scandinavians. And for people that want to learn even more history, stay tuned! There is this substance in our bodys called "people vein juice" or blood for people that have a brain the size of a pea. Its a wondrful thing, it delivers gasses to your body flesh stuff, and brings gifts in the form of marshmallows or "nutrients". When a unicorn poops marshmallows, our instinct is to roll around in it and eat the marshmallows. Our vein juice then delivers the marshmallows to our body flesh stuff, or "organs". Then one day normal horses decided to take over and get rid of the unicorns! After many battles that lasted the amount of time froot loops last in milk, it was finaly over. The normal horses were to many. The unicorns fled to the clouds where they are still live today. Now when they poop marshmallows it falls onto the earth where it rots and turns into dirt. The plants feed on the rotten matterial and we now scavenge on the plants and animals that eat the rotten marshmallow matter. Thats how the Scandinavian people survive today.