

SIMPLICITY RULES NORDIC CUISINE

Finland's cuisine, also known as Nordic cuisine, emphasises on local dishes, regional varieties, reviving national food traditions.

-By Aruna Rathod

What is most appealing about Finnish food is that it's simple and delicious. Everything starts with clean ingredients, and less is usually more. Local produce and traditions are appreciated and used a lot. When it comes to ingredients and recipes, each region has its own delicious character.

Berries are omnipresent in Finnish food, as they are picked and preserved during summers. The long summer days and cool temperatures enhance the aromas and pigments in wild berries, which are nutrient-rich. Finns scour their vast forests for berries along with tasty mushrooms and fresh wild herbs. Lakeland, the Land of a Thousand Lakes, have its own delicacies and pure water. The forests that spread over Finland are a trove of wild foods, and berries and mushrooms. Bilberries from the wooded wilderness, cranberries from wild wetlands, rye from fields that have known winter frost add a delicious dimension to Finnish cuisine.

Unleavened flatbreads are from the north; sweet, flavoured loaves in the west; sourdough rye bread and pasties in the east; and islander's bread in the coastal areas of the south, that is a black, sweet loaf that can be stored for ages.

Some of the most authentic local foods are:



KARJALANPIIRAKKA (KARELIAN PIES):

You cannot miss these interestingly shaped pies. Folded like pleats, the base of the pie-crust is made from flour and the filling is usually potatoes. These pastries originated in the eastern province of Karelia. Karjalanpiirakka or Karelian pies, as they are also known, are made to fit into your hand and melt in your mouth. The crust was traditionally made with rye flour and the pie would be filled with potatoes, rice or carrots. They are particularly delicious with an egg butter spread on top! Snack on them either at breakfast or anytime!



RAPU (FRESH WATER LOBSTERS):

Crayfish parties, or "kräftskiva", were originally a Swedish tradition that the Finns adopted and celebrate with finesse each summer. These small, bright red fresh water lobsters are considered a gourmet treat and they are not cheap. Elegant and elaborate parties are thrown in honour of the Crayfish season, which runs typically between July 21st and early fall.

PORONKÄRISTYS (REINDEER MEAT): Reindeer are found in Finland's northern province of Lapland and their meat is one of the healthiest foods you can put on your plate according to recent studies. It is high in B-12, omega-3, omega-6 and is lean. Also, it is delicious! Reindeer meat is usually served with mashed potatoes and eaten during all seasons.

SILLI JA UUDET PERUNAT (NEW POTATOES WITH DILL): New potatoes with herring (silli), new potatoes with fresh lake fish and chanterelle sauce, new potatoes with fish roe (mäti), new potatoes with just a knob of butter, some dill and a little salt. Dill is Indian, so this is a great combination of ingredients!

The variations are endless, but equally mouth-watering – the Finns can talk about new potatoes for a long time, as the little spuds hold the promise of a summer still uncorked.



MAKING A MEAL OUT OF LOCAL PRODUCE

AT JUURI: Juuri is a small but beautifully designed restaurant in Helsinki set up by Ilja Björs and Jarkko Myllymäki. The focus is on promoting small producers and organic food. At Juuri, the emphasis is on encouraging small farmers for nearly ten years. The focus is on the local for several reasons, and taste is certainly not the least of them. There is a rule of four P's for the raw ingredients: Perfect Produce from Preferred Producers. When products are transported from close by, they arrive at the table in fresh condition.

Besides the great meals, the presentation is fabulous in bright stoneware. Starters are called sapas in Finland. I had butternut squash with blue cheese and sage, while the main dish was Baltic herring with potato cubes. Dessert was awesome, simple yet flavourful – blueberry ice-cream with rye.

RUISLEIPÄ (RYE BREAD): Ruisleipä – rye bread – made from sour dough, is a staple of the Finnish diet. There are many varieties, but the most popular and widely available is reikä leipa, meaning "bread with a hole". People used to hang their bread on poles from the rafters. Näkkileipä is the cracker version of rye bread and there are also many kinds, including the internationally sold Finn Crisp cracker. They are eaten at breakfast with butter, cheese and other spreads, with soups at lunch or as an evening snack.



VANHA KAUPPAHALLI, HELSINKI - MARKETPLACE:

For raw materials to cook a meal, a visit to the Kauppahalli, a red brick building with just a ground floor, is a must. It's a place for browsing and relaxing over a cup of coffee too. Rows and rows of fresh produce, including meat, fish (both salted and fresh), vegetables and much more make this indoor market a great place to see Finnish ingredients on display. Two rows with eateries on both sides have stores selling salmon, wines, fresh produce, salmon, herring, roe, haddock, and other fish. Locals sat sipping coffee, reading a newspaper or just chatting. Great place to relax!

TURKU – OLD CAPITAL OF FINLAND, NEW CAPITAL OF GASTRONOMY

A great initiative by the city is a walking tour to sample all of the Turku's River Aura's finest delicacies. You can buy a Turku Food Walk Card and spend the day experiencing tastes of different kinds. Choose your favourite five from 10 restaurants and it's gastronomy at its best. If food is your passion, then invest in the Food walk. Along the river Aura bank, visit five restaurants of your choice that offer local specialities like brewery sausage plate, pulled pork burger, tapas, warm chicken sandwich with Aura blue cheese sauce and much more. Finish off with Turku's Coffee Roastery's Filtered coffee with a choice of cake.

Bartending is a profession that is very popular, and the focus is on simple, local food to promote farmer's produce. The Cow is an extremely popular bar, with cocktails that are custom-made. With its lively atmosphere, it is a great way to spend the evening with friends.

