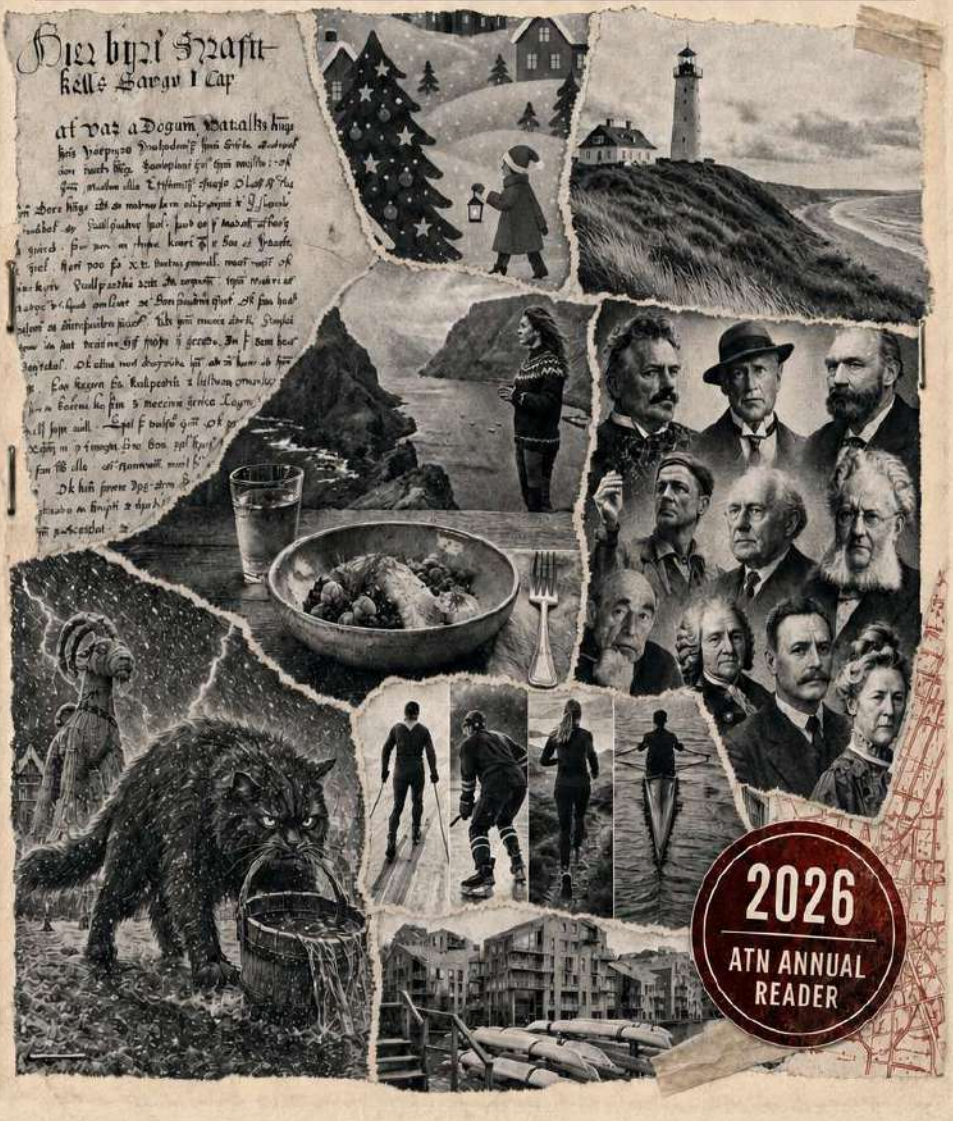
ATN ALL THINGS NORDIC

JÓLABÓKAFLÓÐ 2026

THE ALL THINGS NORDIC ALMANAC



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The All Things Nordic Almanac

Edited by Petter Danielssen

Contributions by Hilda Lainen, Petter Danielssen, Jon Andreas Gunnarsson, Ingrid Hanssøn, Lumi Nordström, Alma Skovby and Marit Kari Solberg

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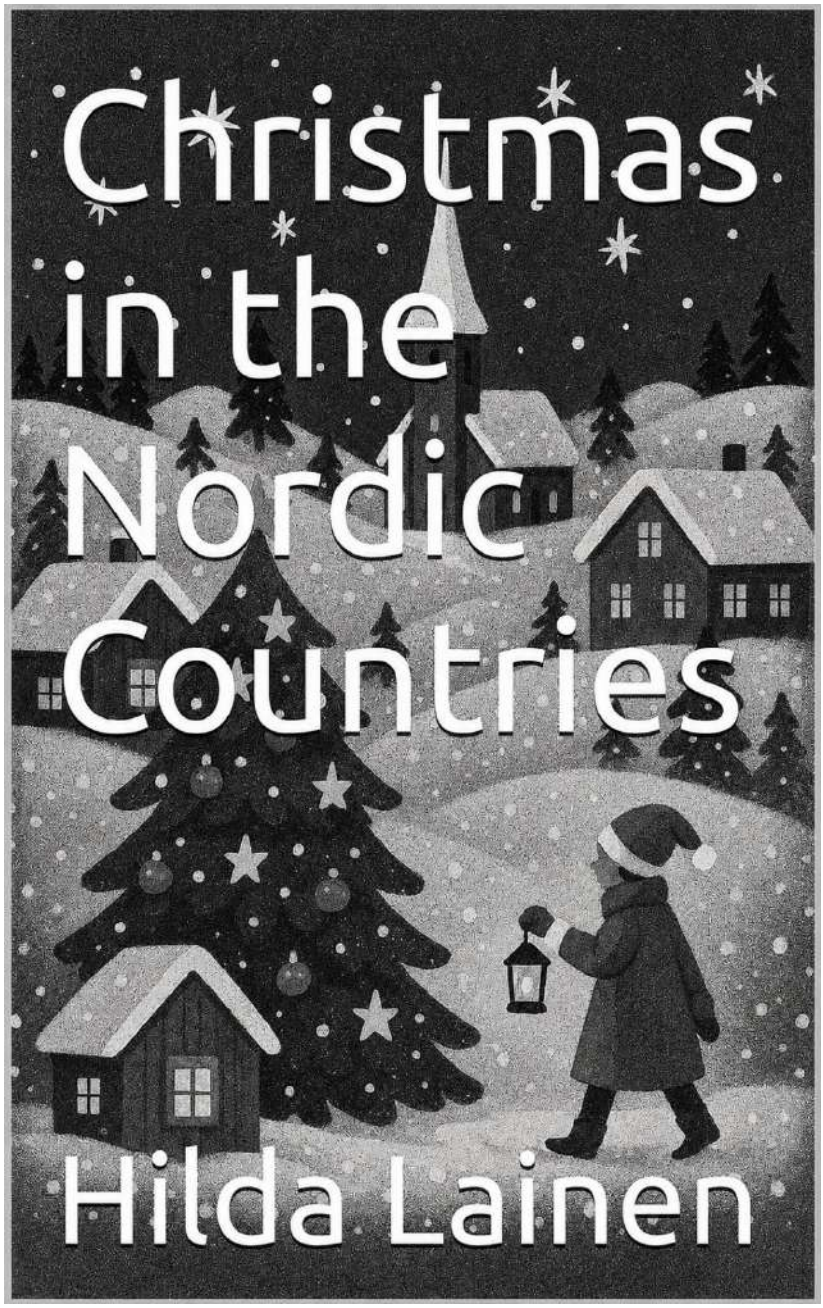
Introduction

There is something wonderfully simple at the heart of the Icelandic tradition of Jólabókaflóð: books arrive at Christmas, and the long winter evening is given over to reading. This volume begins with that idea. It is intended not merely as a catalogue of books published by All Things Nordic, but as something complete enough to be read and enjoyed in its own right—a companion for a quiet evening, a journey through different corners of the Nordic world, and an invitation to discover the books from which these pages have been drawn. The 2026 edition is the first ATN Jólabókaflóð reader. As such, it looks both backwards and forwards. It brings together selected work from the books published by All Things Nordic up to and including 2026, while establishing what we hope will become an annual tradition. Future editions will reflect each new publishing year; this first volume necessarily begins at the beginning. The selections vary considerably in form and subject. Here, an Icelandic saga stands beside Faroese Christmas traditions; the Greenlandic concept of *sila* leads into Swedish and Sámi food culture; Jutland's literary landscape is followed by imagined encounters with figures from Nordic history and culture. The collection also moves through Nordic sport, a Christmas tale featuring the Yule Cat and the Yule Goat, and finally the streets and waterfront of Oslo. Some pieces offer substantial extracts from longer works. Others function as windows: a chapter, an image, a conversation, a recipe, a map or a short passage capable of suggesting a much larger journey. Each selection retains a clear reference to its original book. Readers who wish to continue will therefore know where the path began—and where it leads next. This is not intended as a definitive portrait of the Nordic countries. No single volume could provide one. The North is too diverse, too contradictory and too constantly reinterpreted for that. Instead, these pages reflect the particular interests that have shaped ATN: literature and folklore, landscape and travel, food and daily life, history, sport, traditions and the words through which people understand their relationship with

place. The physical character of the book is also deliberate. Its straightforward, almost journal-like presentation belongs to the idea of an annual reader rather than a formal collected edition. Photographs and illustrations are reproduced in black and white, with the texture of a fanzine or independent cultural bulletin. The aim is not to diminish the individual books, but to give their assembled fragments a new and recognisable identity. Above all, this volume is about renewed encounters. A book does not cease to be new simply because its publication date has passed. A story, idea or image can return at the right moment and find a different reader. By bringing these works together for Christmas 2026, we hope to give them that second life—and to give you something worth reading when the evening grows dark. Choose a piece that catches your attention. Read the collection in order, or move freely between countries, subjects and forms. Begin with a medieval oath, a Christmas custom, a Nordic word or a bowl of food by a winter window.

The flood of books has arrived.

All Things Nordic
Christmas 2026


Christmas in the Nordic Countries
Hilda Lainen

Faroe Islands and a shared Nordic design tradition

Excerpted from Christmas in the Nordic Countries
by Hilda Lainen

History

The Faroe Islands, an archipelago in the North Atlantic, have developed Christmas customs shaped by their remote location and Norse heritage. For centuries, Faroe Islanders relied on what nature provided – fish, seabirds, and sheep – which led to unique food preservation traditions like drying and fermenting that persist in their holiday cuisine today. Christianity arrived in the Faroes around the 10th century, and Yuletide became an important time of celebration in these small communities. Historical accounts describe how, in ancient times, the Second Day of Christmas (December 26) was the biggest communal festivity: people would travel on foot from farmhouse to farmhouse and even between villages to dance and make merry. Certain villages became known as “Christmas villages” because they welcomed large crowds for music and dancing on that day. This emphasis on community gatherings and preserving traditions is a hallmark of Faroese Christmas. Despite modern influences, islanders take pride in maintaining their centuries-old practices, whether it’s fermenting meat in a windswept shed or passing down folk dances and songs performed in the holiday season. In the Faroes, Christmas is as much about honoring cultural heritage and resourcefulness as it is about Christian observance, reflecting a history of island resilience and close-knit community life.

Traditions

Christmas in the Faroe Islands strongly emphasizes both community and family bonding. In Tórshavn, the season begins early. Streets fill with pop-up stores and markets. The country’s largest shopping center creates the famed 'Christmas City,'

featuring elves, animals, trees, and ornaments that delight children. As December progresses, Faroese families engage in cosy traditions much like their Nordic neighbors – homes are decorated with candles and twinkling lights to offset the winter dark, and Advent is celebrated each Sunday with gatherings and perhaps a warm bowl of rice porridge. Christmas Eve (24 December) is spent with the family: by morning, everyone has finished last-minute jól shopping and stocked up on food. Children wake up early, barely containing their excitement for the night ahead. Many families attend an afternoon church service on Christmas Eve, after which they return home to a big meal. In earlier times, it was customary in some Faroese homes to eat ræstur fiskur (fermented fish) for Christmas Eve dinner, but nowadays dishes like roast duck or goose, fermented mutton, and roasted lamb ribs have become common – duck being a relatively new addition borrowed from Danish Christmas menus. After dinner, the long-awaited moment arrives when presents are opened – often a joyous marathon, since Faroese children typically receive gifts not only from parents but also from multiple godparents and relatives. Once the children are finally put to bed with their new treasures, the adults might relax with coffee, homemade cookies, and perhaps a Christmas beer, chatting late into the night. Christmas Day (25 December) itself is usually quiet and restful; families sleep in, then spend a lazy day together at home. Many will attend church at midday – Christmas Day service is one of the most attended of the year in the Faroes – and share a simpler lunch afterward, often consisting of whatever traditional meats or fish the family favors. By December 26th (Second Christmas Day), however, the Faroe Islanders are ready to socialise again. The second day of Christmas is one of the year's biggest party days, echoing the old custom: people visit friends and neighbors, and all are welcome to join in organized dances and community parties. This blend of quiet family time and exuberant communal celebration defines the Faroese Christmas

spirit – deeply traditional, community-oriented, and joyful.

Food

Faroese Christmas gastronomy is unlike any other – a testament to the islands' rugged environment and long-held preservation methods. Fermented and dried meats and fish feature prominently on holiday tables. An iconic delicacy is skærpekjøt, which is air-dried, fermented lamb cured in special sheds that allow salty sea winds to age the meat to a tangy, tender perfection. Thin slices of this fermented lamb are often enjoyed at Christmas as an appetizer with rye bread and butter, providing a deep, gamey flavor unique to the Faroes. Similarly, many families will serve ræst kjøt (fermented mutton) or ræstur fiskur (fermented fish) as part of their Christmas meal – traditionally accompanied by boiled potatoes, rutabagas or turnips, and a creamy sauce to balance the intense taste. These acquired flavors reflect how islanders made the most of limited resources in winter by preserving food, and they remain a point of pride. Of course, not every dish is fermented: fresh seafood is also common. Fried cod and even fish roe, served with potatoes and a white sauce, offer a lighter but still flavorful option among the holiday spread. In modern times, some Faroese households have also incorporated roast duck or goose on Christmas Eve (a nod to Danish influence), as well as roasted lamb ribs, so the exact menu can vary by family. On the sweeter side, Christmas means baking season in the Faroes. Homes fill with the aroma of kleynur, a beloved twisted doughnut cookie fried until golden – crispy outside and soft within. Gingerbread cookies and almond-based treats are also made in abundance, often enjoyed with a cup of hot coffee or Gløgg (spiced wine) during family gatherings. To drink, many Faroese brew their own Jólabrygg (Christmas beer) or enjoy Danish akvavit to wash down the hearty fare. Even herbal teas made from local wild herbs might be served as a non-alcoholic choice, giving a sense of the islands' nature in each cup. Every dish and treat on the Faroese Christmas

table tells a story – of a people who learned to celebrate with what the land and sea provided, turning necessity into delicious tradition.

Modern Celebrations

Christmas in the Faroe Islands today is a charming mix of time-honored customs and lively new traditions, especially in and around Tórshavn. The capital city transforms into a winter wonderland each December: the downtown area hosts an outdoor ice-skating rink where families skate under festive lights in the crisp ocean air. The SMS shopping center in Tórshavn delights children with its annual "Christmas City" installation – a whimsical indoor village filled with illuminated displays, elves, animals, and one of the largest collections of Christmas trees and ornaments in the Nordic region. Shoppers browse stalls selling Faroese knitwear, local art, and handmade Christmas decorations, supporting artisans and soaking up holiday cheer. Amidst the bustle, cosy cafés fill with people warming up over hot chocolate, coffee, and Danish pastries – prime spots to take a break and admire the city's decorations and jól lights strung along the streets. Many Faroe Islanders also take advantage of the islands' natural beauty during the holidays. It's not uncommon for families to bundle up and take a Christmas Day hike in the stunning landscape, such as the walk from Tórshavn to the historic village of Kirkjubøur, enjoying sweeping views of sea and sky before visiting the medieval church there for a moment of tranquility. This blend of outdoor adventure with holiday reflection feels uniquely Faroese. In terms of celebration, while the Faroe Islands are geographically isolated, global influences have made their way into the festivities – you might find homes with Christmas trees imported from abroad (since the rugged Faroese terrain has few trees) decorated alongside traditional Faroese ornaments like knit wool angels or paper stars. However, modern Faroe Islanders still cherish their community gatherings. The old custom of visiting

friends and neighbors on Second Christmas Day (December 26) to eat, dance, and celebrate is alive and well – though now it might be a planned party at a community hall or local club, it remains one of the biggest social events of the year. Thus, a Christmas in the Faroes today might include an afternoon of skating in town, an evening feast of Faroese delicacies with family, and the next day a lively dance with neighbors – a small but spirited celebration that lovingly preserves its heritage while embracing a bit of modern fun.

Introducing Hrafnkell's Icelandic Saga New Annotated Translation



Jon Andreas Gunnarsson

An introduction to "Hrafnkell's Saga" by Petter Danielssen

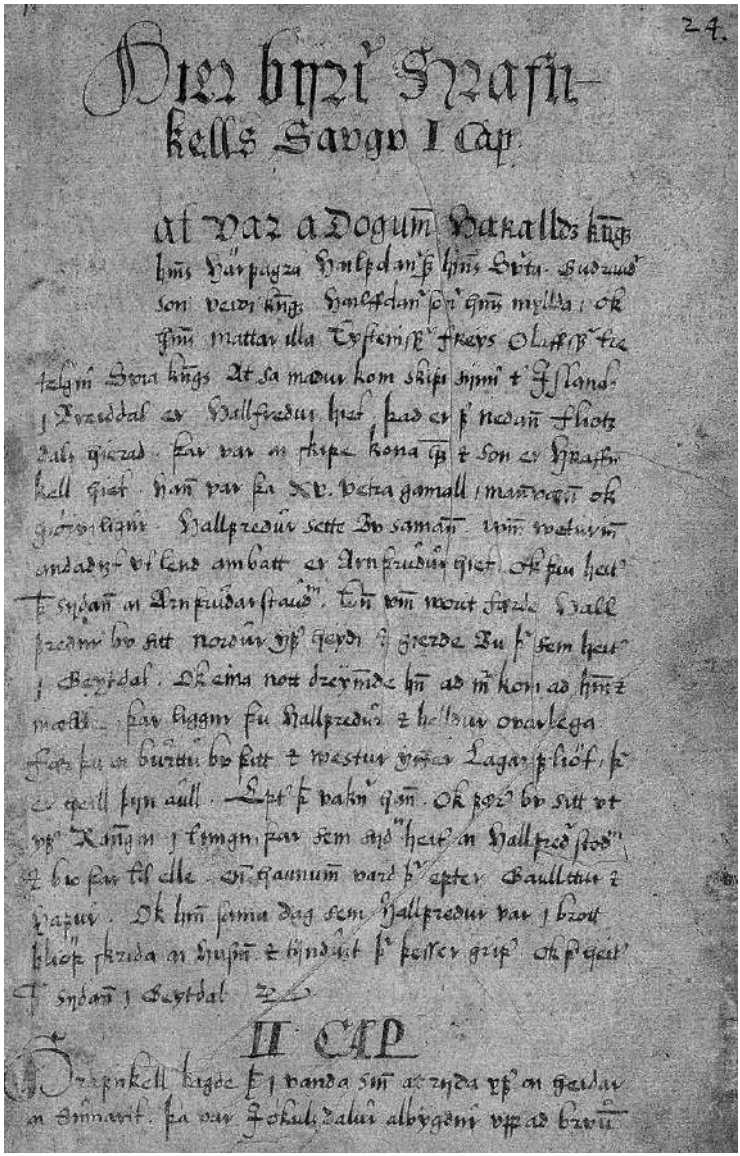
Excerpted from Introducing Hrafnkell's Icelandic Saga by Petter Danielssen and Jon Andreas Gunnarsson

The conflicts between chieftains and farmers in the eastern region of Iceland during the 10th century are chronicled in the Icelandic saga known as "Hrafnkells" or "Hrafnkells saga Freysgoða". Hrafnkell, the protagonist of the title, begins his professional life as a fierce duelist and devoted follower of the deity Freyr. After his defeat, humiliation and the destruction of the temple, he becomes an atheist. He develops a new personality and learns to interact with people in a more composed manner. Following years of steadily rebuilding his power base, he takes revenge on his enemies and lives out his days as a strong and respected chieftain. According to some interpretations, the saga tells the story of a man who discovers that the loyalty of his subordinates, rather than the blessings of the gods, is the true source of power. The story is still widely read and appreciated for its compelling characters, logical plot and realistic structure. For these reasons, it has served as a test case in the controversy over the origins of the Icelandic sagas. The author of the Hrafnkell saga is still completely unknown, as he is not mentioned by name in the text or in any other extant source. However, he was undoubtedly Icelandic and probably lived close to the region where the events of the saga take place. Sigurður Nordal believed that it was written by a chieftain. Hermann Pálsson was certain that it was the work of a cleric because he noticed a Christian catechism tone. According to Hermann Pálsson, it was written by Bishop Brandur Jónsson shortly before his death in 1264. However, other critics have found his evidence insufficient. Although the exact date of the saga's creation is unknown, the late 13th century seems the most likely. Unfortunately, only one page of the earliest surviving manuscript remains: it dates from the first half of the fifteenth

century and was written on parchment. The full text of the story survives in paper copies made from the original manuscript, and it is possible that the skin manuscript itself is a direct copy of the original work. In any case, the story appears to be faithful to the original, with minimal editing and few inadvertent errors. Although the Hrafnkell story is preserved in numerous manuscripts, only about seven are important in determining which version is the most original. One particular class of paper manuscripts, the "AM 551c 4to" and its copy, has a slightly altered version of the narrative, with a few, probably insignificant, changes. However, most scholars consider the shorter version of the text to be more accurate than the others. The saga was first published in Copenhagen in 1839 by P. G. Thorsen and Konráð Gíslason, and has since been translated into many languages. The popular edition by Halldór Laxness, published in 1942, was controversial because it used modern Icelandic orthography for an Old Icelandic text without obtaining permission as required by a recently passed law. Critics of Laxness' edition considered this method to be a distortion of the source material. This led to a dispute between experts, and from then on the Sagas were regularly reprinted using modern orthography. Several eminent academics have expressed their high regard for the work. According to Finnur Jónsson, "In respect of its composition the saga is a masterpiece, a spotless pearl among the family sagas", while Sigurður Nordal called it "one of the most completely developed short novels in world literature". The Hrafnkell saga is still one of the most read sagas today: its compelling and logical plot is particularly popular with readers, and these qualities, combined with its concise length, make it an excellent choice for those unfamiliar with the sagas. It has been used as an introductory text for Old Norse students and as a compulsory text in Icelandic high schools. Various theories about the origins of the Icelandic sagas have been confirmed by the ‘Hrafnkell Saga’, thanks to the qualities that make it so accessible. According to some analysts, the sagas are essentially historical

narratives that record real events and were passed down orally for hundreds of years before being written down by scribes. This view was supported by scholars, especially in the 19th century, but by 1940 it had largely fallen out of favour. The Hrafnkell Saga is now regarded by many as a model of accurately recorded oral history: because the characters' intentions are reasonable and the outcomes of their actions realistic, the story is considered essentially plausible. There is not much supernatural material in the book, and it is sufficiently coherent and short to make oral preservation perfectly reasonable: after two or three readings, the typical modern reader can probably recite the story accurately. However, there are a number of problems with the historical interpretation. There are discrepancies when compared with other sources from the same period. For example, according to Landnámabók Hrafnkell's father was called Hrafn, but in the saga he is called Hallfreðr. The way in which the rules of the time are treated in the saga also differs from reliable sources, including the Grágás Code. E. V. Gordon and Sigurður Nordal methodically examined historical contradictions and other challenges and questioned the historical accuracy of "Hrafnkell's Saga" using information from a variety of sources. They came to the conclusion that the Saga was a 'bookish composition' that was 'historically impossible', rather than a redaction of oral tradition. This position is known as the 'Buchprosa' or 'book-prosist' view. For example, according to Gordon, the trial of Hrafnkell in the Althing was out of place; nor could foreigners from the northwest have interfered in this local east coast matter as in the saga, so the interlopers from the west fjords, Þorkell and his brother Þorgeirr Þjóstarsson, are considered fake. According to Nordal, the saga misrepresents demographic and geographical facts: he argues that there could never have been such a large population in the valleys that serve as the apparent settings of the story, and that there is no such cliff at Aðalból where Freyfaxi is said to have been killed. Nordal believes that the saga's compelling story and cast of characters

prove that it was written by a single, exceptionally talented author who was not interested in historical truth: if he used any written historical material, he changed it to suit the plot of the novella he wanted to write. In the second half of the twentieth century, the 'freeprosist' or 'Freiprosa' view gained ground: it emphasises the long-term oral transmission of legends and folklore, rather than the exact historical truth. According to this theory, the central plots of the sagas remain oral for a very long time, but details, such as the names of minor characters, are likely to change over the centuries. Óskar Halldórsson, for example, criticised Sigurður Nordal: in his opinion, details such as the wrong name for Hrafnkell's father do not support the idea that the epic is a work of 13th-century fiction. Halldórsson interprets this as evidence that the Hrafnkell story continued to exist independently in the eastern part of Iceland, with minor modifications, and that the origins of the Freyfaxi story can be traced back to the worship of horses by Indo-European peoples. The controversy surrounding the Hrafnkell saga is still unresolved. In a 1988 book based on the longer version of the saga, Hermann Pálsson rejects the idea of an oral tradition and looks for the saga's roots in medieval European thought. In his 2000 book, Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson emphasises the pagan religious aspects of the epic: in his view, Hrafnkell's sacrifices and Freyfaxi's actions are evidence of an oral tradition within the story, although he admits that much of the plot is probably fiction from the 13th century. In his 1988 analysis, Jónas Kristjánsson summed up the controversy surrounding the Hrafnkell saga by noting that its widespread popularity "has led to deeper consideration of other texts... It has become a test-case, the classic example, in the discussion of relations between unsophisticated oral story-telling and learnt well-read authors, between inherited pragmatic attitudes and imported Christian ethics".



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Before Chapter Six

Earlier in the saga, Hrafnkell dedicated half of his beloved roan horse, Freyfaxi, to the god Freyr. Such was his affection for the

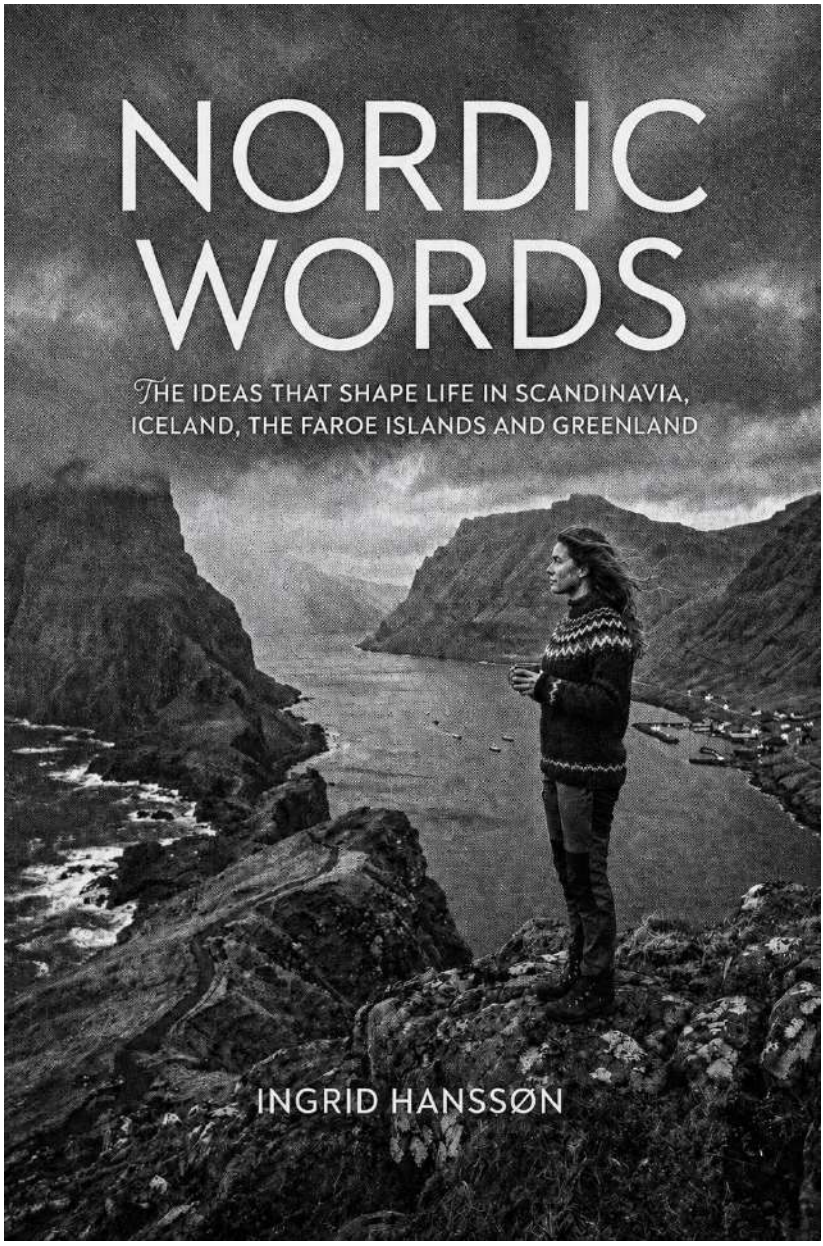
horse that he made a solemn vow: he would kill any man who rode Freyfaxi without his permission. When thirty sheep went missing, Hrafnkell's young shepherd Einarr nevertheless used the forbidden horse to search for them. Freyfaxi eventually returned to Aðalból exhausted and covered in mud, revealing what had happened. The following morning, Hrafnkell rode to the mountain dairy to confront Einarr.

Chapter Six

Excerpted from Introducing Hrafnkell's Icelandic Saga by Petter Danielssen and Jon Andreas Gunnarsson

That evening, Hrafnkell went to bed as usual and slept through the night. In the morning, he had a horse brought to him, ordered it saddled, and rode up to the mountain dairy. He wore blue clothing and carried an axe in his hand, but no other weapon. At that moment, Einarr had just driven the ewes into the pen and was lying along the wall, counting them. The women were busy milking. All greeted Hrafnkell, and he asked how matters stood. Einarr answered that things had not gone well with him, for no fewer than thirty ewes had been missing for a week, though he had now found them again. Hrafnkell said that he found no fault in such matters. "It has not happened so often as might have been expected that you have lost sheep. But has something worse occurred than that? Did you not ride Freyfaxi yesterday?" Einarr replied that he could not wholly deny it. "Why did you ride the horse that was forbidden to you," said Hrafnkell, "when there were many others you were free to ride? This one offence I might have forgiven, had I not spoken such solemn words before. And yet you have confessed your guilt openly and like a man." Believing that those who keep their vows never come to harm, Hrafnkell leapt from his horse, sprang upon Einarr, and struck him his death blow. After this, having done the deed, he rode home to Aðalból and told what had

happened. He hired another shepherd to take charge of the dairy. Einarr's body was carried westward onto the terrace by the dairy, where a cairn was raised for him, and beside it a beacon was set up. It is called Einarr's Beacon, and when the sun stands directly above it, the people at the dairy reckon it to be mid-evening hour.


NORDIC
WORDS
THE IDEAS THAT SHAPE LIFE IN SCANDINAVIA,
ICELAND, THE FAROE ISLANDS AND GREENLAND
INGRID HANSSØN

Sila — The Breath of the Arctic World

Excerpted from Nordic Words by Ingrid Hanssøn

Weather, World and Consciousness

In a small settlement on Greenland's western coast, morning does not arrive suddenly. Light grows slowly across the horizon, reflecting off sea ice drifting between mountains. The air feels immense — clear, cold, and deeply quiet. A hunter steps outside, pauses, and looks upward, not simply to check the weather but to understand the day. Wind direction, cloud texture, temperature, and light all carry meaning. These signs are not separate observations. Together, they form something larger — something alive. In Greenlandic Inuit culture, this presence has a name: Sila.

The Word

Sila (pronounced SEE-la) is one of the most profound words in the Greenlandic language, Kalaallisut. It is often translated as "weather," yet this definition captures only a fraction of its meaning. Sila can refer to: weather, the natural world, atmosphere, intelligence or consciousness, the order that connects humans and environment. Rather than separating external conditions from internal awareness, the word unites them. Sila describes both the world outside and the state of mind required to live within it. Nature and perception become inseparable.

A World Without Separation

Many modern societies treat humans and nature as distinct categories. Environment becomes scenery, resource, or obstacle — something external to human life. In Arctic cultures, such separation is impossible. For thousands of years, Inuit communities survived in environments where attention to natural signals meant survival. Weather patterns determined travel safety, hunting success, and community wellbeing. Ignoring

environmental cues could have fatal consequences. Sila emerged as a linguistic reflection of this reality: humans exist inside nature rather than alongside it. The environment is not background. It is relationship.

Awareness as Survival

To understand sila is to understand attentiveness. Traditional Inuit knowledge relies on continuous observation: reading snow texture, sea ice movement, animal behaviour, and subtle changes in wind. These skills require patience and humility. Knowledge accumulates slowly through experience rather than abstraction. Awareness becomes a moral quality as much as a practical one. A person who understands sila demonstrates balance — calm judgment, respect for environment, and emotional steadiness. Sila therefore connects intelligence with harmony. To think clearly is to live attentively within the world.

Intelligence Beyond the Individual

Western traditions often locate intelligence within individuals. Sila suggests another possibility: intelligence as relationship. Understanding arises not solely from internal reasoning but from interaction with surroundings. Wisdom grows through listening — to landscape, weather, animals, and silence. In this worldview, knowledge is ecological. The environment teaches
those willing to observe carefully enough.

The Arctic Sense of Time

In Greenland, seasonal cycles reshape perception of time. Winter darkness stretches for months; summer daylight barely disappears. These extremes dissolve conventional rhythms of day and night. Sila helps orient experience within these shifting patterns. Weather becomes calendar. Light becomes clock. Movement follows environmental conditions rather than fixed schedules. This flexible relationship with time contrasts sharply

with industrial societies organized around precision and predictability. Life adapts to nature's rhythm instead of imposing artificial ones.

Emotional Balance in Harsh Landscapes

Living in extreme environments requires psychological resilience. Isolation, cold, and unpredictability can challenge emotional stability. Sila represents equilibrium — the mental state necessary to coexist peacefully with powerful surroundings. Calmness is valued not as personality trait but as survival skill. Reacting impulsively to changing conditions can be dangerous. Patience and observation allow better decisions. Thus, emotional regulation becomes part of environmental knowledge. Mind and weather mirror one another.

Colonial Encounters and Cultural Continuity

Greenland's history includes periods of Danish colonial administration and rapid modernization. Urbanization, technology, and global influences have transformed daily life, yet concepts like sila continue to shape cultural identity. Modern Greenlanders navigate multiple worlds: traditional knowledge systems alongside contemporary education and technology. Sila remains relevant precisely because it addresses universal human questions — how to belong within an environment undergoing change. In an era of climate transformation, Arctic perspectives increasingly speak to global concerns.

Climate Change and Listening to Sila

Few regions experience climate change as visibly as Greenland. Melting ice sheets, shifting wildlife patterns, and unstable sea ice alter traditional practices. For many Greenlanders, environmental change is not abstract data but lived reality. Observations passed through generations now encounter unfamiliar conditions. The concept of sila encourages careful listening rather than denial.

Change is acknowledged through observation first, interpretation second. This approach emphasizes humility — recognition that humans must continually relearn how to live within evolving environments.

Misunderstanding the Arctic

Outside observers sometimes romanticize Arctic cultures as mystical or timeless. Such portrayals overlook the practical intelligence embedded in concepts like sila. Sila is not spiritual abstraction detached from reality. It is grounded knowledge developed through daily interaction with one of Earth's most demanding environments. Its philosophical depth emerges from practicality. The Arctic does not allow illusions to survive long.

Try It Yourself

Experiencing sila elsewhere begins with attention: notice environmental details often ignored, observe weather as dynamic rather than inconvenient, slow perception instead of rushing through surroundings, treat awareness itself as meaningful activity. The practice is less about going somewhere remote and more about changing how one notices the world already present.

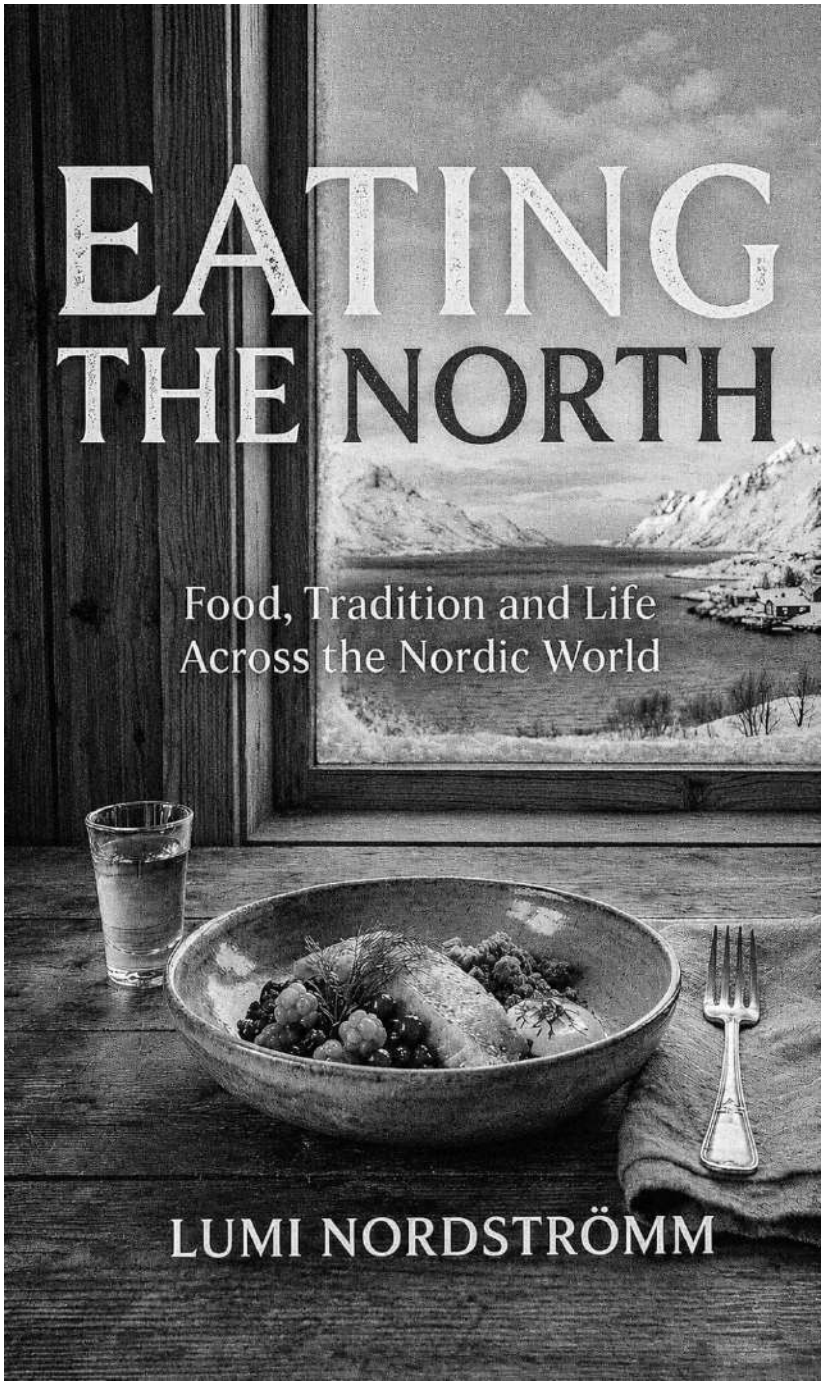
From Nature to Consciousness

With sila, the journey of this book reaches a turning point. Earlier chapters described ways Nordic societies interact with nature — walking in it, accessing it, adapting humorously to it. Sila moves deeper, dissolving boundaries between human life and environment altogether. Nature is no longer something people experience. It becomes something people participate in. The North grows quieter here, more expansive, less certain — yet also more connected.

Breathing the Same Air

As evening settles across Greenland's coastline, wind moves gently across sea ice under a pale Arctic sky. Inside homes, conversations continue softly while outside the environment shifts

continuously, shaping tomorrow's possibilities. The same air moves through landscape and lungs. Sila names this shared existence — the understanding that humans are not observers of the world but expressions within it. To live with awareness of that connection is to live with sila.


EATING
THE NORTH
Food, Tradition and Life
Across the Nordic World
LUMI NORDSTRÖMM

Festive Sweden and the Taste of Light

Excerpted from Eating the North by Lumi Nordströmm.

In a country where winter darkness can last for long hours each day, celebration often revolves around light. Swedish festive food traditions are deeply connected to the changing seasons, especially the transition from autumn into the long winter period. Meals become richer, tables more decorative, and rituals more meaningful. Cooking during festive times is not simply about indulgence — it is about creating warmth, hope, and continuity. Throughout Sweden, holidays provide opportunities to transform everyday ingredients into symbolic dishes that mark time and strengthen social bonds. Food becomes illumination.

Winter Celebrations and Cultural Memory

Among the many festive moments in the Swedish calendar, few are as emotionally resonant as Lucia Day, celebrated on 13 December. During this festival, processions of children and adults dressed in white carry candles through schools, churches, and public spaces. Songs echo through dark mornings. Families gather early to share warm drinks and freshly baked treats. Lucia celebrations historically coincided with the darkest period of the year according to older calendars. Offering light — both literal and metaphorical — became a powerful collective gesture. Food played a central role in sustaining these gatherings. Sweet baked goods enriched with rare and precious ingredients signalled that this was no ordinary day.

Saffron: Luxury in the North

One of the most iconic flavours associated with Swedish festive baking is saffron. Unlike rye or barley, saffron did not originate in Nordic landscapes. It arrived through trade networks linking Scandinavia to southern Europe and beyond. Its vivid colour and

distinctive aroma made it both desirable and symbolic. Using saffron in baking represented generosity and celebration. Even small quantities could transform simple dough into something visually striking and emotionally uplifting. Today, saffron buns known as lussekatter remain closely associated with Lucia traditions. Their golden hue evokes sunlight returning to winter skies.

Baking as Collective Ritual

Festive baking in Sweden often involves participation across generations. Children help shape dough into traditional forms. Adults supervise ovens and prepare accompanying drinks such as coffee or mulled wine. Kitchens fill with warmth and conversation. Recipes are rarely followed mechanically; they are performed through memory and improvisation. These moments reinforce continuity. Even in modern apartments or ur- ban environments, the act of baking together connects families to ancestral rhythms. Food becomes heritage enacted in real time.

The Festive Table

Swedish holiday meals typically expand beyond a single dish. Smörgåsbord traditions intensify during winter celebrations, incorporating cured fish, meatballs, sausages, salads, and desserts. Candles, textiles, and seasonal decorations transform dining spaces into environments of comfort. Despite abundance, moderation persists. Guests sample rather than consume excessively. Conversation flows between courses. Children move freely between tables and play. Festive food thus balances joy with restraint.

Modern Interpretations of Tradition

Contemporary Swedish society continues to reinterpret festive culinary practices. Artisan bakeries experiment with new flavours while preserving classic shapes. Vegan versions of holiday dishes

appear alongside traditional ones. Urban cafés host Lucia-themed events attracting both locals and visitors. Global influences enrich rather than replace existing customs. This adaptability ensures that festive food culture remains vibrant rather than static. The essence of celebration — light, warmth, shared time — endures.

A Festive Bake to Try at Home

Preparing saffron buns offers readers a tangible way to engage with Swedish winter traditions. The process fills kitchens with colour and fragrance, echoing Nordic celebrations even in distant climates.

Simple Recipe — Swedish Saffron Buns (Lussekatter)

Serves: 10–12 buns
Preparation time: 25 minutes
Rising time: 1 hour
Baking time: 10 minutes

Ingredients
250 ml warm milk
7 g dry yeast
75 g sugar
75 g butter, softened
400 g plain flour
Pinch of salt
½ teaspoon saffron threads or powder
Raisins for decoration

Method
1. Dissolve saffron in a small amount of warm milk.
2. Combine yeast, remaining milk, sugar, butter, flour, salt, and saffron mixture to form a dough.
3. Knead until smooth.

4. Cover and let rise for one hour.
5. Shape into traditional “S” forms and decorate with raisins.
6. Bake at 200° for about 10 minutes until lightly golden.

Lapland — Indigenous Sámi Food Traditions

Excerpted from Eating the North by Lumi Nordströmm.

In Lapland, food follows movement. Across northern Finland, Norway, and Sweden, the Sámi people have developed a food culture shaped by migration, seasons, and survival in extreme conditions. Borders exist on maps, but not in tradition. Here, cuisine is defined not by nation, but by landscape. Reindeer, fire, wind, and time form the foundation. To eat in Lapland is to understand a way of life that adapts continuously to nature — not controlling it but moving with it.

Food Without Permanence
Unlike settled agricultural societies, Sámi food traditions evolved through mobility. Cooking had to be portable, efficient and reliable. Preservation methods such as drying and smoking ensured that food could travel. Ingredients were limited but deeply understood. Simplicity was not a choice. It was a necessity.

Reindeer as Culture
Reindeer is central. It provides meat, fat, tools and clothing. Every part of the animal is used. Nothing is wasted. This relationship goes beyond food — it defines identity, economy, and knowledge systems. Taste becomes territory.

Fire and Community
Cooking often takes place over open fire. This creates warmth, gathering and continuity. Meals are shared, often in silence or minimal conversation. Food is not performance — it is presence.

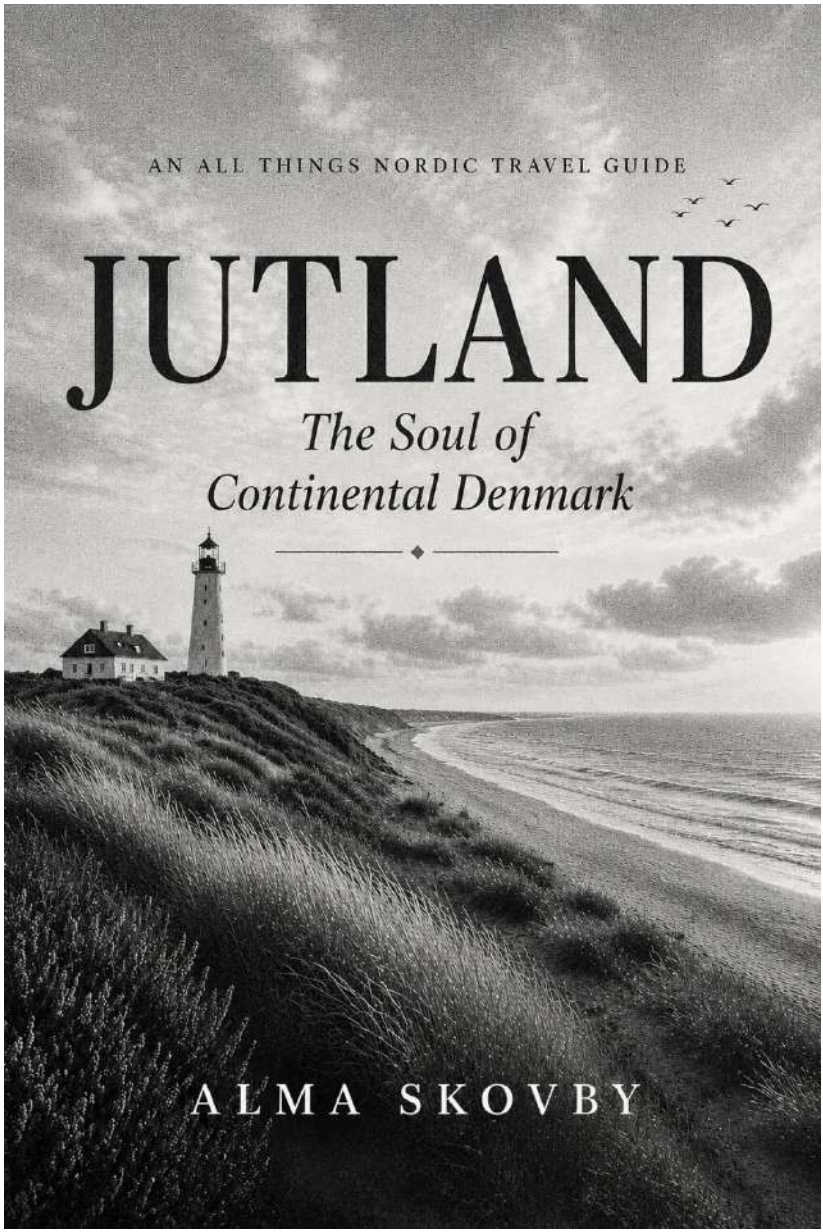
Simple Recipe — Sámi Reindeer Stew

Serves: 4
Preparation time: 15 minutes
Cooking time: 1 hour

Ingredients
500 g reindeer meat (or beef substitute)
2 potatoes, diced
1 carrot, sliced
1 onion, chopped
500 ml water or stock
Salt and pepper

Method
1. Place meat and vegetables in a pot.
2. Add water and seasoning.
3. Bring to a boil, then simmer gently for about 1 hour.
4. Serve hot with bread.

A dish of necessity, still deeply meaningful today.


AN ALL THINGS NORDIC TRAVEL GUIDE
JUTLAND
The Soul of
Continental Denmark
ALMA SKOVBY

Why the peninsula produced so many regional writers

Excerpted from Jutland: The Soul of Continental Denmark by Alma Skovby.

At first glance, it may seem paradoxical that Jutland — long perceived as Denmark's peripheral peninsula — produced such a rich tradition of regional literature. Yet precisely the factors that made Jutland feel distant from political and cultural centres helped turn it into one of Scandinavia's most fertile literary landscapes. One key reason is geography. Jutland's vast open spaces, windswept heathlands and long coastlines create a powerful sense of scale and solitude. Unlike the dense urban environments of Copenhagen or continental Europe, much of the peninsula encourages introspection. Writers such as Steen Steensen Blicher and Jeppe Aakjær experienced landscape not merely as scenery but as a shaping force in human life. The horizon itself became a literary motif — symbolising endurance, uncertainty and freedom. Equally important is historical marginality. For centuries, Jutland stood at the edge of Danish political power. Economic development arrived unevenly, and many communities remained rooted in agriculture well into the twentieth century. This fostered strong local identities and oral storytelling traditions. Literature became a way to document provincial experience and assert cultural value against metropolitan assumptions. Regional writing was therefore not nostalgic by default — it was often quietly resistant. Another decisive factor lies in social structure and moral culture. Jutland's Lutheran heritage, emphasis on work ethic and communal responsibility created a distinctive emotional tone in literature. Characters frequently confront questions of duty, faith and belonging within tightly knit communities. Authors such as Jakob Knudsen explored the tensions between tradition and modern progress, while Marie Bregendahl exposed the psychological pressures of rural life. The peninsula's social

intensity provided dramatic material even in seemingly uneventful settings. At the same time, mobility and education paradoxically strengthened regional consciousness. Many writers left Jutland for universities or cultural careers in Copenhagen, only to rediscover their origins through writing. This distance allowed them to transform memory into narrative. Johannes Vilhelm Jensen turned Himmerland into both a real and mythic territory, while contemporary voices like Ida Jessen and Dorthe Nors continue to reinterpret provincial landscapes through modern themes of loneliness, migration and identity. Finally, Jutland offered writers a symbolic alternative Denmark. In national imagination, the peninsula could represent authenticity, continuity and connection to land — especially during periods of rapid modernisation. Literature thus became a bridge between centre and periphery, helping define what it meant to belong to the Danish cultural community. Today, the tradition endures. Jutland is no longer isolated in the practical sense, yet its literary image remains powerful. The heath, the fjord, the small town and the long coastal road still function as narrative spaces where personal and collective stories unfold. Regional writing from Jutland continues to remind readers — and travellers — that landscapes shape not only economies and settlements, but also imagination itself.

Jutland in Literature (1800 → Today): Timeline

The literary image of Jutland has evolved alongside Denmark itself — from a remote rural frontier to a symbolic heartland of identity, memory and modern introspection. This timeline helps travellers and readers understand how different generations of writers have interpreted the peninsula's landscapes and people.

The Discovery of the Heath (1800–1850)

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Jutland was still perceived — even by many Danes — as a distant and underdeveloped region. Literature began to change this perception by transforming its harsh landscapes into meaningful narrative spaces. Steen Steensen Blicher (1782–1848) was the first major writer to give Jutland a central role in Danish fiction. Through works such as The Diary of a Parish Clerk and The Parson of Veilbye, he depicted heathland communities shaped by poverty, isolation and moral dilemmas. His use of regional dialect and realistic description helped establish the idea that provincial life could be worthy of serious literature.

Travel Writing and National Imagination (1850–1900)

As Denmark modernised, writers began to integrate Jutland into broader national narratives. The peninsula became both a physical destination and a poetic symbol. Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875) contributed significantly through travel writing such as 'Jutland Between Two Seas' (1855). His descriptions emphasised vast skies, moving sands and the quiet dignity of rural inhabitants. Andersen's work helped urban readers imagine Jutland not merely as remote, but as romantically expansive. During this period, the region entered Danish cultural consciousness as a place of authenticity and reflection.

Regional Realism and Social Consciousness (1890–1920)

Industrialisation and social change brought new literary attention to rural life. Writers from Jutland increasingly portrayed the peninsula as a space of labour, identity and cultural resistance. Jeppe Aakjær (1866–1930) wrote poetry celebrating the dignity of agricultural workers and criticising inequality. His verses about heathlands and rural struggle helped shape the political imagination of the Danish countryside. At the same time, Johannes Vilhelm Jensen (1873–1950) published his Himmerland

Stories, portraying northern Jutland with psychological depth and historical awareness. His later Nobel Prize confirmed that regional writing could achieve international significance. Marie Bregendahl (1867–1940) added a sharply realistic perspective on domestic and emotional tensions in rural communities, while Jakob Knudsen (1858–1917) explored conflicts between faith, education and modernity. Together, these authors established Jutland as a literary heartland rather than a peripheral backdrop.

Memory, Identity and Cultural Continuity (1920–1970)

After the dramatic transformations of the early twentieth century, literature increasingly turned toward memory and continuity. Jutland was portrayed as a place where older rhythms of life persisted despite national modernisation. Regional settings continued to appear in Danish fiction, often symbolising rootedness and moral seriousness. The peninsula's landscapes became part of a shared cultural memory — representing stability in a rapidly changing society.

Provincial Voices and Inner Landscapes (1970–2000)

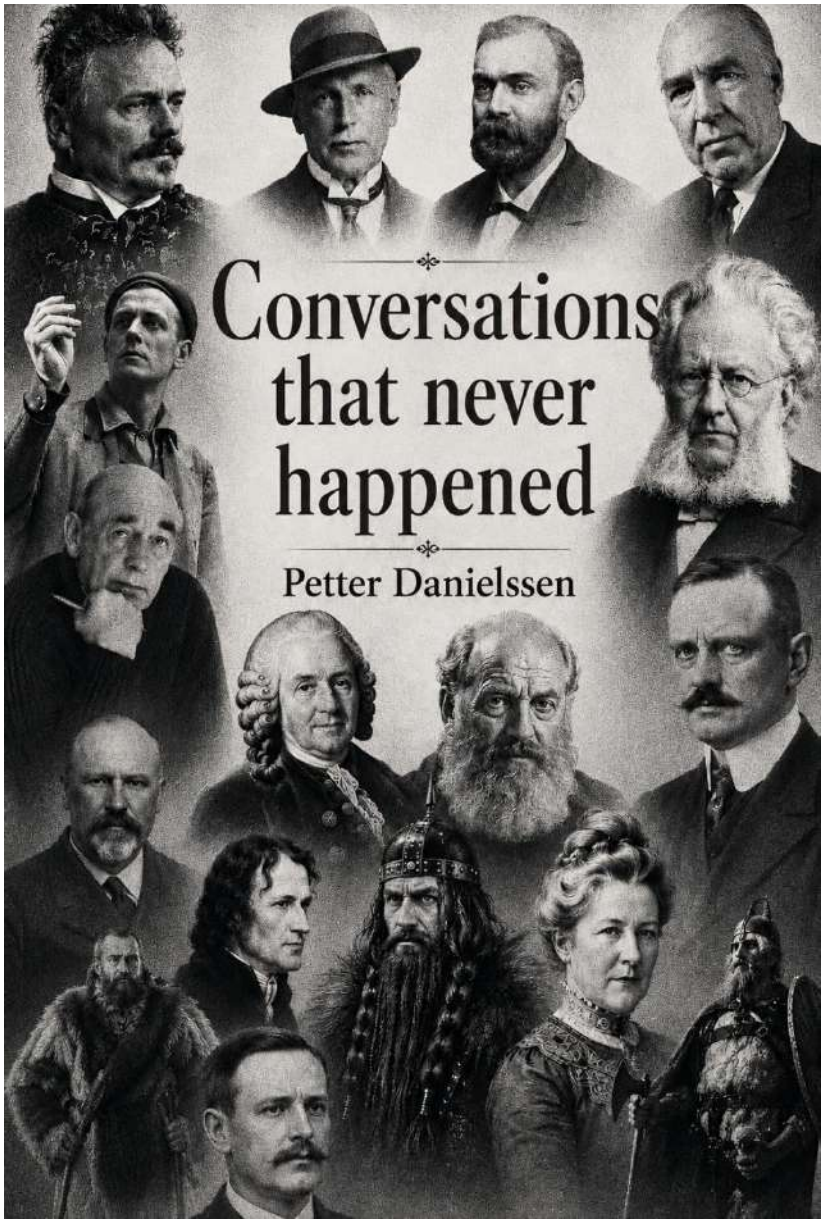
From the 1970s onward, writers began to explore provincial life less as social realism and more as psychological territory. Authors such as Ida Jessen (born 1964) created fictional towns inspired by Jutland environments, using subtle narrative shifts to explore loneliness, routine and memory. Her Hvium Trilogy presents small communities where emotional dramas unfold quietly beneath everyday interactions. This period marked a transition from external description of landscape to internal reflection shaped by place.

Marginality, Mobility, Global Perspectives (2000 → Today)

In contemporary literature, Jutland often represents questions of belonging in an increasingly urban and globalised Denmark. Writers such as Dorthe Nors (born 1970) evoke western Jutland

as a landscape of emotional distance and quiet resilience. Her minimalist prose reflects how provincial identity interacts with modern mobility, migration and cultural change. Today, Jutland continues to inspire Danish authors not only as geography but as metaphor — a space where past and present, centre and periphery, memory and movement all converge.

Reading this literary timeline alongside a journey through Jutland reveals how the peninsula has been continuously reimagined. Heathlands that once symbolised isolation now evoke heritage tourism; Limfjord towns that inspired social realism now appear as sites of introspective storytelling. From Blicher's nineteenth-century moors to Nors' contemporary coastlines, Jutland remains one of Scandinavia's most enduring literary landscapes.


Conversations
that never
happened
Petter Danielssen

Four imagined encounters

Excerpted from Conversations That Never Happened
by Petter Danielssen

Munch and Sturluson

INT. ARTIST'S STUDIO IN OSLO – DAY

The studio is filled with the smell of paint and the quiet hum of creativity. EDVARD MUNCH, the iconic Norwegian painter, stands before his easel, brush in hand, lost in thought. Enter SNORRI STURLUSON, the renowned Icelandic historian and poet, his presence commanding respect.

MUNCH: (looks up, surprised) Ah, Snorri Sturluson, the chronicler of Norse sagas. What brings you to my studio?

STURLUSON: (nods respectfully) Edvard Munch, the master of expressionist art. I've long admired your work and felt compelled to witness the creative process firsthand.

MUNCH: (smirks) You'll find no sagas here, only the raw emotions of the human soul splashed across my canvases.

STURLUSON: (chuckles) And yet, your paintings tell stories that resonate deeply with the human experience. They capture the essence of existence in ways words cannot.

MUNCH: (returns to his painting) Indeed, Snorri. Each stroke of the brush is a silent scream, a whisper of despair, a reflection of inner turmoil.

STURLUSON: (moves closer to a painting) Your works speak of profound longing, of the eternal struggle between light and darkness, life and death.

MUNCH: (nods) Life is but a fleeting shadow, a dance of fleeting moments and eternal truths. In my art, I strive to capture the essence of this fleetingness, this impermanence.

STURLUSON: (fascinated) Much like the sagas, your paintings are timeless narratives that speak to the human condition across generations.
MUNCH: (sighs) And yet, the struggle persists. The anguish, the ecstasy, the ever-present spectre of mortality.
STURLUSON: (wistfully) In the sagas, we find echoes of that same struggle, the eternal dance of gods and mortals, heroes and villains.
MUNCH: (gazes into the distance) Perhaps we are all characters in a grand saga, each playing our part in the unfolding drama of existence.
STURLUSON: (smiles) A saga of life, death, and everything in between. Your paintings, Edvard, are but chapters in that timeless tale.

As the two visionaries continue their conversation, the studio becomes a meeting ground of art and literature, where the echoes of the past mingle with the brushstrokes of the present. In the quiet sanctuary of creativity, Munch and Sturluson find solace in the shared exploration of the human experience.

Finsen and Ibsen
INT. FINSEN'S LABORATORY – DAY
The laboratory of Niels Ryberg Finsen is filled with scientific equipment and books. The sunlight streams in through the windows, illuminating the room. NIELS RYBERG FINSEN, the Danish physician and Nobel laureate, born in Tórshavn, and known for his work in phototherapy, is deeply engrossed in his research when HENRIK IBSEN, the renowned Norwegian playwright, enters.

FINSEN: (surprised) Henrik Ibsen, what a pleasant surprise! To what do I owe the honour of your visit?

IBSEN: (smiling) Niels Ryberg Finsen, your work in phototherapy has captured my attention. Your dedication to understanding the healing powers of light is truly remarkable.
FINSEN: (humbling) Thank you, Henrik. I have long admired your contributions to literature, particularly your profound exploration of the human condition in your plays.
IBSEN: (nods appreciatively) Ah, the human condition – a subject that fascinates us both, albeit from different perspectives. While you seek to heal the body through scientific inquiry, I delve into the complexities of the human psyche through the art of storytelling.
FINSEN: Indeed, Henrik. Yet, in our pursuits, we both strive to alleviate suffering and illuminate the path to a better understanding of ourselves and the world around us.
IBSEN: (musing) Your work with light therapy speaks to the inherent connection between humanity and the natural world. It reminds us of the profound impact that the elements can have on our well-being.
FINSEN: Precisely, Henrik. Light, with its transformative power, holds the key to unlocking new frontiers in medicine and healing. It is a testament to the wonders of nature and the limitless possibilities of scientific exploration.
IBSEN: (gesturing to Finsen's equipment) And here, in your laboratory, you stand at the forefront of innovation, pioneering new treatments and therapies that have the potential to change lives.
FINSEN: (nods in agreement) But we must also acknowledge the role of inspiration and creativity in our respective endeavours. Just as you draw from the depths of human experience to craft your masterpieces, I too am inspired by the mysteries of nature and the pursuit of knowledge.
IBSEN: (smiling) In the end, Niels, it is our shared commitment to the betterment of humanity that unites us, bridging the gap between science and art, healing and storytelling.

As the sunlight bathes the room in its warm glow, Niels Ryberg Finsen and Henrik Ibsen continue their conversation, finding common ground in their quest for understanding and enlightenment. In the meeting of minds, science and art converge, illuminating the path forward with the brilliance of discovery and the power of imagination.

Amundsen and Erikson

SETTING: A COZY CABIN IN THE NORWEGIAN WILDERNESS
The fireplace crackles, casting a warm glow as ROALD AMUNDSEN and LEIF ERIKSON sit across from each other, cups of steaming coffee in hand.

ROALD AMUNDSEN: Leif, it's an honour to meet you. Your explorations have inspired generations of adventurers, including myself.
LEIF ERIKSON: Thank you, Roald. The feeling is mutual. Your conquest of the South Pole was nothing short of extraordinary.
ROALD AMUNDSEN: (smiling) It was a journey filled with challenges, much like yours across the Atlantic to Vinland.
LEIF ERIKSON: Ah, Vinland… Those were adventurous times. Sailing across uncharted waters, discovering new lands, forging connections with indigenous peoples.
ROALD AMUNDSEN: Your courage and resilience paved the way for future explorers, including myself. Your spirit of adventure inspired me to embark on my own expeditions to the ends of the Earth.
LEIF ERIKSON: And your determination to conquer the South Pole was unparalleled. The way you meticulously planned every detail, braving the harsh Antarctic conditions—it's truly commendable.
ROALD AMUNDSEN: (nodding) Preparation is key, just as you meticulously prepared for your voyages across the North Atlantic. Your navigational skills and seamanship were unmatched.

LEIF ERIKSON: (grinning) A Viking‘s legacy, passed down through generations. But your achievements in polar exploration have left an indelible mark on history. To reach the South Pole, to be the first to stand at the bottom of the world—it’s awe-inspiring.
ROALD AMUNDSEN: Yet, it is the spirit of exploration that binds us, Leif. The thirst for discovery, the yearning to push the boundaries of what is known—it transcends time and place.
LEIF ERIKSON: Indeed, Roald. Our journeys may have taken us to different corners of the Earth, but our passion for exploration unites us. To venture into the unknown, to embrace the challenges that lie ahead—that is the essence of our shared adventure.
ROALD AMUNDSEN: And as long as there are uncharted territories to explore, as long as there are horizons waiting to be discovered, the spirit of exploration will endure.
LEIF ERIKSON: (raising his cup) To new horizons, Roald. May the spirit of adventure guide us on our journeys, now and forevermore.
ROALD AMUNDSEN: (raising his cup) To new horizons, Leif. May the winds of discovery carry us to the ends of the Earth and beyond.
TOGETHER: Skål! (Cheers!)

As the fire continues to flicker and the echoes of their conversation linger in the cabin, Roald Amundsen and Leif Erikson share a moment of camaraderie—a bond forged by their shared passion for exploration and discovery. As they bid each other farewell, their exchange leaves an indelible mark— a reminder that the pursuit of exploration knows no bounds, echoing through the annals of history and inspiring future generations to chart their own course into the unknown.

Pettersson and Nobel

SETTING: A QUAINT CAFÉ OVERLOOKING THE SERENE WATERS OF ÅLAND, BATHED IN THE SOFT GLOW OF THE AFTERNOON SUN.

JOEL PETTERSSON, the esteemed writer and painter, sits across from ALFRED NOBEL, the renowned inventor and philanthropist.

JOEL PETTERSSON: Alfred, it's a pleasure to have you here in Åland. Your legacy has inspired countless individuals, myself included.

ALFRED NOBEL: Thank you, Joel. It's truly a pleasure to be in the midst of such natural beauty. Åland holds a special place in my heart.

JOEL PETTERSSON: Your contributions to science and innovation have reshaped the world in profound ways. The Nobel Prizes, a testament to your vision, continue to honour those who strive for excellence and progress.

ALFRED NOBEL: (smiling) The Nobel Prizes are but a small part of my legacy. I hope they serve as a beacon of hope and inspiration for future generations.

JOEL PETTERSSON: Indeed, they do. Your commitment to peace and progress is unparalleled. Your vision has transcended borders and united humanity in pursuit of common goals.

ALFRED NOBEL: I have always believed in the power of knowledge and enlightenment to transform society for the better. Each Nobel Prize represents a step towards a brighter future for all.

JOEL PETTERSSON: Your words resonate deeply, Alfred. Here in Åland, amidst the tranquil beauty of nature, one cannot help but appreciate the importance of harmony and understanding.

ALFRED NOBEL: Nature has a way of reminding us of our interconnectedness and the fragility of our existence. It is through mutual respect and cooperation that we can safeguard our planet for future generations.

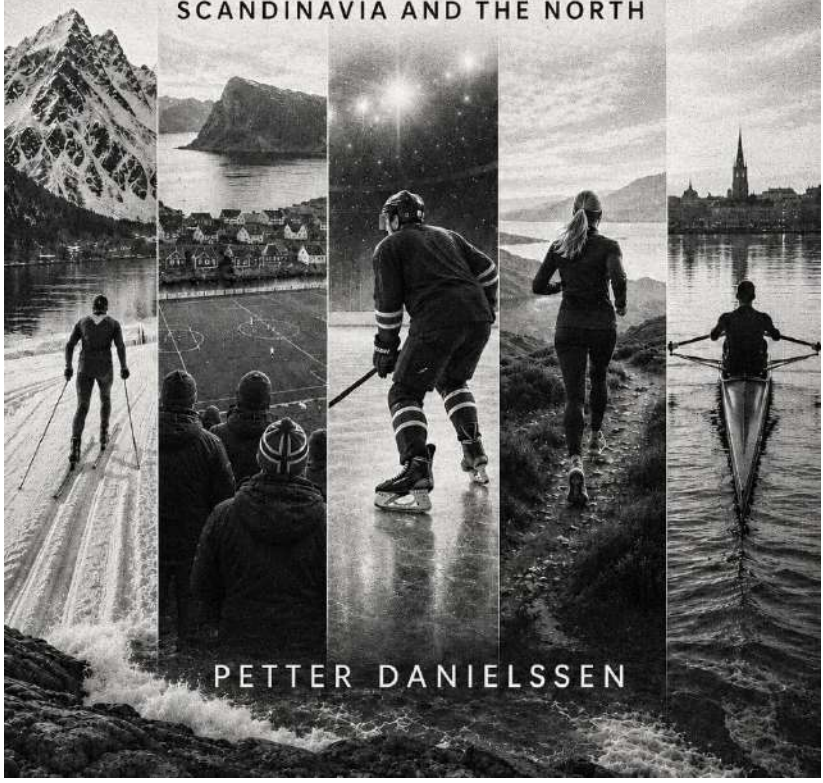
JOEL PETTERSSON: Your sentiments mirror the ethos of Åland—a place where nature and culture intertwine, fostering a deep sense of community and stewardship.

ALFRED NOBEL: (nodding) Åland is indeed a treasure trove of inspiration. Your artistry and literary works capture the essence of this unique region, preserving its heritage for generations to come.
JOEL PETTERSSON: I am humbled by your words, Alfred. Through my writing and paintings, I strive to convey the timeless beauty and spirit of Åland to the world.
ALFRED NOBEL: Your dedication to your craft is admirable, Joel. Art has the power to transcend boundaries and touch the hearts of people from all walks of life.
JOEL PETTERSSON: As does science and innovation, Alfred. Together, they shape our understanding of the world and illuminate the path towards a brighter tomorrow.
ALFRED NOBEL: (raising his cup) To the pursuit of knowledge, creativity, and peace—may they guide us on our journey towards a better world.
JOEL PETTERSSON: (raising his cup) To the enduring legacy of Alfred Nobel and the timeless beauty of Åland— may they inspire generations to come.
TOGETHER: SKÅL! (CHEERS!)

As the sun begins to set over the tranquil waters of Åland, Joel Pettersson and Alfred Nobel conclude their heartfelt conversation, each enriched by the wisdom and insights shared in this idyllic corner of the world, where nature's beauty meets human ingenuity.

THE NORDIC GAME

SPORTS ACROSS SCANDINAVIA AND THE NORTH



PETTER DANIELSSEN

Pesäpallo: Finland's Reinvention of Baseball

Excerpted from The Nordic Game: Sports Across Scandinavia and the North by Petter Danielssen.

Baseball reached Finland during the early twentieth century, but Finland did not simply adopt it. Instead, the country transformed the American game into something entirely its own — faster, more tactical, more unpredictable, and deeply adapted to Finnish culture and landscape. The result was pesäpallo, commonly known as pesis: Finland's national sport and one of the most unusual sporting inventions in modern Europe. At first glance, pesäpallo resembles baseball. There is a batter, a pitcher, fielders, innings, and base running. But the similarities quickly become deceptive. The pitcher throws the ball vertically upward beside the batter. The field itself is asymmetric, with an L-shaped layout, and the base path bends into a zigzag rather than a diamond. Offensive tactics dominate the game. Coaches communicate through coded fan signals. Matches unfold less like American baseball and more like a blend of strategy game, sprint relay, and organized chaos. And at the top of this uniquely Finnish sporting universe stands Superpesis — the elite national league that transformed pesäpallo from rural summer pastime into a modern professional sport. To outsiders, Superpesis can feel strange and fascinating. To Finland, it represents something much deeper: a national game created not by imitation, but by reinvention.

Lauri Pihkala and the Finnish Game

The story begins with Lauri "Tahko" Pihkala. An athlete, sports theorist, and Olympic competitor, Pihkala became one of the most influential figures in Finnish sporting history during the early twentieth century. After travelling to the United States (1907) and studying baseball, he admired certain aspects of the game but believed it required adaptation for Finnish conditions and sporting

culture. Pihkala combined elements of American baseball, Finnish bat-and-ball folk games, military training exercises, and Nordic outdoor sporting traditions to create pesäpallo during the 1910s and 1920s. The first official matches were played in Helsinki in 1920, while the sport's first formal rulebook appeared in 1922. The timing mattered enormously. Finland had declared independence from Russia only in 1917 and soon endured civil war. Building national culture became politically and emotionally important. Pihkala envisioned pesäpallo partly as a unifying Finnish sport — something distinctly national rather than imported from larger powers. The game spread rapidly through schools, civic associations, military training, and rural communities. By the 1930s, pesäpallo had become deeply embedded in Finnish society itself.

More Tactical Than Baseball

The genius of pesäpallo lies in how thoroughly it transformed baseball's internal logic. In American baseball, pitching largely dominates the game. In pesäpallo, the vertical pitch allows hitters far greater control over direction and placement. Batters can intentionally target open spaces, execute tactical hits, and manipulate defensive positioning with remarkable precision. This changes everything. The sport becomes highly strategic and dynamic: runners move aggressively between bases, coaches signal plays through coloured fans, fielders constantly reposition, tactical sacrifice hitting becomes central. The field itself contributes to the chaos. Instead of baseball's diamond, pesäpallo uses an asymmetric zigzag base path that creates unusual running angles and defensive challenges. To baseball purists, the sport can appear almost alien. But to many Finns, pesäpallo feels more active, tactical, and continuously engaging than traditional baseball. The game emphasizes anticipation, teamwork, and spatial intelligence — qualities often celebrated across Nordic sporting culture more broadly.

The National Summer Sport

For much of the twentieth century, pesäpallo became Finland's defining summer sport. The game flourished especially in smaller towns and rural regions where local clubs evolved into powerful community institutions. Unlike football or ice hockey, which became increasingly globalized and commercially international, pesäpallo remained deeply local and unmistakably Finnish. This local identity became one of the sport's great strengths. Entire municipalities rallied around clubs representing towns such as Sotkamo, Vimpeli, Kouvola, Joensuu, Seinäjoki. Many of these places would remain almost invisible in international sport without pesäpallo. Summer evenings at Finnish pesäpallo stadiums developed their own atmosphere with forest light lingering late into the night, spectators seated close to the action, tactical tension rather than continuous noise, and communities gathering around local identity. The sport became tied to the rhythm of the Finnish summer itself.

Superpesis and Modernization

By the 1980s, however, Finland was changing rapidly. Urbanization, television culture, and shifting leisure habits threatened pesäpallo's traditional rural foundations. If the sport was to remain nationally relevant, it needed to be modernised. The answer was Superpesis. Launched officially in 1990, Superpesis reorganized elite Finnish pesäpallo into a modern national league with stronger marketing, television broadcasting, professional structures, and upgraded stadiums. The reforms transformed the game: play-off systems increased drama, statistics and tactical analytics expanded, artificial turf improved playing quality, and television audiences grew significantly. During the 1990s, Superpesis became one of Finland's most watched summer sports competitions. Attendance figures surged even in relatively small towns, while local rivalries acquired near-mythic importance. The league also reflected a particularly Finnish balancing act:

modernization without complete globalization. Pesäpallo remained unmistakably local even as it professionalized.

Sotkamo, Vimpeli, and the Rural Dynasties

One of the most striking aspects of Superpesis is where its dominant clubs come from. Unlike many global sports increasingly concentrated in major metropolitan centres, pesäpallo's strongest traditions remain rooted in smaller communities. Sotkamon Jymy, perhaps the greatest club dynasty in Finnish pesäpallo history, comes from Sotkamo — a municipality of barely 10,000 inhabitants in eastern Finland. Vimpelin Veto, another historic powerhouse, represents a town of roughly 3,000 people. This rural strength reflects the cultural geography of pesäpallo itself. The sport remained strongest in regions where community identity, local volunteer structures, and summer sporting traditions survived modernization most successfully. At times, Superpesis almost resembles a parallel sporting Finland: less urban, less global, more locally rooted. And yet the league also evolved. Clubs such as Manse PP from Tampere symbolized efforts to reconnect pesäpallo with larger urban audiences during the 2020s.

Crisis and Reinvention

Like many sports, pesäpallo also experienced crisis. The year 1998 brought a major match-fixing scandal — remembered in Finland as "Black Thursday" — which badly damaged the sport's credibility: the police investigated 460 people, of whom 30 were convicted. Television coverage declined, sponsors withdrew, and Superpesis entered one of the most difficult periods in its history. But the sport survived. The recovery reflected one of pesäpallo's great strengths: its grassroots depth. Because the game remained deeply tied to schools, clubs, and local communities, it retained cultural resilience even when elite structures weakened. During the 2000s and 2010s, Superpesis rebuilt gradually through youth development, stadium modernization, tactical evolution, and

improved professionalism. By the mid-2020s, the league had stabilized as a uniquely Finnish sporting institution — smaller than football or hockey commercially, but culturally distinctive and remarkably durable.

Women's Pesäpallo

Another important dimension of this sport is women's participation. Women's pesäpallo championships began in 1931, when Lahden Mailaveikot claimed the first title, unusually early compared with many other team sports. Today, women's Superpesis remains one of Finland's strongest women's domestic sports competitions. This reflects broader Nordic sporting traditions emphasizing participation and organizational equality. Clubs such as Pesäkarhut from Pori became major forces within women's pesäpallo during the 2020s, drawing strong attendances and national visibility. The sport's structure — community-based and less commercially distorted than some global sports — arguably helped sustain women's competition more naturally.

Finland's Sporting Identity

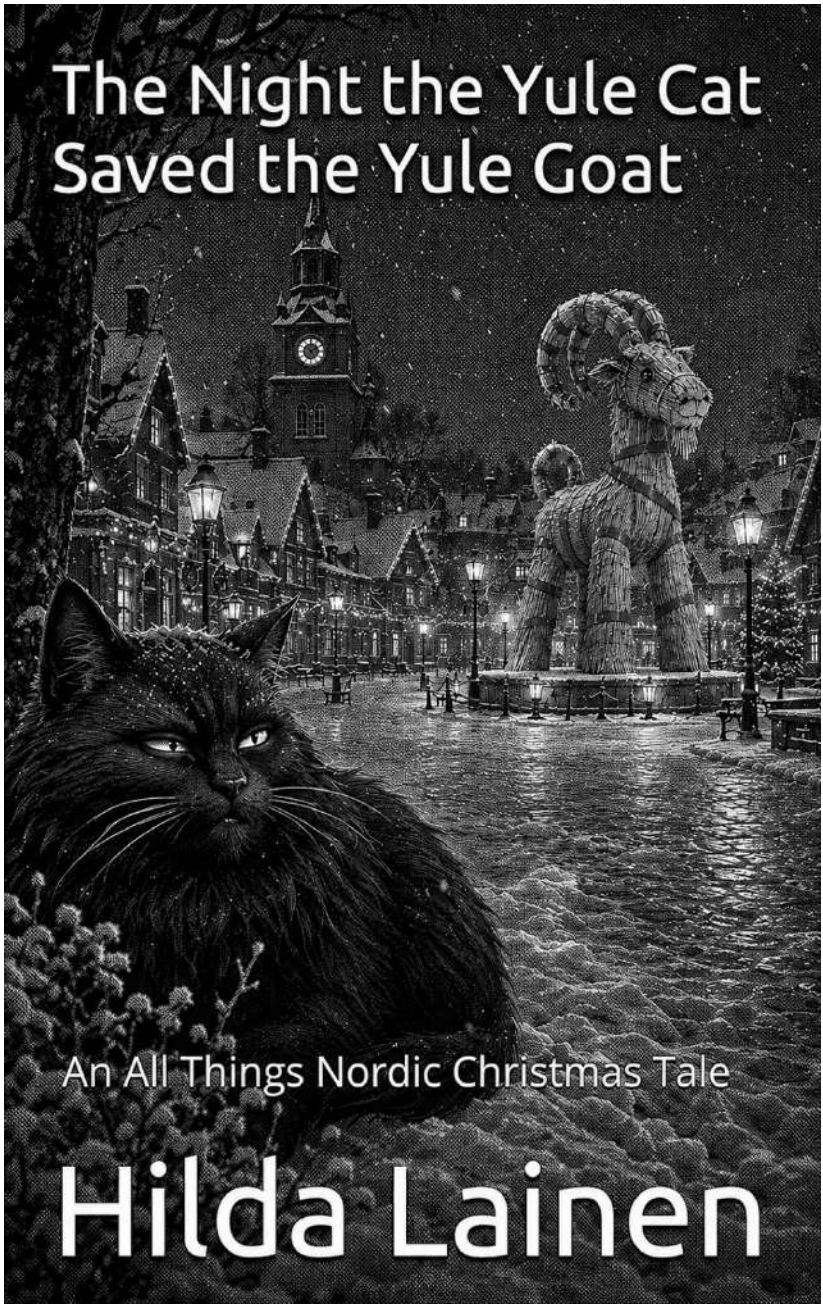
Pesäpallo reveals something fundamental about Finnish sporting culture. Many nations adopt global sports systems created elsewhere. Finland instead created its own national game by adapting foreign influence into something locally meaningful. That instinct appears repeatedly across Finnish society: adaptation rather than imitation, local reinvention, practicality shaped by geography, as well as national identity expressed through everyday culture. Pesäpallo also reflects the Finnish relationship with summer itself. After long northern winters, the sport unfolds outdoors beneath bright evenings and forest landscapes. It remains emotionally tied to lakeside towns, rural municipalities, school fields, and local stadiums surrounded by pine trees. The game belongs visibly to Finland.

Beyond Finland

Although pesäpallo remains overwhelmingly Finnish, the sport gradually expanded internationally through Finnish communities abroad and dedicated enthusiasts. World Cups have featured teams from Sweden, Germany, Australia, Estonia, India, Japan, Switzerland among others. India in particular emerged as an unexpected growth area during the late 2010s and 2020s, demonstrating how Finnish sporting culture occasionally travels in surprising directions. Still, pesäpallo remains one of the few major sports where Finland stands unquestionably at the centre. And perhaps that is precisely why the sport matters so much culturally.

The Most Finnish Game

Superpesis occupies a strange and fascinating position in world sport. To outsiders, it often appears eccentric — a Nordic reinterpretation of baseball played in remote towns few international audiences could locate on a map. But inside Finland, pesäpallo represents something more enduring: a national sporting language created from Finnish history, geography, and social organization itself. The game survived modernization, scandal, urbanization, and globalization without entirely losing its local roots. And every summer, when Finnish crowds gather once again beneath long northern evenings to watch the vertical pitch rise into the air, the country's most distinctive sporting invention continues forward into another season.


The Night the Yule Cat Saved the Yule Goat
An All Things Nordic Christmas Tale
Hilda Lainen

The Night the Yule Cat Saved the Yule Goat

An All Things Nordic Christmas Tale by Hilda Lainen

It was the quietest night of the year…

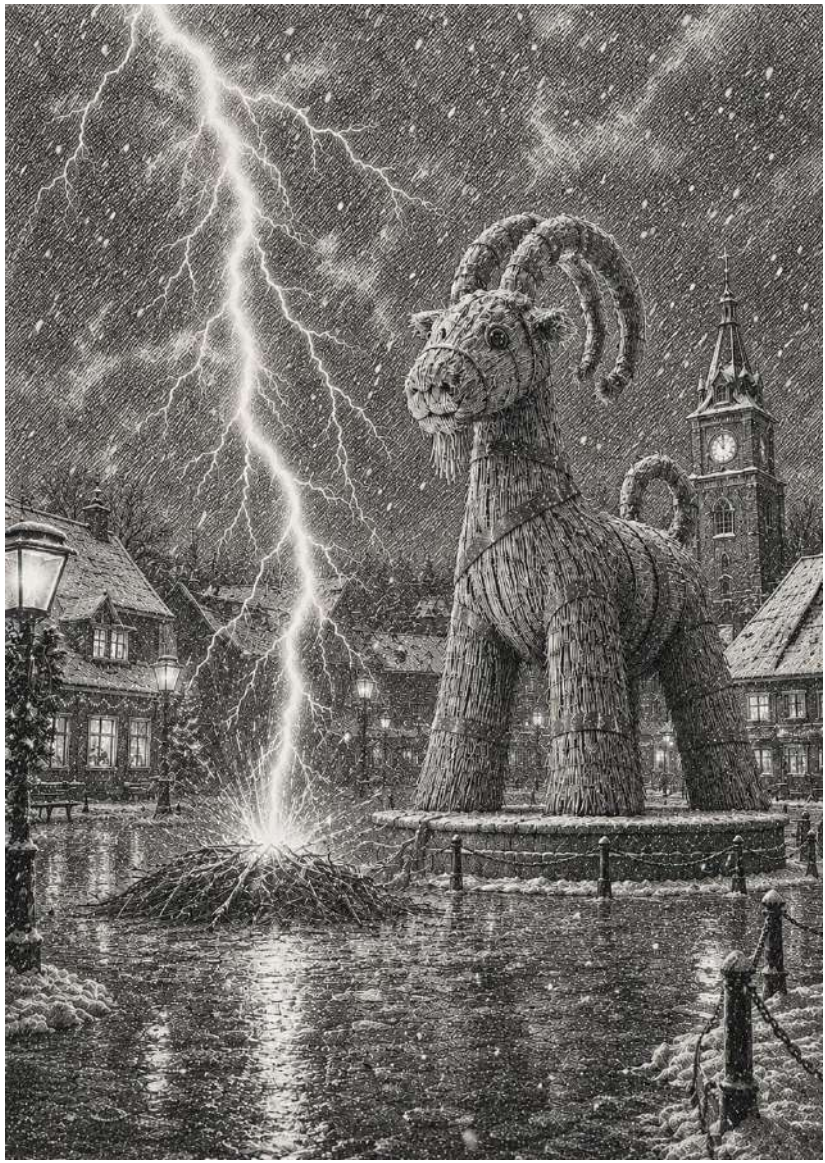
Winter had wrapped the little Nordic town in snow, and everyone was asleep. Everyone... except two very unusual creatures.

In the middle of the square stood the Yule Goat: proud, tall, silent. Made entirely of straw. He loved watching the Christmas lights twinkle. Not far away, beneath an old pine tree, lay the enormous Yule Cat. He looked at the goat through half-closed eyes and yawned. "…You're still standing there." The goat smiled politely. The cat muttered, "What a frightfully boring night."

A little cart crossed the square and passed slowly in front of the Yule Goat. A small pile of dry twigs slipped from the back. The cart disappeared into the night. Nobody noticed what had been left behind… except the Yule Cat.

A cold wind whispered through the empty streets and swept across the square. The moon slipped behind thick clouds. The cat lifted one ear. A deep rumble rolled across the sky… The cat opened one eye. The goat looked up nervously.

BOOM! A bolt of lightning split the darkness. It struck the pile of dry twigs beside the Yule Goat.



The lightning strikes beside the Yule Goat.

A tiny flame appeared, then something strange happened: the rain suddenly stopped. But the little flame didn't. Instead... it began to grow.

The goat smelled smoke. He looked around. “Oh dear... I'm made of straw...” he whispered. His straw legs began to tremble as the little fire grew and crept closer. Too close. One spark would be enough.

The goat could do nothing:
He couldn't leave his place.
He couldn't run.
He couldn't move at all.
He could only… watch.

“Please...” said the goat softly. “Please… someone... help”
But everyone was asleep. Except the Yule Cat.

The enormous cat stared at the flames, then at the frightened goat… then back at the flames. “Honestly...” sighed the Yule Cat as he got to his feet. “I was planning to sleep tonight."

The cat searched the square. There! A wooden bucket beside the old fountain. The cat grabbed it with his teeth. It was heavier than he expected. Much heavier. The Yule Cat pushed... Pulled... Grunted... Every step felt longer than the last. SPLASH!... Not enough! The flames leapt higher and the goat shut his eyes. “Not tonight,” growled the cat. “Again!” With all his strength, he filled the bucket, dragged it to the flames and WHOOSH! …emptied it over the burning twigs.



The Yule Cat drags the bucket towards the fire.

HISSSSS! Steam rose into the cold night. The fire vanished. Wet ashes remained, and silence returned as snowflakes drifted gently down.

The Yule Goat opened one eye. Then the other. "I... I'm still here." The Yule Cat flicked his tail and strolled back to his favourite spot as if he didn't care. "You were making far too much smoke." "Thank you," said the goat. The enormous cat looked away. "I know…" but the corner of his mouth almost smiled.

Friends.

Every Christmas night since then, the Yule Goat has never been alone. If you ever visit a Nordic town late at night, you might spot a straw goat and, watching from the shadows, the enormous Yule Cat, who still keeps watch.

Even if he still pretends he doesn't.



AN ALL THINGS NORDIC PHOTOBOOK

OSLO

Where the Fjord Meets the Future

A compact route through the photographed locations

Excerpted from Oslo: Where the Fjord Meets the Future
by Marit Kari Solberg.

“Christiania, this singular city, from which no man departs without carrying away the traces of his sojourn there.”

— Knut Hamsun, Hunger (1890)
Translated by George Egerton (1899)



Oslo — Places in This Book. Map data © OpenStreetMap

A Walk Through Oslo

Begin at the *National Museum*, home to an important collection of works by Edvard Munch, and the nearby *Nobel Peace Center*. Then cross the city centre towards *Oslo Cathedral* and Østbanestasjonen. From there, follow the waterfront to *SALT* for lunch before continuing to *Deichman Bjørvika* and the *Opera House*. The route then leads towards *MUNCH*, *Munch Brygge*, *She lies* and the *floating saunas*, where you can unwind beside the fjord. To include *Akershus Fortress*, take a short waterfront detour from the Nobel Peace Center. Its commanding position above the harbour makes it impossible to miss.

The complete walk takes approximately two to three hours at a relaxed pace, excluding museum visits, lunch and time at the saunas.

Scan to explore the itinerary on the All Things Nordic website — no registration required.

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If you enjoyed this edition of the All Things Nordic Almanac, you may also enjoy these ATN books:

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Oslo: Where the Fjord Meets the Future — *A beautifully crafted keepsake for lovers of photography*.

The Night the Yule Cat Saved the Yule Goat — *An All Things Nordic Christmas tale for children aged 5–9.*

Introducing Hrafnkell's Icelandic Saga — *An accessible introduction to one of the most powerful and most widely read Icelandic sagas.*

Conversations That Never Happened — *Imagined encounters between famous figures who shaped Nordic history, culture and identity.*

ABOUT ALL THINGS NORDIC

ATN is an independent editorial project dedicated to the cultures, histories, landscapes and everyday life of the Nordic countries through books, articles and long-form cultural storytelling.

Allthingsnordic.com



Christmas in the Nordic Countries

Hilda Lainen

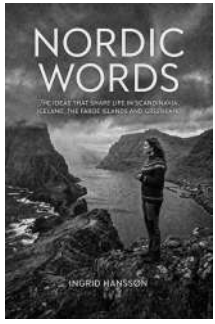
Discover the complete book



Introducing Hrafnkell's Icelandic Saga

Petter Danielssen and Jon Andreas Gunnarsson

Discover the complete book



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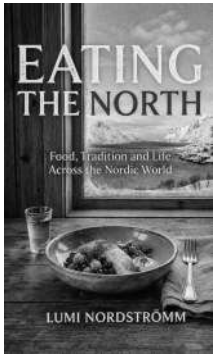

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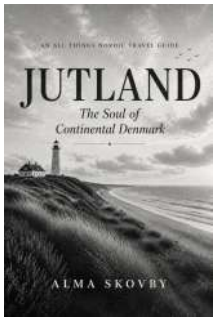

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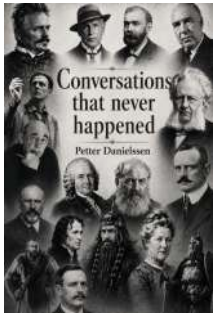

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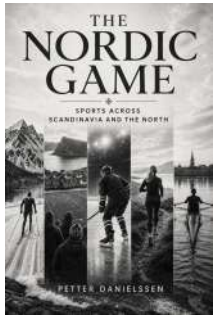

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Notes

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ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

This volume features work by Hilda Lainen, Petter Danielssen, Jon Andreas Gunnarsson, Ingrid Hanssøn, Lumi Nordström, Alma Skovby and Marit Kari Solberg. Together, they explore Nordic history, literature, folklore, food, sport, language, travel and photography as part of the All Things Nordic editorial project.

In Iceland, Christmas Eve is traditionally marked by the giving of books and a long night of reading. Jólabókaflóð 2026 brings that spirit to the wider Nordic world.

This first All Things Nordic Almanac gathers stories, traditions, ideas and journeys from across Scandinavia, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and the Arctic North. Its pages lead from an Icelandic saga manuscript to the meaning of sila; from Sámi food traditions and Swedish Christmas celebrations to Jutland's literary landscape, Finnish pesäpallo and the changing waterfront of Oslo.

Along the way, imagined conversations bring remarkable Nordic figures together, while the Yule Cat and Yule Goat step into a Christmas tale of their own.

A book to explore slowly, revisit often and share during the darkest nights of the year.

Allthingsnordic.com