

## Gotland- Culinary Capital of Sweden 2013



### Culinary region Gotland in Sweden the new culinary nation

Concepts like local, regional and organic have become increasingly popular amongst consumers and customers. Also, people care more about vitamins, antioxidants and natural products without additives. Our geographical position in Northern Europe becomes more and more interesting due to the herbs, berries and mushrooms growing wild, which will become increasingly attractive on the world market. This may very well become a golden opportunity for small, rural food processing companies. How can we best manage the traditional knowledge about primary produce and ways of processing these in the future, so that more capital remains in rural areas? Many jobs can be created in the processing and retailing of healthy and locally-produced food. Culinary skills that used to be taught in the home are becoming less common. Here, the Swedish Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies, the Swedish national support centre for food producers LivsTek, ALMI and other organisations play an important role. Thanks to various projects, some of these skills can be brought to life again through practical courses. The following is meant to inspire the reader and to show that Gotland's culinary traditions is a goldmine when developing new products and experiences.

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## Gotland's culinary traditions

Food culture has always played an important role in Gotland culture and society. The time of the barter economy is a fine example to draw from when creating new, regional products for cafés, restaurants and the food processing industry. Thanks to Gotland's geographical isolation, the distinctive local character of its food still prevails, more so than on the Swedish mainland. Gotland, with its dominating agricultural trade, has been allowed to develop slowly. At the same time, Gotland has been an important trading point, open to influences from visiting tradespeople. These two factors have contributed to the island's current cultural heritage.

Strategic marriages in the past have secured the riches of the farms through many generations. Traditions relating to births, christenings, name days, birthdays, confirmation, graduation, marriage, funeral, hay-making and other festivities related to the farming cycle have left footprints in the form of culinary traditions that are still alive on Gotland. Some of these are described below.

Baking ovens have been used for a long time on Gotland, which has resulted in a rich tradition of making bread, particularly thick, soft loaves, sourbread made of wholemeal and fine-grained bread made of sifted rye flour. Usually, the dough was allowed to rise in the dough trough, and bread was baked once every two weeks. Later on, wort bread was made with home brewed wort. Crispbread is a later addition. Sweet white bread, *vetebröd*, was made only at festive occasions, but gradually became more common in the home. Saffron buns were the most festive of all sweet breads. On Gotland, they were eaten at parties all year round, not only around Christmas (as in the rest of Sweden). The so-called *Gotlandsknuten* or "*fletn bulle/läggdar bulle*", a type of sweet white bread, is a true Gotland speciality. Apart from soft bread, other products were baked for extravagant coffee parties (*kaffekalas*), such as sweet pretzels, flat wafers (*gorån*) and rolled wafers (*rullrån*), apple cake, lard biscuits (*isterkakor/eistarbakelsar*) and much more.

Porridge is seen as a forerunner of the bread culture and has become trendy again. Porridge could for example be made from rye flour, rice or barley grain, with beer or milk as liquid. Also, meat-stuffed potato dumplings (*kruppkakar*) were boiled in the brewery cauldron. *Ugnstrull* (a typical Gotland bread filled with meat or fish) was often packed as a meal when the men went fishing. Much used root vegetables were Gotland turnip, boiled turnips, swedes, carrots, and later also potatoes.

Different kinds of beer soup was common in the Gotland kitchen. The home-brewed beer *drikke*, a fermented, alcoholic beverage, was made to boil and seasoned with bitter orange

and cardamom, thickened with flour, milk and eggs, and sweetened with treacle. *Ölsupa* was a type of soup, where half of the *drikke* was replaced by beer. Another type of soup, *avig dricksoppa/avu drikksäupå*, was made with boiling milk that was thickened with flour and *drikke*, and seasoned with treacle and salt. *Drikke* was a dominating part of the Gotland diet in former times, and it was used in many different ways.

On most farms, there was a vegetable garden, a herb garden, an orchard with fruit trees and a rose garden. These have been a part of the Gotland countryside for a long time. Fruit was used in different soups, not only in black soup. Gooseberries were an ingredient in broad bean soup and fruit was also commonly used in lentil soup. The Stenkyrke apple (province apple of Gotland) was considered a special treat. Vegetables were always cooked, raw vegetables were not appreciated. Mullberries and walnuts were valued and expensive ingredients, which in modern days have been replaced by dewberries. A well-liked berry dish was *bär-kas*. When you had been out picking wild strawberries, you made *raubärskas* when you came home. This dish consisted of freshly-picked wild strawberries, still warm from the sun, enjoyed with sugar and milk in a bowl. If you had been out picking blueberries, the same tradition applied, but then with blueberries. This may be something to put on modern-day restaurant menus.

The wild sand leek, *kaipar*, and other wild onions were used in spring. Depending on where the animals graze, the butter and milk get a flavour from the various onions. This oniony flavour is popular today. Sand leek was boiled with grains, meat or bones, milk and flour. Pieces of potato were sometimes added, and cowslip flowers and chervil enhanced the flavour. This was a typical spring dish. Sand leek was also a remedy for spring fatigue, that was the result of a winter with a poor and unbalanced diet.

Peas for use in the kitchen were grown on every farm. Pea soup was the traditional Thursday meal, or Sunday dinner. It was made with pork and enjoyed with sourbread. Black soup was made when a pig or goose was slaughtered. Broad bean soup, lentil soup, fish soup and lamb-bone soup were other popular soups. Fresh soup, made with fresh meat, was also made during the slaughter season. Wild cocks and birds were also used in soup, which was often served with *klimp/krunggar*, a kind of dumpling. Prune soup with different spices, cognac and wine was common between courses or as a dessert at more important dinners.

Baltic herring, cod, flounder and scaly fish were used. Scaly fish was either saved for festive occasions or sold. Salted herring was everyday fare and Gotland's own "national fish", which could be preserved for a year, if not two. Harvest fishing brought money into the farmers' pockets, while the fish caught in summer was mainly for private consumption. Salting and smoking fish were the most common methods of conservation on Gotland. Salted ide was common in coastal regions, where it was also made into fish patties. Ide has been used since the Stone Age, which is also true of cod and flounder. Smoked flounder is common on

northern Gotland, but in the south the flounder was salted and dried and saved to be boiled in the winter. Smoked Baltic herring, *böckling/bikkingg*, was a speciality of northern Gotland, where the women did the smoking. All Baltic herring was smoked to *böckling* when there was a lack of salt. Fresh fish was common in season, but it was also salted for boiling later. Fried eel and eel poached cold, or eel baked on coals, were common dishes.

Turbot was – due to a lack of knowledge – not very popular in the old days. Stuffed cod heads and pike soup with dumplings made from pike roe mixed with flour and milk were popular dishes in 17th century Gotland. So-called *tåskbåddar/kruppbåddar* is an ancient element of the Gotland diet. This was considered one of the most peculiar – and tastiest – of all the dishes served at a meal for human consumption. It consists of cod heads stuffed with cod liver, rye flour and wheat flour (half of each), eggs and chives. Fish was either grilled on a grid on coals, plain grilled or fried in fat in a pan. A dinner in rural Gotland in the 17th century could start with Baltic herring and boiled turnip slices. After that, a wooden bowl with fish soup came to the table. Duck mussels were boiled, and Baltic prawns were also used for consumption. Crayfish came to the waters around Gotland in the 1840s. Shellfish was not previously used as food to any great extent.

Meat was dried, pickled, salted and smoked, and came from sheep, lamb, pig and cattle. Mutton from Gotland has since the 18th century been known as a treat for any gourmet, and was exported as early as the late Middle Ages. In the old days, most lambs were kept outside all year round. The meat acquired its taste from the thyme growing on the heaths, and had a natural, wild flavour. In those days, mutton was winter food. It was saved for three occasions: Christmas Eve, New Year's Eve and the Eve of Epiphany. Maybe the roast lamb is the equivalent of the Sunday roast of our days? The lamb was cut up in a different way than today. It was divided along the spine and different parts were grilled at the same time.

In well-assorted butcher's shops, you can still find dried salted legs of mutton, *fårfiol*. The legs are salted and smoked in a smoke sauna. The meat becomes dry, salt and tasty. There are people who still smoke lamb legs in the traditional way today, in the sauna on the farm.

Lamb heads have been eaten in all times, on Gotland and elsewhere in the world. Cooking lamb heads is an art that every housewife on Gotland mastered. Fewer master it today, but you can still get a tasty lamb head on your plate. When the lambs have been slaughtered, the heads are cut off and divided into two halves. The two halves, including the teeth, are cleaned with water. The brain and the wool are removed, and the head is put in water. Estimate one lamb head per person. The heads are boiled in extra salted water for about an hour. Before they are served, the heads are put on a plate and brushed with a mixture of mustard, bread crumbs and egg. Then they are roasted in the oven for about 20 minutes. The lamb heads are preferably served with mashed turnips, swedes, carrots –

*strunkamos/rogråit* – and a glass of beer. The meat, found mainly on the cheeks, is tender. It may not be a lot, but there is also a tongue to be peeled and enjoyed. And you get the eyes! These are taken out of their sockets, and the black pupil is removed. In the old days, children were taught that the eye tasted best served on a piece of dark, coarse bread without butter. This is still true today.

Different cooked and cured meat products, such as German sausage, were manufactured. The sausage making was inspired by the trade contacts with Germany during the Middle Ages. All sorts of sausages were made in the farm kitchens. From Cuckoo's day, 25 April, it was allowed to use the winter's salted, smoked or dried meats and sausages, which were then dry enough to eat. Blood sausage, black soup, black pudding etc were eaten in connection with the slaughter. Blood sausage of different kinds were stuffed, boiled and dried for later use.

Bird meat was used to a greater extent than today, for example geese were smoked. St. Martin's Day was important in Visby, where ducks were also held. Ducks' eggs, pancakes and pigeon were part of the diet, as well as turkey, hen, eider, long-tailed duck and other birds. Forest birds were considered better than sea birds. In former times, lots of sea birds, particularly long-tailed ducks, were hunted. These were mainly used in soup, but could also be stuffed with root vegetables and roasted whole. Estimate one long-tailed duck per person.

Hares and wild rabbits prepared in different ways were also on the menu. Eggs from sea birds, ducks and hens were used when they were available. A thick oven pancake that was served on festive occasions became even more popular when saffron was added. Great amounts of farm eggs from rural Gotland were sold to Visby and "exported" to the mainland.

*Skyr* is a type of thick sour milk without cream, while *filbunke* still has its cream. Milk from cows and sheep was used to make this. Cheese has been produced on Gotland since the era of the Great Migrations, and it was also made from beestings, the first milk from a newly calved cow.

Honey, treacle and spices were readily available thanks to the transit trade on the island and the monastic system. Saffron, cinnamon, horse-radish and mustard were important spices. Caraway was used in bread. Aniseed was used in barley grain porridge. Mustard pears was a popular side dish and the festive food was richly spiced.

People drank snaps or vodka as though it was water, and later on Bavarian beer became popular, alongside home-brewed malt drinks and mead. Rum was appreciated, and later also wine at feasts. Birch sap was consumed fresh or fermented. *Flipp* was made from fermented

*drikke* (homemade beer), dried fruits and a splash of vodka. When the last batch of *flipp* had been made, Christmas was over.

The peasantry on Gotland started to drink tea before people in the rest of the country, in the early 18th century. Expensive and novel food was often introduced at weddings. The tea was usually taken with sugar, cinnamon and cream. Picking cowslips, wild strawberry leaves, hyssop and fresh blackcurrant leaves for making tea was an autumn task in Visby. Coffee was introduced during the 19th century, when the people of Gotland had been drinking tea for a long time.

**In former times, festive food was very different from the everyday food.**

On the Monday after Shrove Sunday, flat round dumplings of barley grain or wheat flour filled with diced pork, *kruppkakar*, were boiled and eaten warm. On the day after, Shrove Tuesday, a flat, long cream bun filled with almonds, sugar and butter was often served. It was cut into pieces and served with milk in a bowl. The individual cream buns of today, *fastlagsbullar*, were introduced in the 19th century.

Goose was considered the finest festive food. In the old days, the goose meat was salted and smoked for use on bread, for example in the hay-making season. Gotland has been one of Sweden's most prominent goose breeding regions, and the goose has been just as important on Gotland as in the Skåne province (Scania).

On Gotland, there is today another traditional culinary culture which lives alongside the Gotland tradition. This parallel culture is that of the "svenskbyborna", descendants of immigrants from the Swedish colony in Estonia, who moved to Gammalsvenskby in the Ukraine. Many Russian dishes were introduced on Gotland by the svenskbyborna after their return to Sweden in 1929. This tradition differs from the Swedish one in that the drinks are based on tea, kvass and wine, and particular importance is given to vegetables and spices such as garlic and peppers. There is also a Scanian/Danish culinary heritage on Gotland. Examples of this are the traditional goose feast and black soup.

## ***High feasts***

### ***Getting married on Gotland***

Below is a description of a traditional mid-19th century farmers' wedding according to the ethnologist Per Arvid Säve.

A week before the wedding ceremony, a young farm-hand goes to the vicarage to invite everyone to the wedding. On the wedding day, he goes again, this time to fetch the *bruttöverskan*, a woman whose task it is to help and support the bride. At finer weddings, the clergyman's wife often performs this honorary task. The bride is dressed in a black dress, a crown of gilt paper is put on her head, she is adorned with flowers in her hair, gold bells as

earrings, a gold chain around her neck and a bright red ribbon around her waist. She also wears white cotton gloves and gets a silver box with so-called "church spices".

Meanwhile, the groom arrives on horseback with his *bruttbonde* (best man), who makes a speech at the gate, where of course snaps is offered. He talks about the beauty of the bride, praises her virtue and congratulates the groom on his luck. Then the musicians take over, and coffee and wine are offered before it is time to leave for church. This does not happen in peace and quiet – there is nothing peaceful or quiet about a Gotland wedding.

At the vicarage, all guests are welcomed by the clergyman and offered wine and cake. Then the party continues to the church, accompanied by music and *kimbning*. *Kimbning* is when the church bells are struck with large, flat stones. This was done at high feasts, particularly weddings, and "the sound was infernal", Säve writes. The return to the farm is accompanied by more *kimbning* and gun shots. The newly-weds take their seats at the dinner table. Women sit to the right and men to the left, in ranking order. According to tradition, the guests must be persuaded to be seated.

The dinner starts with a snaps to promote the appetite and *gorån* (flat wafers). Then a lot of food follows. It could be boiled pike, salted beef, boiled ham with rice pudding, prune soup with saffron bread, steaks, butter pastries, soft clams, apples, accompanied by snaps, *drikke* and bread.

When the steaks are carried in, the hostess performs the steak dance (*staikestrik*) to the tune of violins. She dances in with the steak and offers one guest after the other. Just when the guest is about to take some food, she retracts the plate. While she dances, the party shouts and cheers, and the violins play louder and louder. When all the guests have been fooled, it is time to properly offer them some steak. After approximately four hours, the dinner is concluded with wheat cake (*fladu*) and cheese.

The clergyman reads the blessing and the party leaves the table with much ado, everyone bowing and curtseying. Money is collected for the musicians, the kitchen staff, and the poor and sick of the parish. The dancing lasts until midnight. The bride disappears and changes into the clothing of a young married woman, including a black silk cap. Meanwhile, the groom dances with everyone he has not had the time to dance with earlier. Then the newly-wed woman re-enters and dances the reel with her husband.

A late night snack is always appreciated before the trip home. Wheat cake (*fladu*) and cheese may be served for this purpose.

The wedding feast goes on for another two days. After that, the couple is truly married.

### **Gotland kaffekalas (coffee party)**

A tradition that is often re-enacted in different situations on Gotland is that of the coffee party. Coffee parties are regularly held at Bottarvegården in Vamlingbo, at Petesgården in Hablingbo, at Kattlundsgården in Grötlingbo and at local folklore societies. They attract

many visitors. At a proper Gotland coffee party, plenty of bread, biscuits, buns and cakes are served, for example saffron buns, sweet white bread in slices, gingerbread cake, *skarpskyttar* (pastry cones filled with jam and whipped cream), *gorån* (flat wafers), chocolate leaves, lard biscuits, rosettes, almond tarts, palmiers, jam biscuits, macaroons, biscuits with currants, gingerbread biscuits and dreams (sweet, crisp biscuits). After that, it is time for the huge almond cake and finally a magnificent cream cake served with another cup of coffee and a glass of liqueur or brandy. Then you get up and move around a bit, while the fruit table is prepared. Here you might find meringues, Gotland apple cake, prune compote, rubarb compote, ginger pears, whipped cream and something to drink. At the end of the party, sweets are offered. The more different cakes, biscuits and pastries, the better the party. The idea is not that you eat all that is offered – that would be impossible. Bags are handed out so that the guests can take the uneaten cakes and biscuits with them.

***Gotland Christmas traditions. From the book: Mat och måltidsseder på Gotland (Food and culinary traditions on Gotland) by Kurt Genrup***

On Gotland, like in other Swedish provinces, preparations for Christmas began in good time with a number of "compulsory" tasks, such as the slaughter of the Christmas pig, the brewing of Christmas beer, *drikke*, the Christmas baking and the chopping of the Christmas wood. The women baked and brewed beer, washed and mangled, dipped candles, spun yarn for mittens and so on. They also made Christmas gifts for the farm hands. Bought gifts were a rare thing. The men could take it more easy. They did not perform any more proper full days of work that year. However, they were not completely idle – they had to tend to the animals, chop wood and clear away the snow.

The wood chopping was demanding enough. The chopped wood had to be piled next to the cottage door. The pile should reach the ceiling and it should last for five weeks.

The men had many opportunities to taste the food and drinks made in preparation for Christmas. An abundance of food and drink has always been a characteristic of Christmas, on Gotland as well as elsewhere. At this time, the farm supplies were full.

This is a glimpse of rural Gotland in the 1840s: "On the morning of Christmas Eve, a great fire was lit in the stove in the brewery. Here, as many kinds of meat as the house could muster were prepared – salted beef and ham, fresh and salted mutton, roasted goose and pig, German sausage and other meat sausages – all to be consumed during the Christmas holiday, when no food was to be cooked". A by-product of the Christmas cooking was a fatty, nourishing broth, which was the basis for the dinner on Christmas Eve. The family gathered around the large pot with their slices of bread. You took as many as you could eat and dipped them in the boiling pork broth. In 19th-century Gotland, this way of eating was called "eating as the heathens" and always took place in the farm brewery, at the stove where the



baking oven was and where the great iron pot had its place. The dinner on Christmas Eve was always a fairly simple meal. An older description from Kräklingbo parish tells about a meal consisting of meat, sausage, cold potatoes, *myle* (a version of dipping bread in broth) and beer.

On Fårö, an island northeast of Gotland, boiled meat was not so important. Instead, a ewe was roasted in the oven. As an afternoon snack on Christmas Eve, fine rye bread was dipped in the resulting roast fat and everyone was given a piece. On northern Gotland, the Gotland variety of Russian pasties could also be served on this occasion. "In some houses, the *talku*, a large, pointy bun filled with pork and meat, came on the table. It was a tasty bun rich in fat. It was cut into pieces and everyone had a piece". On the evening of Christmas Eve, however, the table was properly laid. There could be bread, butter, sausage, beef and mutton and the great pig's head, the only pork to be consumed at Christmas.

After a number of graces and blessings, and a couple of snaps, the meal could begin. There was no limit to the food, drink and good cheer. "When one had had one's fill of meat, finally the Christmas porridge was brought in. It was made with barley grain, sometimes with the addition of bitter orange and cardamom or pepper, and was eaten out of one common bowl with a soup made of beer and flavoured with treacle. After the meal, grace was said again and a psalm was sung, not all too beautifully since everyone usually sang their own tune". At a peasant feast, there were fewer dishes, but this varied a lot between different homes. There could be anything from ham with mustard, or fresh pike with horse-radish, or *lutfisk/bergfisk* (boiled ling soaked in lye) with butter and pepper. The Gotland Christmas fish was generally better liked fresh than made into *lutfisk*. After a few of these dishes there was porridge with treacle. From a vicarage household we are told that the meal could be completed with high cakes.

A forerunner of modern-day Christmas presents is the Christmas fare (*julkost*) for servants and the Christmas pile (*julhög*) for the family members. This is described as follows, from the village of Hörsne in the 19th century: "On the long table was a narrow table cloth and there were Christmas piles with different kinds of bread and a shining Stenkyrke apple on top. There were also s-shaped saffron buns". From another village we are told that a tallow candle and a blood sausage, saved from the October slaughter, was included. The period following Christmas and up to St Knut's Day on 13 January was a time for Christmas feasts, when people visited the neighbouring farms. The feasts could be grand, but people could also enjoy themselves without so much food and drink. Sometimes butter, loaves of bread, snaps and doughnuts with lingonberries were served, and between games nuts and apples were offered.

**This information about Gotland's culinary traditions, their roots in the past and their possibilities in the future, has been produced by the Swedish Rural Economy and**

Agricultural Societies (Sw. Hushållningssällskapet). We have done this in order to inspire retailers, producers, consumers, restaurants and tourism entrepreneurs to profile Gotland's culinary culture in the best possible way during 2013, when Gotland bears the title Culinary Capital of Sweden 2013.

Our products and services in the Food and experiences project may be developed and extended further. There is room for many more products based on the Gotland culinary tradition. Only our imagination limits us.

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