

Nordic Food takes to the streets

The Nordic food scene has earned tremendous interest internationally, but so far been synonymous with experimental fine dining restaurant Noma, gravadlax and aquavit. This is no longer the case. Organisers of a conference in Malmö aim to start a new food revolution and take Nordic food to the streets.

Inspired by the British street food revolution, the New Nordic Food Programme want to explore and develop the possibilities of the rapidly growing street food industry.

With his book "Street Food Revolution", his column on street food in the Guardian and his influential Street Food Awards, keynote speaker and food journalist Richard Johnson, has been leading the transformation of British street food in the last decade.

- In part the rise of street food has to do with the recession, explains Richard Johnson. Times are tight and not everyone is an "expense account diner". It's also to do with people's expectations. We are travelling more and tastes are more eclectic. Street food can feed that diversity, says Johnson.

Being an avid traveller himself, Richard Johnson has scoured the streets of the world making programmes for radio and television (<http://flavors.me/richardjohnson>) and in the process has explored the global street food scene. Arriving back in Britain a few years ago, he found a majority of the Brits were still having sandwiches for lunch. Instead of getting depressed, Richard Johnson teamed up with Chef Marco Pierre White and founded the British Street Food Awards in 2009. The British street food sector now employs an estimated 10 000 people around the country and the growth of the sector is reflected in the prizes of the Awards. The first year the winner took home a food blender -- last year they won a business makeover by Marks and Spencer and the right to trade at the Olympics.

Big business is finally waking up to the potential of street food. By moving into consultancy, Richard Johnson's company-British Street Food -- is now developing street food brands suitable for Heathrow airport, King's Cross station as well as working with a huge new retail outlet opening this year in Leeds.

Street food entrepreneur Tiffany Ng, saw the gap in the Nordic market when arriving from street food capital San Francisco to Copenhagen a few years ago.

- I had just had the most fantastic meal of heirloom tomatoes at a street food restaurant on Mission Street and realized that Copenhagen could really benefit from something like this. Instead of pursuing a career in international law and management, Tiffany Ng founded catering company Silver Spoon, which offers, among other things, Street corner kitchen.

- Each month we explore a new kitchen and pop up in new venues. It may be Japanese udon noodles, New Zealand lamb pies, Mexican chocolate chili or Jamaican jerk chicken. The events are advertised on Facebook or other social media, or by word of mouth. Although the street food scene revolution in Copenhagen is yet to happen, Tiffany Ng is hopeful.

- More and more street food is certainly cropping up, she says. It won't come as a sudden explosion but street food will happen here as well. It suits our times and moods; you can go out five days a week without dressing up or get ruined.

As a self-proclaimed "gastropol" Copenhagen city council has this year eased regulations for street food vendors and welcome food trucks on public spaces except for the historic Latin Quarters in the inner city.

Fredrik Mehlin, at Fred's Food Truck in Stockholm hopes that Stockholm council will go down the same route. He has bought a German baker's truck, complete with serving hatch, which he has transformed into a funky street food truck. As street food pioneer in the Swedish capital, he has no permanent parking permit, but is currently operating under the same regulations as an ice cream van. Moreover, reputable for its stringent interpretation of health - and safety legislation, Swedish street food vendors are not permitted to cook in their vans, which means that trained chef Fredrik has to prepare his food in a professional kitchen before transferring it to his food truck. The menu is clearly inspired by American street food cooking, although with a Nordic twist.

- I serve pulled pork with chutney on Swedish apples and pickled red onions, says Fredrik Mehlin.

Although battling with Swedish authorities, Fredrik Mehlin is hopeful and has been invited by the council of Stockholm to be part of the process of changing the regulations for street food vendors.

- I can see the possibilities with street food, says Fredrik, whose goal is to add street food to the city's thriving restaurant scene and serve tasty dishes to hungry city dwellers around the clock. The start-up costs are low and the possibilities of experimenting with different foods is exciting.

by Ingar Nilsson/ New Nordic Food II