



## TASTES OF LAPLAND – THE WILD FOOD OF THE NORTH

### **Finnish Lapland’s Arctic nature, unique ingredients, and rich heritage create a culinary adventure unlike anywhere else.**

In Lapland, food is deeply connected to the local nature, the seasons, and tradition. Arctic summers with endless sunlight give ingredients a rich flavor, and fall is the time to forage nature’s bounty. Part of Lapland’s culinary richness comes from the Sámi, the only indigenous people within the EU.

With the fall season upon us, now is the perfect moment to explore the culinary traditions of Europe’s northernmost region.

#### **Pure food in Arctic nature**

Lapland’s magic makes people fall in love, leave their old lives behind, and pursue happiness by living in harmony with nature. That’s what happened to **Sirly Ylläsjärvi**, a world-travelled Finnish *MasterChef* competitor.

Sirly has called Ylläs, Lapland, her home since 2009. There, she realized her dream of opening a restaurant of her own. [Restaurant Elsa](#), named after her husband’s grandmother, offers a fine dining experience rooted in Arctic nature. There’s just one communal table, and the impressive fireplace used for cooking creates a cozy atmosphere.

“I feel incredibly lucky to live and work here. Nature is the most important thing for me, and there, stress disappears. Lapland feels like a completely different world”, she reflects.

Sirly’s life in the north might be grounded, but her culinary ambitions haven’t slowed down. On the contrary, she spends her time foraging in the wild, working with local producers, and finessing her craft.

Food in Lapland is all about simplicity. Local ingredients are naturally full of flavor and packed with vitamins and antioxidants.

“In Finland, ingredients are respected. Flavors aren’t hidden. You can taste that there’s nothing extra,” Sirly says.

“Pure food makes you feel better,” she explains. “A holiday here is about calming down. What you put in your body should bring peace.”

According to Sirly, the best ingredients to taste in Lapland are reindeer, white fish and roe, and local Lappish potatoes, *puikulaperunat*.

“Whitefish is a Lappish delicacy, same with Arctic char and trout,” she enthuses. “Vendace roe is so delicious. People rave about caviar, but this is heavenly too. I recommend trying dill with fish and roe.”

“Reindeer tartare is a must-try. The taste is so pure it doesn’t need cooking, only salt and pepper,” she adds.

Reindeer is a staple in the local diet. These semi-wild animals have been herded by the Sámi for millennia, a traditional livelihood still very much alive. Reindeer stew, *poronkärästys*, or dried reindeer meat can be found everywhere, and reindeer fillet might be served instead of beef at restaurants.

Traditionally, every part of these magnificent animals has been utilized, and Sirly aims to support this practice. Her favorite is the tender, fatty tongue.

“Our reindeer tongue burger is simmered for hours and then pan-fried, served in a small brioche with fermented garlic aioli and caramelized onion. Our guests love it,” she says with a smile.

In summer, golden cloudberry are a unique treat. Sirly’s favourite food season is fall, when mushrooms and berries fill the forests. At restaurant Elsa, guests can even pick blueberries themselves for their ice cream, made from the milk of the rare Lappish cows.

On the dessert menu you might also find *leipäjuusto*, bread cheese, served warm with cinnamon and cream or cloudberry. Sirly prefers the authentic way to enjoy it – dunking it in hot coffee.

### **Dining at the top of Europe: coolest restaurant picks in Lapland**

In the heart of Sámi homeland, Inari, the award-winning restaurant [Aanaar](#) brings the tundra to your plate. Set beside the rapids of River Juutua, the restaurant celebrates local heritage with a seasonal menu featuring lichen, wild herbs, reindeer, and fish from Lake Inari.

Amid the stunning fells of Pyhä, restaurant [Aihki](#) serves Nordic cuisine with a modern twist. Ingredients are local, and the menu changes with the seasons. The restaurant also offers festive seasonal dinners, complete with live music, and a lakeside hut perfect for intimate private dinners.

Many visitors dream of staying in a glass hut to admire the auroras, but how about dining under these Northern Lights? At [Restaurant Utsu](#) in Levi, the glass ceiling makes that dream come true. The experience is incredible even without the auroras – the Lappish menu will ignite your palate.

For a truly Lappish experience, head to Kilpisjärvi. Surrounded by Arctic fells and pristine streams, [Aika Kitchen & Bar](#) serves local flavors and seasonal ingredients with breathtaking wilderness views. The fish dishes are worth a special mention!

Rovaniemi, the capital of Lapland, offers plenty of local food options. Family-owned restaurant [Nili](#) is a beloved classic, serving authentic Lappish cuisine in the heart of the city. Reindeer, game, mushrooms, and berries are always on the menu, and the cozy atmosphere feels like home.

### **PHOTOS**

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