



NORDIC LIFESTYLE

Embrace slow living,
cultivate happiness and
know when to take off
your shoes

SUSANNA HEISKANEN

FOUNDER OF THE NORDIC MUM

N  M

Contents

Introduction	7
PART ONE	
Defining ‘Nordic’	11
PART TWO	
Who are the Nordics?.....	33
PART THREE	
What makes the Nordics Nordic?	63
PART FOUR	
Live like the Nordics.....	101
PART FIVE	
How Nordics stay happy.....	137
Final Thoughts.....	165
Nordic facts and figures.....	166
Glossary	170
Acknowledgements	175
References	176



Introduction

When people ask me where I'm from, I always say I'm from Finland, even though I live in Australia. I moved to the UK when I was 23 and then to Australia for work when I was 32. I have maintained my passport, citizenship and connections to Finland ever since I first left for London in 1999. Later, when my kids came, I embraced my identity as a Nordic mum, because I wanted my kids to know the Finnish part of their heritage.

In 2018, I started my website and podcast *The Nordic Mum* as I wanted to understand what we could do to embrace the Nordic lifestyle more. I used the podcasts to learn more about Nordicness and share it with the people around me. Then when I started researching this book, I looked at my own life and how I still draw from my youth in Finland.

As I explored my heritage by talking about Nordic lifestyle and the people I interviewed on my podcast and writing about it on my blog, I noticed that the content included themes such as sustainability, *hygge*, nature, minimalism and more. I was curious to hear how those people I interviewed saw their culture if they were no longer living in their home country and how they were able to maintain their connection with their Nordic roots. I thought about what I could learn from it. I also talked to expatriates living in the Nordic countries and asked how they found life there.

I wanted to understand the benefits of nature in helping us disconnect and how to live a more minimal Nordic life. How do people in the Nordics manage to spend so much time in pure clean unspoiled nature? Why is nature so important to the Nordic lifestyle? How could I integrate that into my own life?

LEFT: *Fínsko, Lapland*



The slow life that the Nordics still enjoy has not been spoiled as the world has become busier and this was something I wanted to explore and make available to all Nordic lifestyle lovers. I admire how Nordic people have been able to sustain the important things in life.

Sustainability is an important cornerstone concept for a good Nordic lifestyle. Many innovations — particularly around sustainability — come from the Nordic countries. Showing how we can make a difference with our behaviour and actions as well as being eco-friendly is expected from everybody in Nordic society.

Since going deeper into these concepts on the podcast, I wanted to ensure that this book would help you honour and embrace Nordic life wherever you are. My aim with *Nordic Lifestyle: Embrace Slow Living, Cultivate Happiness and Know When to Take Off Your Shoes* is to share the life of my upbringing with people who want to connect with Nordic culture and heritage, as well as those who are curious about the differences between Nordic countries.

In this book, I will talk more about the lifestyle and what it means to come from the Nordics and how you can find Nordicness

where ever you are. If you want to learn more about Nordic lifestyle, heritage and culture, then this book is for you.

Nordic Lifestyle: Embrace Slow Living, Cultivate Happiness and Know When to Take Off Your Shoes is not about Nordic design, or interior styling the Nordic way. There are other books that you can read on those subjects. It's not a country guide either though I have insights on all Nordic countries. It's also not a cookbook, although I have included some recipes that we use in my house on a regular basis to keep us connected to our Finnish roots. This book is more of glimpse into the life of everyday Nordic people to show you what you can learn from them and what you could implement in your own life.

I hope *Nordic Lifestyle* makes you want to learn more about the Nordic countries. If you do, I have included some resources in the back of this book that will help you to find your inner Nordic.

I would like to thank the amazing people I have had the good fortune of interviewing on my podcast The Nordic Mum. Their insights into their cultures and countries have helped me keep this book factual and understand other parts of the Nordics better.

If you want to learn more about my own Nordic lifestyle, you can join my email list and get to know me better at **www.thenordicmum.com**. I promise not to spam you, but instead keep you company like a good friend. You can also find and follow me on Instagram, Twitter or Facebook for some more Nordic lifestyle inspiration.

Without further delay, let's take off our shoes and enter into this cosy Nordic cabin where a hot drink and a good book are waiting for us by the fire.

Let's learn how the Nordics live and why Nordicness could be the next best thing for you...





What does Nordic actually mean?

Imagine you are from the northern part of Europe. No matter which country you think about when I say northern Europe, you no doubt realise that Nordic people have had to put up with a lot to get to where they are today.

Each of the Nordic countries have areas where they excel and things they export overseas. For example, sustainability, FridaysForFuture and the Climate Strike have become synonymous with Greta Thunberg. When you think of the best education in the world, you think about Finland, right? ABBA or IKEA bring to mind Sweden. For many, *hygge* equals Denmark. When asked to imagine Norway, you may think of snow-covered fjords and Iceland recalls those Nordic-style jumpers from a Nordic crime drama.

However cute these images of the Nordics may be, isn't there more to this part of the world than the jumpers? The innovation that comes from Nordics is mind-boggling. Many great inventors and sophisticated processes were originally from the Nordics. Many environmental innovations are from the Nordics too, like green energy from waves, sustainable and eco-friendly fabrics made of seaweed and the use of fish skin in the clothing industry.

People from the Nordics, I think, also feel a companionship with one another. Whenever I have been travelling and come across people from the Nordic countries, I have felt a little pang of belonging. Like the woman I had dinner with at a random restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam many years ago. We had never met before, but we were both dining alone and just started talking. She was from Sweden, backpacking through the area. She had just come across from Cambodia and was on her way to Thailand. We spent the evening talking about

OPENING SPREAD: *Espoo, Finland*

RIGHT: *Steinsdalsfossen, Norheimsund, Norway*

life, travel and missing home. I never saw her again, nor kept in contact, since this was before we had social media. Just talking with her, I remembered home and knew she was feeling the same homesickness as I was, missing the same things, like the snow and the cold climate during the December holiday season.

This meeting was not the only time I've felt this. Another time I saw a man wearing a SISU t-shirt at the Opera Bar in Sydney. I could tell he was not a Finn from the golden tan and sun-kissed hair. After talking with him, I discovered that his mother was a Swedish-Finn married to an Australian and he just happened to get the SISU t-shirt as a present and thought it was a cool word to know.

These meetings with random people have always reminded me of how far we Nordics have travelled and explored the world. However, being Nordic means more than just having a connection with these five North European countries. The countries are tied together with economic, political and cultural ideas too. When Sweden or Finland elects a new prime minister, their first phone calls or foreign trips are to the neighbouring Nordic countries. Our historical ties are strong. The leaders in each country respect and follow similar ideology. Relying on each other's help in times of need is important to Nordic countries, which is strengthened by belonging to The Nordic Council.

Nordic Council being the formal inter-parliamentary Nordic



cooperation among the Nordic countries since 1952 which all Nordic countries and the autonomous areas have representatives.

The people and cultures of the Nordic countries have similar outlooks on life as well. The stillness of society. The no-hurry factor in life. I would argue that slow living is part of us as Nordic people. Perhaps it was created and named in Italy in the 1980s but we Nordics embody this simple way of life by taking it easy and cherishing the important moments.

Since I moved outside Sydney to the south coast of New South Wales in Australia, I have really embraced slow living, becoming more centred in myself, taking those slow walks to taste the air, enjoying the simple things. It has taken me a while to relearn this Nordic way of life after all the bad habits, busyness and looking for the next best thing. My slow life is a work in progress, but I feel more connected to who I am now than when I first arrived in Australia many years ago.

So, how do we define Nordicness? Nordic means many things to many people. For me, it means home. That distant country that I still call home even after all this time abroad. All these peculiarities within my character can be traced to those early years of my life growing up and living in Finland. The outspoken nature, the honesty, the trustworthiness. All that is who and what I am. Nordicness cannot be removed from you.

Here's how you can add some Nordicness to *your* life.





What countries make up the Nordics?

We Finns prefer to talk of Nordic countries, whereas our neighbours like to speak about Scandinavia. So, which countries make up the Nordics? And who belongs to the area known as Scandinavia? Is there a difference? And how are the people different between Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland? What about the language? There's a lot of confusion around all this, so let's simplify.

The Countries

The difference is that the Scandinavian countries include all except Finland. So that is Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Iceland. Nordic countries are all the countries just mentioned plus Finland.

Finland is not part of Scandinavia, even though people talk about Scandinavia as if Finland were included in that group. Strictly speaking, the Finnish language sets us apart and we are not Scandinavian, but Nordic. To confuse you more term Fennoscandia is used at times when talked about Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland.

The basic line is that we all love our neighbours. Unless you mention ice hockey to Sweden and Finland. Or Eurovision to any of the other Nordic countries. There is a friendly competition there. I am sure you get the picture...the neighbour that you love to hate and hate to love, all with good humour, of course.

The Language

Scandinavian countries have the North Germanic (North Scandinavian) language group in common. Finnish, on the other

RIGHT: *Moomin Mug*

hand, is part of the Finno-Ugric language group, which also includes Hungarian, Estonian and the languages used by tribes in some northern parts of Siberia. This separates Finns from our Scandinavian friends, because our language is different.

Most Swedish people understand Norwegian and Danish language. We Finns learn and speak Swedish at school, as it is our official second language. Finns often understand some Estonian and many Estonians can understand and speak Finnish.

Icelandic is different again, as the base of this language is Faroese and western Norwegian dialects.

This may sound complicated, but the truth is that many of the Nordic countries can understand and relate to each other due the similarities in linguistics.

The Islands

Within the Nordic countries, there are islands that do not get mentioned very often. The Faroe Islands, Greenland, Svalbard, Gotland, Lofoten and Åland Islands are part of the Nordics. They might be geographically small (except Greenland), but they have a special place in Nordic hearts for many of us.

The Faroe Islands and Greenland are part of Denmark. However, they are a self-governing archipelago. Greenland is also an autonomous territory of Denmark. Svalbard is a Norwegian archipelago between the mainland and the North Pole. Åland Island is an autonomous island belonging to Finland though physically closer to Sweden. Gotland being largest island on the Baltic Sea belonging to Sweden.

The People

What is the difference between the characteristics of the Nordic people then? I will use some well-known stereotypes here – which might be stretching it! In general, the Finns are a quiet sort and Swedes are considered the talkative ones. Norwegians are commonly considered observant and Danes are said to get

LEFT: *Faroe Islands*

along with everybody. Icelanders are proud and strong-willed.

In this book, I answer how Nordic people are the happiest in the world and dive into how the Nordics live. Given that the darkest period of the year can be pretty miserable, you might wonder how the happiest people can come from the Nordics. And what about summer when the sun does not go down at all and it stays bright all through the night?

As well as discussing the people of the Nordics, I will touch on many aspects of all these countries. Even though I am from Finland and have a Finnish viewpoint, I will be taking you on a journey of discovery what it means to come from the Nordics more widely and exploring how to connect more to this Nordic region. You can have a piece of the Nordic lifestyle for yourself.

To do that, let's first take a look in more detail at some of the more isolated geographic locations.



NEXT SPREAD: *Aleksanterinkatu, Helsinki, Finland*



The Islands of the Nordics

FAROE ISLANDS

This 18 volcanic island group lies 320 km north-northwest of Scotland, towards Norway. The islands are beautiful, isolated and a destination for many who are passionate about bird-watching.

These islands, in the north Atlantic Ocean belong to Denmark. However, though the Faroe Islands are an autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark, if you ask the locals, you'll soon find out that they see themselves as independent from Denmark.

The official language is Faroese, while Danish is taught in schools as a second language.

Although the Faroe Islands are connected to Denmark, they are very proud of their independent status. A political struggle has taken place over Faroese currency and voting in recent years. Changes have been made on how the Faroese people govern their land, though it is still done with the help of mainland Denmark.

The Faroe Islands have recently lifted their status as a tourism destination for those looking for a more secluded part of the Nordics to visit. Bird-watching, especially viewing the puffin colony, is one of the most famous things to do along with hiking, kayaking, fishing and just taking in the rugged but beautiful landscape.

Because of the isolated location, the Faroe Islands are one of those destinations for people who truly want to explore off the beaten track. It is top of my destinations to visit one day and I recommend adding it to your list to visit before the crowds arrive!

GREENLAND

This large island is located between the Canadian Arctic Archipelago and the Nordic countries in the north Atlantic Ocean. It is geographically closer to North America than to the Nordics.

The Inuit people were the first to inhabit Greenland, which nowadays is an autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark.

Inuit people lived in Greenland for centuries before the Vikings arrived. However, the first permanent settlers were the Vikings in the 10th century. There were two colonies established for walrus ivory hunting, which was an in-demand product in Medieval Europe. Hunting continued until the 15th century when the colonies disappeared due to the Black Death and the market for walrus ivory declining.

Today, Greenland and particularly its capital Nook is a tourist and scientific destination. Greenland has an active US military base: the Thule Air Base. There was controversy about the location of a nuclear-powered base US Camp Century that was built on an ice sheet in the late 1950's. Locals did not want a nuclear-powered base on their territory – and with the melting icecaps, you might agree with their reservations! US Camp Century was later abandoned and the buried nuclear waste has become an environmental concern.

Many scientists visiting Greenland have provided analysis about the changes to the thinning icecaps. Over the years, these changes have made locals wary of what is happening to their traditional whaling and hunting of seals and other sealife as the ice disappears.

Greenland offers tours to educate tourists about icecap changes. You can explore icecaps by diving, flying over, skiing or hiking, but you can expect a more sustainable approach than any of these if you're lucky enough to visit Greenland. I would recommend getting there quick, as climate change and the alteration in how the ice behaves will have a lasting impact on the nature that you can view in this part of the world.

ÅLAND ISLAND

This island is nestled between Sweden and Finland and has an autonomous and demilitarised position. It has its own parliament and representation in the Finnish parliament too. The main language there is Swedish and Åland has a distinctive

NEXT SPREAD: *Lofoten Islands, Svolvær, Norway*



Swedish cultural heritage. Though it belongs to Finland, the people on the island call themselves Ålanders.

The capital Mariehamn is known for its slow lifestyle, wooden houses, handcrafts and cafes where you can explore the local life. There are interesting books written about the island and Finnish author Helena Halme has a whole series about a family living there for those looking for a romantic twist on Nordic life.

GOTLAND

This largest island in the Baltic Sea is nestled close to the southwest coast of the Swedish mainland. Gotland has been inhabited since 7000 BC and there are many burial sites along the island that can be traced back to the pre-Viking era. Many silver and bronze treasures from the Viking era have been uncovered and history places Gotland as a significant commercial trading hub for Vikings.

Today Gotland is fully integrated part of Swedish society and an important tourist destination. It is also strategic for the Swedish defence who have had a presence on the island for hundreds of years. If visiting Gotland, you would be astonished by the number of medieval churches the island has and the Viking era buildings that are UNESCO heritage listed in the town of Visby.

SVALBARD

This island group is found between Norway and the North Pole. The islands are the world's northernmost inhabited area and were first used as a base for whalers who sailed far north in the 17th and 18th centuries. After this period, the islands were abandoned.

Later came coal mining, which had an impact on the islands. Nowadays, tourism is encouraged and is one of the main sources of income. Many visit the island to see the rugged glaciers, polar bears, reindeer and arctic foxes. The Northern Lights are visible many nights during the winter and it is somewhere that you can experience the midnight sun, when the sun does not set in the summer skies and shines through out the night. Today, Svalbard is a free economic and demilitarised zone of Norway.

LOFOTEN ISLANDS

The Lofoten Islands lie on the northern end of Norway's west coast. The islands are connected by bridges to the mainland and are known for their dramatic landscape and nature. They are a hive of activity for fisherman and there is evidence that they were settled before the Viking times. You can island-hop and visit many of the beautiful villages of the Lofoten Islands as well as enjoying a visit to the local Viking museums.

I've introduced you to the place, but the Nordic countries and territories wouldn't be what they are without Nordic people. In Part Two, I will introduce you to some intriguing folks who live or have lived in this part of the world, but before I do, here are a few must-know concepts from the Nordic languages that will help you navigate the rest of this book.