

Nordic Islands' Cuisine

Restaurant Alexander is named in homage to the last noble owner of Pädaste Manor, Alexander von Buxhoeveden. Alex – as he was known by intimae – had considerable gravitas and impact on local island life, after all he was the Land Marshall and as such the highest in command. His considerable wealth as well as his position as a confidant of the last Tsar's inner circle at the court of St Petersburg certainly would have helped him to realise his quest.

Little known is Alexander's passion for nature; he was an ardent collector of trees brought home from his frequent travels, many of which still line our park. In his own way Alexander was not unlike many ordinary inhabitants of Muhu Island, who for centuries combined the love for their own shores with new discoveries from neighbouring island communities. In this spirit I wish to introduce you to our Nordic Islands' cuisine.

When I bought the Pädaste Estate together with Imre Sooäär in 1996, we envisioned creating a destination hotel offering a distinct sense of place - deeply rooted in the unique environs of Muhu that had so captured our imagination. From there on our journey was guided by the seasons and the fascination for the terroir.

Throughout the ages islanders have been great sailors - no doubt they are by definition more adventurous than mainlanders, eager to explore and discover. The inhabitants of Muhu Island have always had a harmonious relationship with other islanders across the sea, dating back to well before the 19th century, when the concept of a nation state brought Muhu into the orbit of the mainland.

Interactions among the Baltic Sea islands were intensive, the travels of Muhu seamen to Gotland and other islands in the region are well documented with barges connecting the islands in weekly intervals.

For most of its past, the Muhu Island community has thus been influenced by other seafaring communities in the Nordic Islands region such as Gotland, Bornholm, Åland Öland and Rügen, as well as our neighbouring islands Saaremaa and Hiiumaa - an influence that is very noticeable in the food and cultural traditions of Muhu families to this day.

Here at Pädaste Manor we decided to backtrace, to unfold and rediscover along the paths of these traditions and to embark on what we decided to call our *Expedition in Search of the Nordic Islands' Cuisine*.

This fascinating venture involves visits to our fellow Island communities and their farmers, artisans, fishermen and hunters and at the same time is also a conceptual journey, discovering our terroir.

We offer flavours which get their character from the produce, techniques and recipes originating in the Nordic Islands - the terroir and the seasons are guiding us in our cuisine.

Despite their diverse geographical locations, the islands of the Nordic Islands' Cuisine area share many similarities: flavourful meats such as high quality lamb, venison, moose and wild boar, glorious fish such as flounder, cod and whitefish, not forgetting root vegetables, honey, herbs, leeks, wild mushrooms and a plethora of berries. Forests, meadows and the shores of the Estate offer an abundance of wild greens and herbs for daily foraging.

One of the locals' favourite wildflowers, picked each spring after the snow melts, must be named Keys of Heaven for good reason. These little golden gems will light your way to the cuisine of the Nordic Islands and are a fitting inspiration on this voyage of discovery.



Martin Breuer
Restaurateur & Hotelier