

Must have Swedish delicacies

On 11 December, the Swedish Embassy held a Nobel-themed dinner as part of the observance of Nobel Week; another banquet was arranged on 13 December, as part of celebration of St. Lucy's Day. Renowned Swedish chef, Magnus Albrektsson was flown in to take charge of the kitchen and oversee the culinary aspects of the events. In 2007, Chef Albrektsson was one of the chefs for the prestigious Nobel Dinner and has worked across the globe in various positions.

Star Lifestyle caught up with the revered chef and asked about his favourite Swedish dishes. The following are just snippets from the culinary marvels of Sweden, recommended by the chef himself.

A HERRING APART

If you like herring, you will love pickled herring. "Prepared with vinegar and other goodies, pickled herring is usually eaten with potatoes, sour cream and chopped onions," chef Albrektsson says.

THE GREAT GRAVLAX

Gravlax is salmon cured in salt, sugar, dill and white pep-



per. For Albrektsson, gravlax is a must-have in all Swedish celebrations. "The food never fails to make an appearance at traditional buffets during festivities", he explains.

THE TASTY TOAST SKAGEN

Toast Skagen, a food the Swedish are in love with, is one of Tore Wretman's inventions. It is essentially butter-fried crispy

toast topped with shrimps and mayonnaise. "Tore Wretman is like a father figure for Swedish chefs, and the dishes that he created enormously contributed to our country's culinary scene," Albrektsson informs.

FOR THE LOVE OF MEATBALLS

Everybody loves meatballs. And the Swedish people are not an exception - except that they make some exceptional meatballs with cream sauce, lingonberries and pickled cucumber. "It's something I long for when I am away from my country," Albrektsson puts his seal of recommendation.

AND FINALLY, PANCAKES!

Served with jams of various berries (and of course no one leaves Sweden without tasting lingonberry jam), and whipped cream, the rather thin Swedish pancakes are a delicacy. "It is a tradition to eat these pancakes on Thursdays after the yellow pea soup," the chef says.

Bon appetit!

By M H Haider

Photo: Mehedi Hasan

Christmas – celebrating with food

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SRI LANKA

In the island nation of Sri Lanka, celebration of Christmas is universal to all communities, even though only around 7 percent of the population is Christian. Come December the whole country is abuzz in preparation for the festive season. Decorations are everywhere, special Christmas markets are set up on the streets and Christmas songs are blaring from buses and hotels.

Like in India, the food for the occasion reflects the local favorites as well as the colonial influences of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British.

The fact that all communities in Sri Lanka are able to prepare Christmas festive food is partly made possible by the publication of the book "Ceylon Daily News Cookery Book" by Hilda Deutrom at the turn of the 20th century. It was a must have for all middle class housewives, and the recipes from this

pioneering book formed the basis of the Christmas cake and other goodies.

The first of December heralds two important activities - the setting up of the Christmas tree, gaily decorated with bangles, balloons and stringers; and making of the Christmas cake. Although the idea of a fruit cake is borrowed from the English, the Sri Lankans have created their own version.

The dried fruits are all painstakingly chopped by hand. The fruits include local varieties like chow-chow preserve and pumpkin preserve. Cashew nuts are also chopped by hand. The mix is then soaked for a day either in brandy or local coconut 'arrack'. It is then mixed with eggs, flour and spices. The large quantities of cake mixes are then sent to the local bakery to be baked in slow, large ovens. The result is a delectable, brown, moist cake. Again liquor is sprinkled on top so that the cake can keep long. The cake is then sliced and carefully wrapped in festive paper to be shared

among friends and family.

Another Sri Lankan Christmas specialty is 'breudher'. A cake with Dutch influences, often eaten with a piece of Dutch cheese. Another specialty is Love Cake, made with semolina and spices and harking to the Portuguese era.

The main Christmas meal, which could be lunch or dinner, has to be accompanied by local delicacies such as yellow rice, chicken dry roast, fried eggplant curry, spicy potato curry, cashew nut curry, pol sambol made with coconut and fish.

Middle and upper class sometimes go for the more western style turkey with all the trimmings. Homemade leg of ham soaked in beer and baked slowly with spices is also included.

Dessert could be vattalappamor coconut custard and Christmas cake. Also a must for Christmas is the Yule Log. A chocolate roll smothered in chocolate and cream, topped

with a little ceramic robin sitting among red and green holly.

PAKISTAN AND NEPAL

Christians form a small community in Pakistan, which is a predominantly Muslim country, and in Nepal, a predominantly Hindu/Buddhist nation. Christmas day in both countries is declared a public holiday and the Christians celebrate with decorations, lights and carol singing in churches. Pakistan has a rich food tradition which the locals draw upon. The hotels and bakeries in the cities also offer Christmas cakes, Christmas puddings and other festive food.

In the mountain nation too, all Nepalese join in the festivities as they would with other festivals. The Christmas feasts could be western style turkey roast or traditional dishes like 'momo'.

By Vallinaciyar

Photo: Collected

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