**Island:** Gotland
**Country:** Sweden
**Local Recipe Name:** Saffranspannkaka med psalmbärssylt och grädde
**English Name:** Saffron pancake with dewberry jam and whipped cream
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**Preparation time:** 60 min**; Cooking time:** 30 min; **Serves 4**

## Ingredients

½ cup porridge rice
200 ml water
½ teaspoon salt
½ cinnamon stick
500ml full fat milk
½ tablespoon butter

2 eggs
250ml (11/2 cup cream)
50 g scalded, chopped almonds
½ tablespoon flour
1 tablespoon honey
½ teaspoon vanilla sugar
½ teaspoon ground cardamom
0,5 g saffron (one packet)

Dewberry jam (or boysenberry, raspberry, blueberry jam) and whipped cream for topping.

## Method

1. Boil the rice with water and salt until the water is absorbed. Add milk, butter, salt and cinnamon. Simmer over a low heat until soft, about 30-40 minutes. Stir every now and then. Add extra milk if needed. Cool slightly.
2. Preheat the oven to $175^0$C ($350^0$F).
3. Whisk eggs and cream together lightly. Beat the mixture into the porridge.
4. Heat the honey slightly and mix with saffron. Stir into the porridge with flour, vanilla sugar, chopped almonds and cardamom. Pour the rice mixture into a spatious, sallow, buttered oven-proof dish.
5. Bake on the lower shelf of the oven until set, for approx. 30 minutes.

*Serving Suggestion*: Serve the saffron pancake lightly cooled, with jam and whipped cream.

## Origins and Transformations

Sweden is a country with a distinctively continental self-image. Yet, Sweden has no less than 221,800 islands. If the many islands in the Swedish speaking areas along the west coast of Finland and in the Åland archipelago are included, Sweden is probably second only to Canada as the largest island-nation in the world.

A consequence of the continental self- image, and of a centuries old centralist policies, is that most Swedish islands have been effectively marginalized, which, in turn, has lead to a rapid depopulation. In the year 1900, there were 815 permanently inhabited islands without fixed links to the mainland. In 2005, there were 401, out of which 297 had less than 10 inhabitants.

Moreover, Gotland, once one of the most prosperous places in Northern Europe, has long since been a marginalized part of Sweden. It is Sweden's largest island, 170 km long and 52 km wide, with a total land area of 3,140 $km^2$. It is situated in the Baltic Sea, some 100 km from the Swedish mainland, and 180 km from the Estonian coast. Around 58,000 people live here permanently, less than 2% of Sweden's population. Approximately 22,000 live in Visby, the capital, on the island's west coast.

Politically, economically, and in terms of communication, Gotland is effectively tied to the Swedish east coast, and especially to the Stockholm area. While earlier airfares were out of reach for most islanders, and ferries took a good 6 hours to reach the east coast, today modern high speed ferries makes the trip in just over three hours, and by air it is a reasonably cheap 40 minute flight from Stockholm. Earlier, Gotlanders travelled also eastwards, but during the Cold War Gotland became one of the most militarized parts of Sweden. Although more than two decades have passed since the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the demilitarization that followed, there are still no regular connections eastwards; the Baltic countries can be reached only through Stockholm.

Traditionally, Gotland is farming area. Today the workers and farmers are few, while the urban middle-class is rapidly increasing. Most Gotlanders have low earnings; for some time now they have been firmly fixed at the bottom of the country's list for taxed income per capita. Unemployment is high, particularly among young people. The population falls into three main categories. 75% are Gotlanders born on the island. About 15% are mainlanders, most of which are born in Stockholm County. Approximately 10% are immigrants from abroad, many of which have lived for long on the island and are well integrated socially and culturally.

The island has long exerted an especially powerful attraction on expressive specialists: intellectuals, artists, crafts persons and musicians. Today it is likely that there are more expressive specialists in relation to population size than anywhere else in the country. The impact of tourism is great, which makes for a strong seasonality. Around 1.5 million visit the island yearly, mostly during a short yet intensive summer, from mid-June to mid-August. To many tourists, Gotland is an Eden of a sort, to which they retreat from the anxieties of modern everyday mainland life.

Saffron pancake today is the most well-known 'typical Gotlandic dish', served with whipped cream and dewberries, all year around, in most cafés and restaurants, all over the island. Dewberries, sometimes called blue or black raspberries, is a local speciality that grow wild in ditch-banks in the island, but are seldom found in the Swedish mainland.

The common story that you will find in homepages, books and brochures intended for the tourist market is that saffron pancake is a common, traditional dish, with a long history on the island. Some connect the saffron with the supposedly wealthy Gotlandic peasantry of the $17^{th}$ and $18^{th}$ centuries. Others see it as a legacy of the middle ages, when spices were status symbols and Gotland was both a trade centre that had access to these exotic imports and wealthy enough to be able to afford such luxuries. It is said that, to be authentic, a saffron pancake has to contain seven foreign and seven local ingredients. In this recipe, the foreign

ingredients are rice, salt, cinnamon, almonds, saffron, vanilla and cardamom. The local ingredients are water, milk, egg, cream, flour, honey and butter.

There is however little historical evidence of a long saffron pancake tradition on Gotland. From the few documents where the dish is mentioned, no certain conclusions can be drawn. In Gotland, as in many other parts of Sweden, rice porridge was often served for Christmas. Rice pudding, with eggs and cream, were among the dishes that were commonly considered to be somewhat finer (richer, nicer) and therefore often used as *förning*, that is, food brought along to festivities as gifts to the host, at weddings, funerals and birthday parties. Especially during Christmas, there were many ritualized festive occasions, to which food had to be collectively collected, distributed and consumed. Adding saffron at such occasions was a way of adding value both to the food and to the occasion. Moreover, adding saffron, eggs and cream was a way to 'save' or 'remake' porridge that had become sour during Christmas.

In spite of the uncertainty surrounding its origins, saffron pancake has been produced as a typical Gotland dessert during the last three or four decades: presented as traditional, old, even archaic, locally distinctive, and even endemic. In short, the dish has been 'islanded'. From my childhood, in the 1950s, I cannot remember having heard about saffron pancake, nor can I remember any instance when saffron pancake was served. And to my parents, as to many other Gotlanders of their generation, saffron pancake was an oddity up to at least the 1970s, when the victorious advance of the dish as typically Gotlandic seems to have begun. There are a number of explanations to why this may have happened.

First, is the regionalization of national symbols. In the early 20th century, a wave of nationalism swept over Sweden, centering not so much on the nation, as on *landskap*, regions or counties. Over the years, these regions have been ascribed with much of the ideas, symbols and paraphernalia that in other countries are attributed to the nation: a distinct history, folk music, costumes, customs, food, even 'landscape animals' and 'landscape flowers'. So when, in the 1970s, a new-born interest in folk traditions turned Gotlandic traditions and island roots into valuable assets among young islanders, there was already a demand from the outside to produce typical Gotlandic food of a certain format. To the lamb steak as main course, and the homemade ale, or *dricke*, saffron pancake was added as a suitable local dessert.

A second reason is transnational compatibility. Partly, the 'roots movement' had to do with the expanding tourist industry. During the 1970s and 80s, a large number of Swedes spent their summer holidays in Spain, France, Italy and Greece, enjoying a variety of 'local specialties' in the restaurants. In the same period, tourism in Gotland boomed. Most of the visitors were Swedes, and these would ask for 'local specialties' compatible to the menus of the Mediterranean tourist restaurants. Again, while lamb steak provided a good start, the saffron pancake made a good companion, the perfect local dessert, exotic, endemic, islandic.

Glocalization is a third explanation. In the 1980s, an intensification of heritage production began in Gotland. In a remarkably short time, 'The Hanseatic town of Visby' was created, one of Sweden's most postmodern cities, a creation of urban space and European medievalism, cast in a limestone-grey and rose-red poetry. A process of gentrification began, transforming the somewhat shabby quarters of the old town into the genteel habitat of a new, aesthetic and intellectual elite. By charging the old town with the double authenticities of a mythical medievalism and an equally mythical islandness, Visby was uncoupled from the rest of the island, formatted and launched as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, a trade mark, symbol, and logo for a new class, a new time, a new world. An important component of this package is a series of exclusive restaurants serving local food and drink. A standard menu of such restaurants soon became soup from *kajp* (wild leek) or *ramslök* (bears garlic, or buckrams)

that grow wild all over the island, lamb steak and, of course, saffron pancake. This standard Gotlandic menu is a fine example of glocalization, when the locally distinctive is produced and formatted to meet global standards.

A fourth reason is islanding. During recent decades, Gotland has been actively produced as a place apart, remote, 'almost abroad, and just 'a short trip far away'. In 2008, 'Magical Gotland' was designated as the island's new official trademark or brand name, in an attempt to promote Gotland as a tourist destination on the same market as many other Northern European islands, such as Bornholm, Ven, Åland, Sült, Rügen and Jersey. Important to these destinations are notions of an exclusive remoteness and an island magic. To the core of this island magic belongs the idea of a certain island 'terroir', offering a distinct island flavour in locally produced food, beer, wine, and spirit, all served in a growing number of highly prized restaurants dedicated to island specialties.

To summarize: behind the recent spread of the saffron pancake as a typically traditional, archaic and endemic Gotlandic dish are a number of regional, national and global trends and tendencies, such as those I have outlined above. Yet, to the list of explanations, one other must be added: the simple fact that the saffron pancake is tasty; people seem to enjoy eating it.

**Further Reading**


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**Homepages:**


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http://www.skargardssmak.com/start.con?iLan=3

European Network of Regional Culinary Heritage. http://www.culinary-heritage.com/index.asp