

# Vacations & Travel

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## THE Taste issue

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# Net gains



In Lofoten, a new wave of restaurants and wine bars is emerging inside former fishing factories and cabins, where proximity to the sea still defines the plate. *Chloe Frost-Smith* reports.



OPENING PAGES, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Trevarefabrikken café; Seaside gathering at Trevarefabrikken; Life in Lofoten revolves around the water © Chloe Frost-Smith; Breakfast in Nusfjord © Chloe Frost-Smith; Trevarefabrikken wine bar  
 OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The hotel at Trevarefabrikken is housed in a former cod liver oil factory © Chloe Frost-Smith; Nusfjord's wild beauty © Chloe Frost-Smith; Seafood rules the menu at Trevarefabrikken; Lofoten's cabins are being repurposed © Chloe Frost-Smith; Trandampeniet wine bar; Drinks with a view at Trevarefabrikken

**T**he Arctic waters surrounding Lofoten, which swirl with skrei and saithe, are still a lifeline for this remote archipelago jutting out from Norway's north-west coast in a narrow smattering of mountain-crested islands known for exporting stockfish. For centuries, fishing has been the reason people came, stayed and survived above the Arctic Circle.

Today, that heritage is being reworked with new-gen style, as weather-beaten cabins, boathouses and fish-processing buildings are transformed into some of Scandinavia's most atmospheric places to sample the fruits of the sea. In Lofoten, taste is inseparable from place: the salt-laced air, the cold whip of wind off the water, and fish brought ashore mere hours before it reaches the plate.

It is not the soft pink glow of sunrise above the glacial peaks that wakes me one winter morning, nor the wind bringing cries from sea birds gliding over foaming waves. It's the crunching, shovelling and shaking of grit onto the pontoon, a sound I initially resent, until I realise it signals the start of another working day in the harbour of Nusfjord. Fishermen move confidently across the ice, hauling creels heavy with fish into an old boathouse. By evening, that same building glows with candlelight and ship lanterns, reborn as an intimate dining room where the catch is served simply, as visitors mingle with local crew members. This daily choreography has played out for generations in this fjord-cradled village that once housed fishermen arriving from all corners of Norway for the winter cod season.

### SLEEPING WITH THE CATCH

Those fishermen slept shoulder to shoulder in traditional rorbuer – red-painted wooden cabins perched on stilts above the water. Many of them now form part of Nusfjord Village & Resort, where preserved timber walls are still lined with boating tools and nets, and salt-sprayed windows dressed in sail canvas-style linens.

Staying here feels like inhabiting a piece of seafaring history: the architecture exists because of fish. It's the closest you can come to sleeping at sea without actually boarding a boat, set to the soundtrack of sloshing waves which lulled many a visiting fisherman to bed after braving the elements.

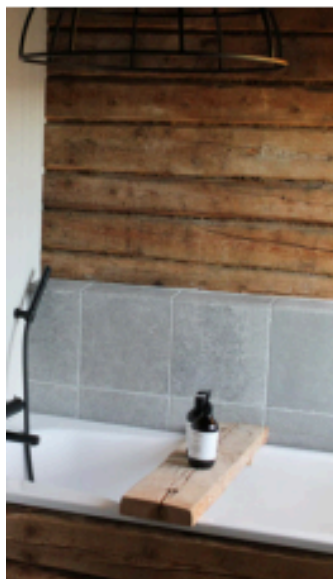
Every meal reinforces that lineage, too. Old salt stores and fish-packing warehouses now house restaurants and taverns, where menus lean heavily on the sea – cod cheeks, haddock, halibut and creamy fish soups fortified against the cold. At Landhandleriet, the village's former general store turned waterfront café, even simple open sandwiches feel elevated, topped with seaweed foraged from nearby shores for a natural hit of salt.

A bountiful provider in these parts, the sea is always to be respected – but it is the wind that dictates the day's movements, especially for Nusfjord's captains. Strong winds can turn trawling the deep sea for precious fish into a full-blown Arctic expedition, whipping up white horse waves and giant swells. Without even a whisper of a breeze though, the coastline might be draped in skodde (the local term for 'ocean fog') for days on end. Eventually, when conditions allow, boats venture out to fish, lines dropped into steel-blue depths.



### TRAVEL FACTS

nusfjord.com  
 trevarefabrikken.no



## FACTORY SETTINGS

Further south, in the fishing village of Henningsvær, Trevarefabrikken is a former cod liver oil factory from the 1940s by two pairs of Bergen-based brothers with the feel of an industrial East London hangout. Once filled with thousands of litres of rendered oil during skrei season, the raw concrete and timber-framed building now houses a hotel, restaurant, wine bar, yoga studio and sauna overlooking the wild edge of Vestfjord. Its bare-bones dining spaces lean into the building's industrial past, pairing seafood-heavy menus with

funky natural wines and long communal tables crafted from local larch trees, where conversation stretches into the cold night.

On the first floor, Hermetikken – a nod to the site's cannery days when freshly caught shrimp was peeled and packaged by hand – serves everything from local cod burgers to wood-fired pizza, attracting fishermen, hikers and artists alike. Above it, Trandamperiet occupies what was once a storage space for cod liver oil, now repurposed as an industrial-chic wine bar that hosts vinyl nights and tastings. The idea of transformation is literal here:

places built to process fish are now places to savour it, slowly, with a glass in hand and the ice-blue horizon always in view.

As the tiny propeller plane hums along the snow-dusted runway, skimming low over islands strung together like pearls, I unwrap one last open sandwich for the journey – smoked salmon slicked with sour cream and juniper berries picked from hardy coastal shrubs. It's a simple meal, assembled for sustenance. And delicious as it is, I come to realise that the most memorable meal of all in Lofoten is made from the fish you catch yourself. ☪