

5 Scandinavian secrets to a happier, healthier life

- [Kaiser Permanente, Thrive](#)

Scandinavian winters are dark, cold, and long. Depending on the city, a typical day could have little to no sunshine, freezing temperatures, and lots of snow. Some people might see those conditions as a recipe for seasonal depression. But despite their harsh winters, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Iceland have topped the World Happiness Report — which surveys 156 countries by asking their citizens how happy they are — for several years in a row.

So, what is it that makes Scandinavian people so content? The answer may lie in their approach to life — which contains several feel-good philosophies that promote an overall sense of well-being. Let's take a look.

1. Fika paus

The Swedish term fika paus roughly translates to “coffee break.” But there's more to it than just grabbing a cup of joe and rushing back to work. A fika paus is more like a social ritual, giving you time to rest and reset. It consists of coffee, typically accompanied by a sweet treat, and is meant to be enjoyed with others and away from work. In Sweden, fika paus is so important that work is often scheduled around these breaks — and not the other way around.

How it helps: Prioritizing time for breaks and socializing each day can help with work-life balance, which may reduce stress.

2. Friluftsliv

Spending time in nature is a practice that takes many forms in many cultures around the world. In Japan, it's known as shinrin yoku, or forest bathing. In Norway, it's known as friluftsliv, or open-air living. But while forest bathing encourages you to spend time immersed in nature for a few minutes each day, friluftsliv is more indulgent. Rain or shine, it's a commitment to getting the most out of those outdoor moments — whether it's long camping trips through the mountains or leisurely strolls on the beach with friends.

How it helps: Time spent outside — even if it's just at an urban park — can have a positive impact on our sense of well-being.

3. Gokotta

The Swedish idea of gokotta takes friluftsliv one step further. It's the act of waking up early in the morning to go outside and listen to the birds sing.

How it helps: On its own, waking up early can make you more proactive — meaning you're more likely to get things done. But with gokotta, you're also spending quality time in nature. So, from the moment you wake up, you're boosting productivity and your sense of well-being.

4. Hygge

The long, dark hours of winter can take their toll. But instead of dreading the winter months, the Danish concept of hygge encourages you to embrace them. Hygge is about celebrating coziness and turning it into a type of self-care. Lighting candles, sipping your favorite tea, putting on a pair of fuzzy socks — these acts are hygge in practice. And the key to this practice is to find the joy in feeling warm and fuzzy, inside and out.

How it helps: Focusing on the positives in life — like getting cozy when it's dark and snowy — can increase your overall sense of well-being.

5. Lagom

Balance is essential to living a healthy life. Roughly translating to “just the right amount,” the Swedish and Norwegian concept of lagom is about making it a priority to always find balance in every part of life.

How it helps: Many things can be harmful to your health if not done in moderation — from overeating to not moving enough throughout the day to working long hours without breaks. This is why the concept of lagom is important. Finding the right balance can help you avoid damaging your health.

Bottom line

Happiness isn't a location — it's a state of mind. By putting these Scandinavian philosophies into practice, you may find yourself feeling happier over time and living a more fulfilling everyday life.