

Easter in Norway

Compiled by Janna Armbruster

Bun Sunday or Carnival, starts the season leading to Easter, or as the Norwegians call Easter, *Paskedag*. Much like the Mardi Gras in New Orleans here in America, it ends the season after Christmas and prepares one for the somber season of Lent leading to Easter. Special buns, called *Fastelavnsboller* in Norwegian are baked, cut in half and layered with whipped cream or soy milk. Sometimes a vanilla custard becomes the filling. There is a great U tube video that leads you through all the steps to make them in English by a delightful Norwegian girl.

In Norway, Easter is a religious holiday. It occurs always on a Sunday but follows the church calendar for Lent. Even though Easter is a religious holiday, Norwegians enjoy the social and family activities associated with it. A week of activity precedes Easter Sunday starting with Palm Sunday when Norwegians decorate their homes to welcome visitors. Maundy Thursday or Holy Thursday commemorates the Last Supper, Jesus shared with his disciples. In Norway it is a public holiday as is Good Friday and the Saturday following it. Businesses and shopping stores are shut down until the Tuesday following Easter. Hardest on the Norwegians is the closing of all liquor stores for the whole week. This is such a big deal that the Radio station does a countdown prior to the Wednesday before Easter reminding folks that they only have so much time to load up their supplies. The *polet(vinmonopolet)* which sells any alcoholic beverages above 5% shuts down at 3:00 p.m. on the Wednesday before Maundy Thursday. It does not open until Tuesday after Easter.

Aside from the religious services, Easter is the time to decorate the house with fresh spring greenery, change the curtains to light colors and use yellow wherever they could find it. Yellow is BIG. Paper products are yellow. Many items in stores are wrapped in yellow. Yellow flowers such as daffodils and tulips are given as gifts to neighbors and relatives. Birch branches are cut and hung with decorated eggs.

Easter morning, early Norwegians would climb to the top of a mountain to see the sun come up. They thought the sun danced for joy for the resurrection of the Christ. Very little baking was done as the stores laid aside for the winter were fairly depleted by Easter.

Of course food now becomes a major part of Norwegian Easter Celebrations. Easter breakfast or brunch is usually different kinds of egg dishes, scrambled, hard boiled, fried, along with pancakes and fish. Cured meats are also on the table. Yeast breads, and cakes take center stage on the table. Most of all Norwegians love chocolate and their favorite is *Krikk lunsj*. Second favorite are oranges. Oranges originally were traded and imported from Spain in early spring just in time for Easter. An article from the New York Times once reported that over 20 million oranges were consumed during Easter Week. It is now known that was a conservative estimate. .

Today, Easter being a weeklong event from the Wednesday before Easter to the Tuesday after Easter, many Norwegians take the time to travel to a warmer vacation spot. Lines at the Ferries are long and the roadways congested as Norwegians get away to the snow for skiing. Time to enjoy the outdoors is treasured by all Norwegians. Those who do vacation at home spend their time reading crime novels, and watching detective programs which are the big thing on T.V. Popular reruns are Agatha Christi, PD James and Ruth Randell. Publishers bring out a series of crime books and detective stories just for this week. Milk cartons carry pictures of crime clues, crime stories or teasers on upcoming crime books coming out.

Does the Easter Bunny make an appearance? Not in Norway. Norwegians celebrate with Easter chicken and eggs. Chickens are a symbol of fertility and lust along with dawn and the sun. The theme of rebirth among plants and animals dominates. The Easter Bunny has only appeared in Norway recently with the advent of worldwide media. The mixture of pagan and Christian traditions make Easter in Norway uniquely charming.