

# Take Norwegian advice for a happy winter

Those of us who live in the northern regions of the country or visit them know that winter-washed landscapes, stark and white, with freezing temperatures and shorter days nudge us to snuggle up indoors. Sometimes nestled close to the glow of a fire, perhaps with a book. If you are like me, this sounds like the perfect way to enjoy the colder months. But there is a nature-inspired way, which is even better.

It is a Norwegian concept called *koselig* (pronounced *koosh-lee*) which emphasizes being cozy — outdoors. Think of *koselig* as conjuring up that same toasty feeling of curling up next to a fireplace by bundling up warmly enough to enjoy being outside, experiencing the refreshment that nature serves up in winter.

*Koselig* is *friluftsliv*'s (pronounced *free-loofts-liv*) or the Norwegian's open-air living philosophy's cozy cousin and looks something like this scene I recall of cross-country skiing in a sparkling meadow many years ago. It was at least minus 20 degrees that evening with the temperature plunging with the setting of the sun. A fresh layer of snow was luminescent, lit by the beacon of a full moon in an inky blue sky.

I was dressed for the extreme cold that night — wearing base layers coupled with the customary Fair Isle wool sweater, knickers and tall socks with gaiters to cover my leather, lace-up ski boots, which was the winter attire of the times. Mittens, a knit scarf and a fleece hat with flaps that tied under my chin added to the cozy, which is just one of the key concepts of *koselig*.

There is more to the concept than just keeping

warm outdoors. *Koselig* also mixes in the elements of connecting with friends and celebrating nature.

To illustrate, on that same cold night years ago, I was joined by friends who shared the experience with me. As the stars entered the sky one by one and we trickled off in various directions to ski under a canopy of constellations, a few non-skiers gathered around the warm elegance of a bonfire, hot cocoa in hand. Orange flickers from the crackling wood revealed smiling faces while the quiet of the night was broken by laughter, conversation and the call of a coyote echoing across the frozen landscape. Soon enough, the skiers gathered around the outdoor fire too, huddling under soft-wool blankets as a moose grazed on bare willow branches far off in the distance.

This memorable outdoor gathering had all the elements needed to enjoy winter like a hearty Nordic dweller. Notably, Norway consistently ranks high on the list of the happiest places in the world despite winter's scarce sunlight and frigid temperatures at its locale that kisses the Arctic Circle. By paying attention to what works for the Norwegians, we too can elevate our emotional well-being by incorporating the valuable wisdom of *koselig* into our wintertime activities.

The Norwegian concept helps us because it has been shown that taking a break in nature has a positive effect on our overall mindset. And *koselig*'s focus on social connections gives us more meaning in our lives while having fun outdoors is a natural de-stressor.

A friend tells me he takes a novel approach to this idea by balancing both indoor and outdoor

coziness. He bridges activity with non-activity during the short days of winter in order to enhance the effects of both, emphasizing that if you are dressed warmly, then there is nothing more lovely than being outdoors in the snow. After all, he reminds me, "The Norwegians are known for saying, "There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes.""

For him, breathing in the fresh air and taking a few laps on skate skis are exhilarating. The time he spends enjoying nature out in winter's frosty beauty enhances his time indoors by making it feel more relaxing. If he didn't have the outdoors, he says he would not enjoy being inside as much. One helps him enjoy the other.

That is what *koselig* is really about — finding pleasure and contentment from within. Staying cozy and connected while celebrating the outdoors are the Norwegians' keys to winter wellness the natural way, and there are many ways to personalize this approach.

We can soak in the brilliance of winter and its regenerating benefits by bundling up and taking a walk with a friend or building a snow sculpture or igloo in the backyard or a park. With *koselig*, the emphasis is on cozy, so add in a thermos of hot cocoa or a bonfire to enhance the effect. Simply, cozy up outdoors, enjoy nature and connect with others. This is winter's invitation to nurture our well-being.

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## Nature Rx

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