

Island Logic: Why Ærø Is the Perfect Laboratory for Sustainable Seafood

Islands have a way of clarifying things. When you are surrounded by water and connected to the mainland only by a ferry that runs a few times a day, the question of where your food comes from is not abstract. It is immediate. It is practical. It is, in a very real sense, the water you can see from the kitchen window.



Ærø is a small island in the South Funen Archipelago, a constellation of Danish islands where the sea has always shaped daily life. Marstal, the town where Marstang Mad & Vin is located, has a history rooted in maritime trade and fishing that stretches back centuries. The fishermen who still work these waters know species that have never appeared in a supermarket. They know the seasons of the sea in a way that no supply chain algorithm can replicate. And for most of Ærø's history, this knowledge flowed naturally into the kitchens of the island.

What Marstang has done is reconnect those two worlds after a long interruption. When Ida and Camilla opened their restaurant, they made a deliberate decision to source almost everything - fish, vegetables, dairy, bread - from the island of Ærø and the surrounding region of Funen. Not as a marketing concept, but as a genuine operating philosophy. The local area was their larder, and they would work with what it contained.

This meant, inevitably, encountering forgotten fish. Not because Marstang set out to be a project partner in a European sustainability initiative, but because when you buy from local artisanal fishermen, the full catch comes with the territory. A net pulled from Ærø's waters does not return only the species listed on a wholesale price sheet. It returns the sea, in all its variety — and a kitchen that has committed to local sourcing has to find something creative and delicious to do with that variety.

In this sense, Ærø is not just the location of Marstang. It is the argument. The island demonstrates, week after week, that a small, isolated community with direct access to artisanal fishing and local agriculture can build a food culture that is simultaneously more sustainable, more diverse, and more interesting than anything a globalised supply chain can offer. You just have to be willing to cook what's actually there.

For the Forgotten Fish project, Marstang's island context is both an inspiration and a challenge. If this model works on Ærø, how do we translate its logic to coastal communities across Europe that have lost their connections to local fishing? That is the work we are engaged in together.

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