

How to love the cold, according to an arctic researcher

Kari Leibowitz, a researcher who studied 'wintertime mindset' above the Arctic Circle, says if you want to love winter, channel your inner Norwegian.

Feb. 2, 2018, 4:38 PM CET By Dana McMahan

<https://www.nbcnews.com/>



1. Is there anyone you know in the eastern half of the country not lamenting about the cold? I don't think I've started a conversation in the last two months with anything other than a list of complaints related to the arctic cold that has gripped so much of the nation. If my dog could talk he'd have had plenty to complain about too, as I couldn't muster the nerve to take him out for his usual long walks when the days began at frigid temperatures. And while, yes, it's been unusually cold for a protracted amount of time, I have to wonder why I'm always so shocked when — gasp! — it's cold in the wintertime. Every year it seems to come as an utter surprise that I need to bundle up come January. And, like many Americans, I want to hibernate as soon as the holiday festivities are over, wistfully dreaming of sunshine and blue skies as I count the days till spring.

2. But what if there were another way to spend winter? What if we could look at it as a season to enjoy, even embrace? Sound impossible? Not if you're Norwegian, says Kari Leibowitz, a psychology researcher who lived in Tromsø, Norway as part of U.S. Norway Fulbright grant. She went to study wintertime mindset above the Arctic Circle, a part of the world where winter reaches Game of Thrones proportions. Her time abroad included the Polar Night, the stretch from November to January when the sun doesn't rise at all.

3. Why would anyone subject themselves to that? “Recently we've started to look to Scandinavia as models of the good life,” Leibowitz tells NBC News BETTER. “They have this reputation for being very happy. That's certainly why I went to study — how can they be this happy when it's cold and dark?” Along the way this cold-hater herself — who moved to Atlanta for college to escape the northeast winters — picked up a few lessons. So what can we learn from the Nordic embrace of their long winter to help us get through our, come on, admittedly shorter (and usually) tamer cold months?

First, accept that winter is a real thing

4. “Even when it was below freezing [when I lived] in New Jersey,” Leibowitz says, she would just throw a coat over her jeans and regular clothes, “and then I'd be surprised when my legs got cold!” When we can surmount so many other obstacles (such as there's nothing to make for dinner) through modern miracles like grocery or meal delivery, it's easy to forget that some things, like weather, are non-negotiable. It's much easier to see cold weather as an inconvenience when we won't actually acknowledge it, says Leibowitz

And prepare accordingly

5. In Norway, people dress appropriately, Leibowitz says. Their winter clothes are actual winter clothes that protect them from the cold and let them be outside in the snow and teeny digit temperatures. Since returning from her arctic studies, Leibowitz slides a pair of woolen leggings under her jeans before she heads out in the Jersey cold, she says. They also do things like, oh, insulate their houses sufficiently in northern climates. (I might not be whining so much about my freezing, drafty old house if we'd invested in some serious insulation!)

Lean into it

6. Instead of looking at winter as something to be endured, Leibowitz says, Norwegians really lean into it. Of course with summers there likely to be rainy, cold, and drizzly, winter really is the best season. But as opposed to here, where “on the East coast, everyone is bemoaning the cyclone and people are posting pictures of warmer places to pretend they're not [in the midst of this],” she says, “that's not done in Norway where people look forward to the first snow.” The trouble is, “we don't want to do anything different in winter so all we notice is the lack of being able to go outdoors,” she explains. “But we're not filling that void with anything else because we're not changing with the season.”

So on that note, get out

7. Cold weather is no excuse to stay indoors in Norway, Leibowitz says. Where there's snow there's skiing. Where there's bracing cold air there are invigorating walks. And look, how much better will that hot drink and fireplace be when you've come in from an active day in that oh-so-crisp air!? While we're over here with cabin fever cursing the sub-zero wind chill they're having a blast romping around their winter wonderland. (And to be fair, it is quite the wonderland — from fjords to the magical Northern Lights, they do live in one of the most stunningly beautiful places on earth.)

Free your mind: it's not have to, it's get to

8. Quick: if it's too cold and snowy to leave the house, do you have to stay home, or do you get to stay home? It's not just the Norwegians who get this — ask any kid who has a snow day. “Going out and being active even in winter is important,” says Leibowitz, “but also it's nice to have an excuse to stay home and binge watch and talk with family or friends and catch up on sleep.” While “we could look at this as opportunities, we tend to look at it as 'we're stuck and can't go out.'” Instead, she says, why not just say “we get to stay in and bake cookies!”

Which brings us to hygge

9. No talk of Scandi approach to winter would be complete with talk of hygge, the Danish word encompassing all things cozy, warm, snuggly, and intimate — whether that's a crackling fire, fuzzy socks or cup of hot chocolate with your beloved. Derived from a Norwegian word meaning wellbeing, the idea of hygge — known as koselig in Norway — is certainly a necessity, Leibowitz says, in such dark and cold climates. But just importing the notion itself won't cut it. “It's interesting because if we as Americans focus too much on coziness without changing our mindset about winter or [without] bundling up to go outside when it snows or the lake freezes it's not going to be enough,” she says. So if you really want to stop worrying and love winter, start channeling your inner Viking. And bundle up and get outside.