



## Ants on a Shrimp Discussion Guide

Director: Maurice Dekkers

Year: 2016

Time: 88 min

### You might know this director from:

This is the debut feature-length film from this director.

## FILM SUMMARY

Rene Redzepi is a rare breed. With many prestigious awards tucked in his apron pockets and the menu at his world-renowned Noma featuring items more commonly found on the forest floor, he has revolutionized fine dining. With an unquenchable desire to learn, question, and remain avant-garde, he moves his entire Noma staff to Tokyo in early 2015.

Dutch director Dekkers was in the planning stages of a food series with Redzepi when the top chef announced his Japanese intentions. Noma's world class team embarking on a new adventure was the perfect recipe for Dekkers's to create his first full-length film, *ANTS ON A SHRIMP*. Briefly documenting the inner workings of Noma at its Copenhagen HQ, Dekkers then travels to Tokyo to join the team as it embarks on its month-long experimentation and preparation period before the new restaurant opens.

"We want to take our vision, our aesthetic, and free-fall into a new culture," Redzepi tells the camera. Visiting early-morning fish markets, picking white strawberries, and trekking through the Japanese wilderness to reach edible roots and leaves, the chefs return to their temporary kitchen to toil and to extend their imaginations, all for a limited number of guests over a five-week period.

In his quest to capture the unique philosophy of the team behind Noma, Dekkers creates a magnificent character-driven tale of pushing the boundaries of our everyday expectations. Why subject oneself to such madness for little more than a dish of ants perched atop a shrimp? As Dan Giusti states, "The environment is narcotic. You get hooked." As a testimony to the lengths required to reach the apex of ultra fine dining, *ANTS ON A SHRIMP* certainly takes the cake.

## FILM THEMES

Voted restaurant of the year time and again, Noma has a reputation to maintain. By moving to Tokyo for a five-week stint, Redzepi and his team push themselves out of their comfort zone to refresh their vision.

### PERFECTION BEYOND THE COMFORT ZONE

Redzepi is a man aiming for perfection, never allowing his work to be mediocre. But just what is perfection, and how is it achieved? By trusting his intuition, taking a brave, no-nonsense stance to all he approaches, and constantly challenging himself, he defines an entire genre of cooking. Beginning with a vision, he works until all possibilities have been exhausted and the learning process complete. In this quest for perfection, there is no room for comfort. In order to develop and hear the song of the future dish singing, Redzepi pushes beyond the familiar and embarks into the unknown.

### IMMENSE, INTENSE SACRIFICE

The life of a top chef is not an ordinary one. In order to create such unique, creative, and highly scientific culinary masterpieces, the team at Noma sacrifices everything for the service. Earning accolades such as restaurant of the year multiple times is an honor reserved for the most dedicated, and for those who sign-up for the 16-hour days at Noma also agree to a lifestyle outside of the norm. As Rosio Sanchez, who celebrates her 30th birthday working in the Tokyo kitchen, so matter-of-factly states, "I give up everything. My personal life is empty." Taking it one step further, Thomas Frebel explains, "In the end we are all just a bunch of freaks. A normal person doesn't understand what we're doing."

### THE BURNING HEAT OF EXPECTATION

Before Redzepi was rated as one of the culinary world's crème de la crème, he had only himself to please. He was still a nobody, and he had nothing to prove or any preconceived expectations to fulfill. Those days are long gone for him and Noma. With a reputation that precedes him, the world waits with bated breath to capture the morsels of his next move. The pressure mounts as he strives to stay on top, to not only maintain his status as the best, but to also supersede his past brilliance and create the next gastronomic innovation. Having proven his weight in unexpected food finds, the world expects nothing less than perfection so the heat is on.

### FAIL, FAIL AGAIN, THEN SUCCEED

As Lars Williams puts it, "Our job is not to succeed. Our job is to fail, every day, over and over again." For the team at Noma, the path to uncovering brand-new foodstuffs and transforming them into artistic chef d'oeuvres involves an incredible amount of trial and error. Mind-boggling creations like black garlic leather and scallop fudge wouldn't be possible without a lot of inedible chances taken between harvest and service. The manner in which those failures are handled separates the good from the great, once again best expressed by Lars. "It's 99 percent failure. How one can become successful is by the manner in which you recover from those failures."

**"It's about finding the identity of a place. We tend to look towards nature."**

Lars Williams

**"As soon as you feel comfortable in a situation, you get rid of that situation so you can again be uncomfortable. That's the thing that makes the whole clockwork start, your brain tick... That's when new things happen and you learn more about yourself and the world."**

Rene Redzepi

## FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. How much did you know about René Redzepi before watching *ANTS ON A SHRIMP*? What did you think of him after watching the film?
2. What drives you as a person? Do you perform best in your work when you are in a predictable, safe setting? Or do you thrive on the unknown, pushing the boundaries of the predictable?
3. Discuss cooking as a creative art form. When you go out to eat, do you consider the creative process that the chef has put into your meal? Or do you view eating—and food in general—as just a basic necessity?
4. Do you consider the origin of the food you buy at the store? Do you buy local produce? Do you think it is important—from an environmental perspective—that people purchase local produce and use what is native to their surroundings?
5. Have you ever eaten at a restaurant like Noma? As well as satisfying hunger, what desires and impulses does a restaurant like Noma satisfy?
6. How do you come to terms with failure in your own life? Do you agree with chef Lars Williams when he says that success has to do with how an individual manages failure? Would you be able to cope with the 99 percent failure rate that Noma chefs endure?
7. Discuss your thoughts on food foraging. Why do you think the Noma team spends so much time foraging for food? What are they hoping to uncover by scrambling around in forests and fields, tasting leaves and plants and other wild growth?
8. How do you manage under pressure? How would you fare as an employee in a high-end kitchen such as Noma’s? Would you be willing to sacrifice your personal life for the sake of your job?
9. Did *ANTS ON A SHRIMP* do a good job of reflecting how Noma Tokyo represented Japanese culture in its menu? Do you feel that Redzepi and team found their Japanese voice, while reflecting their Danish/European influences?
10. How would you describe Redzepi as a leader after seeing the film? Discuss the notion of teamwork and how the various characters at Noma—Lars, Thomas, Rosio, Dan, and Kim were the primary figures featured in the film—reflected the importance of a well-balanced team.

## NOTES:

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## FILM FACTS:

- ANTS ON A SHRIMP had its world premiere at the 2016 Berlin International Film Festival in the interactive culinary film series, which was entitled “Make Food Not War” that year.
- Dutch Director Maurice Dekkers has been making food television since the early 2000s, having developed a more journalistic approach to cuisine that has proven popular. He approached Redzepi to make a series involving his work, and as the two were writing for the show Redzepi told Dekkers about his upcoming venture in Japan. Dekkers felt compelled to make a film, which led to ANTS ON A SHRIMP, his debut documentary. Being a foodie himself, Dekkers also co-founded Tony’s Chocolonely in 2005, a 100% slave-free chocolate bar. He stars in documentary “Tony” (2016), which follows him and two other journalists as they investigate human exploitation within the chocolate industry.
- The name Noma is created from the first two letters of two Danish words: “nordisk” (Nordic) and “mad” (food).
- Redzepi and culinary entrepreneur Claus Meyer, often credited with founding the New Nordic Cuisine philosophy, co-opened Noma in 2003, which promotes local, natural, and seasonal produce as a basis for all dishes served.
- Other pop-up Noma locations include 10 days in London, England, in 2012 and 10 weeks in Sydney, Australia, in 2016.
- René Redzepi was born in 1977 to a Danish mother and Macedonian father and lived in Macedonia until the start of the Yugoslav Wars, when his family relocated to Copenhagen. At the age of 15, Redzepi enrolled in culinary school. He began his career 10-years before opening Noma in 2003, starting at Copenhagen’s Restaurant Pierre André, and going on to work at the 3-star Le Jardin Des Sens in Montpellier, France; Ferran Adrià’s El Bulli in Rosas, Spain; Thomas Keller’s 3-star Michelin restaurant The French Laundry; and at Copenhagen’s Kong Hans Kælder.
- Redzepi picked up his love for food foraging from his times with family in Macedonia.
- The Noma staff planned for the five-week Tokyo pop-up restaurant, which served 32 lunches and 32 dinners in total, for a period of two years. During the time in Tokyo, Noma fed 3,584 guests 57,350 courses, with a menu costing ¥40,200 (\$400) per person. The restaurant took over the 37th-floor dining room normally home to Signature, the Mandarin Oriental’s Michelin-starred French restaurant. Noma Tokyo was open six days a week, with only Sundays off.
- Noma Copenhagen, open Tuesday to Saturday, receives 100,000 booking enquiries a month.
- The entire Noma staff relocated to Tokyo for the pop-up. This included chefs, waiters, managers, and dishwashers, a total of 63 employees. Redzepi’s wife and three daughters also joined.

## WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Share** ANTS ON A SHRIMP with both the foodies and non-foodies in your life. If you dare, include some adventurous insect snacks, with [this article](#) providing plenty of creepy-crawly tips.
2. **Learn** about New Nordic Cuisine, the culinary philosophy to which Redzepi and many other chefs ascribe. [Cook It Raw](#), a community and annual gathering of culinary experts inspired by Noma, “not only encourages innovation on the plate, but addresses environmental, social, and cultural issues as well.”
3. **Read** one of the books penned by Redzepi, including the cookbook “Noma: Time and Place in Nordic Cuisine” or “René Redzepi: A Work in Progress.”
4. **Expand** on your knowledge of René Redzepi and his culinary philosophy by watching the documentary “[Noma: My Perfect Storm](#)” from 2015, described by one film critic as “a foodie’s valentine.”

## We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

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They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

**Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.**