



10 | THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT SWEDEN



1 | SOME QUICK FACTS TO BEGIN WITH

Capital: Stockholm

Language: Swedish

Official minority languages: Sami, Finnish, Meänkieli, Yiddish and Romani Chib

Population: 10.5 million

Land area: 407,000 km², the fifth largest country in Europe

Population density: 25.7/km²

Form of government: Parliamentary democracy, constitutional monarchy

Currency: Swedish krona, SEK

Life expectancy: Men 81.2 years, women 84.8

Religion: The Church of Sweden is Evangelical Lutheran, but in practice the country is very secularised

Calling code: +46

Time zone: GMT +1

USEFUL LINKS

Sweden.se
Scb.se

The official site of Sweden
Statistics Sweden

2 | SWEDEN IS GOVERNED BY DEMOCRACY

The 349 members of the Swedish parliament are elected by and represent the people. To be assigned seats in parliament, a party must receive at least four per cent in an election. Elections are held every four years, after which a new government may be formed. The speaker of the parliament proposes a new prime minister, who then appoints the other government ministers.

The Swedish head of state is a monarch, currently King Carl XVI Gustaf, the 74th King of Sweden. The monarch's duties are regulated by the constitution, and are primarily ceremonial and representative.

The Swedish Constitution is made up of four fundamental laws:

1. **The Instrument of Government**
2. **The Act of Succession**
3. **The Freedom of the Press Act** (including the principle of public access to official documents)
4. **The Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression**

USEFUL LINKS

[Government.se](https://www.government.se) The Swedish government
[Riksdagen.se](https://www.riksdagen.se) The Swedish parliament

Sweden was first to write freedom of press into its constitution, back in 1766.





The Sami are Europe's northernmost indigenous people.



The gaming industry is booming in Sweden.

3 | PEACE FOR MORE THAN 200 YEARS

Some 100,000 years ago Sweden was covered in ice. When the ice receded, the first immigrants started arriving. Around 1000 AD, the Vikings helped put Sweden on the map through their expeditions and raids around Europe. Then, centuries of war-hungry kings and power struggles drained the Swedish economy.

Only after the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815) peace arrived. Enter industrialisation and a transformation from a poor nation of farmers to the innovative high-tech Sweden of today.

A number of factors made this rapid development possible: peace, access to raw materials such as iron ore and timber, well-functioning infrastructure, compulsory schooling, a tax-financed welfare system and – more recently – widespread internet access, to mention but a few.

USEFUL LINKS

Historiska.se
Ajtte.com

The Swedish History Museum
Ajtte, the Swedish Mountain and Sami Museum

4 | EQUALITY IS HIGH ON THE AGENDA

Sweden aims for everyone to have the same rights; no one should be discriminated against on the basis of gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, political and/or religious conviction, or physical, mental or intellectual disabilities. The Equality Ombudsman is Sweden's government agency tasked with protecting and promoting these rights. In terms of gender equality, Swedish society is one of the world leaders according to international rankings.

A FEW EQUALITY MILESTONES

- 1921: Women vote in parliamentary elections for the first time, and get to run for office
- 1944: Homosexual relations are legalised
- 1974: Both parents get the right to parental leave
- 1980: Throne succession becomes gender neutral
- 1994: A new law offers people with disabilities equal rights to an independent life
- 2009: Same-sex marriage is legalised; the Discrimination Act is introduced
- 2013: Mandatory sterilisation is stricken from the law regarding change of legal gender
- 2021: Sweden gets its first female prime minister

USEFUL LINKS

Do.se
Mfd.se

The Equality Ombudsman
The Swedish Agency for Participation

There are numerous Pride festivals in Sweden every year.



5 NATURE IS FOR EVERYONE

Did you know that 97 per cent of Sweden's land area is uninhabited? There are 30 national parks and more than 5,000 nature reserves, and outside of protected areas *allemansrätten* applies. It's a unique Swedish right of public access, which allows people to roam freely in nature, to camp and pick berries, mushrooms and flowers – if they aren't protected species. The guiding principle is 'don't disturb, don't destroy'.

Sweden's four distinct seasons differ quite a lot from north to south. Record temperatures are -53°C in February in the north and $+38^{\circ}\text{C}$ in June in the south, but the yearly average temperatures for the whole country vary between -8°C and $+10^{\circ}\text{C}$. Come winter, it gets very dark, and in some parts above the Arctic Circle, the sun doesn't pass over the horizon during the whole of December. But these same regions also get countless hours of daylight in the summer as the sun doesn't set from the end of May to mid-July.

Perhaps the nearness to nature has helped spur Swedes' environmental consciousness. Children learn to recycle almost before they can walk, and Sweden is pulling its weight in the global efforts to find sustainable solutions for the future.

USEFUL LINKS

Smhi.se
Nationalparksofsweden.se

The government weather agency
Sweden's national parks



Sweden's coastline consists of vast archipelagos.



Accessibility is a right that also reaches into nature.



Fathers on parental leave are a common sight in Sweden.

6 | WELFARE IS LARGELY TAX-FUNDED

Nearly everyone living or working in Sweden is covered by the Swedish social insurance. It includes benefits like parental leave pay, child allowances and sick pay for longer term illnesses, which are all administered by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (*Försäkringskassan*). The parental insurance is generous, entitling parents to 480 paid days of parental leave. This makes it easier for both mothers and fathers to combine working with having a family.

Swedish healthcare is heavily subsidised through taxes, making it affordable to go to the doctor, stay in a hospital and buy prescription medication.

The Swedish labour market is characterised by a strong presence of trade and labour unions. Collective agreements regulate wages and holiday entitlements (minimum 25 days). Most non-EU residents need a work permit and are therefore advised to apply for jobs via the European job mobility portal EURES before coming to Sweden.

USEFUL LINKS

[Forsakringskassan.se](https://forsakringskassan.se)
[Arbetsformedlingen.se](https://arbetsformedlingen.se)

The Swedish Social Insurance Agency
The Swedish Public Employment Service



Children in Sweden start school when they turn six.

7 | SCHOOL IS FREE FOR ALL

Sweden offers free education for all from the age of six to nineteen. Going to school is compulsory for ten years from the year children turn six. All levels of the school system generally encourages creativity and critical thinking.

University studies are free for citizens of Sweden or other EU/EEA countries or Switzerland; for others, application- and tuition fees apply. Sweden also prioritises innovation and research – perhaps not so surprising considering that it is the country of the Nobel Prize. Annually, Sweden invests between three and four per cent of its GDP in research and development, significantly higher than the OECD average.

THE SWEDISH SCHOOL SYSTEM:

Age:

1–5	Nursery school
6	Preschool class
6/7–15/16	Compulsory school
15/16–18/19	Upper secondary school/high school (non-compulsory)

USEFUL LINKS

Skolverket.se
Nobelprize.org

The Swedish National Agency for Education
The official Nobel Prize site

Ruben Östlund (right) and actors from his film *Triangle of Sadness*. It won the 2022 Palme d'Or in Cannes.



Selam Fessahaye is one of Sweden's rising stars of fashion design.



8 | IT'S A BREEDING GROUND FOR STARS

Swedish music went truly global in 1974 when ABBA won the Eurovision Song Contest. Since then, acts such as Roxette, The Cardigans and more recently Zara Larsson, First Aid Kit and the now-deceased Avicii have kept Sweden in the spotlight of pop music.

As a film nation, Sweden is often associated with Ingmar Bergman (1918–2007), the country's film director and scriptwriter extraordinaire. Two-time Palme d'Or winner Ruben Östlund is among today's active directors that stand out internationally, as is Tarik Saleh, who boasts awards from both Cannes and Sundance.

Swedish actors also draw international attention. Most of them start out on stage or in film at home before they aim for a bigger audience. Alicia Vikander had quite a career in Swedish television and film before winning her Academy Award and headlining Hollywood blockbusters.

In Sweden, fashion is rarely just fashion. More often it is a statement – about democracy, affordability, and sustainability. Of course, it also has to look brilliant, but whether we're talking giant H&M, minimalist Filippa K or denim company Nudie Jeans, one eye is always on the future.





At one point, swimmer Sarah Sjöström held eight world records simultaneously.

▷ **Another way to achieve success** in the fashion industry is to first become a tennis superstar, like Björn Borg. He's one of many sports icons from Sweden with a brand name in fashion. In fact, the country seems to be a nation of sports lovers, with nearly two-thirds of 10- to 18-year-olds exercising at least once a week. Some of them might make it onto this list eventually:

10 SWEDISH ALL-TIME SPORTING GREATS, FROM A TO Z:

(our selection)

1. Annika Sörenstam, golf
2. Björn Borg, tennis
3. Carolina Klüft, heptathlon
4. Charlotte Kalla, cross-country skiing
5. Ingemar Stenmark, alpine skiing
6. Jan-Ove Waldner, table tennis
7. Magdalena Forsberg, biathlon
8. Nicklas Lidström, ice hockey
9. Sarah Sjöström, swimming
10. Zlatan Ibrahimović, football

USEFUL LINKS

Kulturradet.se
Rf.se

The Swedish Arts Council
The Swedish Sports Confederation

9 IT'S SECULAR BUT WITH RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

Most Swedes' everyday life is fairly secular, but many yearly traditions and celebrations have religious origins. Influences from different parts of the world also make traditions like Ramadan part of Swedish society today.

Lucia and Christmas are big in December, but Midsummer in June is probably the biggest – and most typically Swedish – celebration.

CALENDAR OF CELEBRATIONS

31 December	New Year
March/April	Easter
30 April	<i>Valborg</i> /Walpurgis: celebration of spring with bonfires and singing
Around 21 June	Midsummer: social gathering involving eating, singing and dancing around a pole
August	Crayfish party: feast focused on crayfish and – often – schnapps
13 December	Lucia: pre-Christmas tradition marked by candlelight and singing
24 December	Christmas

USEFUL LINKS

Sweden.se/culture-traditions
Nordiskamuseet.se

The official site of Sweden
The Nordic Museum

Traditional Swedish Midsummer includes raising the maypole.



Lucia celebrates light on one of the year's darkest days.

10 | REMEMBER TO SAY *TACK!*

Mini-glossary

Hej! [hay]	Hello
Tjena! [sheh-nah]	Hi (informal)
Talar du engelska? [tahl-ahr doo ehng-ehl-ska?]	Do you speak English?
Hur mår du? [hoor moor doo?]	How are you? (neutral)
Jag mår bra, tack. Och du? [yag moor brah tack. ock doo?]	I'm fine, thanks. And you?
Trevligt att träffas [trehv-leet ut trai-fuss]	Pleased to meet you
Hejdå! [hay-daw]	Bye-bye
God morgon! [good morron]	Good morning
God natt! [good nut]	Good night
Tack! [tuck]	Thank you/Please
Varsågod! [vahr-saw-good]	Here you go/Please/ You're welcome
Ursäkta mig! [ooshehk-tah mey]	Excuse me
Var ligger toaletten? [vahr liggeh twa-lett-en?]	Where is the toilet/ restroom?

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It's difficult to fit a country into a brochure as small as this. This is an attempt to boil down Sweden to ten vital facts. Discover how large Sweden is in relation to its small population, that the Equality Ombudsman is sort of king and that Midsummer is a serious matter of fun and games.



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