



▶ EUROPE

*Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.*

## BACKGROUND

**Land and Climate.** Sweden, one of the “three fingers” of Scandinavia, is just larger than the state of California. It covers 173,732 square miles (449,964 square kilometers). From the northern to the southern tip, Sweden is about 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) long, but only 310 miles (500 kilometers) wide. Thousands of tiny islands line the coast. Mountains form much of the northwest, but most of Sweden is relatively flat with some rolling hills. Many rivers flow from the mountains through the forests and into the Baltic Sea. Sweden is filled with lakes and rivers provide ample water for the country. More than half of the land is forested. Rivers in the Norrland region (roughly the country’s northernmost two-thirds) provide most hydroelectric power.

North of the Arctic Circle, winters are long and relatively cold while summers are short and pleasant. But summer’s “midnight sun” makes the days long. Although Sweden is located far to the north, most of the country has a relatively temperate climate, moderated by the warm Gulf Stream. July temperatures in Stockholm average 64°F (18°C); January temperatures average 27°F (-3°C). Snow remains on the ground about one hundred days each year.

**History.** Sweden has been inhabited for nearly five thousand years and is the home of the Gothic peoples who battled the Roman Empire. In the ninth century, Rurik, a semilegendary chief of the Swedes, is said to have founded Russia. Christianity was introduced in the 11th century and adopted by the monarchy. Queen Margrethe I of Denmark united Denmark, Norway, and Sweden in the Union of Kalmar in 1397. Sweden remained fairly autonomous and began its own parliament in 1435. It became an independent kingdom in 1523, with Gustaf I Vasa as ruler. The kingdom fought wars with Denmark and

Russia in the 16th and 17th centuries, and by the 17th century, Sweden was one of the Great Powers of Europe. It acquired Norway in 1814 through the Napoleonic Wars. During the 19th century, however, Swedish power declined. Finland was part of Sweden until 1809, when it briefly became an archdukedom of Russia. Norway became independent in 1905. The Frenchman Jean Baptiste Bernadotte was elected Sweden’s crown prince in 1810 and became king in 1818 as Karl XIV Johan. His dynasty continues today.

During the 20th century, neutrality and nonalignment were cornerstones of Sweden’s foreign policy, keeping it out of both world wars and allowing it to transform its rather poor society into a prosperous social welfare state. With increased European integration and the end of the Cold War, Sweden joined the European Union (EU) in 1995.

Sweden’s image as a peaceful, egalitarian society, with relatively low crime, was shaken in 1986 when Prime Minister Olof Palme was assassinated on the streets of Stockholm. Palme was succeeded by Ingvar Carlsson of the Social Democrat Party. After the rejection of his strict economic reforms in 1990, Carlsson resigned and led a minority government until elections in 1991. The new prime minister, Carl Bildt of the Moderate Party, formed a coalition government. Bildt’s administration concentrated on economic challenges and negotiated Sweden’s entry into the EU.

The Social Democrats won the 1994 elections, and Ingvar Carlsson returned to power. Carlsson retired from the party leadership in November 1995 and was replaced by his finance minister, Göran Persson. A fiscal conservative, Persson continued economic reforms aimed at improving the country’s finances. Although a member of the EU, Sweden opted out of

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joining Europe's Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) in 1999 because of voter opposition to welfare service cuts. Sweden now faces the challenge of negotiating its place within the expanding European Union.

### THE PEOPLE

**Population.** Sweden's population of 8.9 million is growing at 0.01 percent per year. More than 80 percent of Swedes live in the southern third of the country. At least 85 percent of the people are ethnic Swede. Finns compose about 5 percent of the population; most of them are immigrants from Finland, but some are native to northern Sweden. A small indigenous minority (up to 20,000 people), the Sami (pronounced "SAW-me"), lives in the north. Traditionally, they herded reindeer for a living. While some continue that occupation, most are involved in other fields. The Sami are sometimes called Lapps, but this is a derogatory term and therefore not encouraged in Sweden. Immigrants have added to Sweden's population since the 1960s; Swedish immigration laws are some of the most liberal in Europe. More than 10 percent of Swedish citizens were born outside of Sweden. Many immigrants have recently come from the former Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, and Latin American or African countries.

**Language.** Swedes speak Swedish—a Germanic language related to Danish, Norwegian, and Icelandic. It developed from Old Norse, the language of the Vikings. Swedish emerged as a distinct language around the 10th century. The Sami speak their own language and the Finnish minority speaks Finnish. Most immigrants speak their native tongue at home. Many people speak English, which is also taught in the schools.

**Religion.** Sweden, like most of Europe, is a highly secular society. Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution. Most Swedes (about 87 percent) are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church but rarely attend church services. The Lutheran Church is supported by the state; however, plans to largely separate church and state began in 1995. Membership is growing in other religious organizations. Most of these are various other Christian churches, such as the Roman Catholic faith, which has a following of about 1 percent of the population. Other groups, such as Muslims and Jews, are also expanding, primarily because of the immigrant population.

**General Attitudes.** Swedes are somewhat more reserved than people in the United States. Friendships are important but take time to develop. Swedes are proud of their nation, as well as their regions and towns. Visitors who recognize this pride are careful not to praise another area over the one being visited. Swedes value modesty and material security. Punctuality is also emphasized in various aspects of daily life.

Sweden has created an egalitarian society in which men and women enjoy equal access to opportunities for personal advancement. In addition, Swedes highly value their extensive social welfare system, which provides for most of the population's health, education, and retirement benefits. While public sentiment in the early 1990s led to some cuts in the system, most people oppose deep changes in what are called "cradle-to-grave" benefits.

Sweden takes great pride in awarding the Nobel Prizes each year, with the exception of the Nobel Peace Prize, which Norway sponsors. These prizes are given to significant contributors in the areas of chemistry, literature, medicine, and physics. Alfred Bernhard Nobel (1833–96), the inventor of dynamite and a wealthy Swedish businessman, sponsored the prizes.

**Personal Appearance.** European fashions are common in Sweden. However, because of the country's cooler climate, Swedes wear warm clothing more often than other Europeans. Dress is generally conservative; it is important to be neat and clean in public. Swedes may not dress up as much as people in other countries when they go out. They prefer to avoid glamorous clothing but are still fashionable. Traditional costumes, which vary by region, are worn on special occasions.

### CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

**Greetings.** Swedes commonly shake hands when meeting. Most adults will shake hands with each person in the room when entering or leaving a social setting. From a distance, one may nod the head or raise the hand to greet another person. People usually address each other by first name; they use titles only in very formal situations. More formal greetings include *God dag* (Good day) or *God morgon* (Good morning). However, most Swedes use the more casual *Hej* (pronounced HEY, meaning "Hi"). One answers the phone with *Hallå* (Hello) and clearly identifies oneself. "Good-bye" is *Adjö* or, more casually, *Hej då*.

**Gestures.** Eye contact is important during conversation. Swedes avoid excessive hand gestures when speaking. Chewing gum, yawning, or having one's hands in the pockets when speaking to another person is considered impolite. Although in the past people seldom embraced in public or put their arm around another's shoulder, the population in general is becoming more casual and such displays of friendship are increasing.

**Visiting.** Swedes enjoy visiting one another, but they do not often visit without prior arrangement. Hosts usually offer guests coffee or something else to drink. People most often entertain in the home; it is popular to invite friends over for an evening meal. Guests are expected to arrive on time. In bad weather, they usually bring an indoor pair of shoes to wear after entering the home. An odd number of flowers or a box of chocolates is a common gift for the hosts. Sweets for the children are appropriate if the parents approve. Guests unwrap flowers before giving them to the hostess. If they do not give a gift, guests usually send a thank-you card later in the mail. It is also customary to thank hosts for their hospitality the next time a guest sees them.

It is impolite to "eat and run." Swedes expect guests to stay for coffee and conversation, even as late as 11 p.m. Conversation, ranging over a wide variety of topics, is a popular pastime. When leaving, guests say good-bye before they put on their coats.

**Eating.** Swedes eat a light breakfast around 7 a.m. and might have a coffee or tea break at midmorning. The main meal (*middag*) traditionally was eaten at midday. This is still the case in most rural areas, but urban residents eat only a light lunch at noon and then have their main meal around 6 p.m. Swedes eat in the continental style, with the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right. A dinner knife is not used as a butter knife, since separate butter knives are usually provided. Diners keep hands, but not elbows, above the table during the meal. When finished eating, a person places the utensils side by side on the plate. Leaving any food on the plate is impolite. Guests usually wait for the hosts to offer second helpings. Declining is not impolite, but guests may take more if they desire. Food is placed in serving dishes on the table, so if the dishes are empty there is usually no more food; asking for more would be impolite.

For some occasions, the host makes a welcome speech at the

beginning of the meal. The host then makes a toast (*skål*) and all dinner guests taste the wine. The guest of honor makes a speech during the dessert, elaborating on the meal and the charm of the hostess. Each guest personally thanks the host directly after the meal.

## LIFESTYLE

**Family.** The nuclear family is the basic social unit and is usually strong and close-knit. Most families have only one or two children. Extended family relationships are maintained through gatherings and holiday visits. Many women work outside the home; they comprise nearly half of the labor force. Young children are cared for during working hours at day-care centers. Adult children are expected to be independent. Elderly individuals generally rely on the social system or themselves for their care and support.

Many urban families live in apartments, but most people in smaller towns and rural areas have single-family dwellings. Sweden is known for its red wooden houses built in the 18th and 19th centuries that still dot the countryside.

**Dating and Marriage.** Although serious dating is reserved for older teens, Swedes start to date early. They enjoy going to movies, dining out, having parties, and dancing. Many people choose to live together before or instead of marrying. Often, a couple marries when they have a child. Half of all Swedish marriages end in divorce, and single-parent homes are becoming more common. Unmarried couples who live together have nearly the same rights and obligations as married couples. That is, cohabitation is nearly the same as marriage under the law.

**Diet.** Health concerns have affected eating patterns in Sweden in much the same way they have in other industrialized countries. Once heavy in meat, fish, and cheese, the diet now includes many fresh vegetables and fruits. Common foods include potatoes (eaten a few times a week), cheeses of many types, seafood, and other fresh foods. For breakfast, one might eat *fil* (a kind of yogurt), *knäckebröd* (crisp bread) with margarine, and coffee. Open-face sandwiches (*smörgåsar*) are also popular. Some favorite main-meal dishes include *Köttbullar med kokt potatis, brun sås och lingonsylt* (meatballs with brown sauce, boiled potatoes, and lingonberry jam); *Stekt falukorv med senap och potatis* (fried slices of thick German sausage with mustard and boiled or fried potatoes); *grillad lax med spenat, citron och potatis eller ris* (grilled slices of salmon with spinach, slices of lemon, and potatoes or rice); and *Pytt i Panna* (potatoes, leftover meats, and onions, fried with an egg on top and served with pickled beets).

The *smörgåsbord* is a lavish buffet eaten (mostly at restaurants) on holidays or special occasions. It is not an everyday meal. A *smörgåsbord* includes warm and cold dishes, meat, fish, and desserts. Some families have a special type of *smörgåsbord* on Christmas Eve.

**Recreation.** Swedes are sports enthusiasts. Popular sports include soccer, skiing, tennis, golf, swimming, ice hockey, *bandy* (a sport similar to hockey), and orienteering races (using a map and compass to cross an area). Ice-skating and other winter sports are common. Physical fitness is particularly important to Swedes. Most towns have lighted exercise trails for jogging/walking (in the summer) or cross-country skiing (in the winter).

Even more popular than sports are activities such as hiking, fishing, and bird-watching. Swedes love nature and spend as much time as possible outdoors. Many consider it ideal to own a summer cottage for weekends and vacations. Sweden's

mountains are popular destinations. Favorite leisure activities also include reading, attending cultural events such as the theater or concerts, and watching movies or television. Singing in choirs is by far Sweden's most popular hobby, with 1.5 million participants.

**The Arts.** Because the arts in Sweden receive substantial public and private funding, cultural activities are accessible throughout the country. People enjoy traditional music by singing, playing instruments, or attending festivals. Common types of music are the *polksa* (polka) and the *vals* (waltz). Prominent instruments include the fiddle, accordion, and various wind instruments. The *nyckelharpa* (key fiddle) is a Swedish invention.

Swedish filmmakers like Ingmar Bergman are known worldwide and Swedish design and architecture are recognized for their simplicity and functionality. Common crafts are tiled stoves, wood carvings, ceramics, textiles, and stainless steel.

**Holidays.** Sweden's national holidays include New Year's Day, May Day (1 May), and National Day (6 June). Other holidays are often associated with the season or a religious event. At *Påsk* (Easter), children dress up like old witches with brooms and go door-to-door (among friends and neighbors only) to collect candy. Colored Easter eggs are also common at this time.

*Midsommar* (Midsummer) celebrations are held in late June (usually around the 20th), when the summer days are much longer than the nights. Festivities include dancing around the maypole and having picnics. In contrast, *Lucia* coincides with the longest night of the year. On the morning of 13 December, a girl in the family (or school or town) assumes the role of St. Lucia (the "light queen") and dresses in white with a crown of candles in her hair. She sings a special song and serves coffee and *lussekatter* (Lucia cats), a type of roll. This event often marks the beginning of *Jul* (Christmas) season. The climax is Christmas Eve, when a family *smörgåsbord* is accompanied by gift giving. Santa Claus is called *Jultomte*—the "Christmas gnome." The name *Jultomte* once referred to a fabled gnome who lived under the house and protected it during the year. In the modern tradition, he brings children's gifts to the door on Christmas Eve. After Santa delivers the gifts, the family dances around the tree and sings carols. Christmas Day is spent relaxing, while 26 December is for visiting family and friends.

**Commerce.** Business hours generally run from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., with some variations. For example, many businesses (but not shops) close by 4 p.m. in the summer. Banks usually close at 3 p.m. People buy their food and other goods from supermarkets and department stores, as well as smaller neighborhood shops. Open-air markets operate in some places on Wednesdays and Saturdays; these markets usually sell only fresh produce.

Swedes enjoy one of the shortest workweeks in the industrialized world. They receive at least five weeks of vacation each year, and other benefits. Some benefits recently were cut to reverse a trend toward lower productivity and absenteeism.

## SOCIETY

**Government.** Sweden has a constitutional monarchy. King Carl XVI Gustaf, a descendant of the Bernadotte Dynasty, has ruled since 1973. His duties are mostly ceremonial. The head of government is the prime minister (currently Göran Persson). Members of the 349-seat Parliament (*Riksdag*) are elected to four-year terms. The voting age is 18. Sweden is

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divided into 21 counties, each with its own government. Municipal councils handle local affairs. Immigrants must reside in the country three years before they can vote in local elections. They must have citizenship before voting in national elections.

**Economy.** Sweden has one of the most prosperous economies in the world. It is highly industrialized, has a modern distribution system, and boasts a skilled and educated labor force. Only around 2 percent of the workforce is engaged in agriculture, while 24 percent labors in mining and manufacturing. Sweden is a major producer of automobiles (such as Volvo and Saab) and exports machinery and steel products. Important natural resources include silver, zinc, lead, iron ore, and copper. Timber exports (mostly pulp for paper products) are also important. Lacking indigenous fossil fuels, which must be imported, Sweden depends on nuclear and hydroelectric power for 90 percent of its energy needs.

In spite of its strengths, Sweden's economy was hampered in the early 1990s by budgetary difficulties, inflation, unemployment, and a gradual decline in global competitiveness. Fortunately, recent reforms have boosted confidence in the economy, inflation is low, and the government budget has yielded surpluses in recent years. Membership in the EU is expected to provide greater opportunities for trade and economic growth.

Although salaries are high, the cost of living is high too. An income tax funds the country's extensive welfare system. Private service alternatives and spending cuts have encouraged greater productivity and reduced overall costs. Preserving key elements of the country's welfare system remains important to most Swedes. The currency is the Swedish *krona* (SEK).

**Transportation and Communications.** Only one in four households does not own a car. Although private cars are an important means of transportation, many continue to use the well-developed and punctual public transportation system. Trains, buses, subways, and streetcars are common. There are three international airports. Most roads are paved and in good condition. The Øresund Link, a combined motorway and railway, links Copenhagen, Denmark, and the southern coastal Swedish city of Malmö. The telecommunications system is excellent. Sweden relies heavily on mobile phone service. Cable and satellite television are available. Many Swedes use the internet; Sweden has a high density of web servers.

**Education.** The Swedish government spends more money per pupil than most other countries, and illiteracy is virtually unknown. The public school system is a comprehensive nine-year program that children begin at age seven. All education is free, and one free hot meal is provided each day. Immigrant children have the right to some instruction in their native language. When compulsory education ends at age 16, students have several choices. About one-fifth start working. The others choose between a three-year vocational school and a three-year high school (with a focus in either the social or natural sciences). There are dozens of institutions of higher learning. Tuition is free and loans are available for living costs. Adult education programs are extensive.

**Health.** By most standards, Swedes enjoy some of the best health in the world. All Swedes are covered by national health

### DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank . . . . .	3 of 175 countries
Adjusted for women . . . . .	3 of 144 countries
Real GDP per capita . . . . .	\$24,180
Adult literacy rate . . . . .	99 percent (male); 99 (female)
Infant mortality rate . . . . .	3 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy . . . . .	77 (male); 82 (female)

insurance. The government pays nearly all fees incurred for medical care. At least 85 percent of day-care costs are also covered. Dental fees are shared by the individual. While basic health care is readily available, patients must often wait several months before their elective surgeries are approved. In response to public demand, private health care options are now more widely available, as are facilities for private child care. The government pays an ill person's wages for an extended period. Parents share a total of 12 months' leave, which can be taken at any time between the child's birth and eighth birthday. The infant mortality rate is one of the world's lowest.

### AT A GLANCE

#### Events and Trends.

- Sweden is one of three European Union countries that has not adopted the euro as its national currency. In the most recent referendum on the subject in September 2003, 56 percent of Swedish voters rejected the euro. Voters said the top reasons they voted against joining the monetary union included keeping national sovereignty and retaining control of national interest rates.
- In September 2003, the Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh was stabbed to death as she shopped in a Stockholm department store. A suspect was arrested and is facing trial for murder. He confessed to having killed Lindh on impulse and without political motivation.
- Following 2002 general elections, Göran Persson began his third term as Sweden's prime minister. His Social Democrat Party continues as a minority one-party government, relying on support from the Left and Green Parties. Persson's campaign promises included continued support for the welfare state and generous funding for education and health care.
- A recent poll revealed that 62 percent of Swedish employees have no qualms with calling in sick when they are perfectly healthy. In 2002, sick leave and disability compensation cost the government nearly US\$12 billion—more than 10 percent of the annual budget. In October 2002, Prime Minister Persson began plans to halve reports of sick leave within six years.

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