



# Sweden

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## *cultural note*

as in other Scandinavian languages, the additional letters in Swedish (two versions of "a" and one of "o" with diacritical marks) are listed at the end of the alphabet, after the letter "y". Remember this when searching for words beginning with such letters or sounds in a telephone book.

## Country Background

### History

The Vikings (also called Norsemen) were feared for their raids throughout northern Europe from the eighth to eleventh century. These Vikings eventually became the Swedes, the Norwegians, and the Danes.

Political power was concentrated first in Denmark, which came to rule much of Scandinavia, conquering Sweden in 1520. Many prominent Swedes were slain by the Danes in this "Stockholm Bloodbath." But Sweden broke away from Denmark in 1523 and became a rival power. The Kingdom of Sweden dates from 1523. Rather than heading west to battle Denmark, Sweden's armies marched east and conquered most of the Baltic lands. Sweden's military supremacy ended in 1700, when a coalition of Denmark, Poland, and Russia forced Sweden to yield its captured Baltic territory.

Sweden and Denmark fought on opposite sides during the Napoleonic Wars. To punish Denmark for supporting Napoleon, the postwar Congress of Vienna took Norway from Denmark and gave it to Sweden in 1815.

Sweden had become an aristocratic nation of landed noblemen, and had little in common with the fishermen, sailors, and merchants of Norway. Friction developed. Fortunately for the Norwegians, their rugged, rocky nation could not be divided up into the vast farming estates preferred by the Swedes. In 1905, after a century of Swedish occupation, Sweden gave Norway its independence.

Sweden remained neutral in both world wars.

### Type of Government

The Kingdom of Sweden is a parliamentary state under a constitutional monarchy. Sweden's current constitution was adopted in 1975. In the executive branch, the cabinet (which consists of the prime minister and the advising ministers) is responsible to parliament. The parliament has one house, the Riksdag. Its members are elected by

universal suffrage and serve three years. There is a Supreme Court. The king is the chief of state, while the prime minister is the head of the government.

Sweden has a free-enterprise economy, while maintaining an extensive social welfare system. State benefits include child care, health care, and extensive pension plans.

Sweden historically maintained neutrality and felt that membership in the European Union would not be consistent with this policy. However, the end of the cold war put Sweden's entire foreign policy into question. There is no longer a need for Sweden to maintain a strict neutrality between NATO and the now defunct Warsaw Pact.

## Language

The official language is Swedish, which is a Germanic language related to Danish, Norwegian, and Icelandic. The native minority group, known as the Lapps or Laplanders, speak their own language. The term *Sami* is a somewhat derogatory term for this group. The language most commonly learned in school is English, and you will find that most Swedes can speak English; if you plan to do business outside of the major metropolitan areas, German is useful.

## Religion

The majority (over 90 percent) of Swedes are Lutheran, but other Christian denominations are represented, as are Jews. The Evangelical Lutheran church is supported by the state, but there is complete religious freedom.

## Demographics

The population of the Kingdom of Sweden is 8.7 million. Stockholm, the capital, has over 1.5 million people in its metropolitan area. Sweden is highly urbanized. One-eighth of the population is foreign-born.

## Cultural Orientation

### Cognitive Styles: How Swedes Organize and Process Information

The Swedes are proud people. Their education teaches them to think conceptually and analytically, and they tend to look to universal rules or laws to solve their problems.

### Negotiation Strategies: What Swedes Accept as Evidence

All truth is subject to one's faith in the ideologies of the social welfare state. These truths are supported by objective facts rather than subjective feelings.

### Value Systems: The Basis for Behavior

Sweden is a humanitarian culture, with the quality of life and environmental issues given top priority. The following three sections identify the Value Systems in the predominant culture—their methods of dividing right from wrong, good from evil, and so forth.

### Locus of Decision Making

There is a strong belief in individual decisions within the social welfare system and with the consensus of all concerned. Although there is a strong self-orientation, there is also a need to help those who are not able to help themselves, and a need for teamwork.

Swedes place an emphasis on individual initiative and achievement, with one's ability being more important than one's station in life. They feel that they have a right to a private life that is not to be discussed in business situations.

### Sources of Anxiety Reduction

Life's uncertainties are accepted, and anxiety is reduced through a strong social welfare system; but a "spiritual unease" makes Swedes very serious about life. A strong nuclear family gives stability and structure to life. The need for social organization and ritual allows Swedes to remain uncommitted and uninvolved with others.

### Issues of Equality / Inequality

Sweden is basically a middle-class society that strives to minimize social differences, so there is very little evidence of poverty or wealth. Nationalism transcends social differences, and a largely homogeneous population minimizes ethnic differences. However, there is a deep need to find a challenge in life, since most of the necessities are taken care of. This is an androgynous society in which husbands and wives share the responsibility of child care.

## Business Practices

### Appointments



#### *punctuality*

- Be punctual at all times, to both business and social events. It is not appropriate to be "fashionably late" to dinners.
- Appointments should be made two weeks in advance.
- Remember that many Europeans and South Americans write the day first, then the month, then the year (e.g., December 3, 1999, is written 3.12.99). This is the case in Sweden.
- The workweek is 8:30 or 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., Monday through Friday. There is one hour for lunch, and many people go to lunch between 11:30 and 1:30 P.M.
- The minimum vacation per year is five weeks.
- Most people take their vacations in July, so take this into consideration when planning business in Sweden.
- During the Christmas holidays (from December 22 to January 6), many Swedish business people are unavailable.



#### Negotiating

- In business meetings, the Swedes do not begin with small talk, but get right down to business.
- Do not show emotion during negotiations.
- The Swedes value consensus and avoid confrontation.
- In presentations, be very precise and concrete; do not exaggerate or expect the Swedish imagination to do part of the work.

- Humor is not usually part of negotiations. Swedes tend to be serious in general, and may appear downright stuffy in business.
- Many business people are fluent in English, especially in the large cities, such as Stockholm, Göteborg, and Malmö.
- Avoid criticism of Swedish culture, Swedish politics, or the Swedish sense of humor (which North Americans often find incomprehensible).
- Swedes avoid arguing over sensitive topics in general, especially with foreigners. If a discussion of this type begins, don't be offended if the Swede cuts it off abruptly.
- Do not be too open in expressing emotion (for example, "I'm so happy to be here" should be said calmly).
- Similarly, appearing reserved or even slightly shy can give a positive impression to your Swedish hosts.
- Avoid conducting a private conversation in public areas.
- Do not ask personal questions or be offended if Swedes do not inquire about your family, work, and so forth.
- Avoid superficiality in conversation.
- Silence is accepted with ease by Swedes; don't rush to fill in pauses in the conversation.
- There is much pride in local regions. Visitors should not praise one area over another.
- Scandinavians appreciate knowledge of the differences among the people of Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark.
- The Swedes have an intense appreciation of nature.
- Relaxation is important to the Swedes. This includes breaks in their work schedule. Don't try to rush a Swede who is taking a long coffee break or an even longer lunch break, even if you are inconvenienced by it.



### Business Entertaining

- Business lunches and dinners are quite popular. Make reservations in advance. Formal restaurants are recommended for business meals.
- Invite spouses to business dinners, but not to lunches.
- It is not uncommon for businesswomen to pick up the check in Sweden, especially if they are on an expense account.
- The Swedes generally do not socialize with coworkers after working hours, although they do consider their colleagues to be good friends.
- If you are invited to a Swedish home, you should bring flowers for the hostess.
- The toast is more formal in Sweden than elsewhere in Northern Europe.
- Allow your host and those older than you to toast you before proposing a toast to them.
- *Skoal* is the Swedish "cheers."
- Wait until your host has said *skoal* before touching your drink.

- If you are seated next to the hostess as the guest of honor, you may be expected to make a speech.
- The *smörgåsbord* is a buffet (hot and cold) served year round, and especially during Christmas and Easter.

## Time

- Sweden is one hour ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (G.M.T. + 1), or six hours ahead of U.S. Eastern Standard Time (E.S.T. + 6).

## Protocol



### Greetings

- The handshake is the standard greeting. Good friends (especially among the young) who see each other often do not bother to shake hands.

### *cultural note*

Older, upper-class people may be very formal. Be sure to shake their hands when greeting and when leaving. Note that they often avoid the pronoun "you," but instead refer to people in the third person (e.g., when greeting Mr. jarl, they will say "How is Mr. jarl today?"). To be properly formal, you should respond in the same way, although few young people use this mode of speech.

- When you meet someone after you have been a guest at his or her house, thank him or her immediately.
- Usually a third person will introduce you to a group, but if this doesn't happen, go around the room, shaking hands and telling your name to each person.



### Titles / Forms of Address

- The order of names in Sweden is the same as in the United States: first name followed by surname.
- Expect to address everyone by their surname unless you are invited to do otherwise. Young people are more likely to go to a first-name basis quickly.
- People without a professional title should be addressed as Mr., Mrs., Miss, or Ms., plus surname.
- Persons with professional titles should be addressed by that title, plus surname (e.g., Professor Olson). Such titles include Doctor, Engineer, Professor, and so forth.



### Gestures

- The Swedes do not use many gestures; you should be restrained as well. Avoid talking with your hands.
- A toss of the head means "come here."
- In dealing with the Swedes, keep your voice tone modulated. Swedes are a relatively quiet people.

- Look people directly in the eye when you speak to them.
- Swedes do not like physical contact with anyone except close friends, except for the handshake. Do not touch, backslap, embrace, or put an arm around a Swede.
- While Swedes are known for their sexual openness, do not mistake a Swedish woman's forwardness for a sexual invitation. Swedish women often speak to strangers, especially foreigners when they want to practice the foreigner's language.
- Hats are commonly worn in cold weather. Men should tip their hat when passing someone they know, and remove it when speaking to a woman.



### Gifts

- Liquor is very expensive in Sweden, and so is a highly appreciated gift. Fine liquor or wine from the United States makes a good business gift.
- Flowers, liquor, wine, cake, or chocolates are appropriate gifts for your hostess when you are invited to a Swedish home. You may also bring candy for the children.



### Dress

- Conservative dress is appropriate. For business appointments, men should wear suits and ties, while women should wear suits or dresses.
- Swedes are usually fashionably well-dressed in public.