

Facts: Sweden

Architecture of the Swedish Embassy

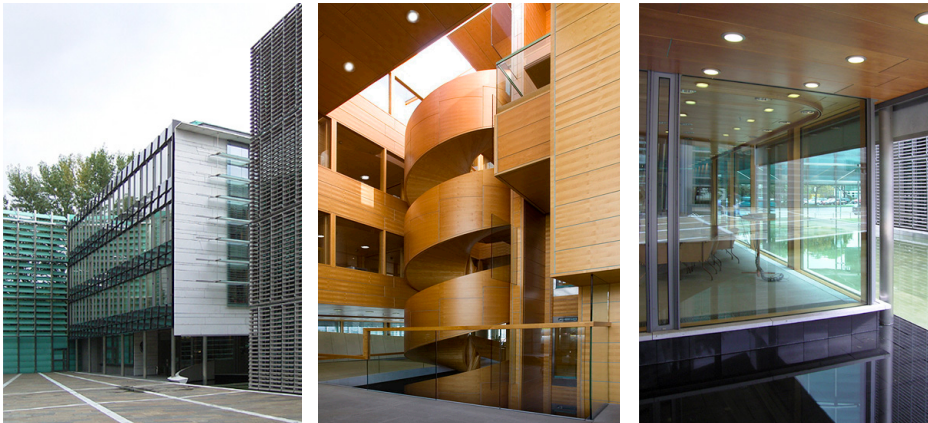
White limestone, glass and black granite

The Embassy of the Kingdom of Sweden is located in the northeastern part of the embassy ensemble. The design of the Gothenburg architect Gert Wingårdh refers to the aesthetics of classical Swedish Modernism, for example in the window band and the wall strip of the western façade.

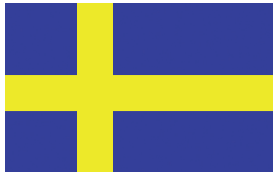
With large glass fronts in the western and southern façades, the embassy building opens onto the plaza. Toward the street side the horizontal louvers of the copper band are open, allowing insight into the embassy building. Both of the façades facing the plaza – following the structure of the copper band – have horizontally accentuated rows of windows. But otherwise the façades are quite different from each other. The façade facing south is framed with white Gotland limestone, the western façade, by contrast, consists of panels of polished black granite, which are arranged in strips.

The central element of the four-storey atrium is a spiral staircase faced with birch wood which winds its way up and connects all of the floors. The walls are also panelled with this wood. The panels are joined by thin copper strips, resulting in a grid structure.

Visitors are led along a large, curved limestone wall into the building. The conference room appears to be floating on the water outside the building.



Flag



The Swedish flag is many centuries old, but its exact age cannot be determined with certainty. First historical evidence dates from the 16th century. The Danish flag presumably served as model for the Swedish flag – the cross was patterned after it. The blue and yellow colours are probably based on the colours of the king's coat of arms. Since 1916 the 6th of June has been celebrated as Swedish Flag Day. However, it was not until 1983 that it officially became the Swedish National Day.

There are about 15 official flag days, including birthdays of members of the royal family, the 1st of May, the day of the parliamentary election, UN Day on the 24th of October, and Nobel Day on the 10th of December.

National Anthem

The Swedish National Anthem *Du gamla, Du fria* is based on the melody of an old folk song. Richard Dybeck (1811-77), a folklorist and ballad writer, wrote the lyrics to this melody from the province of Västmanland in the middle of the 19th century. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the song became so popular that over the course of time it came to be generally accepted as the Swedish national anthem. The song is a festive hymn which alludes to former times and is a homage to the freedom and beauty of the nature of the North.

1. Du gamla, Du fria, Du fjällhöga Nord,
Du tysta, Du glädjerika sköna!
Jag hälsar Dig, vänaste land uppå jord,
Din sol, Din himmel, Dina ängder gröna.
2. Du tronar på minnen från fornstora dar,
Då ärat Ditt namn flög över jorden.
Jag vet att Du är och Du blir vad du var.
Ja, jag vill leva jag vill dö i Norden.
3. Jag städs vill dig tjäna mitt älskade land,
din trohet till döden vill jag svära.
Din rätt, skall jag värna, med håg och med hand,
din fana, högt den bragderika bära.
4. Med Gud skall jag kämpa, för hem och för härd,
För Sverige, den kära fosterjorden.
Jag byter Dig ej, mot allt i en värld
Nej, jag vill leva jag vill dö i Norden.

Language

Swedish is spoken as a native language by approximately 8.5 million people. About 8 million of these live in Sweden, and about 265,000 live in Finland as members of the Finnish-Swedish minority. Swedish sounds like singing – at least to the ears of foreigners. The language is often described as melodious with rising and falling intonation elicited by the many vowels. The colloquial language is strongly coloured by dialects.

Of all of the Nordic languages, Swedish is the language that is most often learned abroad. Swedish is characterized by short words and sentences as well as relatively simple grammar. The structure is similar to English.

Mini language course in Swedish:

Good day – god dag

Good evening – god kväll

Hello – hej

Good-bye – hej då

Thank you – tack

Excuse me – ursäkta

National Day

Since 1983, National Day has been celebrated on the 6th of June, the anniversary of the election of Gustav Vasa as King of Sweden in 1523 as well as the adoption of the new constitution in 1809.

Swedes have a somewhat reserved attitude towards the national state. They are proud of their country, but seem reluctant to demonstrate this pride.

Every year, the King and Queen take part in a National Day ceremony at Skansen, Stockholm's open-air museum, where the yellow and blue flag is hoisted, and children present bouquets of summer flowers to the royal couple. Also, a special ceremony welcoming new Swedish citizens is held on National Day. Previously, the 6th of June was not a public holiday, and for many people the only sign that this was a special occasion was the decoration of buses with Swedish flags. In 2004, the Swedish parliament voted to make it a public holiday.

Christmas

Christmas is called **Jul** in Swedish

Advent Season

During the Advent season people bake pepparkakor (gingerbread cookies) and decorate the house for Christmas. Every Sunday, an additional Advent candle is lit, and each day another door of the Advent calendar is opened. During the Advent season, glögg (a kind of hot wine punch with almonds, raisins, and spices) is a popular beverage. On the 13th of December St. Lucia's Day is celebrated. Prior to that in every community there is a Lucia competition in which a young woman (with long, preferably blond hair!) is elected to be Lucia. She is the leading character of the Lucia procession and, wearing a crown of lighted candles, goes with her entourage to schools, homes for the elderly, or other central social institutions. There a Lucia breakfast is served with coffee and Lussekatter (Lucia saffron buns). At home, people celebrate early in the morning with coffee and the traditional saffron buns. On the 23rd of December, the Uppesittarkväll (late night), people wrap presents and sometimes write short rhymes that go with the presents.

Christmas Eve

The Christmas tree is decorated with crystal balls, tinsel, and lights. People's homes have already been decorated for Christmas with special Christmas curtains at the windows, and red table cloths, candles, straw figures, and gnomes complete the decoration on Christmas Eve. The most important dishes of the Christmas meal are ham, köttbullar (small meat balls), sausage, herring, salmon and rice pudding. Julmust, a special soft drink, and Christmas beer are served as beverage along with the food. Herring is served with the obligatory schnapps. After the festive buffet Jultomten (Santa Claus or Father Christmas) comes and distributes the presents.

Christmas Holidays

For many Swedes, the first day of Christmas begins with a church service very early in the morning. Usually this day is spent at home with the family, and leftovers from the bountiful Christmas Eve buffet are eaten. This is also true for the second day of Christmas.

The last day of the Christmas season in Sweden is the 13th of January, also called Tjugonedag Knut. A popular tradition in some homes is to dance around the Christmas tree, and on this day at the latest, the Christmas tree is carried out the door.

Easter

Easter is called **Påsk** in Swedish

At Easter time, birch branches – decorated with feathers in all colours of the rainbow – brighten up the grey-ness of late winter at Swedish outdoor markets. Their models are the colourful "palm leaves" that have long been part of Palm Sunday celebrations in Central Europe.

Easter decorations include yellow daffodils and, of course, birch branches decorated with coloured eggs, small hand-crafted witches and chicks. To this day, the Easter eggs are dyed with onion peels, spikes, and birch leaves which – when bound around the eggs and boiled together with them – leave pretty patterns on the shell. Foods associated with the Easter holiday include salmon, which is traditionally served on Good Friday, and Easter lamb.

Following old Easter customs, little children paint their faces and dress up in long skirts and headscarves and go from door-to-door with a coffee pot or basket, hoping the adults will fill them with coins and sweets.

The children call themselves Easter hags or Easter witches, thereby bringing the witches to mind who, in Swedish popular belief, flew around Easter time to Mount Blåkulla (the Swedish equivalent of Brocken Mountain) to the Devil. To this day, fireworks explode during Easter night, and in West Sweden, based on old folk practice, Easter bonfires are lit to ward off witches.

Summer

At Midsummer the Swedish summer is a lush green, the nights are light – and the lightest of them all is Midsummer night. In the northern part of Sweden the sun never sets. Midsummer Day was originally celebrated on the 24th of June in commemoration of St. John the Baptist. Since 1953 it has been celebrated on the first Saturday after the 24th of June.

The day before Midsummer – that is, Friday – is traditionally celebrated in the countryside. People start the day by picking flowers and binding wreaths for the Midsummer maypole. The maypole is raised in a public place, and traditional games and ring dances are performed around it – fun for children and adults alike. Teenagers between these two age groups tend to stay out of it and wait to celebrate in the evening.

A typical Midsummer menu features herring, boiled new potatoes with dill and sour milk cream with chopped red onions. This is often followed by a grilled dish of some kind, such as spare rib or salmon, and for dessert the first strawberries of summer, with cream. The traditional accompaniment is a cold beer and schnapps, preferably herbal schnapps.

Midsummer is an occasion associated with a certain nostalgia. Deep inside, Swedes all agree on what it should look like and how it should proceed. So after dinner, many people still want to go out dancing, just like in the old days – preferably on an outdoor dance floor surrounded by birch trees, beside a lake as the evening mist settles and the sound of the dance band echoes back from the rocky hills on the opposite shore.

Like Whitsun, Midsummer is a popular time of year for weddings and christening ceremonies. According to tradition, these should take place in a country church with a flower-bedecked, arched entrance and beautiful hymns. Excerpt from the publication “Celebrating the Swedish way - traditions and festivities” by Po Tidholm and Agneta Lilja, published by the Swedish Institute in Stockholm.

Sports

Sweden is a country with good natural conditions for sports. During the winter people go skiing and ice skating, and during the summer all water sports, such as sailing and canoeing, are practised. Like Norway and Finland, Sweden also has the “Right of Public Access” – a right which among other things ensures free access to nature, no matter who owns the land. The sports enthusiasm of the Swedes is also reflected in this statistic: Approximately one third of the population is a member of one of the 22,000 sports clubs or 11,000 corporate sports clubs.

A relatively new sport in Sweden is innebandy, a game similar to indoor hockey or ice hockey (floorball in English or Unihockey in German). Innebandy was first played in Gothenburg in the 1980s. In this indoor sport two teams play against each other with the aim of scoring as many goals as possible. Each of the two teams consists of 5 players and one goalkeeper. Innebandy is an excellent school sport, since there are different variations of the game and the individual prerequisites of the students can be taken into account. Furthermore, the rules are very easy to learn.

Floorball/Unihockey in Sweden: www.innebandy.se