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Sweden

Location:

Between Finland and Norway in Northern Europe, bordering the Baltic Sea, Gulf of Bothnia, Kattegat and Skagerrak.

Capital:

Stockholm

Language:

The official language is Swedish and is spoken by the majority of individuals. One of two key minority languages is Sami, which is spoken in the Northern regions of Sweden and the other is Finnish, Meänkieli (Tornedalen Finnish). Also, spoken are Yiddish and Romani to a lesser degree.

Culture:

As with Australia, the Swedes are humble and find boasting absolutely unacceptable. They prefer to listen to others as opposed to making sure they are heard. When speaking, Swedes speak softly and calmly. It is a rare moment that you would witness a Swede demonstrating anger or strong emotion in public. Failing to say thank you (Tack-thanks) is a very negative in Sweden.

Sweden is a believer in “everything in moderation.” This does not mean if you work hard you must play hard. People work hard, but not too hard and enjoy themselves without going to extremes. Children are raised to believe they are not any more special than other children.

The family is extremely important in Sweden, and the rights of children are well protected.

- ~ Either the mother or father is entitled to be absent from work until their child reaches 18 months old.
- ~ Either parent has the right to reduce their workload by 25% until their child reaches 8 years old (and is formally ready for school).
- ~ A parental allowance is paid for 480 days, which is intended for both parents. Sixty of these days must be used by the “minority” parents. For this reason, these days are often known as “Daddy’s months.”
- ~ You have the right to up to 60 days off per year to care for a sick child.
- ~ If you are travelling in Sweden, you will notice that most restaurants and other establishments have a play area for the children even on the trains.



Your message. Clearly delivered.

Business Etiquette:

Business personnel in Sweden are typically reserved. It is important that all dealings are formal and serious until it is acceptable by the respective Swedish personnel to allow the events to become more relaxed. Key suggestions:

- ~ Maintain eye contact, firm handshake, you shake hands with all attendees on both arrival and departure.
- ~ Address your hosts with either their professional title or their honorific title and surname.
- ~ Younger people are more likely to move to a first name basis than older people.
- ~ Avoid unnecessary touching. Personal space is very important in Sweden, and I recommend that you do not invade that space.
- ~ There is no specific protocol for exchanging business cards in Sweden.

Business Meetings:

- ~ Give at least 2 weeks notice if you are planning a meeting in Sweden.
- ~ Avoid the following time periods if possible: late February through early March, June, July, August and the Christmas season. Most Swedes will be on holiday during these periods.
- ~ Punctuality is essential. If you are late this will reflect poorly on you, and you will be viewed as discourteous.
- ~ Meetings are governed by an agenda. There is very little talk outside of the agenda given to you upon arrival.
- ~ All individuals are expected to contribute.
- ~ Business personnel are detail focused and your presentations should be well prepared with supporting, accurate and relevant data.
- ~ Decisions are seldom made during initial meetings. It will be general and low key.
- ~ Swedes are direct “saying what you mean and meaning what you say” is practiced and expected.
- ~ Decisions are made by a committee. Endearing yourself to the most senior executives will be of no avail.

What to Wear?

- ~ Men should wear good quality suits with silk ties and shirts.
- ~ Women should wear conservative business dresses or a suit. I am unsure if slacks are acceptable.
- ~ It is strongly recommended that you do not wear anything flashy. Even senior directors or executives do not dress any more elaborately than average employees. No ostentatious or obvious jewelry.

Gift Giving Etiquette:

- ~ If invited to someone's home, it is suggested that you take a gift of flowers or candy.
- ~ Do not give white lilies or chrysanthemums, because they are reserved for funerals.
- ~ It is recommended that you take gifts for any children who are part of the family you are visiting.
- ~ If you are given a gift, open it upon receipt.



Export Goods:

Paper products, electrical and computer equipment, motor vehicles, machinery, chemical products, pharmaceuticals, iron, steel, and foodstuffs.

Imported goods:

Petroleum products, motor vehicles and accessories, machinery, electrical and computer equipment, foodstuffs, textile products, and footwear.

Climate:

In central and southern Sweden the winters are short and quite cold. Summer temperatures are similar to those in southern England, but with a lot more hours of daylight. In some places, the hazy, lazy days spent on the beach as the azure waters lap the shore will allow you to bask in the Midnight Sun and get a suntan. In the northeast, the winters are severe, while the summers can be surprisingly warm. The far winters are also severe with snow lying on the ground year-round in elevated areas. Summers are short and changeable.

Government:

Constitutional monarchy parliamentary democracy. Parliament is The Riksdag with 349 members in one chamber.

Religion:

82% keep the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sweden. The other 18% include Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Baptist, Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist.

Ethnic Make-up:

Sweden's indigenous population consists of Swedes with Finnish and Sami minorities. Foreign-born or first-generation immigrants include people from Finland, the former Yugoslavia, Denmark, Norway and, a surprise to me, people from Greece and Turkey.

