

**COUNTRY: SWEDEN****FACTS:**

Area: 447.435 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 10.300.000

Government: Constitutional monarchy with parliamentary democracy

Language: Swedish

Religion: Christianity

Currency: Swedish Krona (SEK)

Time difference from CET: 0

Climate:

- Southern part: oceanic climate,
- Central part: humid continental climate,
- Northern part: subarctic climate.

Capital: Stockholm (population: 1,400,000)

National Day: 6<sup>th</sup> June

**TIME:****HOLIDAYS AND VACATION:**

- New Year's Eve, New Year's Day
- Twelfth Night, Epiphany
- Easter (Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday, Easter Monday)
- May 1<sup>st</sup>
- Ascension Day
- Whit Sunday
- Midsummer Eve, Midsummer Day
- All Saint's Day
- Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Boxing Day

Workdays followed by a public holiday normally end at lunch.

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#### OFFICE HOURS:

Normally 8 to 17, lunch: approx. 1 hour, between 11.30 - 13.30.

Do not expect people to work over weekends, holidays, or vacations, since these times are usually very precious to Swedes. It is however relatively common that a businessperson will bring work home. If your Swedish business partner has given you his/her phone number, it is acceptable to make a phone call after official business hours. You should remember however, not to disturb your Swedish business partners outside of office hours on business related matters that are not urgent, wait until the next business day.

#### MANNERS AND CUSTOMS:

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##### COURTESY:

You are greeted by hand or just say "Good morning" ( *God Morgon* ) or "Hi" ( *Hej* ).

Titles are not used in conversations. Generally, use first names at once.

Swedes avoid arguing, especially with visitors. If a discussion appears to be turning into an argument, do not be offended if a Swede abruptly changes the subject. Do not use a lot of superlatives when speaking. The Swedes are opposed to stretching the truth. The marks of rank or status are disliked. Do not get too personal. Topics like family, income and personal background should be avoided. Swedes are very proud of their society, so it is wise not to criticize their way of life, welfare system, economy, government or culture. Racist or sexist jokes are not tolerated.

Swedes love their mobile phones, but you should not answer calls during an important meeting. It says that whoever is on the phone is more important than who you're meeting with. Simply turn it off when heading into an important meeting.

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##### DRESS:

Sweden is one of the European countries where a casual dress code is the most popular in the workplace. However, for important business appointments you should dress more conservatively. Appropriate clothes would be a dark suit and tie for men, and a business suit or skirt and blouse for women. Trousers are also acceptable for businesswomen in Sweden.

Swedes themselves are usually fashionably well-dressed in public. Highly styled clothing is preferred in the evening when going out and this is even the case in the smaller towns.

Swedes value quality and that is also true when it comes to clothes. Modesty and a low profile are important. Avoid wearing anything flashy, even the most senior executives do not dress more elaborately than average employees. It's also okay to simply ask whoever you're meeting what dress code to expect. They won't find the question off-putting.

You should remember that there are four distinct seasons in Sweden. This should be taken into account when planning what to wear. During the height of summer, the weather can be hot and humid. The long winter requires appropriate winter clothes: heavy coats, warm gloves, hats, and boots. The colder weather allows women, and sometimes men, to wear heavy boots to work, and then to change into more comfortable office shoes. Because it is cold in Sweden, be prepared to dress in layers.

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#### BODY LANGUAGE:

A cool reception doesn't mean you're out in the cold. Swedes aren't known for being overly gregarious, so don't interpret a terse response as a sign you've failed to make a connection. "Even Swedes can laugh and smile, but if they don't, that doesn't mean they're angry or that the deal is in jeopardy," And rather than a back slap or embrace, Swedes are generally more comfortable with touching "below the forearm".

#### NEGOTIATION:

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##### BUSINESS MEETING:

In Sweden, as in Finland and Denmark, punctuality is very important both when doing business and making social engagements. It follows that you should never be late. If you must be late for any reason it is polite to phone and let someone know. Punctuality symbolizes respect and efficiency. Being late is seen as poor etiquette.

Scheduling and planning are sometimes mentioned as part of the Swedish 'way of life'. Generally, spontaneity and improvisation are not the strongest characteristics of Swedes.

Meetings are expected to commence at the agreed time and will normally start and end with a handshake. The notion of the schedule must be well respected from the beginning to the end of the meeting.

The notions of equality and consensus are also very common in business meetings. Make sure that everyone participates in the decision and that no direct confrontations occur.

It is seen as a matter of course that meetings proceed according to a written agenda and that they result in a written summary recording the most important decisions and agreements. It is important to keep to the promises made at the meetings. Tasks agreed on should be accomplished in time. This will maintain and increase your credibility and build trust, which is an essential condition for any business relationship.

You should make the arrangements for your business meetings in good time. Making the appointment at least two weeks in advance is recommended. Changes at the last minute are not appreciated. When a meeting is organized in Sweden it is common to receive a confirmation in advance.

The ideal times for business meetings are 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. Changing the time and place at short notice is not appreciated. Swedes treasure their leisure time, most of which is spent with the family. Business partners should not therefore, routinely expect to meet with their Swedish counterparts outside of office hours.

Don't forget to *fika*. The Swedish-style coffee break serves as an informal staff meeting in many offices and isn't something that should be ignored. Normally there are two or three *fika* breaks every day. If you're on deadline, no one will react if you say you are too busy for a *fika*. But if you skip *fika* all the time, people may start to wonder what your problem is.

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#### NEGOTIATION SKILLS:

Where people from other countries may be used to warm things up with a small talk, Swedes tend to get right down to business. In Sweden, you're always ready to talk business. If you're out at a business lunch in Sweden, don't be surprised if you start talking business before your food has even arrived.

Be well-prepared when entering negotiations with Swedes, as they are known for analysing information, backgrounds and proposals carefully. Make sure your presentation is factual and well organized.

Swedes are known for their ability to secure good deals without making enemies. They cherish dialogue and the idea of democracy and it is normal to discuss subjects in detail in order to reach an agreement. Swedish people tend to rely heavily on compromise and consensus when it comes to making decisions and reaching solutions. It's generally felt to be much better if policies and ideas are discussed openly and across all levels before any conclusion is reached. To do business with Swedes it is important to be honest and all agreements must be written and signed since Swedes consider a written contract as a memorandum of understanding as well as being proof of a deal. Swedes are used to being paid within 30 days and all prices are in SEK.

Swedish companies tend to be less hierarchical than companies in many other countries when it comes to internal organisation. This means that a managing director of a firm is more openly available to his or her employees. In general, it's possible for employees to take their comments, questions or concerns directly to the boss. Subordinates often have more responsibility to conduct negotiations or close a deal. If you're meeting with a frontline sales rep, you don't necessarily need to involve his or her supervisor to seal the deal.

#### Don't do this:

- Use force. Easing your way into a company or into relations with a company takes time. Swedes are not so receptive to new thoughts/plans if they feel that they are being forced upon them.
- Boast or brag. Generally, Swedes are modest and avoid embellishing their accomplishments.
- Show disrespect. This may seem obvious, but it's important: understanding the Swedish culture and work ethic will mean that you respect your colleagues or business associates. Watch and listen to get the feel of the situation before you act.

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#### INVISIBLE CODES:

Stereotypically, Swedes do not feel that it's necessary to stand out in a crowd. The Swedish word *lagom* is not just a word. It's a concept that doesn't easily translate into English. Essentially, *lagom* means 'just right' or 'adequate' and can be used for just about anything. The *lagom* concept or mentality exists in Swedish business as well. Employees, and many employers, often focus on doing exactly what's needed and doing

it well, rather than doing unnecessary things. This concept can be frustrating for foreigners to understand sometimes.

The Swedish term *jantelagen* downplays the importance of individual accomplishments and also infuses Swedish business culture. "You can promote your business all you want, but if you start bragging too much, that won't impress anybody."

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#### ETHICS:

Sweden is one of the world's leading countries in corporate social responsibility (CSR). Issues such as climate change, gender, human rights and anti-corruption are all taken into account when doing business. Since the 1970s Sweden has been active and fast in reacting to the calls for CSR which nowadays is considered to be a crucial part of strategic planning in Swedish business life. Equality in the workplace and job security are of utmost importance, so unions work hard to assure that employees feel secure and unthreatened at work.

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#### COMMUNICATION:

Swedes are often very informal but display very little emotion in business dealings. When you are negotiating with a Swedish partner, make sure that you do not come across as being too emotional since showing too much emotion during a negotiation can be a mistake and create a bad impression. The use of humour is not common behaviour during the negotiations.

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#### GIFTS:

In business dealings, gifts are rarely given at the beginning of the relationship. Wait for your Swedish partner to give you a gift first. Although exchanging gifts is not common at the beginning of a business relationship, it is appropriate when you are closing your transaction.

Holiday cards are appropriate, particularly as a thank you for the recipient's business during the previous year, and these should be mailed in time to be received the week before Christmas. It is customary to exchange small gifts at Christmas among colleagues and business partners, too.

Sweden is one of the least corrupt countries in the world and there is very strong public opinion against all modes of corruption. Swedish law has included sanctions against any person receiving or giving any kind of bribe. This is good news for investors who want to set up a business in Sweden.

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#### REPRESENTATION:

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##### AT A RESTAURANT:

Lunch is the most common mealtime for business negotiations in Sweden. Longer and socially more intimate dinners offer a good opportunity to get to know your business partners and to develop deeper

relationships. Most restaurants do not require a tie for men, although upscale ones expect both men and women to dress well.

Breakfast meetings are uncommon in Sweden as Swedes usually have breakfast at home with their families. Lunchtime is between 11.30 am and 1.30 pm and the Swedes normally spend one hour for lunch.

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#### IN THE HOME:

At social events gifts are expected. For instance, when you are invited to a dinner, flowers, liquor, wine, cake, or chocolates are appreciated. Family is very important to Swedes, so it is much appreciated if you bring small gifts for the family, e.g. candy for the children.

#### OTHER:

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#### COUNTRY AND PEOPLE:

Swedes are environmentally conscious and separate their garbage to facilitate recycling.

Sweden has very different climate, compared south to north. People living in the north will experience spring to arrive much later and autumn to arrive much sooner than those living in the south. There are different accents across the country and you may find Swedish sounding very different in different areas. Most people in Sweden speak English very well, as school start to educate English at low ages. As standard, foreign TV series are broadcasted with original language with at texted translation. However, you may find the older generation a little less comfortable speaking English.

When entering private homes, you normally take off your shoes and place them carefully in front of the vast shoe collection sorted in a practical two-level *skohylla* (shoe shelf) under the coat rack.

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#### CHALLENGES:

- To balance on the edge of plain & simple and professionalism when it comes to business contacts.
- To build trust. Keep promises and deadlines. Both spoken and formalized in documents.
- If you're not from Sweden you might not be aware of how animated and loud you can be in a conversation. Being loud and flamboyant is the quickest way to irritate the locals in Sweden and you might even be gently reprimanded if your voice carries over to the next table.
- Swedes value their personal space. Unless you're in a crowd, you should never stand too close to people, even the cashier in a shop.

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#### WHAT IS THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN:

If a Swedish person perceives you as arrogant, aggressive or overbearing it can lead to a no deal. Never pressure a Swede into making a quick decision. If you are in a hurry, please ask for a quick decision and

explain why. Be honest – if it is the boss pushing you to close the deal – let the Swede know, they will understand and do their best to accommodate you.

If you are not able to answer a question, ask to come back with the correct answer rather than guessing. Otherwise you may appear as unprofessional or in worst case – a liar.

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#### WHEN IT WORKS WELL - WHAT HAS TO BE IN PLACE:

When you show due respect, show that you have your facts straight, behave moderately, and stick to the Swedish “distancing rules” (not to close to the other person). You have a very good chance to succeed in making business with the Swedes. Honesty and trust are the keywords. People make business with people the like!

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#### INFORMATION AND/OR KNOWLEDGE AND/OR SKILLS:

As mentioned above; honesty, respect and interest in your business counterpart will take you far. It is always a good idea to prepare yourself with information about the company you are dealing with, as well as some knowledge about political and social subjects that are high on the agenda at the moment.