

Holidays in Sweden

The first holiday is Trettondagen – **The Epiphany** – on the 6 January. It is a red letter day, but we don't celebrate in any special way. Maybe we visit friends or have them over to our house.



The next one is Tjugondag Knut – **St Knut's Day**. Tjugondag means twenty days and therefore it is on 13 January, twenty days after Christmas. This is the last day of Christmas and it is time to get rid of the Christmas tree. Earlier it was very common to have gatherings where you danced around the Christmas tree and afterwards the children got sweet from Santa before the tree was thrown away. This happened all over the country in cities and villages as well as in homes. Some people still celebrate like this.

47 days before Easter we have Fettisdagen – **Shrove Tuesday**. It is celebrated on a Tuesday between 3 February and 9 March. That day we eat semlor. Other names are fettisdagsbulle or fastlagsbulle. It is a bun where you cut a lid and scoop out the center of the bun and mix the inside with cream, sugar and grated almonds. Then you put the mixture back again and add whipped cream on top of it, before putting back the lid and sprinkle icing sugar on top of the bun. Some people serve them in bowls with hot milk – then they are called hetvägg. You are only supposed to eat those buns during this day, but nowadays bakery's and shops sell them from right after Christmas.



Valentine's Day is of course celebrated in Sweden as well and in Swedish it is Alla hjärtans dag – all hearts' day.

25 March is Våffeldagen – **Waffle Day**. In early days this day was considered to be the start of spring. Of course we eat waffles this day!



Sweden is not the only country to celebrate 1 April – **April Fool's Day**. The only thing we do is to try to fool people. There are April Fool's Jokes on TV, in newspapers, in schools – yes, everywhere. When we have made the joke we say "April, april du dumma sill, jag kan lura dig vart jag vill" which means "April, April, you silly herring, I can fool you into going anywhere".

Easter is a holiday we often spend together with friends or family. We eat about the same things as during Christmas - ham, herring, potatoes, meat balls, sausages, Janssons frestelse (Jansson's Temptation), salad and of course a lot of eggs. The children get Easter Eggs with sweets and sometimes the eggs are hidden and they have to search for them. A tradition that is not that common now as it used to be is that children are supposed to dress up as witches Maunday Thursday. They then knock on doors and ask for sweets, so you have to have a lot of sweets ready for the occasion.



In some parts of Sweden there was a tradition earlier where you had to put up your stockings the evening before Wednesday and during the night a crane would come and put sweets in your stocking. In some parts of Sweden it is common to light bonfires on Easter Eve.



Valborgsmässoafton, Walpurgis Eve, 30 April is a genuine Swedish tradition. All around Sweden bonfires are lit to welcome spring. A choir is often there too, singing spring songs. In Lund and Uppsala, the most famous university cities, choirs have been singing for more than 200 years during.

The **First of May** is a red letter day. Students at universities have parties. The Social Democrats have demonstrations and march through towns to celebrate Labour Day.



Since 1907 **May flowers** in paper are sold before 1st May to wear in May. School children sell them and the profit goes to aid work for children. The flower looks almost the same every year – only the colours differ.

Ascension Thursday (Kristi himmelfärdsdag) is also a red letter day in May, but most people don't think of the religious origin. It is just another holiday free from work or school.

50 days after Easter we have **Pentecost**. Until 2004 Whit Monday was a red letter day, but in 2005 it was just an ordinary day. A lot of weddings are held during this holiday. Otherwise there are no special celebrations or food traditions.



On the fourth Sunday in May we celebrate **Mother's Day**.



Our **National Day** is the 6th June. In 1892 the celebration of the Swedish Flag Day started at Skansen, an open-air museum, in Stockholm. Not until 1983 this date was finally made National Day and from 2005 Whit Monday became an ordinary day and 6th June became a red letter day instead. We don't celebrate much, but at Skansen our king still hands out flags to different organisations this day.

Midsummer is an important holiday in Sweden. Midsommar Eve is not a red letter day, but many people just work until lunch. It is always a Friday between June 19 and June 25. You should eat herring and new potatoes with soured cream and chive. A strawberry cake is also important. In every town there is a Midsummer pole and a lot of people also have one in their own garden. You



have to dance around the pole. A lot of people wear traditional folk costumes. If you are single you should put seven flowers under your pillow in the evening in order to dream of your future partner. In fact you don't sleep much this night because you are supposed to stay up until the sun will rise in the morning.

Crayfish parties. In August many people have parties in order to eat a lot of crayfish. In earlier days crayfish fishing was prohibited between 1 November until 8 August, but these days you are allowed to fish whenever



you like. But of course most people buy their crayfish. You also eat bread, cheese and pie and drink alcohol or soft drinks. Before you drink the alcohol you have to sing a "snapsvisa" – a song about the drinking. The parties are usually outdoors and there are paper lanterns and you put on silly hats and a bib.

Another fish party is **Fermented Herring Day** – Surströmmingsdagen. It is only celebrated in the northern part of the country or among people who have moved south. You either love or hate fermented herring. The fermentation process takes about six to seven weeks and the fish is put in to cans. You have to be outdoors when you open the can, because the smell is really awful. Otherwise you put the can in water when you open the can. You eat the fish with boiled potatoes, sour cream and red onions. Everything is wrapped in "tunnbröd" – a thin flatbread.



All Souls' Day is celebrated on the Saturday between 31 October and 6 November. We commemorate all our deceased family members and friends by putting candles and wreaths on their graves.

Halloween is also celebrated in these days and the tradition is of course imported.

Father's Day is always celebrated on the second Sunday in November.

In the south of Sweden they celebrate St Martin's day or rather **St Martin's Eve** (Mårtensafton) on the 10th - 11th November. You have a three course dinner where you start with black soup, consisting of goose blood among other ingredients, then continue with geese and as a dessert you have apple pie.





During **Advent** - the four weeks before Christmas - there are certain electric lights or stars in the windows. Candles are also lit – one every Sunday.

13th December is the day we celebrate Lucia in every town and school, but sometimes also in our homes. There is a Lucia with candles in her hair and beside her there are attendants, starboys, gingerbread men and elves.



Christmas. In Sweden Christmas Eve is the most important day – not Christmas Day! We actually see Santa Claus, because he comes knocking on our door in the late afternoon/early evening and he has a sack full of presents to hand out.

New Year. New Year's Eve is mostly celebrated with parties in our homes even if many people also gather in e g restaurants. There is no special food or drink except champagne at midnight. There are a lot of fireworks around midnight and many people also watch a TV programme from the out-door museum of Skansen where a famous person reads the poem Ring Out, Wild Bells (in Swedish) by Alfred Tennyson every year. New Year's Day is not celebrated – it is just a day to relax after New Year's Eve.



Questions

1. What is the first holiday that is celebrated in Sweden?
2. When do you danced around the Christmas tree and get sweet from Santa before the Christmas tree is thrown away?
3. What is a semla?
4. What do Swedes say when they make a joke on April Fool's Day?
5. What do some children do on Maunday Thursday?
6. What holidays are there in May?
7. What tradition started in 1907?
8. The National Day has it's origin in another holiday – which one?
9. What can you tell about Midsummer Eve?
10. Two parties are celebrated in August. What do you eat then?
11. How do you commemorate the deceased people on All Soul's Day?
12. When is Father's Day celebrated?
13. What does the black soup eaten on St Martin's Eve consist of?
14. When is Lucia celebrated?
15. When does Santa come with presents in Sweden?