

Introducing Sweden – Speaker's script

Slide: Introducing Sweden

This presentation will give you an introduction to Sweden, the Swedish society, history, economy and people.

You will be given an understanding of the extraordinary journey Sweden has made over the past 100 years.

Today Sweden is one of the strongest economies in the world offering a high quality of life in a modern welfare society.

Slide: Geography

Sweden is a part of Scandinavia. With its 450,000 square km (about 170,000 square miles), Sweden is the third largest country in Western Europe – almost the same size as Spain or France, and bigger than California.

Sweden is a long country: 1,574 km (about 980 miles) stretching from north to south. About the same distance as Seattle-Los Angeles (1,541), Berlin-Moscow (1,619) or Mumbai-Calcutta (1,665).

Sweden is, however, a small country in terms of population, with only 9.2 million inhabitants – which is about 0.1 percent of the world population.

Consequently, Sweden is sparsely populated with roughly 22 inhabitants per square km. This can be compared to the population density in China (134/sq km), Hong Kong (6,688/sq km), India (318/sq km), European Union (112/sq km), Germany (231/sq km), Spain (87/sq km), UK (246/sq km).

Almost 90 percent of the population live in southern Sweden, where we also find the three largest cities, Stockholm (capital, 1.2 million inhabitants), Göteborg, and Malmö.

Slide: People

Historians have disagreed over the years, but nowadays most of them agree that the Sami are entitled to call themselves the original Scandinavians. The Sami are one of the world's smallest groups of indigenous people. The Sami population in Sweden is estimated to some 15,000 (out of the total of 50-60,000 in the whole of Scandinavia).

Not more than one hundred years ago Sweden was a country of poor peasants and emigrants. From the end of the 19th century to 1930 1.5 million Swedes (a fourth of the population) emigrated, most going to North America.

Today Sweden is a rich and well-educated country with large annual investments made in education and research.

Sweden has also become a multicultural country over the past fifty years. This is due to the fact that hundreds of thousands of people from different parts of the world have migrated to Sweden, as refugees or on other grounds.

Today, almost one fifth of the nine million inhabitants were born abroad or have parents who were born abroad.

Swedish is the main language in Sweden, but almost all Swedes speak fluent English.

Slide: History

Swedish ancient history is violent and dramatic, filled with war and conquests.

It began with the Viking plunderings around the 11th century, and continued as time went by with endless military campaigns under warrior kings like Gustav II Adolf and Karl XII.

In the 17th century, Sweden was a great power in Europe, its territories stretching over large parts of the Baltic Sea region.

By the 18th century, Sweden had become so impoverished by all its fighting that peace had to be achieved if the country was to survive. Sweden has lived in peace since 1814, that is, almost 200 years.

Sweden is one of the few European countries that was not involved in the two world wars.

In the post-war period, Sweden has become renowned for its role in international peace work.

The fact that there has been peace for so long is one of the most important factors for the development and well-being of the country.

Slide: Economy

At the end of the 19th century, Sweden was one of the poorest countries in Europe. The industrialization changed this dramatically.

During the following fifty years, Sweden became one of the richest countries in the world. A record economic development took place, that was strongly connected to the building of railroads, allowing access to natural assets (forests, iron ore, hydropower) in northern Sweden - assets that are still considered the traditional basis of the Swedish economy. This development is often referred to as "the Swedish economic miracle."

Sweden has one of the highest gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in the world, roughly USD 47,000 (2007). This can be compared to:

- UK: USD 45 500
- USA: USD 45 500
- France: USD 41 000
- Germany: USD 39 500
- Norway: USD 79 000
- China: USD 2 500
- India: USD 1 000

Slide: Trade 1

With an insufficient domestic market, major Swedish companies were “forced” right from the start to export to customers worldwide. This early globalization has given Swedish companies an advantage in international competition.

A surprisingly large number of multinational export companies and brands have their origin in Sweden, given the size of the population (many of them founded during the rapid economic development in the first half of the 20th century), for example: Volvo, AstraZeneca, ABB, IKEA, Ericsson, Electrolux, H&M, Saab and Absolut.

Today Sweden’s most important export goods are electronic and telecom equipment, machinery, passenger cars, paper, pharmaceuticals, iron and steel.

Basic industry, steel and paper production still account for one fifth of export income. The main part (60 percent), however, comes from the mechanical engineering industries.

Swedish industry has become more and more research-intensive and is characterized by a high level of technological development.

Slide: Trade 2

So, what does the future hold for Swedish exports?

Knowledge-intensive industries such as IT, biotechnology/biomedicine and environmental technology are expected to be increasingly important.

The so-called creative industries – design, fashion, music and gastronomy – are also up and coming. Sweden has experienced a creative revolution over the past decade that has attracted worldwide attention and given the country substantial new export income.

The Swedish capital of Stockholm in particular has received a great deal of international coverage in the world press over the past few years as one of the top scenes for an urban lifestyle, fashion and trends, alongside world cities like London, Paris, Milan and New York. This has also boosted incoming tourism.

The tourism in Sweden has increased greatly over the past two decades. Today the export value of the Swedish tourism industry is 88 billion SEK, which is more than the total export value of the Swedish passenger car industry (2007).

Slide: Society

In parallel with the economic development during the first half of the 20th century, Swedish society went through fundamental changes. The active aim of the government was to create a society with focus on the safety and welfare of the individual.

The ground pillar of “the Swedish welfare policy” is that every citizen, regardless of background, income etc, should be guaranteed basic security in every phase of life. High taxes pay for a large public sector and finance general welfare systems (healthcare, childcare, schools, senior care among others).

Another way of describing the Swedish system is as a market economy with strong elements of redistributive policy. It is often referred to as "the Swedish model," "the third way" or "the middle way" and has attracted attention among political scientists and politicians worldwide. It has served as an example in many other countries.

Slide: Sustainability

Another focus in the development of the Swedish society has been concern for the environment. One reason for this is the Swedes' close connection with and love of nature.

It was in fact a Swede, physicist Svante Arrhenius, who in the late 19th century discovered the greenhouse effect, and foresaw the global warming that we are experiencing today.

Sweden's Riksdag has decided that we are to hand over to the next generation a society in which the most important environmental problems have been solved. Setting the agenda for Swedish environmental policy are 16 environmental quality objectives, first adopted by the Riksdag in 1999. (Examples are "Reduced climate impact", "Clean air", "Zero eutrophication", "A good built environment" and "A rich diversity of plant and animal life".)

As noted before, environmental technology is considered to be one of Sweden's most important future export industries. Its main strength lies in producing systemic solutions for fields like waste management and renewable energy.

Swedish companies (SKF and Stora Enso, among others) have received international attention for their successful work with incorporating corporate social responsibility (CSR) in their business strategies, and Sweden ranks as number one (i.e. the world's most responsibly competitive nation) out of 108 countries in the 2007 edition of The State of Responsible Competitiveness Index (developed by the organization AccountAbility).

How do Swedes live sustainably?

- One third of all energy consumed in Sweden comes from renewable sources (mainly biofuels and hydropower). This is a good thing, considering that we use more energy per capita than most other countries – in large parts due to our cold climate and high standard of living.
- District heating accounts for about half of all heating used in Sweden, and is produced largely through burning resources that would otherwise be lost; household refuse and other waste, residues from logging etc. Surplus heat from manufacturing is also used.
- The number of "green cars" (as defined in the national Ordinance on an eco car subsidy/Förordningen om miljöbilspremie) on the Swedish roads is on the increase. Thirty percent of the passenger cars registered in August 2008 were green cars, to compare with 15 percent the same month in 2007. (Out of the total stock of passenger cars, 4.38 million, about 4 percent were green cars.)
- The interest in organic food and drink is on the increase. According to statistics from Sweden's two largest food chains, their ecological market grew 18 and 30 percent respectively during 2007 (to compare with a European average of 5-7 percent). In a survey on behalf of the European Commission, 40 percent of the Swedes said they had bought an eco-labelled article of some kind over the past month, to compare with the European average of 17 percent (2008). The leading Swedish eco-label for food is the KRAV label, established in 1985.

- A majority of the Swedes sort their household waste. A fairly common perception is that if there is one thing you can do yourself to help the environment, this is it. Today, about 85 percent of all used PET bottles and aluminum cans are returned. We also return glass cans and bottles, tin cans, paper packaging and rigid plastics. What doesn't fit into the sorting scheme, the "leftovers," are burned along with other bio waste in the district heating plants. Statistics from 2008 show that a total of 96 percent of the household waste is recycled, either as material or as energy.

Slide: Equality

A ground pillar in the Swedish welfare state is the belief that everyone is of equal worth.

Swedish laws and customs include a system of rules that prohibit discrimination against people on the basis of sex, ethnic origin, physical, mental or intellectual disabilities, sexual orientation and political and religious conviction.

Sweden is ranked in the top three in the 2008 edition of The Gender Gap Index (created by the World Economic Forum), having among the highest overall gender equality (81 percent) in the world. This shows that Sweden has come a long way.

A well-developed social welfare system makes it easier to combine work and family in Sweden. Seventy-nine percent of the women are gainfully employed (to compare with a European average of 56 percent).

It is fairly common that both parents take parental leave – 69 percent of the fathers do so (to compare with one in three fathers as an EU average). Out of the 480 days during which parental allowance is paid out, 60 days are reserved for the father and 60 for the mother. The remaining days the parents can choose who takes care of the child. According to the Swedish Equal Opportunities Act an employer may not treat unfairly any employee or job applicant who is, has been or will be on parental leave.

Slide: Education

The Swedish Education Act states that all children shall have equal access to education, regardless of gender, where they live or social or economic factors. All education in the public school is free of charge.

Sweden has nine years of compulsory schooling, which begins at the age of seven. Today almost all children attend non-compulsory pre-school classes at the age of six, which is supposed to prepare children for compulsory school. In practice this means ten years of schooling in total.

Around 98 percent of the students who finish compulsory school start high school, which is also offered free of charge. High school programs run for three years. Students can choose from some 20 different programs that provide general qualifications to study at universities and university colleges.

Slide: Higher education and research

Roughly 25 percent of the students who attend a high school program continue to university or university college.

Higher education is free of charge for everyone, financed by the state. Swedish students are offered a grant component and a student loan to cover living expenses during their studies.

Sweden has a long tradition of higher education dating back to the 15th century, when the first Swedish university was founded (Uppsala: 1477). Today Sweden has no less than 16 universities and 23 university colleges.

In total 320,000 students study at Swedish universities and university colleges, of which 28,000 are foreign students (2007). Roughly 60 percent of the students in undergraduate university studies are women (compared to 20 percent in 1940).

Sweden is one of the countries in the world that invests the largest percentage of its GDP in education – an important policy priority given that education is considered the most important investment in the future in a knowledge-intensive society like Sweden's.

Sweden is also one of the world's most committed investors in basic research; spending in the field of research amounts to 3.8 percent of GDP (2006). What further distinguishes Sweden is the high proportion of university-based research, which makes a strong connection between research and education possible.

In the field of environmental technology Swedish research is in the lead. Another strong area is nanotechnology, important in many industries, not least within the fields of biotechnology and information technology.

Slide: Swedish innovation

Modern research at Swedish universities and companies have resulted in a number of successful inventions. Some examples are: the computer mouse, Bluetooth for internet mobility, the pacemaker, the AXE telephone exchange, the Tetra Pak beverage packaging system, the dialysis machine, the Brånemark System (osseointegration) and the Leksell Gamma knife (surgery).

However, the Swedish tradition of innovation goes further back.

In 1881, Lars Magnus Ericsson – the founder of Ericsson – released the world's first telephone handset to the market. Four years later the Swedish capital of Stockholm had the world's highest density of telephones, in terms of both the number of apparatuses and telephones per inhabitants. In the early 1980s, the Swedish telecom company Ericsson launched the first NMT-system, which was a breakthrough for modern mobile telephony. Ericsson has since then played an essential role in the development of mobile telephony globally.

Some other examples of Swedish inventions are the Celsius thermometer, the safety match, the ship propeller, dynamite, the cream separator, the adjustable wrench, the ball bearing, the unmanned lighthouse and the steam turbine.

These Swedish inventions have become well known and used internationally, and constitute the foundation for many of the major Swedish international export companies.

In conclusion, Sweden has long been at the forefront of research in natural science, starting with Carl Linnaeus and Anders Celsius 300 years ago. Still today Sweden is a country where innovation and entrepreneurship run deep.

Slide: The Nobel Prize

The Nobel Prize was established at the end of the 19th century under the will of Alfred Nobel, one of Sweden's many great inventors. (Among other things he invented the dynamite.) Early on the Nobel Prize acquired the status as the world's most prestigious academic distinction.

At an annual ceremony in Stockholm on Nobel Day, December 10, the Nobel Prize is awarded by the Swedish monarch in the categories of literature, medicine, physics and chemistry. Since 1968 there is also a prize in economics.

On the same day the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded in the Norwegian capital of Oslo (this was also decided by Alfred Nobel and had to do with the fact that Norway and Sweden was still in a union when Nobel wrote his will).

Slide: Monarchy

Sweden is a constitutional monarchy in which the king is head of state. However, the king has no political power, only representative and ceremonial functions. The Swedish kings have been members of the Bernadotte family since 1818.

The current king of Sweden, Carl XVI Gustaf, has been on the throne since 1973. His wife, Queen Silvia, grew up in Brazil and has a German father and a Brazilian mother.

The successor to the throne is Crown Princess Victoria (born in 1977). Victoria is the oldest of three children in the royal family and big sister of Prince Carl Philip and Princess Madeleine.

At birth Victoria was in fact not first in line to the throne; female succession of throne was only implemented in 1980.

Slide: Form of government

Sweden has a one-chamber parliament, the Riksdag, with 349 members elected from all parts of the country. The Swedish parliament is one of the world's most gender-equal. Almost 50 percent of its members have been women during the past years. (Women were given the right to vote and run for office in 1921.)

There are currently seven parties represented in the Riksdag, divided into two blocs – the Alliance (the Moderate Party, Liberal Party, Center Party and Christian Democrats) on one side and the Social Democrats, Left Party and Green Party on the other.

The dominant party since the early 20th century has been the Social Democrats, who have governed the country most of the time since the 1920s.

However, in the latest election in September 2006, with a voter turnout of 82 percent, the Alliance of four non-socialist parties received a majority.

The country's current prime minister and leader of the four-party government is the Moderate Party leader, Fredrik Reinfeldt.

Sweden became a member of the European Union (EU) in 1995, which meant a major change in the country's domestic and foreign policy. In 2003, however, the Swedish people voted against giving up the Swedish krona and joining the EU's euro zone.

Slide: Climate

What is it like living in Sweden? Over the coming slides we will give you a better understanding of everyday life in Sweden, starting with the climate.

Sweden is a long country that stretches from north to south. The climate therefore varies within the country and the changes in seasons are dramatic. A warm and light summer is followed by a colorful fall, a long, dark winter and a bright and longed-for spring.

The average daytime temperature in the summer ranges from around +12°C in the north (Kiruna) to +18°C in the south (Malmö). The average daytime temperature in the winter ranges from around -15°C in the north to +1°C in the south.

The summers in Sweden are known to be light. On the lightest day of the year in mid-June, there is on average 20 hours of sunlight throughout the country, the sun never setting in Kiruna, north of the Arctic Circle (this is known as the midnight sun). In contrast, on the darkest day of the year (mid-December), the average sun time in Sweden is about 6 hours, the sun in Kiruna not reaching above the horizon at all.

Slide: Living in Sweden

The dramatic changes in seasons put pressure on Swedish housing. Swedish houses are therefore well-isolated and constructed to meet these variations in temperature.

Ninety percent of the Swedish people live in the southern parts of the country. Roughly 85 percent of the population live in cities, whereof 30 percent live in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. Approximately 15 percent live in the countryside.

Fifty-seven percent of the Swedes live in houses and 42 percent live in apartments.

The average family has 1.26 children, and the children move away from their parents around the age of 20.

Slide: Working in Sweden

The Swedish working climate is characterized by a casual atmosphere. From the classroom all the way to the boardroom, titles like "Mrs" or "Dr" are things of the past. Students and teachers, patients and doctors, employees and employers – everyone is on a first-name basis.

Swedish companies tend to be less hierarchical than companies in many other countries when it comes to internal organization. This means that a managing director of a firm is more openly available to his or her employees, erasing some of the chain-of-command arrangements that

exist in other countries. In general, it's possible for employees to take their comments, questions or concerns directly to the boss.

Swedish workers 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.

In Swedish families both parents usually work. During the working day, most small children spend their time at pre-school (dagis).

The Swedish working week stretches from Monday to Friday and is by law regulated to be 40 hours. Parents have the right to work part-time (75 percent) until the youngest child is 8 years old. If you work full time, you have a minimum of 5 weeks' paid vacation.

Around 70 percent of those who work are employed in the private sector, and around 30 percent in the public sector.

Unemployment in Sweden during the last decade has been ranging from roughly 4 to 6 percent, which is slightly below the average EU level.

Retirement age in Sweden is 65 years. Considering that the average lifetime is 83 years for women and 78 years for men, this means that Swedes usually have a long retirement.

Slide: Spare time in Sweden

So, how do Swedes spend their spare time?

During vacations and weekends Swedes tend to spend a lot of time outdoors. Walking through forests and fields is more popular than any of the leisure-time activities the Swedish local authorities invest in (swimming pools, indoor skating rinks, playgrounds etc.).

The Swedish right of common access allows everyone access to forests, mountains and other parts of nature, whoever owns the land, providing due care and consideration is shown towards plants, animals and landowners. The basic principle is "don't disturb, don't destroy."

The Swedish "sports movement" has a very broad coverage. Nearly every second Swede between the age of 7 and 70 belongs to an athletic association of some type. The biggest sports are soccer and hockey, also popular are horseback riding and gymnastics. This big interest in sports explains Sweden's international success in many fields of athletics. Some of today's stars are soccer players Fredrik Ljungberg and Zlatan Ibrahimovic, downhill skier Anja Pärson, hockey player Peter Forsberg, table tennis player Jan-Ove Waldner and track-and-field athlete Carolina Klüft.

During their vacations Swedes are frequent travelers. Almost 50 percent of Swedish families travel abroad every year.

Nature, sports and travel are, however, not the only interests in Swedes' lives. As already mentioned, the urban lifestyle trend has grown stronger over the past decade and Swedes today spend an increasing time shopping and visiting restaurants.

Another characteristic feature of Swedes is their love of coffee. Sweden is the second largest consumer of coffee in the world, with an average of 3.4 cups/person and day (only the Finns drink more).

Slide: Public holidays and traditions

Traditional Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter are big in Sweden, as is New Year. The other main public holidays, however, usually have a strong connection to the shifts in seasons.

After a long and dark winter, Swedes celebrate the arrival of spring at Walpurgis eve, April 30. This is not a family occasion, rather a public celebration. People gather around the local Walpurgis bonfire. Since Walpurgis is celebrated on April 30 and May 1 is a public holiday, many choose to party all night long.

Summer in Sweden is short. It explodes into life in June when everything is green and the sun barely sets. Around the June 20, Swedes celebrate the lightest day of the year – Midsummer. This is usually done in the countryside and is a family and friend occasion. You gather around long tables and eat herring, potatoes, dill, salmon and drink snaps (nubbe).

By December Sweden has very few hours of daylight. The first Sunday of Advent comes as a sign that Christmas is approaching. Throughout the country Swedes put electric candlesticks and stars in their windows to keep the dark away.

During the darkest time of the year in mid-December, the Swedes celebrate Lucia. Lucia is an ancient mythical figure with a traditional role as a bearer of light in the dark Swedish winter.

Slide: Sweden (Wrap-up)

Over the past 100 years Sweden has made an extraordinary journey from a poor nation of peasants to one of the strongest economies in the world.

The long distance between the northern and southern parts of Sweden creates dramatic contrasts in the landscape and nature across the country. Sweden offers mountains and glaciers up north, dense forests and thousands of lakes and rivers in the central parts and fertile farmlands in the south. Along the extensive coastline, of more than 2,700 kilometers (about 1,700 miles), lies a large number of unique archipelagos with tens of thousands of islands and rocks of various sizes.

To sum up you can say that: Sweden is a country of opportunities offering a high quality of life with the human and nature in mind.