Some 90 percent of children spend their early years living with both parents.

CHIL</p>
THE SCHOOL YEAR

FALL
In mid-August, the start of the school year begins and all children move up a grade. More than half of Sweden is woodland, and it’s popular to go mushroom and berry picking at this time of year. In late October/early November, children have a week off school. On 13 October Halloween – a new tradition in Sweden – is celebrated with fancy dress and pumpkins. The next day, All Saints Day, many people light candles at family graves and in memorial parks.

LUCIA
On 13 December Swedes celebrate Lucia. In every school and daycare there is a Lucia procession. Dressed in white and wearing a crown of candles, a girl chosen to be Lucia leads a choir singing carols and wearing a crown of candles on her head.

CHRISTMAS
School ends just before Christmas Eve (24 December) and stays shut until the beginning of January.

WINTER SPORTS
The spring semester starts in the second week of January. In late February or early March there’s a week-long winter-sports break. Many families head to the mountains in the north of Sweden for cross-country or downhill skiing and snowboarding. With many lakes frozen over, ice-skating is a popular pastime.

set of parents gets 480 days of paid parental leave per child, which must be claimed before the child turns eight. Most parental leave is taken by mothers, but fathers are spending an increasing amount of time at home with their children. Men now claim about 24 percent of all parental leave taken.

Nine years of compulsory schooling
The Swedish Education Act states that all children and young people must have equal access to education, regardless of gender, their place of residence, or any social or economic factors. Education is free in Sweden, except for preschool and higher education (which are partly government-funded). School attendance is compulsory for all children through ninth grade. Then they have the option of staying on for senior high (including students with intellectual disabilities).

Besides senior high, other optional education on offer includes preschool, kindergarten, municipal adult education and adult education for those with intellectual disabilities.

Today, almost all children also attend kindergarten at the age of six. In practice, this means they tend to get at least 10 years of education in all.

The school year is divided into two semesters. The fall semester begins around mid-August and runs until the end of December, with a one-week break in the middle. The spring semester starts in the second week of January and runs until the second week of June. A normal school week is five days long: Monday to Friday. Children aged between six and 12 are offered day care before and after school.

In 2012, a new grading system has been introduced for children in Swedish schools, from sixth grade on. They are now being graded from A–F.

Hobbies and pastimes
Like most children the world over, Swedish children enjoy listening to music and hanging out with friends. They are also encouraged to focus on their interests. Singing and playing a musical instrument are popular extra-curricular activities. Twenty-nine percent of girls and 26 percent of boys aged 13–15 play an instrument in their spare time. Everyone is encouraged to take up sport, and 68 percent of 13- to 15-year-olds are members of a sports club. Soccer is the most popular sport among both girls and boys. Then comes horse riding for girls. Boys prefer floorball, followed by swimming and ice hockey. The sports interest goes all the way to the top; Sweden is number seven on the Olympic medal score list.

Internet and TV
Young Swedes surf the internet as much as they watch TV. Almost a third of all 13- to 15-year-olds watch TV at least three hours a day. Just as many 12- to 16-year-olds spend as much time surfing the internet. Half of all four-year-olds have browsed the internet. Online TV sites and YouTube are among the most popular, but what children do online depends on their age and gender. Doing school work, blogging, chatting and using social-networking sites and smartphone applications are the most common pastimes among older children. Younger children are more into games.
**FACTS ABOUT SWEDEN | CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**THE SCHOOL YEAR**

**EASTER**

In March or April school children have another week off for Easter. Depending on where you are in Sweden, this means either enjoying the first signs of spring, or the last of the snow.

**SUMMER VACATION**

The summer vacation is 10 weeks long and starts mid-June. Some families go abroad, often to the Mediterranean. Others go and stay in their country cottages. Many children spend time at summer camp. Summer for most children definitely means swimming in a lake or the sea. There are thousands of lakes and Sweden’s coastline is 2,700 kilometers long. In Sweden, school rules say that all 11-year-olds must be able to swim 200 meters – 50 of these on their back – and must be able to cope with emergencies in the water.

**YOUTH CULTURE**

With free spirits such as Pippi Longstocking and Emil to inspire them in books and films, Swedish children are encouraged to think independently and question societal norms.

What young Swedes watch

Swedish directors making movies for young people do not shy away from difficult subjects. *The Ice Dragon* (Isdraken, 2012) by Martin Högdahl and Håkan Bjorking is about 11-year-old Mik who is left with his hippie aunt in the country when his father, a hard-rock musician, is admitted to a treatment home for alcoholics.

Lisa Siwe’s *Glowing Stars* (I taket lyser stjärnorna, 2009), based on Johanna Thydell’s award-winning novel, is about a 14-year-old torn between caring for her mother, who has cancer, and her desire for a normal teenage life.

But Swedish films for young audiences do not address heavy topics alone. *Kenny Begins* (2009), by Carl Åstrand and Mats Lindberg, is a comedy about a boy who wants to become a galaxy superhero while his parents think he should become a hairdresser and work in the family beauty salon.

**What young Swedes read**

**Astrid Lindgren** – creator of Pippi Longstocking, Emil, Karlsson-on-the-Roof and numerous other story-book characters – is the most-read children’s author in Sweden. Her books are more widely spread than any other Swedish author’s. Having been translated into more than 90 languages, 145 million of her books have been sold globally. Many have been turned into films or plays.

**www.astridlindgren.se**

**Gunilla Bergström** wanted to write about real life, and created a little boy, Alfie Atkins (Alfons Åberg), as her main character. She describes the stories as mini-dramas on the psychological level. Making mischief, being frightened of ghosts, missing a friend, getting into fights, Christmas being over... they cover the sorts of things any child can relate to. The series includes more than 23 titles so far, published in 29 languages.

**www.alfons.se**

**Sven Nordqvist’s** Pettsson and Findus stories and Anders Jacobsson’s and Sören Olsson’s Sune books are widely read, too. Martin Widmark’s Lasse Maja series has been translated into 19 languages. His books have become bestsellers and are also among the most popular of all the children’s fiction housed in Sweden’s libraries at the moment.

In 2011, a total of 1,747 children’s and young people’s books were published in Sweden.
NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

PLENTY OF SPACE

Sweden has a small population for its size; just over 23 people per square kilometer. (The EU average is more than 116 people per square kilometer.) This means that most people have nature on their doorstep, and enjoying it is a big part of growing up. The right of public access allows everyone to explore the countryside freely, but consideration must be shown for nature, wildlife and other people.

JOINING A CLUB

Many clubs and associations – such as the Swedish Guide and Scout Organization – arrange outdoor activities for children. Skogsmulle, for example, is a type of nature school named after a fictional character who was brought up in the woods. Since the establishment of the first Skogsmulle School in 1957, the organization has helped about 2 million children to appreciate and care for nature. This focus on nature contributes significantly to cultivating a caring attitude towards the environment in children.

RECYCLING

Swedish children are taught to recycle at an early age, and Swedes recycle nearly 90 percent of all aluminum cans and polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles. Every spring, when the snow has melted, the Keep Sweden Tidy Foundation organizes a special day for school children to pick up litter and clean up their surroundings.

OUT AND ABOUT

Children spend part of every school day outdoors, whatever the weather. Some preschools and other institutions are even based on the concept of learning outdoors; I Ur och Skur.

TOMORROW’S GENIUSES

Swedish schools are working with a variety of organizations to encourage young people’s interest in technology and entrepreneurship. Here are two examples:

Finn upp
A teaching method designed to awaken a desire for knowledge in school children, Finn upp encourages them to invent things to help them learn. A Finn upp competition is held every three years for young inventors in grades six to nine. The event aims to inspire a new generation of inventors, innovators and entrepreneurs, and release the power of fresh ideas. Finn upp was founded in 1979 by the Swedish Society of Engineers (Ingenjörsamfundet). www.finnupp.se

Snilleblixtarna
The Flashes of Genius (Snilleblixtarna), a non-profit association, is geared to children from preschool age to fifth grade. The aim is to encourage children’s interest in technology, the natural sciences and entrepreneurship. Snilleblixtarna provides teachers and educators with tools and a working model to stimulate children’s curiosity, desire to learn and ability to think critically. www.snilleblixtarna.se

USEFUL LINKS

www.bris.se Children’s Rights in Society
www.friends.se Friends
www.bo.se The Ombudsman for Children in Sweden
www.savethechildren.se Save the Children Sweden
www.unicef.org United Nations Children’s Fund
www.skogsmullestiftelsen.org The Skogsmulle Foundation
www.scout.se The Swedish Guide and Scout Council
www.naturvardsverket.se The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency
www.tomtit.se Tom Tits Experiment, a science center for children
www.kungahuset.se The Swedish royal court’s official website

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