Sweden

Sweden is not only one of the world’s richest countries, but is also abundantly wealthy in culture and tradition. It is ranked as having one of the world’s highest life expectancy rates as well as very low birth rates. The language spoken by the people of Sweden is mostly Swedish, a Germanic language very close to Danish and Norwegian, differing in pronunciation and orthography. The leading foreign language is English, spoken mostly by people under the age of 50, as well as students.

Sweden is about the size of California with an exact area of 449,964 sq. km. The capital is Stockholm and the climate is known as Northern temperate. The currency is in the form of “kronas.” There are approximately 8.8 million people in Sweden with an annual growth rate of 0.6%. The unemployment rate is 7-8%. The literacy rate for Sweden is an amazing 99%.

Furthermore, the GDP as of 1996 is $267.3 billion and the per capita income is $30,375 with an annual growth rate of 1.1%.

Sweden is located in northern Europe, resting between Norway and the Baltic Sea. The terrain in Sweden is fairly flat. Sweden’s natural resources include forests, iron ore and hydroelectric power. There are 3 million hectares of arable land. Sweden used to be mostly an agricultural economy, but changed slowly from village to private farm-based agriculture during the Industrial Revolution. In conflict with the population growth however, this change failed to give Sweden the economic and social improvements it needed. This resulted in a million of Swedes emigrating to the U.S. between 1850 and 1890. Sweden prospered greatly from the world-wide need of Swedish steel, ball bearings, wood pulp, and matches during and after
World War I, in which they remained neutral. This gave Sweden the foundation it needed to bring it up to the great social situation they are experiencing today, with only a few recessions. Main agricultural products include dairy items, grains, sugar beets, potatoes and wood. These make up 3.1% of the GNP.

Agriculture now only employs less than 3% of Sweden’s labor force. The farms are very well mechanized, even if small in size and number. Swedish agriculture is 80% self-sufficient. Through technology and amazing efficiency, Sweden has been able to utilize its natural resources, enabling it to be a leader in production and exportation. Exports ($106 billion) include machinery transport equipment, wood products, paper, pulp, chemicals and manufactured goods. The major trading partners are Germany, Denmark, U.K., Norway and U.S.

Sweden is exceptional in its tactics in ensuring emotional and physical stability in its people. The social welfare system in Sweden has, and continues to give people maternity and paternity leave. Parents are allowed twelve months of paid leave for each child from birth to 8 years old. The ceiling on health care costs also gives “old-age pensions” sick leaves, as well as other benefits. A child-care system is also offered that ensures a place for kids between the ages of 2-6. This was institutionalized under the Social Services Act of 1980. From age 7 to 16, children attend a “compulsory comprehensive” school and 90% then go on to an academic or technical secondary school after the completion of the ninth grade. There are six state universities as well as many specialty and vocational schools. Sweden is in fact the fifth highest ranked country for the number of their Nobel Peace Prize winners.
Sweden celebrates Easter almost the same way Americans celebrate Halloween. Children dress up as witches and go to people’s doors to receive candy. Pentecost is recognized in May, and May 1st is the day they celebrate and remember the international labor movement. In June, traditional maypole dances are held all over the country. December 13th they also practice St. Lucia’s day by having the oldest daughter perform a song, and deliver buns, hot chocolate and coffee. She wears a white gown and a crown of candles in respect for the ongoing tradition and is known as the “light queen”

In addition to Sweden’s many other traditions, it has an extensive culture in food and drink. Swedish food is simplistic and usually healthy, although sweets and pastries contribute to their diet. They love to have pancakes for dessert, especially on Thursdays. To thoroughly enjoy this dish, Swedes enjoy pouring Swedish punch (made of a very sweet alcohol which is yellow in color) over the pancakes. Known for their love of sweets, they also enjoy another kind of spread on their bread called “messmor”, a soft whey-cheese originating in Northern Sweden. Alcohol itself is very expensive, but is enjoyed as much as their world famous coffee. Sweden is ranked second in the world for their coffees. They enjoy “kffereps,” which is coffee, parties providing no less than seven different kinds of delicious homemade cakes and buns, as well as scrumptious coffee. Sweden also enjoys smorgasbords at parties and after events that are comparable to our buffet. Dishes found on this table of goodies include a numerous amount of herring dishes, meatballs, salmon, pies, salads, eggs, bread, and potatoes (made in every way possible). The Swedish smorgasbord possibilities are endless.
Sweden is a great place to visit if you wish to experience a culture that is truly proud of its economy, meaningful traditions and wonderful food. What more could you ask for? They truly have faith in their country and rely on one another to take care of their Swedish brothers and sisters. Love is in abundance in this country and can be shown in their dynamic prosperity.

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