



Focus On SWEDEN

School Program

"I will miss Sweden a lot! All the people that I've met and all the things that I've done made my year unforgettable! I hope that many other students take the opportunity to get an experience like this. It's one of the best things that's happened to me."

Mariana, participant from Portugal

Surprisingly for a country whose economy depends on exports (today, often high-tech), Sweden has long held itself independent from the rest of the world. But this is changing. Sweden joined the European Union in 1995 and five years later opened a bridge-and-tunnel route to Denmark that slashed travel time to the Continent to 10 minutes. Still, Swedes are typically formal and proper with strangers, though not unfriendly. And although their cities are sleek and modern (with pockets of medieval streets and architecture), Swedes eagerly escape to the countryside, especially to ski and hike after long, dark winters. In fact, in anticipation of summer's nearly perpetual daylight, many Swedes greet the first dawn of spring after all-night celebrations. Fortunately, they have lots of outdoors to play in. More than 57% of Sweden is sparsely settled forest.

AFS & Your Experience

AFS Sweden has been in existence since 1948. About 100 AFS volunteers in five chapters and different support groups across the country work hard year-round to provide you with the most satisfying intercultural experience possible. During the school year, AFS Sweden hosts around 100 AFSers from as many as 30 countries.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

Landing in Sweden

Your flight will arrive in Stockholm, the capital of Sweden. After the plane lands and you collect your baggage, you and your fellow AFSers will pass through customs and be met by AFS Sweden staff and volunteers.

Arrival Orientation

After you have spent many long and tiring hours on the plane, the three- or four-day language and orientation camp, organized by staff and run by volunteers, will give you a chance to relax, meet other AFSers from around the world, ask questions, learn about AFS in Sweden as well as about Swedish culture while you start to learn the Swedish language.

Living in Sweden

Lifestyle and Family Living

Sweden is one of the most egalitarian societies in the world. The Swedes are proud of their nation and its accomplishments, and local patriotism is important. Swedes have a profound respect for privacy and politeness. Although they may appear reserved at first, they tend to have terrific senses of humor and genuinely appreciate a joke.

Family life is important, but family structure is diverse and offers differing lifestyles and beliefs from one family to the next. In a typical family, both parents work, and no Swedish families have maids. Household chores are usually democratically divided among Swedish family members, regardless of traditional female and male roles and age. Any student (boy or girl) must be willing and able to help at home, cleaning, cooking, washing laundry etc. Mutual respect between children and adults is nurtured at an early age. Swedish houses tend to be small and tidy. In Sweden, young people generally do not smoke, and stores are not allowed, by law, to sell tobacco to people younger than 18 years old.

Swedish host families, like AFS host families worldwide, are not paid. They open their homes to students in order to share their community and culture as well as to enrich their own family lives.

Most placements are in rural areas or small towns.

Dress and Appearance

Swedish youth dress very casually. A wardrobe consisting of a change of clothes for every day is not necessary. Also remember that the current style in your country may not be the style in Sweden, so try to avoid buying too many clothes before you leave.

Both boys and girls should have warm underwear, good comfortable walking shoes, warm boots, slippers, mittens, warm sweaters, warm socks, a warm, waterproof coat or jacket and a warm winter coat. Remember that you will have to walk and perhaps ride a bicycle in all kinds of weather.

Swedish schools do not require uniforms. Both boys and girls wear blue jeans with shirts, T-shirts and sweaters. On special occasions, more formal dress is expected: for girls a dress or blouse and skirt; for boys a jacket, slacks and tie.

Diet and Meals

Common foods include potatoes, cheese, seafood, meat, fresh vegetables, salads and open-faced sandwiches. International dishes including pasta and rice dishes are now common. *Smörgåsbord* for special occasions is very popular. Vegetarianism is rare.

The drinking age is 18 at restaurants, but you are not allowed to buy alcoholic beverages in a store until you reach the age of 21. It is sometimes customary to drink wine or beer with meals

School

Most AFSers attend the second or third year of the *gymnasieskola*, selecting one of the 17 national three-year programs. All of the programs offer a broad general education and basic eligibility to continue studies at the post-secondary level. Alongside the national programs are specially designed and individual study programs. Many courses are structured as lectures with some classroom discussion.

You cannot expect to get a transcript of grades from your Swedish school. It is entirely up to the school. A transcript may be obtained if you pass all exams, complete the course work, actively participate in class and are virtually fluent in Swedish.

School opens after the middle of August and goes until early June. There is a one-week vacation in November, two-week vacation at Christmas, one-week in February or March and one-week at Easter. Classes usually run from 8 a.m. to 3 or 4 p.m. A Swedish school will receive an AFSer's school record and determine class placement after discussing the matter with the student.

The school provides teaching materials, lunch and transportation. Sometimes a school can also provide extra Swedish language lessons.

It is difficult to enroll foreign students in special art and music schools.

Teen Life

As you will be placed in a small village, most of your activities will probably take place with your host family. Informal get-togethers are more common than large parties. You will enjoy your stay if you plan on participating in the everyday life of your village or community.

In general, Swedes are very sports-minded. Soccer, skiing, tennis, ice hockey and bandy (related to hockey) are all popular. Ice skating and other winter sports are common. Swedes love nature and try to spend as much time in it as possible. Favorite leisure activities include reading, attending cultural events such as the theater and concerts, and watching movies and television. Swedes also enjoy celebrating holidays.

AFS Activities

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Sweden will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) to talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational, bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experience.

Some local chapters may organize special events, activities and trips for your enjoyment. You can look forward to a three-to-four day mid-stay session where you will either stay with another host family or at a camp and meet other AFSers from the same region. The camps are required of all AFSers and your travel expenses will be reimbursed by AFS.

You will also attend an “End-of-Stay” orientation just before you leave. The “End-of-Stay” is about looking back at your exchange experience and sharing memories with other AFSers. It is also about thinking of the future.

Travel

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in Sweden, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization, local chapter or AFS Sweden. We strongly discourage traveling on your own or with friends.

Spending Money

The cost of living in Sweden is high, so plan on bringing approximately US\$1,500 for a yearlong program. Our experience is that a credit card (Visa, MasterCard, etc.) is the best way to handle money, since you can pay with the card and use it to get cash at banks in Sweden.

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to participate. When you do such things as shopping for yourself or going out with friends, the expenses are your responsibility. Spending more than your peers and family may create a distance between you and them.

Safety and Support

Sweden is a very safe country, and you should do well if you follow the normal precautions you would use in your home country. During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a Swede. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Sweden may have additional rules.

Health Precautions

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Sweden (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant, your medical expenses are covered for illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices of your host country, and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. AFS will help you obtain the visa and provide you with instructions regarding the required documents.

Program Prices

Please [contact the AFS office in your home country](#) for information about program price and scholarship possibilities and what the program price covers for the various program offerings. In most cases the program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Country Information

Geography and Climate

Sweden is located on the east side of the Scandinavian Peninsula in northern Europe. It is bound by Finland, the Gulf of Bothnia, the Baltic Sea and Norway.

Swedish wildlife is one of the most plentiful in Europe. With a length of more than 2,000 km. (1,200 mi.) north-south, Sweden offers a diverse environment. Forests cover more than 57% of the total area. The topography is relatively flat except for the mountains that form much of the northwest. The highest mountain, Kebnekaise, reaches 2,111 m. (6,926 ft.).

Sweden has more than 100,000 lakes, which provides a rich environment for wildlife. The country also has numerous large rivers that run into the Baltic Sea in the east and into the Atlantic on the west coast. Sweden's coastline is the longest of any country in Europe, stretching 7,300 km. (5,400 mi.).

Sweden's archipelagos are world-famous. The west coast is unique because of its rocks and islands. The soil was washed away during the Ice Age thousands of years ago, which left smooth, bare islands. The water is not as salty as the rest of the Atlantic but is clear and supports generally the same kind of maritime life. The Stockholm archipelago on the east coast is known for its many islands—more than 25,000 with forests and meadows.

The warm Gulf Stream in the Atlantic Ocean gives Sweden a milder climate than other areas so far north. Stockholm, the capital, has the same latitude as southern Alaska but has an average temperature in July of 18°C (64°F), and -3°C (25°F) in February. Sweden has a typically continental climate with a moderate-to-large range in

temperatures and a warm summer of more than four months. Average annual precipitation is heaviest in the southwest at 580 mm (23 in.) while the average in the northwest is only 300 mm (12 in.), and most precipitation north of Stockholm is snow.

Population

Sweden's population is composed principally of Scandinavians of Germanic descent and a relatively small number of ethnic Finns. Sweden's immigrant population is increasing rapidly, with approximately 500,000 foreign-born residents living in Sweden in the early 1990s. These included Finns, people from the former Yugoslavia, Iranians, Norwegians, Danes, Turks, Chileans and others.

Language

Swedes speak Swedish, a Germanic language related to Danish, Norwegian and Icelandic.

Government

Sweden is a constitutional monarchy. It is governed under the constitution of 1975, which eliminated monarchical power in governing the country. The monarch remains head of state, an exclusively ceremonial post, but no longer is supreme commander of the armed forces and does not preside over cabinet meetings.

Religion

Although most Swedes are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, theirs is a highly secular society.

Launching Your AFS Experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. In order to get ready, first make every effort to learn some key Swedish words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To familiarize yourself further with life in Sweden, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about Sweden and its culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Sweden. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living life as a Swede. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or national AFS office. In addition, AFS Sweden will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information.

Swedish people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

If you have not already received a full AFS application packet, please contact your local AFS volunteer or national office to request one. We wish you a wonderful experience!

Curiously Swedish

- On the Thursday before Easter, young girls make up their faces, put scarves over their heads and dress in long skirts. The little "Easter witches" then roam from house to house collecting sweets and handing out Easter cards.
- Walpurgis Night. On the night of April 30, crowds of people gather on hilltops and other prominent places all over Sweden to light roaring bonfires. Many wear traditional white student caps, emblazoned with lyres. As the fires blaze, they sing songs praising the long-awaited arrival of spring.
- Swedish Midsummer celebrations are held on the Friday closest to June 24, the "official" Midsummer Day. Celebrations kick off with raising the "Midsummer pole," (Maypole), which is decorated with birch leaves and wild flowers, flags and other decorations; and everyone sings and dances around the pole.
- Moose has become the symbol of Swedish nature.
- December 10 is not just an ordinary winter's day in Sweden; it is Nobel Prize day, full of pomp and ceremony.
- The feast of St Lucia is celebrated on December 13, traditionally considered the longest night of the year. Early in the morning on the 13th, in thousands of homes across Sweden, a young girl will get up and dress herself in white and don a crown of lighted candles. She will then sing about the darkness of winter and the light that is about to return.

How to Apply

To become a participant in this country's School Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

Student age (upon arrival)	16y to 18y	
Country data	Size	173,648 sq mi (449,750 sq km),
	Population	8,822,000
	Official language	Swedish
	Government	Constitutional monarchy
Currency	Krona (SKr) divided into 100 Ore.	
Useful website	http://www.sweden.se/	
AFS Sweden website	http://afsweb.afs.org/sweden.nsf	

AFS program destinations are not always available to residents of all countries. If a program interests you, please contact your nearest AFS office to find out if it is an option for you. You can locate your nearest AFS office at <http://www.afs.org/contact>