

Sweden National Day Special

Home to rich culture, natural beauty

The National Day of Sweden, formerly known as Flag Day, has been commemorated since 1916 and been a public holiday since 2005. The date honors the election of King Gustav Vasa and the end of the Kalmar Union on June 6, 1523, which is considered to be the founding act of independent Sweden. On this day, the king opens large parts of Stockholm Palace to the public, with free entry for all.

Stockholm has a history dating back almost a thousand years beginning as a Viking settlement on the archipelago at the intersection of the Baltic Sea and Lake Malaren. The city was founded by the Regent of Sweden Birger Jarl in 1252. Today the central part of the city consists of 14 islands connected by 57 bridges, and over 30% of the city's area consists of waterways. There are over 100 museums in Stockholm, including the National Museum (which neighbors the palace) and the maritime-focused Vasa Museum, home to the Vasa, a centuries-old ship that sank in 1628 and was recovered in 1961. The city's metro system has also been labeled the "longest art gallery in Sweden" as

over 90 of the 110 stations feature sculptures, mosaics and art installations.

In the south, the official slogan of Smaland is "Sweden for Real." This historical province is known for offering a balance between nature and culture, with hundreds of nature reserves as well as world-class dining and cutting-edge arts scenes. It is also home to the theme park dedicated to "Pippi Longstocking" author Astrid Lindgren, the site of the first Ikea store (now a museum to the world-renowned furniture company), and Granna, the birthplace of the candy cane. The near-endless hiking trails in Smaland have inspired artists like John Bauer, who placed mythological creatures like gnomes and trolls in his landscapes, and adventurous visitors today can camp almost anywhere thanks to the nation's Right of Public Access laws.

Lapland, a region stretching across much of northern Scandinavia, is home to the northern lights and the midnight sun, attracting visitors year-round. The indigenous Sami people divide the year into eight seasons, showing it has more than

snow and long nights. Their culture can be experienced at "ecolodges" run in traditionally sustainable ways by eating dishes like reindeer stew and chanterelle soup and sleeping in *goahti* huts, typical Sami dwellings. Reindeer are also used to provide leather, and the annual Winter Market in Jokkmokk is a chance to see traditional Sami handicrafts.

Most visitors to the north are attracted by the aurora borealis, which is visible between August and April. Some luck is required as the elusive but mesmerizing light show is not guaranteed; however there is no shortage of other activities. From fly-fishing to cross-country skiing, nature is at the heart of a Lapland experience and the famous Icehotel (where guests sleep on beds made of ice) and Treehotel (featuring rooms suspended from trees) incorporate this in their unique accommodations.

This article references excerpts from Sweden's official travel and tourism website. For more information, visit <https://visitsweden.com>.



The Royal Palace in Stockholm is the home of Sweden's monarchy. GETTY IMAGES



A hiker walks through the arctic terrain of Swedish Lapland in Stora Sjöfallet National Park. GETTY IMAGES

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