

Sweden national day

A long-standing national day with a flavor of Swedish summer

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In June, Swedes around the world have two great reasons to celebrate: the National Day on June 6 and Midsummer. Both festivals reflect important aspects of Swedish society and history, but there are differences in how people relate to them.



The National Day

Since 1916, June 6 has been celebrated as Swedish Flag Day. This finally also became Sweden's National Day in 1983 and a public holiday from 2005.

The date was chosen for two reasons: the election of Gustav Vasa as king of Sweden on June 6, 1523, laid the foundation of Sweden as an independent state; and on the same date in 1809, Sweden adopted a new constitution that included the establishment of civil rights and liberties.

At the turn of the last century, when national romantic winds were blowing through the country and folklore societies and local history museums were established, people in general took an active interest in Sweden as



Tradition: Dancing around a maypole is one of the joys of the Midsummer festivities. CONNY FRIDH / IMAGEBANK.SWEDEN.SE

a nation-state. It was then that June 6 first became a day of celebration. In 2004, the Swedish Parliament voted to make it a public holiday.

Midsummer

The summer solstice is the reason why we celebrate Midsummer. Ever since pagan times, Swedes have been eager to

feast through the longest day of the year, on or around June 21. Nowadays, we celebrate Midsummer on Midsummer Eve, which is always on a Friday between June 19 and 25.

This festival is preferably celebrated in the countryside with friends and family. People often begin the day by picking flowers and making wreaths to place on the maypole, which is a key component in the celebrations.

The maypole is raised in an open spot and traditional ringdances ensue, to the delight of the children and some of the adults. Teenagers tend to stay out of it and wait for the evening's more riotous entertainment.

A typical Midsummer menu features different kinds of pickled herring, boiled new potatoes with fresh dill, sour cream and raw red onions. This is often followed by a grilled dish of some kind, such as spare rib or salmon, and for dessert the first strawberries of summer, with cream.

The traditional accompaniment is a cold beer and schnapps, preferably spiced. Every time the glasses are refilled, singing breaks out anew. Swedes are fond of drinking songs, which are passed on from generation to generation.

Midsummer is an occasion invested with a certain nostalgia. Deep inside, Swedes are all

agreed on what it should look like and how it should proceed. So after dinner, many people still want to go out dancing, just like in the old days. Preferably on an outdoor dance floor beside a lake as the evening mist settles and the sound of the orchestra echoes back from the rocky hills on the opposite shore.

On their way home, girls and young women are supposed to pick seven different species of flowers and lay them under their pillows. At night, their future husbands appear to them in a dream. Legend has it that the night before Midsummer is a magical time for love. It still is,

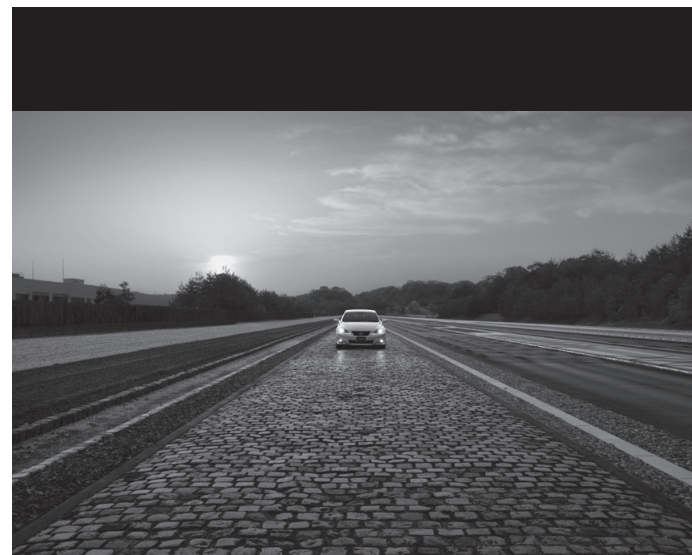
in a way. During this night many a relationship is put to the test. Under the influence of alcohol, the truth will out, which can lead both to marriage and to divorce.

In a sense, both the National Day and Midsummer show us some typical Swedish national features, which may not always go hand in hand: mirth and moderation, distrust of patriotism and maintenance of traditions, socializing with the family, enjoying good food and strong beverages — and of course the love for nature.

For more information, visit www.sweden.se.



Festive: Swedish Flag Day, June 6, also became Sweden's National Day in 1983, when the country commemorates King Gustav Vasa's coronation in 1523 and the adoption of a new constitution in 1809. OLA ERICSON / IMAGEBANK.SWEDEN.SE



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