

Chapter 8: Business Travel

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Business Customs

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The business traveler to Sweden will quickly realize that while most customs and procedures are similar to the United States there are a few quite noticeable differences. After arriving in the world class Arlanda airport, one can catch a cab to center Stockholm, being sure to ask for the fixed fee before departing, all very standard. The difference is that the cab driver will open the door for you and help you with your luggage.

Swedes tend to be less formal than Americans are in all but two areas, “toasting guests” and dinner parties. The procedure is well defined and best explained by your Swedish host. If one remembers to make strong eye contact before and after a “toast” and not to drink until the host “toasts” you, the rest will fall into place. The guest of honor usually is seated to the left of the hostess and is responsible for offering the “thanks” or behalf of all the guests in a toast to the host and hostess.

There is an anecdote that concludes the Swedish worker is the most efficient in the world, unfortunately he only works 8 months a year. Swedish workers do get 5 weeks of vacation each year. Nothing of import happens in Sweden during the month of July. July begins the day before mid-summer’s night June 20 and ends in mid August. The Christmas celebration actually begins when the country shuts down for the Nobel prize ceremonies December 10, and the St Lucia festival December 13. Business is usually back to normal after Orthodox Christmas in January. The month of May has three official holidays, making it the month of long weekends. Consequently the business traveler should focus on specific periods, e.g., September 15 to December 10, January 15 to April 30, and early June. Business is conducted during the vacation periods, but the senior management is often not available.

Swedish business people appear to be willing to spend more time discussing a situation than do Americans. During a business meeting there is always time to get to know each other and to discuss the program in sufficient detail that all feel comfortable with each

other's position. Promptness for meetings and functions is very important, as is organization, be it company matters or an event.

Travel Advisory

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U.S. travelers to Sweden must have a valid passport. A tourist or business visa is not required for stays up to 3 months. This 90-day period begins when entering the Nordic area: Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland or Finland.

For further information concerning entry requirements for Sweden, travelers can contact the Swedish Embassy at 1501 M Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20005, telephone: (202) 467-2600. Sweden has no vaccination requirements.

Medical care is widely available in Sweden. U.S. medical insurance is not always valid out of the United States. Travelers have found that in some cases, supplemental medical insurance with specific overseas coverage has proved to be useful. Further information on health matters can be obtained from the Center for Disease Control International Travelers' telephone hot line at (404) 332-4559.

- Temporary Entry

Sweden honors the ATA Carnet, an international customs document designed to simplify customs procedures for business and professional people taking commercial samples, advertising materials or film, or medical or professional equipment into specified countries for a short period. More than 40 countries participate in the carnet system. The U.S. Council of the International Chamber of Commerce, 1212 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10036-4480 (fax 212-944-0012, tel. 212-354-4480) has been designated by the U.S. Bureau of Customs as the U.S. issuing and guaranteeing organization. U.S. firms should write to the U.S. Council at its New York address to apply for ATA Carnets.

Visa Requirements

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For further information concerning entry requirements for Sweden, travelers can contact the Swedish Embassy at 1501 M Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20005, telephone: (202) 467-2600. Sweden has no vaccination requirements.

U.S. Companies that require travel of foreign businesspersons to the United States should be advised that security options are handled via an interagency process. Visa applicants should go to the following links.

State Department Visa Website: <http://travel.state.gov/visa/index.html>

United States Visas.gov: <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>

Telecommunications

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High speed internet connections are available at all business hotels.

Transportation

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Visitors can access Sweden by air or by ferry. Sweden enjoys a modern infrastructure and all modes of transportation are available. In addition to busses and taxis, a high-speed train is available from Arlanda airport to downtown Stockholm.

Language

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The native language is Swedish. English is the second language in Swedish schools. Most people understand English, and this is certainly true of the business community.

Health

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Local Time, Business Hours, and Holidays

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Local time: GMT + 1 hour

Business hours: 8 am – 5 pm

Holidays for 2008

New Year's Day: January 1

Good Friday and Easter Monday March 21-24

Swedish Labor Day: May 1

Ascension Day: May 1

Swedish National Day June 6

Mid- Summer Day: June 20-21

All Saints Day: November 1

Christmas: December 24-26

New Year's Eve: December 31

Offices are also closed on Mid-Summer's Eve, Christmas Eve, and New Year's Eve. Government and many business offices generally close at 1:00 p.m. on the day before major holidays.

- Business Infrastructure

Business infrastructure in Sweden is similar to that in the United States. The two countries have had a long history of educational exchanges at the student and professorial level. Consequently most business leaders have been taught the same operating principles by professors who have collaborated on writing the text. One slight difference may be that the senior business people in Sweden may be a bit more “hands on” than their American counterparts. Perhaps due to the Swedish tradition of social democracy or the great egalitarian concerns, Swedish managers are more consensus builders than decision-makers. Delays in reaching an agreement are less a negotiating tool as in other cultures and more an in-house management activity.

- Guide for Business Representatives

Guides for business representatives are available for sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402; tel. (202) 512-1800; fax. (202) 512-2250. Business travelers to Sweden seeking appointments with the U.S. Embassy Stockholm officials should contact the commercial section in advance. The commercial section can be reached by telephone at 46-8-783-5346 or by fax at 46-8-660-9181.

Temporary Entry of Materials and Personal Belongings

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State Department Visa Website: <http://travel.state.gov/visa/index.html>

United States Visas.gov: <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>

Local Embassy Consular Website: <http://www.usemb.se/consulate/index.html>

http://travel.state.gov/travel/warnings_consular.html

State Department Visa Website: <http://travel.state.gov/visa/index.html>

United States Visas. gov: <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>

<http://travel.state.gov/travel/sweden.html>