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Christmas in Sweden

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# Christmas in Sweden



Christmas in Sweden, as in many other countries, is a mixture of old and new, religious and secular, native and foreign. Christmas traditions do not only include Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, but the festivities related to Christmas stretch from the beginning of December to the beginning of January.

## Advent

In Sweden, the warming up for Christmas starts at the beginning of December with Advent. This part of the Swedish Christmas traditions is fairly new and did not become wide spread until the 1920's.

Advent means arrival and signifies in the Christian belief, the "count down" for the birth of Jesus. Candles play an important role in the Advent tradition. The warm, living light provides a contrast to the cold weather and the short days. One of the Advent traditions is the Advent candlestick holder. The candlestick has four candleholders and is often decorated with moss, and lingonberry leaves. The first candle is lit the first Sunday in Advent (the fourth Sunday before Christmas) and allowed to burn a quarter of its



Photo: Hans Neläuter

length. The second Sunday in December, the second and the first candle are lit, and so on until the fourth Sunday, when all the candles are lit. By then, the first candle is almost burned down and the fourth has just been started, so the four candles creates a nice stair formation, recalling its German source of inspiration: the "Advent trees".

The "Advent Star" and the stepped electrical candlestick are other Advent traditions that last throughout Christmas, bringing light and warmth to the dark winter landscape. The original version of the "Advent Star", made out of red paper, was introduced in the 1930s. Since then, many different shapes of "Advent Stars" made of different materials such as straw, wood shavings, and metal can be found. Today, every Swedish home has at least one "Advent Star" and one electrical candlestick decorating the windows in the dark winter nights.

"Julkalender", or the Christmas Calendar, is another advent tradition, which also originates from the 1930's Germany. Every child in Sweden has at least one hanging on the wall. It has twenty-four tiny little doors, one for each day from December 1st through December 24th. Each day the children open up a door to find a surprise such as a picture, piece of chocolate or even a small gift.

## Sankta Lucia

Half way into December the Lucia arrives. In the early morning of the thirteenth of December you can see Lucia and her procession in every school,

