

Culture – connectedness in diversity

Part two: Spring traditions



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1st theme: Culture

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Swedish early spring traditions

Typical things and dates during the first period of spring in Sweden

After Christmas and New Year's Eve there are some more traditional dates surrounding the weeks after the holidays and in the early days of spring time.

We celebrate for instance Tjugondag Knut, Fettisdag, Alla hjärtans dag and much more.

Each year since 1940 during week 10 in our county the primary school students get a sports holiday/break, where they are supposed to use their free time to experience different sports and the outdoor. It is very popular to go skiing or ice skating during the sports break, for example.

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The first weeks after the holidays

Even after the holidays there are days to celebrate and get time off for. Most of these days are from old traditions and not many Swedes nowadays knows why we celebrate these dates.

On January 6th "Trettondedag jul" ("Epiphany") is celebrated. Usually this just means that the majority of the Swedish population gets a day off from work/school. Most of these people do not know why they have the day off and where the tradition comes from. It was the day the three wise men came to give gifts to baby Jesus and the Star of Bethlehem was revealed to them.

Since the 1400's Sweden has been a Christian country, which means the majority of the population considered themselves Christian and the church and state were closely connected.

A law about religious freedom entered in 1952 and gave Swedish citizens the right to freely leave the Swedish church, and the right to abstain from belonging to a religious "community"/denomination. The previous requirement that you then must join an approved denomination was removed. The legislation gave the individual the right to freely practice their religion, and the freedom to avoid being forced to specific religious beliefs or membership in a community.

The Freedom of Religion Act was repealed when the Law on Religious Communities came into effect on January 1st 2000. The new law meant that children who are over 12 years old cannot enter or leave the religious community without their own consent.

After the new act came into effect in 1952 the number of citizens belonging to the Swedish Church has dropped. In 1972 95% of all Swedish citizens were members of the Swedish Church. In 2015 that number dropped to 63%.

This might be one of the reasons why Swedes are not sure about why we celebrate all the holidays that we do.

Another day close after Christmas is "Tjugondag Knut" (or "Tjugondedag jul" as it's actually named) and it occurs 20 days after Christmas on January 13th. A tradition in Sweden since at least the 1800's is to clean out the tree and Christmas decorations on Tjugondag Knut.

"Nu är glada julen slut, slut, slut,
julegranen kastas ut, ut, ut
Men till nästa år igen
kommer han, vår gamle vän,
ty det har han lovat"

Translation:

"Now has merry Christmas end, end, end,
the Christmas tree is thrown out, out, out
But the next year again,
he comes, our old friend,
like he has promised"

- A song to sing on Tjugondag Knut



"Tjugondag Knut körs julen ut."
- "Twentieth-day Knut Christmas is driven out"

Fettisdagen

Fettisdagen, or "Fatty Tuesday"/"Shrove Tuesday", is one of our more beloved holidays, probably because of the traditional pastry. Fettisdagen is celebrated on the Tuesday after the Sunday before Lent.

Lent is a Christian tradition on the three days preceding the fast that goes on for 40 days up until Easter.



Semla

Since the 1200's it's been a tradition to eat fatty foods on the days leading up to the fast. A popular thing to eat, that we still eat today on Fettisdagen is a pastry called semla. This delicious pastry has many different names, such as semla, fettisdagsbulle, fastlagsbulle, and is a soft bun with almond paste filling and whipped cream.

In later years there has been a load of varieties on the classic semla, such as the semmelwrap, wienersemle, princess cake-semle, berry or other filling instead of almond paste, and the list goes on.



Semmelwrap

Alla hjärtans dag

Or Valentine's Day in English, is a tradition in Sweden as well as in many other countries. Valentine's Day occurs every February 14th. The tradition originally stems from the celebration of Saint Valentine within the Catholic Church in the 400's.



The celebration of Valentine's day in Sweden didn't really start or become a big thing until the 1960's. In 1985 February 14th was officially marked as Alla hjärtans dag (Valentine's Day) in Swedish calendars.

The day after Valentine's day, February 15th, is marked in Swedish calendars as Geléhallonens dag, or "The jelly raspberries' day".

