

EIP

EIP Around the World - Sweden

To mark the festive season, we spoke to our EIP colleagues who has international background or connection and asked how they celebrate the festivity in their home countries.

Christmas in Sweden by Hannah Elam, Trainee Solicitor

Q. When is your Christmas?

We celebrate Christmas on Christmas Eve. However, just like in the UK, Christmas Eve is not a bank holiday and actually a working day. Christmas day is spent very much like how you would spend Boxing Day in the UK, eating and drinking leftovers.

Q. Are there any special Christmas dishes or food people eat ?

Swedes love traditional Christmas. The celebration starts on Christmas Eve with a breakfast sandwich made with Vörtbröd bread and a slice of Julskinka ham.

The main Christmas meal is lunch rather than dinner and it is made up of a Julbord (buffet) which tends to have cold, hot and sweet items.

The lunch starts with Glögg (mulled wine) and Pepparkakor (ginger biscuit) with blue cheese. Cold Julbord is the starter and is where we have the good stuff

especially variety of pickled herrings! We also have smoked salmon, cured reindeer (yes we eat Rudolph) etc. This will be followed by hot Julbord. Here you find the Swedish classic made world famous by ikea - Köttbullar.

Popular drinks are Christmas beer, Julmust (very popular soft drink) and the most importantly SNAPS! Snaps can either be infused vodka or more traditionally Aquavit. To

be allowed to be called Aquavit it needs to be distilled with caraway or dill for flavour – tasty I know!

My family's favourite sweet Julbord is Mandelmusslor (almond pastries), but a more common tradition is Ris à la Malta (very creamy rice pudding).

After all that you would assume nobody would want to eat ever again, however, Snaps is very potent and a proper Swede will round off their Christmas Eve with a bowl of Risgrynsgröt (rice porridge) and another sandwich.

Tradition is that you put a blanched almond in the porridge and whoever ends up with it in their bowl will get married the following year. My sister did actually get one and managed to get engaged in the following year. However, I ended up with the almond in the first year I brought my boyfriend to Sweden for Christmas, but no ring yet, so it is a bit hit and miss!

Q. Are there any particular Traditions?

The reason Julbord is a lunch is because of Sweden's most sacred Christmas tradition – Donald Duck. Every Christmas eve at 3pm the Disney Christmas special "From All of Us to All of you" is shown on TV. I have never missed it since I was born including last year when I was with my boyfriend's family. I insisted on streaming it on Youtube and we watched it together.

Another important Swedish Christmas tradition is the visit of Tomten (Santa Clause). He does not visit you while you are sleeping, but he comes to hand out the presents in person, usually straight after Donald Duck.

Traditionally one of the men in the family goes out with an excuse such as getting a newspaper (with smartphones this is no longer believable) and change into a Santa costume. Then he returns home as Santa and hand out the presents to the family.

Being half English, I remember being very confused as to why Santa came to our house twice. My parents explained this away by saying that there was simply one Swedish Santa and one English Santa which I was of course laughed at no end when I told my friends.

Q. Anything else?

Before Christmas we celebrate Lucia on 13th December. It is a carol concert. It is very common for kids to have the concerts at school. All the participants are clad in white full-length gowns (read granny nightgown), with the girls holding candles and the boys holding sticks with stars on them. The participants are usually led in procession into the concert venue by the Lucia girl who does not hold a candle but wears a candle crown instead.

You may think no girls would volunteer to risk setting their scalp on fire, however to be crowned your school's Lucia is the biggest honour for Swedish girls. I had the popular vote my year, but I was ROBBED as my school found that deciding the Lucia by student voting was not in line with anti-bullying policy and decided to pull names out of a hat instead.