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# Swedish winter traditions to boost wellbeing

**Surveys show that many find the winter holiday period stressful. But Sweden's Christmas traditions, from Lucia to the 'julbord' dinner and Christmas markets, offer a sense of connection that can relieve stress and boost visitors' wellbeing. Here's our guide to what´s new and special.**

**In brief:**


- **Light and peace: Lucia, Sweden´s winter ritual**
- **Togetherness and community: The Swedish julbord**
- **Seasonal calm at a Swedish julmarknad**
- **Sweet architecture and shared connection: Swedish gingerbread houses**


## Light and peace: Lucia, Sweden´s winter ritual

"Now a thousand Christmas candles are lit upon the Earth"- this verse is only one of many traditional Lucia hymns sung to celebrate the turning from the darker to the lighter period of the year. The festive atmosphere that arises when Lucia - wearing a crown of lit candles, and clad in white, trailed by an entourage of young people similarly dressed up – walks down the aisle of schools, pre-schools, care homes and churches is so captivating that few question why this celebration takes place a week before the actual winter solstice.

The solemn sounds evoke a sense of deep connection, and the festive Lucia morning offers space for reflection and appreciation. As with any good tradition, Lucia, too, comes with its traditional food – in this case 'Lussekatter' (also 'Lussebullar') – sweet buns that, with some imagination, also bring light as they shine yellow from the saffron used in them.

**Where to experience:**

- Half an hour from Sweden's third-biggest city of Malmö, lies Lund, home to a university that is one of Europe's oldest and one of its best. Innovation and tradition meet here – but on Lucia day, it's tradition that wins. The academic choir delivers a deeply atmospheric concert in the university aula, dating back to the 19th century and sporting architecture inspired by ancient Greece.

Lucia in the university aula (Lund University, in Swedish)

- A hard hat is the accessory to wear for Lucia in Unesco´s World Heritage town of Falun, some 200 kilometres outside of Stockholm. Falun is home to a mine, and this mine provides the scene for the city's Lucia concert. A magic, uplifting and at the same time grounding experience!

Lucia underground (Falu mine, in Swedish)

- Uppsala, just north of the capital of Stockholm, offers the opposite of Falun: Here, Lucia and her entourage sing from atop the castle, with the audience (thankfully, for those afraid of heights) watching from below.

Lucia on the castle rooftop (Visit Uppsala)

**More resources:**

Lucia – the bearer of lights, hymns and Swedish treats (Visit Sweden)

Saffronbun ('Lussekatter') recipe (Visit Sweden)

Press images: https://imagebank.sweden.se/my-selections/2e7co07pmq

## Togetherness and community: The Swedish julbord

‘Julbord’: ‘Jul’ means Christmas, and ‘bord’ is table – and the Swedish Christmas table is one brimming with traditional foods. Multiple variations of herring, marinated in cream, vinegar and most often lots of dill, are typical, as are meatballs, small sausages, ham, salmon and a creamy potato gratin known as ‘Jansson’s Temptation’, all typically presented buffet-style.

Rather than a one-off Christmas dinner with the family, the ‘julbord’ may gather work colleagues on one evening, neighbourhood friends on another, the sports team, friends from afar and then the family on yet other evenings: a ‘julbord’ dinner is very much about a sense of connection with the people around the table, and the food on it.

**Where to experience:**

- NEW this year: Stockholm’s Skansen offers a traditional ‘julbord[AL1]
- Gothenburg, Sweden's second-largest city, ranks among the world's most sustainable destinations. Why not enjoy a vegan ‘julbord’ there, which is an option at Blackbird restaurant. This ‘julbord’ focuses on locally grown vegetables and seitan versions of the traditional sausages and ham.

Book a vegan ‘julbord’ at Blackbird restaurant (in Swedish)

- For those who dread sitting through a long dinner, the julbord at Malmö’s restaurant Slagthuset includes a mingle before, entertainment during, and dancing after the dinner—a sure way to lift spirits and raise serotonin levels.

**Julbord at restaurant Slagthuset** (in Swedish)

**More resources:**

Sample the delights of Swedish Christmas food (Visit Sweden)

Press images: https://imagebank.sweden.se/my-selections/m6gks7gfi

**Seasonal calm at a Swedish julmarknad**

‘Julmarknad’: Christmas markets may tend to be a pretty commercial, crowded and rather loud affair – not so the typical ‘julmarknad’ (indeed, ‘marknad’ is the Swedish word for market). Swedish Christmas markets focus on crafts and local delicacies and come with a relaxed vibe. While the largest such market boasts 400 stands, Sweden boasts many smaller markets set against castles, old town squares, or even farmhouses that warm up their visitors with a sense of Christmas comfort (and a little mulled wine).

For those who prefer their julmarknad a little less calm and want to connect with more people, 2025 sees one of Sweden´s most iconic Christmas markets celebrate its 25th anniversary. Gothenburg´s Liseberg has cited around 5 million LED fairy lights and approximately 1,300 Christmas trees, create a festive atmosphere like no other.

Liseberg offers the all-in-one Christmas market experience of wandering through traditional market stalls, visiting Santa’s village, going ice skating, and those who want can even book their ‘julbord’ on site.

**Where to experience:**

- The Christmas market at Liseberg amusement park has something for everyone, different tastes, preferences and age groups.

Christmas at Liseberg

- It takes only half an hour on the metro from Stockholm’s city centre to an exceptional Christmas experience where the smell of gingerbread and mulled wine wafts through the setting of a 17th-century castle, Hesselby Slott.

Christmas market at Hesselby Castle (Visit Stockholm)

- Another venue that takes visitors back in time is the Gamla Linköping Christmas market, about a two-hour train ride from Stockholm. Old (‘gamla’) Linköping has all the cobbled streets and wooden houses of a small town in Sweden a hundred or more years ago. Over two weekends in late November and early December, the Gamla Linköping Christmas market features crafts, seasonal delicacies, and festive cheer.

Gamla Linköping Christmas market (in Swedish)

**More resources:**

Discover the magic of Swedish Christmas markets (Visit Sweden)

Press images: https://imagebank.sweden.se/my-selections/16n83715ra

**Sweet architecture and shared connection: Swedish gingerbread houses**

The Swedish gingerbread house has a surprisingly long and wholesome history. The idea first took shape in 16th-century Germany. German immigrants later brought the custom north, and by the 1800s, gingerbread houses had become a Swedish Christmas staple. Early designs were modest — little cottages rather than grand confectionery castles — but the spirit was the same: creative hands at work, warmth in the kitchen, and time spent together. Today, Swedes still gather around the table to build and decorate, turning a centuries-old tradition into a quiet exercise in mindfulness, imagination and seasonal wellbeing.

Swedes don't just bake gingerbread houses — they turn the tradition into a national showcase. UK bakers can now participate in the annual ArkDes Gingerbread House competition in Stockholm, organised by Sweden's National Centre for Architecture and Design. Registration opened on 20th October 2025, and entrants (both amateurs and pros) are invited to send in their creations to be exhibited and judged. Take a look at last year's winners for inspiration HERE.

More information and how to apply: https://pepparkakshus.arkdes.se/en/

**Where to experience:**

- For over 30 years, ArkDes has invited everyone to showcase their gingerbread creations at Moderna Museet on Skeppsholmen, Stockholm. This year's **Gingerbread House 2025 opens on 28thNovember**. Whether you're inspired by a turn-of-the-century villa, a modernist dream, or a personal favourite building, the exhibition encourages participants to bring imagination to life in spiced dough, icing, and candy.

**More resources:**

Press images: https://imagebank.sweden.se/my-selections/2iw85nsqi6

**Sources:**

Mental Health UK (Nov 2024): A survey of 1,000 respondents revealed that 80% considered their mental health symptoms to worsen over the festive period, and nearly three-quarters reported feeling lonelier even when surrounded by family and friends.

YouGov (Dec 2024): 45% of Britons find Christmas stressful

YouGov (Feb 2024): About two-thirds of Britons (67%) say the festive holidays pose challenges to their health and well-being. Stresses associated with holiday-related chores and obligations are also common worries.

A YouGov US survey (Dec. 2024) saw two thirds of Americans saying they felt stressed at least sometimes related to the holidays. Affording holiday gifts and dealing with challenging family dynamics were among the top stressors identified by a survey of the American Psychiatric Association (Nov. 2024)

**More resources:**

- How to celebrate Christmas in Sweden – a guide to traditions and activities (Visit Sweden)
- Why Sweden's unique way of life makes it the ideal place to reset body and mind: the Swedish Prescription (Visit Sweden)

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