

Country Check (11): **Sweden**

More than elks and Ikea



The Dala horse is the national symbol of Sweden for tourists – and also one of the best-sellers par excellence. Every year, hundreds of thousands of the bright red wooden horses (Swedish: Dalahäst) with the bridle painted in the typical kurbits technique are

Rolf-Göran Bengtsson



sold, generating a turnover of millions of euros.

Sverige är ett hästland – Sweden is an equestrian nation. But not only because of the Dala horse, of course. In several aspects, equestrianism is the second most important sport of the nation directly after football.

In part 11 of our “Country Check” series we are drawing a portrait of Sweden and its equestrian sector.



Sweden is a relatively small country in terms of population, but when it comes to horses, we are a big nation,” says Lotta Amnestål, spokeswoman for the Swedish Equestrian Federation. “Equestrianism is one of the main national issues.” Take the success of Rolf-Göran Bengtsson, for example. The show jumper is one of the country’s superstars. The 2008 Olympic silver medallist was the first Swede ever to top the world rankings in 2012. A year earlier, the 2011 European Champion living near Itzehoe in Germany won the Swedish Jerring Prize, where listeners of a radio station vote for the best athlete every year. The 2007 winner was a certain Zlatan Ibrahimović. In 2016 and 2017, another show jumper won the award - Peder Fredricson.

IT STARTED WITH THE KING

While Bengtsson and Fredricson did a lot for equestrian sport in Sweden in the past years, Gustav I. Wasa (1496-1560), whose historical escape from the Danish king's soldiers is commemorated every year in March with one of the largest cross-country skiing events in the world – the Vasaloppet – is the one who initiated the development of his country as an equestrian nation in the first place. In the 16th century, he banned the import of Finnish horses and founded his own stud farms in Sweden. One example is the stud farm at Strömsholm Castle. There, 130 kilometres from Stockholm in central Sweden, an institution in equestrian racing, the Grand National, has been held every year since 1971 at Whitsun, in combination with jumping competitions. Some say the event is Sweden's biggest picnic, drawing 4000 spectators every year.



“Business in equestrian retailing is developing well.”

Klas Pettersson, EuroHorse MD

The Kingdom of Sweden (Swedish: Konungariket Sverige) is a parliamentary hereditary monarchy in Northern Europe. The Scandinavian country has been a member of the European Union since 1995 – without, however, having the euro as its currency (instead, payment is done with the Swedish krona) and without being a Nato member. Sweden has about 221,800 islands. On Gotland, the largest island before Öland, there is still a group of wild Gotland ponies (Swedish: Gotlandsruss) living in the forest. The land border towards Norway is 1619 kilometres long, the one towards Finland 586 kilometres. Since the Öresund Bridge was commissioned in 2000, there has been a direct land connection to Denmark.

BETWEEN LIGHT AND DARK

Measuring 2100 metres, the Kebnekaise, also known from Selma Lagerlöfs “Nils Holgersson”, is the highest mountain. The lead goose there bears the name “Akka of Kebnekaise”. Due to the warm Gulf Stream, Sweden’s climate is mild and humid, considering its northern location. Polar climate is found in the northern high mountains only. The temperature differences during



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the year are relatively small in large parts of the country. Due to the proximity to the Arctic Circle, however, the difference between the long daylight in summer and the long darkness in winter is considerable.

In southern Sweden, the so-called Limes Norrlandicus can be found, which marks the transition area between the mixed forest zone in the south and the boreal coniferous forests in the north. Sweden was the first country in Europe to establish national parks in 1909. Meanwhile, large parts of the country are protected in that way. The elk seems to like this. It is estimated that there are between 300,000 and 400,000 specimens of the largest deer species to be found in Sweden today – about as many as horses. In the autumn hunting season, hunters kill up to a quarter of the elk population every year. Nevertheless, its continued existence is not in jeopardy.

THE METROPOLITAN AREAS

The capital of Stockholm (2.3 million inhabitants) is by far the largest metropolitan area of the country, which is divided into 21 provinces, followed by Gothenburg (0.9 million) and Malmö (0.7 million). This means that 40 per cent of the population are concentrated in these three regions. Sweden, which has had a relatively liberal immigration law for decades, has a multicultural society. In 2016, the proportion of inhabitants born abroad was 18 per cent. By the way: by the year 2040, the country wants to retrieve its entire electric power from renewable sources - focusing primarily on wind energy.



Many lakes, a beautiful coast – Sweden is an equestrian paradise

Sweden ranked seventh in the 2017-2018 Global Competitiveness Index and was one of the least corrupt countries in the world, according to the Corruption Perceptions Index 2016. In 2018, Sweden had a gross domestic product of 467 billion euros. The economy is heavily dependent on international trade. The mother country of Ikea and Volvo, Abba and Roxette, Astrid

Lindgren and Pippa Longstocking (and her horse Little Uncle) exported goods worth 147 billion euros in 2018 and imported goods worth 150 billion euros.

With an import share of 17.9 per cent, Germany is Sweden's most important supplier (ahead of the Netherlands and Norway) and the most important buyer. In 2018, 10.6 per cent of all exports went to Germany, followed by Norway (10.4 per cent), Finland (6.9 per cent) and Denmark (6.9 per cent).

HIGH HORSE DENSITY

According to Dalarna University's study "The socio-economic impact of the horse industry", the country's 360,000 horses achieved a turnover of 6.7 billion euros in 2016, created 38,000 jobs and generated 560 million euros of taxes. The contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) amounted to 0.5 per cent. In 2012, the Swedish Equestrian Federation estimated the value of charitable work done in equestrian sports at 26 million euros per year. "Horses and humans are doing well together," the study says.

In relation to the population, Sweden has more horses than Germany, for example. The horse-to-inhabitant ratio is 1:28 in Sweden and 1:63 in Germany. The umbrella organisation for all equestrian sports is the Svenska Ridsportförbundet (RF, formerly: Svenska Ridsportens Centralförbund), which was founded in 1912 in connection with the Olympic Games in Stockholm and, together with seven other national associations, set up the FEI

World Equestrian Federation in Paris on 24 November 1921. Since 2015, the RF Chairman has been Ulf Brömster. The office of the association is located in Strömsholm. The Ridsportförbundet is divided into 19 riding districts and had a total of 153,000 members in 2013.



NO. 1 SPORT AMONG WOMEN

According to the RF, a total of half a million people do horse-riding in Sweden. Among young people between the ages of seven and 25, equestrianism is even the second most important sport (after football). With 216,395 training hours and 19,789 events with 156,071 participants, equestrian sport also ranks second behind football. Riding is the sixth largest sport in Sweden in terms of the number of active athletes. With a share of about 90 per cent of female riders, no other sport in the country is practised by more women.



When it comes to horses, we are a big nation.

Lotta Amnestål, spokeswoman for the Swedish Equestrian Federation.

About 900 riding clubs belong to the RF, about half of them run a riding school and give riding lessons. "Thanks to the many riding schools, access to equestrian sports is very easy," says Ridsportförbundet spokeswoman Lotta Amnestål. In 2016, more than 378,700 equestrians participated in competitions, with show jumping (75 per cent) and dressage classes (22 per cent) dominating the statistics. 2016 registered more than 37,500 horses with an active competition licence and more than 29,600 riders with an active competition licence.

STRÖMSHOLM AND FLYINGE

For centuries, Strömsholm has been one of Sweden's equestrian centres. From 1868, the Swedish army trained horses and riders there – for more than 100 years. In Strömsholm, there is not only a riding high school and a riding school but also one of the most modern horse hospitals in Europe – with a long veterinary history. The Swedish Equestrian Federation runs its training courses at the huge facility in Strömsholm. In 2018, the "Häst-museum" was opened. Instead of a museum building and show-cases, there are five signposted walks on the grounds of the riding school, on which visitors can call up information about Sweden as an equestrian nation with a free app.

While Strömsholm's stud history came to an end in 1874 with the dissolution of the stud as a breeding institution, horses are still bred today at the equally traditional Flyinge stud farm in southern Sweden, 100 kilometres from Malmö. The origins of the Flyinge as a stud date back to the 12th century, making it one of the oldest studs in the world. It was founded by King Carl X. Gustav as

Country comparison:



	Sweden	Germany
Square kilometres	450.295	357.340
Inhabitants	10,2 million	82,2 million
Largest population group	25 to 54 years (39,4 %)	25 to 54 years (39,9 %)
Birth rate	1,9	1,5
Population growth	0,8 per cent	-0,2 per cent
Gross domestic product per capita	45.897 Euro	40.852 Euro
Unemployment rate	6,3 per cent	3,4 per cent
Utilised agricultural area	3,03 million hectares (7,4%)	16,7 million hectares (47,9%)
Largest city in terms of inhabitants	Stockholm (1,5 million)	Berlin (3,5 million)
Number of large cities (more than 100,000 inhabitants)	10	80
Umbrella association	Svenska Ridsportförbundet	Deutsche Reiterliche Vereinigung/FN
(members)	(153.400)	(686.747)
Number of riders	0,5 million	3,9 million
FEI tournaments	63	331
Number of competition horses	37.500	147.000
Total number of horses	0,36 million	1,3 million
Equestrian trade fairs	Hästsportmässan, Upplands Väsby	spoga horse, Köln
Equestrian fair	EuroHorse, Göteborg	Equitana, Essen
Number of equestrian magazines	3	60
Number of equestrian specialist	Up to 200	more than 1.500

Sources: DOSB, FEI, FN, GfK, estimates, RF

a royal stud farm in 1661. Today, Flyinge is the largest and best known stud farm in Sweden and the only national stud in the country.

SWEDISH WARBLOOD

To this day, Flyinge cultivates the tradition of breeding the Swedish Warmblood Horse, among others – the most famous local horse breed apart from the North Swedish heavy horse Nordsvensk Häst. The breed of the Swedish warmblood-horse has its origin in the 17th century. Back then, Oriental, Spanish and Frisian stallions were crossed with native breeding horses. The latter were also cross-bred with Trakehner horses, Hanoverians, Arabs and English Thoroughbreds, especially at the Strömsholm and Flyinge studs.

Originally bred as a cavalry horse with above-average characteristics, the breed is now regarded as a versatile sport horse – particularly suitable for dressage, but also for show jumping, eventing and carriage driving. Swedish warmblood horses are exported all over the world today. In the Studbooks Rankings of the World Breeding Federation WBFSH of May 2019, horses of this breed occupy the positions nine (show jumping), eleven (dressage) and 13 (eventing).

EUROHORSE AND HÖÖKS

Scandinavia's largest horse fair is the EuroHorse. According to its own information, it is even one of the largest horse fairs in the world and takes place annually in spring parallel to the Gothenburg Horse Show, which has been held annually since 1977, at the Exhibition & Congress Center in Gothenburg. In 2019, EuroHorse counted 83,582 visitors. In 2020, the fair will take place from 20 to 23 February, with organizers expecting again more than 200 exhibitors. In addition to EuroHorse, there is also a small specialist trade fair, Hästsportmässan. It takes place semi-annually in Upplands Väsby near Stockholm and has an estimated 1000 (invited) visitors per weekend.

According to Klas Pettersson, Managing Director of EuroHorse, there are currently between 150 and 200 equestrian shops in Sweden. “Business in equestrian retailing is developing well –



Eurohorse Fair

even though the number of retailers has declined somewhat in the last five years,” Klas Pettersson explains. “That’s a healthy sign, though, since some of those who had to give up had no viable business plan.” According to the long-standing EuroHorse managing director, the estimated turnover of the Swedish market in

2018 amounted to four million euros – excluding breeding, veterinary, forging and training services.

With Hööks, there is one dominating large chain in the equestrian specialized trade in Sweden. According to its own statement, the 400-employee company, which describes itself as Scandinavia's largest horse company, has an annual turnover of almost 470 million euros. In addition to 35 stores in Sweden, located between Malmö in the south and Luleå, 100 kilometres from the Arctic Circle, Höök also operates seven stores in Finland, three in Denmark and eight in Norway, as well as an online shop that supplies customers throughout Europe.

With Väckelsång Industriplast (products for horse care, stables and pastures), Mountain Horse (equestrian clothing), Jacson Equestrian (equestrian clothing and accessories), Uhipwear (equestrian clothing), K9 Competition (care products for horse hair and skin), Accuhorsemat (acupressure horse blankets) and Stierna Equestrian Sportswear (equestrian clothing), seven Swedish companies have announced their presence at the Spoga Horse trade fair in autumn 2019. Pettersson: “Many Swedish manufacturers - especially in the apparel and high-tech solutions sectors – are at the forefront of their respective businesses.”

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