

SWEDISH CHRISTMAS TRIVIA

Every year, since 1966, in towns and cities across Sweden, residents gather to construct a “Julbacken”, or a Christmas goat. These goats are huge, wood and straw, constructions that stand from the first day of advent until New Year’s Eve when they are burned down.

At one time, it was considered a real victory for one town to steal the goat from another. This is no small feat as the goats can be over 40 feet tall and 25 feet long! The practice of theft resulted in the implementation of serious around the clock camera surveillance, instituted by all participating towns. Guards are posted and a 100,000 krona fine is levied against any group attempting to steal a Julbacken.

The real season of Christmas begins on St. Lucia Day, Dec. 13. Two days before Christmas traditional trees are decorated with gingerbread biscuits and red tulips. On Christmas Eve families partake in a smorgasbord of ham, pork, and fish. Someone dresses as a tomte (a Swedish elf that lives a solitary life, protecting the farmer and his family as well as his land and animals; a tomte is very short, wears a long beard and a very tall pointed hat), and passes out gifts while reciting funny rhymes

Typical gifts at a Swedish Christmas might include sweaters, art prints, dogs, music, angel chimes, and Dala harses.

The Dala horse is the traditional symbol of Sweden. It is believed that woodsmen, during their evening rest, would carve small horses to take home to their children. Over 200 years ago, paint first appeared on the horses. The traditional color of a Dala horse is orange with white, blue, and red kurbits. In the city of Dalarna, Sweden, painters first decorated

home interiors with “kurbits”, the flowering patterns now seen on the Dala horses. Real authentic Dala horses come from the small town of Nusnas, a town of 700 people, of whom, over 50 are carvers. All “real” horses are hand carved and hand painted. It takes many years for an artist to become adept at painting a Dala horse. The intricate swirls are made when 2 colors are on the same brush and held and turned in a specific way. Although there are many carvers of Dala horses, there are few painters. It is a sad truth that some countries are now manufacturing horses in factories and turning them out by the thousands. These are not Dala horses but poor replicas.

Authentic Dala horses can be quite expensive due to the intense skill and hand work required in their construction.