

SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL

SAN DIEGO COUNTY'S AWARD-WINNING BUSINESS WEEKLY

Do stand on ceremony when in Scandinavia

Social graces very important in Denmark, Sweden and Norway

Scandinavia presents a rich opportunity for trade for San Diego businesses, and understanding the culture and expectations of Scandinavian business owners enhances this opportunity.

Denmark was recently ranked third in the world for competitiveness. Sweden is the fifth-largest investor in the United States, and Norway is one of the richest countries in the world due to the oil industry.

To conduct business successfully in these countries, attention to formality and etiquette will earn the respect and trust that are integral components of long-term business commitments.

The Danes, Swedes and Norwegians of Northern Europe have a rich and distinctive history and culture. These three countries were formally united in 1397 by the Kalmar Union created by Danish Queen Margrethe 1.

Denmark is the oldest kingdom in Europe. Sweden declared independence from Denmark in 1523, and Norway became independent in 1905. All three countries are ruled by constitutional monarchies, and Denmark was recently instated as a member of the European Community (EC).

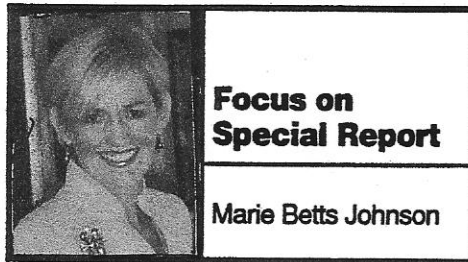
Because of its acceptance of the Maastricht Treaty, Denmark can now promote itself more easily for foreign investment. Both Norway and Sweden, because of their proximity to the other E.C. countries, also provide excellent opportunities for business transactions.

The governments of all three countries provide tax concessions and many other incentives for foreign investment.

Get An Introduction First

It is important to acquire an introduction through an agent before going to Scandinavia for business. When scheduling meetings, avoid the summer months as, due to their long harsh winters, Scandinavians vacation during the summer.

Punctuality is a must. Always arrive on time for business or social occasions. Shake hands on greeting and on departing. Use titles at all times unless some indication is given otherwise. Avoid being overly demonstrative and speaking in a loud voice.



When negotiating business, it is important to be aware that most businesses are medium-sized and family owned. Therefore, family consensus decision-making will usually occur before any agreement can be reached or finalized.

Dress in a conservative manner but always dress well for both business and social occasions. Care should be taken not to be overdressed, as this is considered gauche. Social occasions may be more formal than anticipated; therefore, it is wise to bring along a tuxedo for men or evening dress for women.

Formality should never be overlooked. Always maintain good posture and avoid slouching. Poor posture is regarded as a lack of breeding in this part of the world.

Take the time to get to know your counterparts and avoid becoming over-personal in conversation.

Topics Of Conversation

Good topics of conversation are the history of their country, culture (Scandinavians are extremely interested in anything cultural: books, plays, opera, etc.). They will not criticize their monarchy, and they will not be impressed if you speak negatively about your president or your country.

For Denmark, discuss biotechnology, telecommunications, shipbuilding, beer and liqueurs. Topics for Norway would include shipbuilding, oil and natural gas production. In Sweden, discuss vodka, the auto industry and crystal.

Remember, always be prepared to wine and dine before you wheel and deal. Dining in the continental style is the norm — knife in the right hand and fork in the left hand. It is perfectly acceptable to dine in the American style, but be careful to place your knife and fork together at the end of each course. Otherwise, it will be assumed that you would like another serving.

Most entertaining is conducted in the home in Norway, Denmark and Sweden, as restaurant entertaining is extremely expensive. When invited to dine in the home, be prepared to eat heartily as it is an insult to refuse seconds, and it is also considered poor taste to leave anything on your plate.

Food For Thought

In Denmark, you may be served the *smorrebrod*, which means "open sandwich." It is to be eaten with both knife and fork. In the evening you may be served the *det kildtbord*, a cold buffet, or the *hojt smorrebrod*, a hot buffet. It is acceptable to discuss business over lunch in Norway, Denmark and Sweden, but dinner is usually a more formal and social affair.

Sweden is famous for its smorgasbord, or buffet table of different foods. The smorgasbord is formally laid out with each series of dishes as part of a course. It is usually served in order of cold to hot. Do not eat too much at the beginning as there will be many courses to follow. This is really a time to relax and become better acquainted with your Scandinavian hosts.

The guest of honor is usually the first to leave. Be careful not to leave directly after dinner. The male guest of honor is usually seated to the left of the hostess.

Don't Drink Too Deeply

Aquavit (water of life) will be served at most social occasions. This is 80 proof and care should be taken not to overindulge as there are extremely strict laws against drunken driving that may involve a stay in jail and forfeiture of your driving license. Aquavit will be served cold and neat and will accompany appetizers.

When invited to the home, always bring a gift. If it is a gift of flowers, it is thoughtful to have them sent on the day of the party. Avoid lilies and carnations as these are symbolic of funerals. Also, avoid even numbers and the number 13.

Business gifts may be exchanged. They should be relatively inexpensive to avoid any hint of bribery. Appropriate gifts are cigarettes, cigars or liqueurs. Gifts with historic or intellectual appeal are always appropriate in all of Europe.

Toasting is *de rigueur* in these countries, and it is quite a formal affair, especially in Sweden, where a toast is proposed by the oldest, the most senior ranking person, or the host. The glass is brought to eye level, look the other person in the eye, say *skaal*, drink, wave the glass toward the other person, bow you head, look at the person again, and then replace the glass on the table.

The guest of honor, to the hostess' left, proposes a toast by tapping his knife on a glass. He responds for all present and thanks the hostess for her wonderful hospitality. Always remember not to drink when a toast is being proposed in your honor.

Skaal!

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