

# Welcome to Sweden, Umeå and Umeå University

Your Month-by-Month Guide



UMEÅ UNIVERSITY



Health on Campus gets you moving – with cross-country skiing by the School of Sport Sciences.

Sweden's year is shaped by distinct seasons, recurring traditions, and a wide range of cultural and nature-based activities. This brief calendar overview introduces what typically takes place in Sweden, Umeå and at Umeå University each month.

## January

- January is a quiet midwinter month, marked by cold temperatures, snow, and short days. It is a time for cosy indoor activities or winter sports and enjoying the calm after the festive season. The month also brings the **gradual return of daylight**, which many look forward to after the darkest weeks of the year.
- In Sweden, the Christmas season traditionally ends on Saint Knut's Day (*Tjugondag Knut*), which falls on 13 January. This date marks the official conclusion of the holiday period. A common way to celebrate this day is through *julgransplundring*, which literally means “the plundering of the Christmas tree. Together, Saint Knut's Day and *julgransplundring* represent a cheerful and symbolic way to “dance Christmas out” and welcome the rest of the winter season.
- The start of the winter Sports Season. Enjoy winter outdoor activities such as ice skating on the pond at Campus or at Lake Nydala (*Nydalsjön*), ice bathing, cross country or downhill skiing or just a nature outing with *fika*.
- Cultural institutions such as Väven, Bildmuseet, and Västerbottens Museum offer exhibitions and indoor activities.

## February

- February is a deep winter month, often marked by cold temperatures, snow, and crisp, bright days. **Good chances of seeing the Northern Lights.**
- The **Sámi National Day** is celebrated on 6 February.
- Fat Tuesday or Shrove Tuesday (*Fettisdagen*) is a movable feast in February or March. Historically, it was a day for eating rich foods before the 40 days of fasting. Today, it is a Swedish tradition to eat a cardamom bun filled with almond paste and whipped cream (*semla*) to celebrate the occasion.
- Umeå School of Sport Sciences holds **Health on Campus** (*Hälsa på campus*) as a part of an initiative to promote health and wellness at Umeå University among students and staff. The programme includes lectures, workshops and physical activities. All students and members of faculty and staff are welcome. Everything is free of charge.



## March

- March is a transitional month. Spring-Winter period offers **sunny days and snowcovered landscapes**. Winter Sports Season continues...
- Winter sport break (*Sportlov*) in schools, resulting in increased focus on winter sports.
- **The annual ski race** (*Vasaloppet*) takes place and is widely followed. The Vasaloppet is the world's oldest, longest, and largest cross-country ski race (90 km), held in classic style between Sälen and Mora. The race is organised annually, usually on the first Sunday of March (since 1948), and serves as a tribute to Gustav Vasa's historic escape from the Danish king's soldiers in 1521.
- **International Women's Day** on 8 March highlights women's rights, achievements, and the ongoing struggle for gender equality. Umeå has a museum of women's history located at Väven.
- The spring equinox marks the moment when day and night are of equal length, signalling the official beginning of spring in the Northern Hemisphere. In Sweden, it is seen as a turning point toward brighter days, as daylight increases rapidly after this date.
- Littfest - Umeå's International Literature Festival.
- **Waffle Day** (*Våffeldagen*) is celebrated on 25 March each year and marks a beloved tradition for welcoming spring, often with freshly made waffles served with jam and whipped cream. The day originates from the Christian feast of the Annunciation Our Lady's Day (*Marie bebådelsedag*) where a linguistic shift from Our Lady's Day (*Vårfrudag*) to Waffle Day (*Våffeldag*) gave rise to the custom of eating waffles on this date.

## April

- April is a month of contrasts. Winter still holds on with lingering snow, bright sunlight, and chilly nights, yet signs of spring begin to appear.
- **Easter celebrations** (*Påsk*) with decorations, traditional food, and family activities. Traditional Easter food in Sweden typically includes dishes such as cured salmon, pickled herring, eggs in various forms, meatballs, Jansson's Temptation (a potato and anchovy casserole), and lamb. Easter eggs are a popular tradition often filled with sweets or small gifts and given to children during the Easter holiday. They are usually brightly decorated and symbolize the arrival of spring and new beginnings.
- Walpurgis Night (*Valborgsmässoafton*), celebrated on 30 April, is a **traditional Swedish spring festival marked by large bonfires, choral singing**, and community gatherings. The celebration symbolises the arrival of spring. It is also a major student tradition where student choirs perform traditional spring songs. Umeå Student Choir performs by the pond on campus.



Umeå Student Choir celebrates Walpurgis Day with traditional spring songs on campus.



Left: Red-carpet arrivals for The Spring Graduation. Right: The Brännbollsyrans festival stage glowing in the evening light.

## May

- May marks a period of dramatic change, as **spring arrives in full force**. Gardening and planting season begins. Long, bright evenings – people start spending more time socialising outdoors.
- May Day (*Första maj*), celebrated on 1 May, is a public holiday in Sweden dedicated to labour rights and social justice. It has its roots in the international labour movement, and the day is traditionally marked by demonstrations, speeches, and gatherings that highlight workers' rights and the importance of fair working conditions.
- Ascension Day (*Kristi himmelfärdsdag*) is a Christian holiday that commemorates the ascension of Jesus into heaven, occurring 40 days after Easter. In Sweden, it is a public holiday.
- **The Spring Graduation** (*Vårpromotion*) is one of Umeå University's two academic celebrations. During Spring Graduation, jubilee doctors and new doctoral degree graduates are celebrated.
- **Brännbollsyrans is one of Umeå's largest annual events**, combining an international rounders (*brännboll*) tournament with a major music festival. Teams from across Sweden and abroad compete in a lively, playful atmosphere, while the evenings feature performances by well-known artists on large outdoor stages. Brännbollsyrans began in 1974 as a student rounders tournament organised by IKSU. The event grew throughout the 1980s and 1990s, received official World Championship status in 1997, and has since developed into a combination of the world's largest brännboll tournament and one of Sweden's major music festivals.

## June

- June marks the true beginning of summer, and people spend much more time outdoors enjoying the long, bright days. Schools finish for the summer and it is also common for people in Sweden to start their summer holidays, visit summer cottages, garden, barbecue, and take advantage of the warm evenings.
- **The Swedish graduation tradition** (*studenten*) end of upper-secondary school takes place and mark the formal transition from school to adult life. It combines three iconic elements: the **white cap** a long-standing symbol of academic achievement, the jubilant **“running out of school”** where students gather inside the school and then run out to cheering family and friends and finally the **decorated trucks**, classes ride through town on open trucks (*studentflak*) decorated with banners and slogans. Loud music, dancing, and celebration are central to this tradition, which has existed since at least the 1930s.
- **Sweden's National Day** (*Sveriges nationaldag*) is celebrated on 6 June. Traditional celebrations take place in and around Umeå.
- **Midsummer** (*Midsommar*) is one of Sweden's most important traditional celebrations, marking the arrival of summer and the year's longest days. It is typically celebrated on a Friday in late June with maypole dancing, flower wreaths, outdoor gatherings, and a festive meal. Traditional Midsummer food in Sweden typically includes new potatoes with dill, pickled herring, sour cream, chives, and various cold dishes such as cured salmon and meatballs. Fresh strawberries are an essential part of the celebration, often served with cream or as a dessert. The meal is usually enjoyed outdoors and reflects the flavours of early summer. The holiday is strongly associated with nature, light, and community. Traditional celebrations in and around Umeå.

## July

- July is the height of summer, marked by warm days, lush greenery, and the **lingering glow of the Midnight Sun**. Nature is at its most vibrant, and people spend as much time as possible outdoors. Bright evenings that barely turn dark. Many take their summer holidays during this month.
- Coastal and archipelago activities are popular, as well as hiking and camping. **The Right of Public Access (*Allemansrätten*) makes nature easily accessible.**

## August

- August marks the late summer season, when the days are still warm and bright, but the first hints of autumn begin to appear. Many people return to work after their holidays, yet outdoor life remains important. **Forests become full of blueberries, the first lingonberries and mushrooms.** Cooler nights signal that the darker season is slowly approaching.
- The **peak season for traditional crayfish parties (*kräftskivor*)**, where friends and families gather to enjoy crayfish, singing, and festive decorations. Common accompaniment to crayfish is Västerbotten cheese. August is also the time of the annual surströmming premiere, when the year's fermented herring is first opened and enjoyed according to longstanding northern Swedish traditions.

## September

- September marks the beginning of autumn, bringing cooler air, shorter days, and vibrant colours across forests and mountains.
- Harvest season. Farmers' Market on Saturdays in Umeå at Vänortsparken.
- Umeå School of Sport Sciences holds **Health on Campus (*Hälsa på Campus*)** as a part of an initiative to promote health and wellness at Umeå University among students and staff. The programme includes lectures, workshops and physical activities. All students and members of faculty and staff are welcome. Everything is free of charge.
- **The festival Umepride celebrates diversity** with the ambition of promoting understanding and respect for everyone, regardless of gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, or disability. Umeå University works actively to promote equal rights and opportunities for everyone, and to counter all forms of discrimination. During Pride Week, several activities are arranged at and around Umeå University.



Left: Lucia procession by the student choir. Right: Picnic in the greenery at the Arts Campus.



## October

- October is a true autumn month, marked by colder temperatures, darker evenings, and the rapid shift toward winter. Days grow noticeably shorter, and people begin preparing for the winter season – bringing out warmer clothing and winter tyres. **Darker evenings contribute to the Swedish tradition of “mys”** (cosy indoor atmosphere).
- Cinnamon Bun Day (*Kanelbullens dag*), celebrated on 4 October, highlights one of Sweden’s most familiar pastries. While the day draws attention to the bun itself, it also reflects something deeper in Swedish culture –the everyday ritual of **fika**.
- **The Annual Celebration** (*Årshögtiden*) is one of Umeå University's two academic celebrations. During the celebration honorary doctors are conferred, and new professors are installed. Scientific awards are handed out, and, every three years, a Medal of Merit is awarded. When a new Vice-Chancellor is to be installed, this usually takes place at the Annual Celebration.
- More than 50 years ago – in 1968, to be precise – a lasting and recurring phenomenon was born, opening Umeå to the world: the Umeå Jazz Festival.
- All Saints' Day (*Alla helgons dag*) in Sweden is a quiet and reflective observance dedicated to remembering loved ones who have passed away. It is marked by visits to cemeteries, where families’ light candles and place flowers on graves. All Saints’ Day is celebrated on the Saturday between 31 October and 6 November.

## November

- November is a dark and quiet month, marking the transition from autumn to early winter. Daylight hours become very short, and the landscape often shifts between bare ground, frost, and the first lasting snow. Indoor activities are popular.
- The Autumn Light Festival (*Höstljus*) i Umeå. During **Höstljus**, local artists and community organisations illuminate the November darkness with **light installations and artworks throughout central Umeå**.

## December

- December is a deep winter month, marked by short days, long nights, and a landscape often covered in snow. The darkness is balanced by warm indoor traditions.
- Umeå is a wonderful Christmas city, with cosy Christmas markets, fantastic holiday buffets, and memorable seasonal activities for the whole family.
- Advent in Sweden marks the beginning of the Christmas season and is celebrated on the four Sundays leading up to Christmas. **Many households light one candle each Sunday in an Advent candleholder**, gradually bringing more light into the dark winter weeks. Homes and streets are decorated with starshaped lights and electric candlesticks in the windows, creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere. It is also common to enjoy Advent fika with saffron buns, gingerbread, and mulled wine (*glögg*).
- **Lucia is a beloved Swedish tradition celebrated on 13 December**, bringing light into the darkest time of the year. A procession led by ‘Lucia’ wearing a white gown and a crown of candles sings traditional songs, followed by attendants dressed in white. Schools, workplaces, and communities hold Lucia celebrations, often accompanied by saffron buns (*lussekatter*) and gingerbread.
- Christmas (*Jul*) in Sweden is celebrated throughout December, with the main festivities taking place on **24 December, known as Christmas Eve (Julafton)**. Families gather for a festive meal that often includes dishes such as ham, meatballs, pickled herring, salmon, sausages, and a variety of traditional sweets. Many households also watch the annual 3 p.m. Christmas Eve television broadcast of ‘Kalle Anka’ (Disney’s Christmas special), a longstanding tradition.
- **New Year’s Eve (Nyårsafton) is celebrated on 31 December**. The main moment of the celebration is midnight, when people welcome the new year together. As midnight approaches, people gather to count down and raise a toast when the clock strikes twelve. Fireworks light up the sky across the country.

Production: Umeå University, 2026. Photo: Mattias Pettersson, Malin Grönberg, Szu Chi Chen and Mostphotos



UMEÅ UNIVERSITY