

Alcoholic drinks in Sweden

Alcoholic drinks in Sweden are as common as in most of the Western world. Sweden is historically part of the vodka belt, with high consumption of distilled drinks and binge drinking, but during the later half of the 20th century, habits are more harmonized with western Europe, with increasing popularity of wine and weekday drinking. Wine is now also grown and produced in several parts of Sweden and the southernmost region of Skåne is turning into a hub experiencing a strong growth in number of active vineyards.

Drinks and brands

The main Swedish specialty is brännvin (literally "burn-wine"), liquor distilled from fermented grain or potatoes. Vodka is the highest grade of brännvin, with brands like Absolut Vodka and Explorer Vodka. Brännvin seasoned with herbs is known as akvavit. This is usually drunk as a snaps, also known as nubbe, a small shot glass of alcohol served to accompany a traditional meal (especially pickled herring or crayfish). Swedish punsch is also a spirit of particular historical significance in Sweden.

Lager beer is the most popular beer, both with meals and in bars. In restaurants and bars it is usually served as "en stor stark" (literally "a large strong"), a glass usually containing 40–50 cL of starköl (see below). Lättöl (generally around 2% abv) is very popular in lunch restaurants as for the vast majority of people it is possible to drink one serving of it and still stay below the legal limits for drink driving.

Sweet cider is also common. As of July 1, 2005, new rules established that only fermented juice from apple or pear is allowed to be called cider. Before this change, any fruit-based drink could be called cider, meaning that what would be considered alcopop in other countries could be sold as cider in Sweden.

History

Since the Middle Ages, beer was the staple drink in Sweden. Mead was a common delicacy. Distilling was introduced in the 15th century. Prohibition against production and/or sale of brännvin—distilled alcohol—has been enforced during some periods.

As Sweden was industrialized and urbanized during the 19th century, industrially produced brännvin became more available, and alcohol caused increasing health and social problems. The temperance movement rose, and since 1905, government has had a monopoly on sales of liquor. The Swedish prohibition referendum in 1922 resulted in continued sales of alcohol. A rationing system, called Brattsystemet or motbok, was used until 1955. As Sweden entered the EU in 1995, drinking habits became more relaxed. Systembolaget law allowed private enterprises to produce, import and market alcohol, and sell directly to restaurants—though the retail monopoly remained. Consumption of alcohol increased by 30% from 1995 to 2005.



Figure 1: Swedish Beer

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Regulation and taxation

Sweden has a government alcohol monopoly called Systembolaget for sale of all alcoholic drinks stronger than 3.5% by volume. The minimum purchase age at Systembolaget is 20 years, but 18 at licensed restaurants and bars.

Beer is legally divided into three classes. Class I (maximum 2.25%), called lättöl ("light beer"), is sold without restrictions (although shops often set their own age restrictions). Class II (up to

Beer Brand	Alcohol content	brewery	Country	Year
Mariestads	5.3 %	Spendrups	Sweden	1848
Norrlands Guld	5.3 %	Spendrups	Sweden	1989
Eriksberg	5.3 %	Carlberg Sverige	Sweden	1993

3.5%), called folköl ("people's beer"), is sold in regular stores, but with the minimum purchase age of 18. Class III, starköl ("strong beer", over 3.5%) is sold only in Systembolaget stores.[3]

Drinks are taxed by content of alcohol, more heavily than in most other countries. As of 2007, the tax on vodka (40%) is 200.56 SEK/liter, on wine (14%) at 22.08 SEK/liter, and on beer (4.5%) 6.615 SEK/liter. Beer with 2.8% alcohol or less is exempt from tax, except VAT.[4] The VAT is 12% (food tax) for drinks sold in shops having up to 3.5% alcohol, and 25% above that, and at restaurants.

Systembolaget has a strict monopoly status on alcohol sales to consumers in Sweden, except for restaurant and bars, where alcohol can be sold for immediate consumption (bottles must be opened and cannot be brought home).

Other companies (producers and importers) can sell directly to restaurant and bars, an EU-enforced rule. Producers of alcohol, such as vineyards, however, are not allowed to sell bottles of their products directly to consumers. Small producers have an advantage by being allowed to sell directly to restaurants and due to the fact that Systembolaget shops can buy locally produced beverages for resale. Before these rules were introduced, it was very hard for a local producer to sell anything since the Systembolaget head office then decided on what would be sold, and preferred products that were expected to sell well nationwide because they did not want too many products.

The only exceptions to the monopoly to consumers are export shops at airports, which can sell alcohol to people checked in for a flight outside the EU. Alcohol cannot be sold on boats on Swedish waters, except for restaurants and bars, but the shop is opened at the border to international or foreign waters.

The import quota from other EU countries does not apply to personal use (unlimited).[5] Due to the taxes many Swedes stock up in Denmark, Estonia or Germany. Limited rations of duty-free shopping is allowed on the ferries between Sweden and Finland, provided they dock at Åland, which is an autonomous part of Finland, and has a special treaty with the EU. Ordering alcohol for mail order delivery is permitted, but the Swedish state is able to levy taxes on the recipient of such alcohol.

Moonshining sometimes occurs, mainly in rural areas. Distilling without a commercial production license is illegal in Sweden, even for personal use, and might result in fines or jail time. The mere act of owning parts of a still is also illegal. It is however legal to make alcoholic drinks in a household for one's own personal use (i.e. homebrewing, and winemaking), as long as no distillation is involved.