A guide to the Swedish Parliament
The Riksdag building on the islet of Helgeands-holmen in the heart of Stockholm is the centre of Swedish democracy. This is where laws and the central government budget are determined.

Come along on a tour of the Riksdag!
THE RIKSDAG BUILDING was inaugurated in 1905. The previous premises on Riddarholmen had become cramped, draughty and outdated. But over time the new building on Helgeandsholmen also became too small, and in 1983 it was joined together with the old Bank of Sweden building, with its characteristic crescent-shaped projection overlooking the water.
UNDERGROUND PASSAGEWAYS  Seven of the Riksdag’s buildings are connected by underground passageways. One of these – “the Run” – is situated below the bridge over Stallkanalen, which connects lake Mälaren with the Baltic. Members often run here when hurrying to reach the Chamber. When the voting signal sounds, they have eight minutes to get to the Chamber.
THE CHAMBER is the heart of the Riksdag. It is here that the elected representatives debate and take decisions. The members of the Riksdag sit according to constituency, irrespective of their party affiliation. The light streams in from big windows under the ceiling, illuminating the birch panelling. The public gallery has seats for visitors and media representatives.
MEMBERS’ OFFICES  Being a democratically elected member of the Riksdag is a task that involves no fixed working hours and long working weeks. For many years members had neither offices nor accommodation. Their documents were kept in desks in the Chamber. Today each member is provided with an office in one of the Riksdag buildings.
THE BANK HALL inside the main entrance in the West Wing is a central meeting place in the Riksdag. Restaurants, a post office and an information desk can all be found here. The name reminds us of the time when this building belonged to the Bank of Sweden.
THE GRAND STAIRWAY  When you walk into the impressive entrance hall of the East Wing, which is situated just across from the Royal Palace, you are met by the Grand Stairway with columns and stairs of different kinds of marble. The stairway is used on various ceremonial occasions, for example, when the King opens the Riksdag session each year in September.
THE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  The assembly rooms of the parliamentary committees are housed in the East Wing. One of these is the assembly room of the Committee on Finance which is situated in the Riksdag’s heritage-listed reference library. It once served as a reading room too. The tall bookcases contain the parliamentary record in bound volumes.
THE GRAND GALLERY The East Wing houses both chambers from the bicameral era. They are linked by a 45-metre long gallery – the Grand Gallery. In former times the members of the Riksdag met here between debates. Today it serves as the Riksdag’s main venue for official dinners and receptions. The glass skylight in the middle is ringed by Sweden’s 24 provincial coats of arms.
THE SECOND CHAMBER The octagonal second chamber retains its original furnishings from 1905. The frescoes on the walls frame a large vaulted skylight letting in the daylight. Today the largest parliamentary party group meets here for discussions. Some of the Committee on the Constitution’s hearings are held here too.
THE RIKSDAG LIBRARY is one of Sweden’s biggest specialised libraries in the field of social science. It is one of the few parliamentary libraries in the world that is open to the public. Visitors can borrow books and consult the parliamentary documents. The Riksdag Library is also a deposit library for both the EU and the UN.
THE DEMOCRACY WORKSHOP  In the Old Town the Riksdag runs a Democracy Workshop where pupils in grades 7–9 can become members of the Riksdag for a day in an interactive role play. The Riksdag receives over 100,000 visitors every year, who take part in guided tours or visit the public gallery.
**SWEDEN HAS** a parliamentary system of government. This means that the Government can only govern the country as long as it has the Riksdag’s confidence and support for its proposals.

The Riksdag is therefore Sweden’s principal decision-making body and the Government carries out the Riksdag’s decisions. Today, the King only has representative duties in his role as head of state.

**EVERY FOUR YEARS** in September all citizens who are entitled to vote have the opportunity to vote in democratic elections for the political party that they want to represent them in the Riksdag. The Prime Minister, who appoints the Government, is chosen by the Riksdag.

The most important tasks for the members of the Riksdag are to pass laws, to determine the central government budget and to scrutinise the work of the Government.

The parliamentary working year is referred to as the Riksdag session. During the autumn, the Riksdag primarily deals with the central government budget, and during the spring, laws are enacted.

In the Chamber the members engage in debate and take decisions on various

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**The Speaker** chairs the meetings of the Chamber and directs the work of the Riksdag. On the basis of a proposal from the Speaker the Riksdag appoints a new Prime Minister, which is unique for Sweden. In most other democracies the head of state (the monarch or president) has this task.

2. Members of the Riksdag may also submit proposals, known as private members’ motions. Many motions are in effect counter-proposals to Government bills.

3. Government bills and motions are submitted to the Chamber. The proposals are then sent to the relevant parliamentary committee.

4. The parliamentary committee prepares and writes a report in which it presents a proposal for a decision by the Riksdag.

5. The parties in the Riksdag discuss the legislative proposal in their party groups and decide what position to adopt in response to the proposal.

6. The Riksdag debates and takes a decision in the Chamber on the new law or legislative amendment.

7. The Government is informed of the Riksdag’s decision in a written communication from the Riksdag. It is then the task of the Government to ensure that the decision comes into force.
items of parliamentary business. Debates between party leaders, general policy debates and debates on topical issues are also held there. During interpellation debates, Government ministers reply to written questions submitted in advance by members of the Riksdag. This is one way for the Riksdag to scrutinise the activities of the Government.

Everything that is said in the Chamber is public and is published in the parliamentary record. Members of the public and the media can listen to all the debates and follow votes from the public gallery or via the Internet, radio or TV.

**THE RIKSDAG** takes thousands of decisions every year. The proposals normally come from the Government in the form of a Government bill. But they can also come from members of the Riksdag as private members’ motions. Before the Riksdag takes a decision, the proposals must be considered by one of the parliamentary committees.

There are 15 parliamentary committees, responsible for different subject areas such as matters relating to the environment or education. Each committee is like a miniature Riksdag with 17 members from the various parties in parliament.

To counter the Government’s proposals, the opposition parties or individual members often submit motions. The committee then prepares a proposal for decision by the Riksdag.

On the basis of reports from members of the Riksdag, the parliamentary Committee on the Constitution examines whether or not ministers have complied with the rules that regulate the work of the Government. The Committee on the Constitution’s hearings with Government ministers are normally broadcast on TV.

**SWEDEN IS A MEMBER** of the European Union, the EU. Certain decisions about laws are therefore taken at the EU level. The Government represents Sweden in the EU Council of Ministers but is obliged to confer with the Riksdag on the policies that it intends to pursue. This is done first in the parliamentary committees and then in the Committee on European Union Affairs, whose composition is based on the various parties in parliament in the same way as the parliamentary committees. The Govern-
After the 1921 elections, five women entered the Riksdag. Today 46.1 per cent of the Swedish members of parliament are women.

DEMOCRACY MEANS government by the people. This means that we not only have the right to choose our members in the Riksdag but we are also entitled to free and open information and debate. This is why both freedom of the press and freedom of expression are laid down in the Constitution of Sweden. The right to express one’s opinions freely is one of the cornerstones of a modern democracy.

THE ORIGINS OF THE RIKSDAG date back a long way. Originally, the leaders of the realm met under the open sky to make decisions. One of the first known meetings took place in the town of Arboga in 1435. But not until 1921, with the introduction of universal suffrage, were the members of the Riksdag chosen in fully democratic elections.

For centuries Sweden had a parliament that consisted of the four Estates in society: the nobility, the clergy, the burghers and the peasantry. In the mid-1800s the Riksdag of the four Estates was replaced by a parliament with two chambers, whose members were elected by a limited section of the male population. The bicameral system continued to exist after the introduction of universal suffrage. Only in 1971 did the Riksdag switch to a single chamber, made up today of 349 democratically elected members.
Information about the Riksdag

WWW.RIKSDAGEN.SE
The Riksdag website contains comprehensive information about the activities of the Riksdag, current items of parliamentary business and the members of the Riksdag.

THE RIKSDAG INFORMATION SERVICE
Via the Riksdag Information Service callers can obtain answers to questions about the activities and decisions of the Riksdag, votes, constitutional issues etc.
E-mail: riksdagsinformation@riksdagen.se
Tel: 020-349 000 (national calls)

GUIDED TOURS
Guided tours of the Riksdag are held for the public (in Swedish and in English). Group visits must be booked in advance.
E-mail: besoksbokning@riksdagen.se
Tel: +46-8-786 48 62.
All tours are free of charge.
Entrance: Riksgatan 3, Stockholm.

THE PUBLIC GALLERY
The Public Gallery of the Chamber is open to the public during meetings of the Chamber.
Entrance: Riksgatan 3, Stockholm.

THE RIKSDAG LIBRARY
The Riksdag Library is open to the public.
E-mail: biblioteket@riksdagen.se
Tel: 020-555 000 (national calls)
Entrance: Storkyrkobrinken 7A, Stockholm.