

# ESTONIA

Look and behold!





# Estonia

• facts • national symbols •



Official name: **Republic of Estonia**

Anthem: **Mu isamaa, mu õnn ja rõõm**  
**/My Fatherland, My Happiness and Joy/**  
**(F. Pacius)**

Capital: **Tallinn**

Area: **45 339 km<sup>2</sup> (17 505 sq. mi)**

Population: **1 315 635**

Official language: **Estonian**

Form of government: **parliamentary republic**

National holiday: **24 February**  
**(Independence Day, 1918)**

Currency: **euro (EUR)**

Flag: **blue, black and white**

National bird: **barn swallow**

National flower: **cornflower**

Number of islands: **2222**

Highest point:

**Suur Munamägi /**  
**Great Egg Hill/, 318 m (1043.3 ft)**

Member of NATO, EU, UN, OSCE, OECD and WTO  
(in addition to several other organisations)

## Read more:

- [estonia.ee](http://estonia.ee)
- [visitestonia.com/en](http://visitestonia.com/en)
- [valitus.ee/en](http://valitus.ee/en)
- [estonianworld.com](http://estonianworld.com)
- [events.estonia.ee](http://events.estonia.ee)
- [facebook.com/valismin/](https://facebook.com/valismin/)
- [riigikogu.ee/en/parliament-of-estonia/](http://riigikogu.ee/en/parliament-of-estonia/)
- [president.ee/en/](http://president.ee/en/)





◀ The country with the most erratic boulders in Europe

## What LAND is this?



“What land is this, with no mountain in sight,  
merely forests endless and bogs and swamps,  
with a people full of magical might,  
with peculiar songs and stories for rite.”

Peeter Volkonski, musician, actor and poet

There are just over a million people in Estonia – as many as in a city like Milan, Dallas or Munich. Since there are so few of us, it is almost like a family, as nearly everybody knows one another. It would not raise eyebrows if your classmate was the prime minister, your neighbour was the president, your uncle was a Grammy nominee, your brother was a founder of Skype or your professor was this year’s nominee for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

What land is this that carries a mystical appeal like a setting for a fairy tale where miracles and stories with happy endings are possible? In Estonia, people toil and tinker in order to make their activities even more efficient. Thanks to IT developments, this country boasts cutting-edge state and banking services. Opening a bank account, founding a company, filing your tax returns and registering your car are just a matter of a few (dozen) minutes.

Estonia bears the burden of a troubled history. The country was deprived of independence with violence, yet it was regained without shedding a single drop of blood. Scars do not fade easily, but Estonians have managed to emerge victorious from the direst situations. Once the country was free again, the nation was given a clean slate. Everything had to be started from scratch. Decisions had to be made, risks had to be taken and the country needed to be rebuilt.

Thanks to their efficient arrangements, Estonians are blessed with plenty of spare time, but instead of revelling or going on holidays, they often prefer the forest, the islands or an empty beach— quiet, purity and freedom. Reconnecting with one's roots and finding harmony with nature serve as a means for recharging one's batteries, a breeding ground for new ideas and a safe haven in which to act as a whole and healthy human being.



► Estonians celebrate the longest day of the year festively. On Midsummer's Eve (23 June), people spend time outdoors, jump over bonfires and try to find fern flowers at midnight



► Estonia has a lot of untouched nature and a low population density: 51% of Estonian territory is forestland, which is a good habitat for wild animals. Elk are the largest animal in Estonian forests.

# Heart's home

• history • singing to freedom • loyalty



“Our lives are not only connected to a particular country; the way we live in a certain place is just as important.”

Arvo Pärt, composer

In order to understand the loyalty Estonians have to their land and their roots, a brief history lesson is required. Estonians are one of the oldest peoples in Europe who have continuously lived in the same location. The first people to inhabit this corner of the Earth were here as early as almost 11 000 years ago. Time and again, Estonia has been occupied by foreign powers. On 24 February 1918, against all odds, the Republic of Estonia declared its statehood. During the years of independence, the Estonian economy and culture were allowed to develop. A few decades later, amid global political turmoil, Estonia lost its independence for more than 50 years. In the late 1980s, a new period of national awakening began. The so-called Singing Revolution took place, culminating in the restoration of independence of the Republic of Estonia on 20 August 1991.

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► Approximately half of the inhabitants of Estonia have sung or danced in a song or dance festival at least once in their lives



## Love for one's homeland is fundamental to being Estonian.

The song festivals have played a major role in creating and maintaining national sentiment. While the first song festival in 1869 was more of a festivity celebrating the 50th anniversary of the abolition of the serfdom of Livonian peasantry, later song festivals would contribute to social cohesion and patriotic sentiment. In the final years of the crucial 1980s, the Singing Revolution served as an instrument for regaining Estonia's independence without bloodshed. The song festival, which is on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, features tens of thousands of performers on stage with two or three times as many spectators. In addition to enjoying the concert, people come to partake in the magic of shared feelings, being as one and appreciate the rapturous atmosphere.

▼ The house-barn is Estonia's contribution to the world's architectural history. People still live in renovated buildings of this type

► Folk costume is also popular among young Estonians



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▲ Estonian sailboat Admiral Bellingshausen arriving to its home port. Admiral Bellingshausen was sailing to Antarctica celebrating its discovery 200 years ago.

“In every port in the world, at least two Estonians can be found”. This saying, originally from a Hemingway novel, is confirmed all around the world. Estonians are naturally interested in matters taking place elsewhere. Throughout history, people have come to Estonia and either left or stayed. Various nations and ethnic groups such as the Coastal Swedes, Old Believers, Baltic Germans and Jews have lived together side by side and enriched Estonia’s way of life with their culture and customs. Presently, Estonia is a place of residence or work for people from approximately 150 different ethnic backgrounds.

The great figures of the past and their deeds have played a leading role with respect to the future. The Krusenstern, a four-masted barque that sails around the world, is a token of respect of sorts for Adam Johann von Krusenstern, whose circumnavigation of the globe was vital for research, especially for the coasts and indigenous peoples of the Pacific Ocean. Estonians’ curiosity regarding mountains and seas, outer space and uncharted lands is almost as passionate as it was centuries ago when Fabian Gottlieb Benjamin von Bellingshausen, a man hailing from the island of Saaremaa, became one of the first three people to reach Antarctica.

# Smart ideas

• e-governance • innovation • digital society



“For young Estonians, the Internet is much more than just a service – it is a symbol of democracy and freedom.”

Linnar Viik, IT visionary

In Estonia, access to the Internet is essentially considered a fundamental right. 98% of Estonia has Internet coverage. Fast wireless Internet connections are available in every library and café and on every long-distance bus. After Estonia regained its independence, infrastructure that guided the activities of the state to the Internet was created. Today, no Estonian could imagine being frustrated wasting time, money and paper on essential daily activities. Instead, they file their tax returns online, check their kids' grades in the e-school and participate in i-voting. Estonia has e-governance, an e-health system, an electronic border-crossing system, mobile parking and a platform for founding a company that takes just 15 minutes to complete. Estonia was the first nation in history to offer Internet voting in a nationwide election in 2005. Internet voting (i-voting or online voting) is one of the one of the many voting methods by which citizens can vote. For example, in the 2019 parliamentary elections, 43.8% of all votes were cast by i-voting. Estonia is the first country to offer e-Residency, a government-issued digital ID available to anyone in the world.

▼ Paper-free meetings: e-government sessions save people time and are good for the environment, with all decisions made being available to interested parties online

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## Estonia as a pioneer

Today's world is developing rapidly, especially with regard to technology and the Internet, which have become part of our daily lives.

Estonia is a pioneer in innovative solutions relating to e-governance, e-democracy and cybersecurity and knowledge pertaining to open information societies. Estonia also shares its knowledge and experience in the field of e-services with others. This is a field in which the country is known for its reliability.



◀ The Starship robot courier is gaining more and more renown, particularly in the US, the UK and Germany

**Estonia has shared its e-governance** technology and experience throughout Europe and elsewhere. The prime ministers of Estonia and Finland have entered into what is believed to be the first digitally signed agreement in the world of its kind, by means of which e-services will be 'exported' to Finland. This means that the Estonian X-Road environment is now functioning in a cross-border capacity. If we compare a state's information system to a city with many different buildings (databases), the X-Road is like a street network through which data traffic moves between databases. The X-Road was named after its comparison with an intersection where different databases and systems meet in order to exchange information.

## Estonia: a home to success stories

Estonia is the world leader in number of unicorns per capita. We may only have 1.3 million people, but we have produced five billion-dollar start-ups: Skype, Playtech, Wise, Bolt and Pipedrive. Moreover, we have many other excellent start-ups that try to make their mark (and emerge as winners) in the midst of competition from millions of start-ups around the world. The financial software Erply, the smart flowerpot Click & Grow and the automated couriers of Starship are all well known.



**“To make the world’s next best thing, it has to be a tiny bit better than the world’s best.”**

**Kristo Käärmann,**  
founder of Wise



▶ The Estonian capital has a wonderfully preserved Old Town, which has been named a UNESCO World Heritage Site





## The medieval spirit is alive and well in Tallinn.

The network of streets and alleys and the boundaries of plots that developed between the 11th and 15th centuries are still there to be marvelled at. And the streets are full of life! You can grab a coffee or taste the best that chefs and confectioners have to offer, pass by the studios of textile and glass craftsmen, visit a museum or go to a concert, stop in at the oldest continuously operating pharmacy in Europe and enjoy the wonderful skyline of the city from one of its viewing platforms

The fact that Estonian children are just as smart and eager to learn

as their parents is demonstrated by ever better results in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Estonian students have achieved particularly good results in science. The improvement in global education rankings inspired Estonia to establish an international brand and concept to share Estonia's know-how in the world. The brand is called Education Estonia – for the smartEST people in the world.



## HOW TO RECOGNISE AN ESTONIAN

There's probably a grain of truth in the following humorous suggestions on identifying an Estonian:

- they haven't seen a bus ticket on paper for ages;
- they consider it natural for every country to have Internet access everywhere;
- they don't remember that there are methods of payment other than electronic means;
- they're unable to provide their signature on paper as they only use a digital signature.



▲ Basic programming skills are already taught in kindergartens and primary schools

### Read more:

- [educationestonia.org](http://educationestonia.org)
- [e-estonia.com](http://e-estonia.com)
- [ega.ee](http://ega.ee)
- [eesti.ee/en/](http://eesti.ee/en/)
- [valitsus.ee/en](http://valitsus.ee/en)
- [startupestonia.ee](http://startupestonia.ee)
- [ria.ee/en](http://ria.ee/en)
- [ccdcoe.org](http://ccdcoe.org)
- [ajujaht.ee/en/](http://ajujaht.ee/en/)
- [garage48.org](http://garage48.org)



▲ Estonia is probably the only country in the world where 99% of public services are available online 24/7.

# The touch of nature

• life in the midst of nature • recreation • health • pure food •



“Estonia still has so many empty spaces and pristine nature, while electricity and the Internet are available in nearly every corner of the country. This makes it possible for us to lead a lifestyle that’s become a rarity in some countries in ‘Old Europe’. When I’m in my summer cottage, I’m able to take a shower in the morning, load the dishwasher, read the news on my tablet and then disappear with a basket for hours to go mushrooming or pick cranberries in the bog without encountering a single person.”

**Tiia Toomet**, writer, founder of Tartu Toy Museum

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Estonia has one of the largest proportions of forest in the world

with approximately half of its land covered by spruces, pines, aspens et al. If this abundance were to be distributed between the country’s citizens, everyone would have 1.3 hectares to themselves. Forests are part of the Estonian identity. Respect for nature is nurtured at a young age. As such, children are also involved in the project Estonia’s 100 Oaks which will culminate in young oaks towering in different corners of the country on the 100th anniversary of the Republic of Estonia.

► Estonians are blessed with four distinct seasons





## The Estonian subconscious retains the ancestral belief

that everything in nature — trees, stones, birds and animals — has a spirit. Getting one's bearings based on nature's signs, forecasting the weather and taking the seasons into consideration are passed down to this day. If someone in the family catches a cold, every Estonian mother has medicinal plants stocked up — linden flowers, raspberry stalks, calendula and primrose. The tea brewed from any of them served together with local honey is the best cure. Edible plants growing in forests and fields are a big trend in gastronomy. Young stinging nettles are added to soups, wild masterwort is used to stuff pastries, a fantastic syrup is made from spruce tips and rowan fruit is used to make jam.

Wild strawberries, chanterelles and sorrel grow right on the side of the road — just take a moment to pick them. There is plenty of unspoilt nature in Estonia and the keyword "organic" is increasingly becoming the standard for food production and agriculture. As such, everybody is able to get their share of these delicacies.



▲ Estonians are gatherers: each autumn the forests fill with people gathering berries and mushrooms. And when it comes to prime mushroom-picking territory, Estonians might even keep the secret from their best friends!

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▲ Estonia lies on the banks of the Baltic sea, half of the country's border is a coastline running from Russia to Latvia



◀ The Tartu Marathon is like the song festival of winter, with skiing enthusiasts from all over the world eager to take part in it

Estonians are not afraid of nature, quite the opposite — when they want to relax, they go into the forest for a run or go for a skate on the sea ice. In Estonia, the sea is often poorly navigable due to thick ice during periods of severe cold in the winter. However, even in times gone by, people did not let themselves become isolated from the rest of the world and instead conducted trade with horse and carriage on ice roads. Even today Estonia boasts Europe's longest ice road, stretching 26 km from the island of Hiiumaa to the mainland. Skating marathons, hikes and fishing competitions are held on the ice. Winter swimming and going for a splash in holes drilled into the ice is commonplace even in the coldest temperatures.



In order for humans and nature to coexist peacefully, people must contribute to nature and take care of their surroundings. The World Cleanup Day — which started as a grassroots Estonian project — has now spread to every continent thanks to Estonia's initiative. It is one of the biggest civic movements of our time, uniting 180 countries and millions of people across the world for a cleaner planet. Estonia's gift to the world.



Estonia might not have tall mountains or deep valleys,

but its landscape is nevertheless diverse: bogs, ancient woodlands, meadows, alvars, islets, limestone bluffs, islands and peninsulas. Many of them remain unspoilt and extremely rich in species. Estonia has five national parks with miles of boardwalks, rest areas, campsites and places for barbecues and bonfires built for visitors. In Soomaa National Park you can experience the meaning of a 'fifth season'. During the spring floods, this area starts to resemble Venice — and the main means of transport for local residents are boats. Matsalu and Vilsandi National Parks are two of the most important nesting and migration sites for waterfowl in Europe.

### Read more:

- [visitestonia.com](http://visitestonia.com)
- [letsdoitworld.org](http://letsdoitworld.org)
- [looduskalender.ee/n/en](http://looduskalender.ee/n/en)
- [estonianwildlifetours.com](http://estonianwildlifetours.com)
- [rmk.ee/en](http://rmk.ee/en)
- [estonianfood.eu](http://estonianfood.eu)



“Estonia is like a wild strawberry — it is primal and small, hard to find, and those who are unable to find it will not notice it or learn to appreciate it. But once you have it in your grasp and have made it your own, it is one of the best things in the world.”

Toomas Hendrik Ilves,  
President of the Republic of  
Estonia 2006-2016



# Creativity

• music • literature • art •



“We strive to be trees in the landscape of the world’s culture and to feel and take root of exactly where our language and cultural history should be”.

Tõnu Kaljuste, conductor

This little patch of land on the coast of the Baltic Sea gives rise to creativity,

allows for the spirit to develop naturally and for one’s thoughts to be expressed. Reflection exercises, opinion festivals and contests hosted by TeamLab, Ajujaht and Garage48 are held in order to generate new ideas. Tradition and innovation have intertwined. Tallinn Music Week, Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival, Tallinn Architecture Biennale, Jazzkaar, Tallinn Design Festival and the Saaremaa Opera Festival have become international events. Estonia has plenty of talented people whose creations have brought the country to the attention of increasingly more people around the world. The most renowned among them is without doubt Arvo Pärt, whose musical creations speak to many people worldwide.

- [tmw.ee](http://tmw.ee)
- [saaremaaopera.eu/en](http://saaremaaopera.eu/en)
- [jazzkaar.ee/en/](http://jazzkaar.ee/en/)
- [tab.ee](http://tab.ee)
- [disainioo.ee/en](http://disainioo.ee/en)

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► Tallinn Music Week is the biggest talent festival in Northern Europe

## Estonian design, fashion, music and art

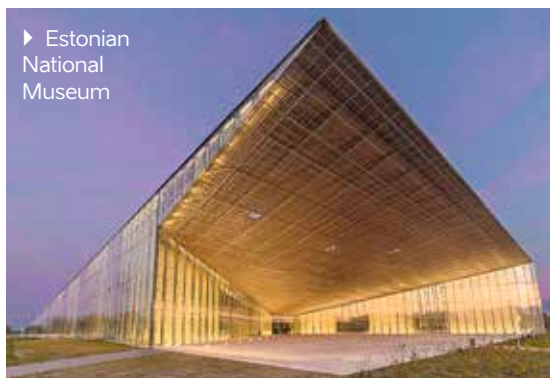
are becoming more widely known and recognised around the world. Estonian designers are taking part in an increasing number of fashion weeks and their unique collections are also beloved of celebrities.

A Grammy – the most coveted prize in the international music community – has been awarded to Estonian musicians a total of four times, three of them in the category of Best Choral Performance, which reaffirms the quality and traditions of Estonian choral singing.

Estonia is also well known for 'Estonia' pianos, Estelon speakers and Paiste cymbals.



▶ Estonian design exhibition "Size Doesn't Matter" in Oxo Tower Wharf, London



▶ Estonian National Museum

## Estonians appreciate creativity.

This is reflected in the various creative quarters of Tallinn, Tartu, Pärnu, Viljandi, Narva and other smaller towns throughout the country. Creative quarters often operate in old factories or complexes and provide an excellent opportunity to spend time or work in an environment that inspires and presents possibilities for independent entrepreneurship.

### Read more:

- [arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part-centre/](http://arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part-centre/)
- [jazzkaar.ee/en](http://jazzkaar.ee/en)
- [laulupidu.ee/en](http://laulupidu.ee/en)
- [lennusadam.eu](http://lennusadam.eu)
- [ajaloomuseum.ee/en](http://ajaloomuseum.ee/en)
- [erm.ee/en](http://erm.ee/en)
- [disainikeskus.ee/en](http://disainikeskus.ee/en)
- [edl.ee/en](http://edl.ee/en)
- [poff.ee](http://poff.ee)
- [looveesti.ee/en](http://looveesti.ee/en)
- [telliskivi.eu/en](http://telliskivi.eu/en)
- [aparaaditehas.ee](http://aparaaditehas.ee)
- [estoniandesignhouse.ee/en](http://estoniandesignhouse.ee/en)
- [lespetites.ee](http://lespetites.ee)



▶ Kumu Art Museum

▶ Port Noblessner



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Industrial heritage and bohemian charm. In recent years, the historical Port Noblessner and the Telliskivi Creative City have become the most popular leisure centres among the locals. The vibrant and artsy Telliskivi area is also often called the hipster district, as you can find a lot of artistic expressions, creative culture and little funky cafes and bars from there.



▶ Telliskivi Creative City



Concept: Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Compiled by: Ekspress Meedia

Designer: Janett Rikkand

Printing by: Lakrito OÜ

Photographs: Liina Notta, Kaupo Kalda, Sven Zacek, Mart Vares, Mait Jüriado, Renee Altrov, Aron Urb, Annika Haas, Mart Sepp, Arne Ader, Tarmo Haud, Starship Technologies, Tauno Tõhk, Josh Redman, Aivar Pihelgas, Karl Ander Adami, Rasmus Jurkatam, Stenbock House, Shutterstock, [www.visitestonia.com](http://www.visitestonia.com)



### PRACTISE YOUR ESTONIAN:

- Tere! – Hello!
- Aitäh – Thank you
- Kuidas sul läheb? – How are you?
- Nägemist – Bye
- Palun – Please
- Head isu! – Bon appetit!
- Õnnelik – Happy
- Kuuuurija – One who explores the Moon
- Terviseks! – Cheers!

### READ ESTONIAN LITERATURE:

- **Truth and Justice** (A. H. Tammsaare)
- **Border State** (Tõnu Õnnepalu)
- **Sailing against the Wind** (Jaan Kross)
- **The Bees** (Meelis Friedenthal)
- **Things in the Night** (Mati Unt)
- **The Man Who Spoke Snakish** (Andrus Kivirähk)
- **The 'Apothecary Melchior' series of medieval murder mysteries** (Indrek Hargla)
- **Shape of Time** (Doris Kareva)
- **The Cavemen Chronicle** (Mihkel Mutt)



• [estlit.ee](http://estlit.ee) • [filmi.ee/en](http://filmi.ee/en)

### WATCH ESTONIAN FILMS:

- **Truth and Justice** (Tanel Toom)
  - **The Little Comrade** (Moonika Siimets)
  - **Ahto. Chasing a Dream** (Jaanis Valk)
  - **Rodeo – Taming a Wild Country** (Raimo Jõerand, Kiur Aarma)
  - **November** (Rainer Sarnet)
  - **1944** (Elmo Nüganen)
  - **The Singing Revolution** (James & Maureen Trusty)
  - **In the Crosswind** (Martti Helde)
  - **Disco and Atomic War** (Jaak Kilmi)
  - **Arvo Pärt – Even If I Lose Everything** (Dorian Supin)
  - **Lotte and the Lost Dragons** (Janno Põldma, Heiki Ernits)
- + collaborations
- **Tangerines** (Zaza Urušadze)
  - **The Fencer** (Klaus Härö)





estonia