



Estonian

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Chapter 1 | Profile



The unique architecture of Estonia.
Flickr / Dennis Sylvester Hurd

Introduction

Estonians have a long and storied history in the Baltic region. Originating from small tribes more than 10,000 years ago, they have grown to dominate the diverse Estonian landscape and persisted despite numerous invading rulers that sought to assimilate or eradicate them. The nation transformed itself after the fall of the Soviet Union. Today, its economy is one of the strongest in Europe. Estonia's mainland and islands are scenic, with extensive coastlines, forests, and fertile agricultural lands. Estonians account for the majority of the population but the country is multiethnic, home to groups from neighboring countries.

Geography

Area

Estonia encompasses a total area of 45,228 sq km (17,463 sq mi), with 42,388 sq km (16,366 sq mi) land and 2,840 sq km (1,097 sq mi) water. It is approximately twice the size of New Jersey, with 657 km (408 mi) of land borders and 3,794 km (2,358 mi) of coastline. The country also has approximately 1,520 islands in the Baltic Sea and holds 12 nautical miles as a maritime claim.¹ To the south and east, it borders Latvia and Russia respectively.²

Climate

Estonia experiences a Baltic, somewhat continental climate that is temperate and humid; Baltic climates are characterized by long and cold winters with short, warm summers.³ The climate in Estonia's coastal areas is characterized as maritime, given its extensive borders with major bodies of water. The country experiences four distinct seasons and rainfall is generally present throughout the year, averaging 600–700 mm (24–28 in) annually and generally consistent with the other Baltic states. Mean temperatures in January reach -8--5°C (17–23°F) and 16–17°C (61–63°F) in July. The climate and terrain are ideal for agricultural activity.^{4, 5, 6}

Winters are generally cold, with temperatures close to or below freezing—0°C (32°F)—even during daylight. Winter temperatures on Estonia's two main islands Hiiumaa and Saaremaa skew slightly lower, with averages around -1°C (30°F). Temperatures have dropped as low as -40°C (-40°F) during the winter. Portions of the Gulf of Finland and Lake Peipus are known to freeze over during the winter months. Snowfall is common throughout Estonia, the result of Atlantic Ocean weather fronts penetrating inland.^{7, 8}

Springtime in Estonia brings temperatures that gradually rise as the land thaws, typically starting in April. Cold weather does occasionally return on an intermittent basis in the early months of the season, bringing snowfall or freezing periods. By mid-May, temperatures start to steadily grow warmer. The iced-over gulf and lakes begin to thaw around April or May when the weather starts to truly resemble the season.^{9, 10}

Summers in Estonia are fair, averaging 20°C (70°F). The country's coastal areas are generally cooler thanks to the air currents from the water. By June, rainfall typically returns; it rains on average one out of three days in the summertime; inland areas occasionally experience thunderstorms. Days will often be mildly humid and evenings cool, around 12°C (54°F). Summers are the most popular time to visit Estonia.^{11, 12}

- 1 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia: Geography," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>
- 2 Aivars Stranga et al., "Estonia: Land," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia>
- 3 Alice F.A. Mutton and Alastair Dougal Couper, "Baltic Sea," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 30 December 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Baltic-Sea>
- 4 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia: Geography," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>
- 5 Climates to Travel, "Climate—Estonia," n.d., <https://www.climatestotravel.com/climate/estonia>
- 6 Aivars Stranga et al., "Estonia: Land," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia>
- 7 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia: Geography," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>
- 8 Climates to Travel, "Climate—Estonia," n.d., <https://www.climatestotravel.com/climate/estonia>
- 9 Climates to Travel, "Climate—Estonia," n.d., <https://www.climatestotravel.com/climate/estonia>
- 10 Seasons of the Year, "Seasons in Estonia," n.d., <https://seasonsoftheyear.com/Estonia>
- 11 Climates to Travel, "Climate—Estonia," n.d., <https://www.climatestotravel.com/climate/estonia>
- 12 Seasons of the Year, "Seasons in Estonia," n.d., <https://seasonsoftheyear.com/Estonia>

Autumns in Estonia are typically rainy, with moderate temperatures that drop dramatically as the season progresses. Snowfall can start as early as October. Estonia's vast forests display a brilliant array of colors during the season as fog and clouds intermittently fill the skies. Temperatures tend to drop to an average of 8°C (46°F). By November, the weather usually grows more extreme as the temperature continues to drop and strong winds become more common.^{13, 14}

Geographic Divisions

Estonia's landscape is dominated by forests, marshlands, and lowlands, with relatively flat terrain to the north that builds to flat hills within the center and rolling hills in the south. Glacial activity shaped the land and created the rivers that crisscross it. Scattered throughout are approximately 1,500 lakes. More than 50% of the land is covered in forests; an additional 22.2% is agricultural land that is occasionally prone to flooding. The country's mean elevation is 50 m (164 ft) above sea level, with less than 10% of the country rising to 90 m (300 ft) or above. The highest point is Suur Munamägi (Egg Mountain), which rises to 318 m (1,043 ft).^{15, 16, 17}

Bodies of Water

Võhandu River

The Võhandu River is Estonia's longest river, measuring 162 km (101 mi). The river flows through the southeastern portion of the country; it starts in the Otepää Uplands, passing through lakes Jõksi and Vagula on its way through more of Estonia's plains and valleys. As it cuts through certain regions, it is banked by walls of sandstone. Its largest tributaries are the Karioja, Iskna, Mäda jõgi, and Rõuge. The river contains important conservation and protection areas and is home to approximately 22 species of fish.^{18, 19}

Pärnu River

The Pärnu is Estonia's second-longest river, measuring 145 km (90 mi), and is named for the city it cuts through on its way to the Gulf of Riga. It is nicknamed the "Estonian Mississippi" because of its length and susceptibility to flooding. The river grows in size near Türi as several tributaries empty into it. Estonia's richest farmlands benefit from the Pärnu as it cuts through the terrain on its way to Paide. Flood plain grasslands and forests thrive along the portions of the river prone to flooding. The Pärnu crosses through the Pandivere Upland, Central Estonian Plain, and Soomaa before terminating into Pärnu's bay, adjacent to the Gulf of Riga.^{20, 21, 22}

13 Climates to Travel, "Climate—Estonia," n.d., <https://www.climatestotravel.com/climate/estonia>

14 Seasons of the Year, "Seasons in Estonia," n.d., <https://seasonsoftheyear.com/Estonia>

15 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia: Geography," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>

16 Mihkel Raud, "Estonian Scenery: Estonian Lakes," Estonian Film Institute, 2 February 2018, <https://filmestonia.eu/index.php/2018/02/estonian-lakes/>

17 Aivars Stranga et al., "Estonia: Land," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia>

18 New World Encyclopedia, "Estonia: Geography," n.d., <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Estonia>

19 Eesti Entsüklopeedia, "Võhandu jõgi," n.d., http://entsyklopeedia.ee/artikkel/võhandu_jõgi3

20 Estonica, "The Pärnu River Basin and Floods," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Nature/Transitional_Estonia/The_Pärnu_River_basin_and_floods/

21 Aivars Stranga et al., "Estonia: Land: Relief and Drainage," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia>

22 Isolated TravellerTraveler, "10 Interesting Facts about Pärnu," n.d., <https://www.isolatedtraveller.com/10-interesting-facts-about-parnu/>

Narva River

The Narva River straddles Estonia's border with Russia and is the largest river in the country by volume. It extends 77 km (48 mi) and features a hydroelectric power station that was constructed in 1957; this power station diverted water from a popular waterfall.^{23, 24}

Lake Peipus

Lake Peipus is the fifth largest lake in Europe, with an area of 3,550 sq km (1,370 sq mi). It reaches a depth of approximately 15 m (50 ft). The lake forms the headwaters for the Narva River and, like the river, falls along Estonia's border with Russia. Approximately 30 small streams act as tributaries for the lake, which is also home to 30 small islands. Peipus is one of three lakes that are remnants of a singular Ice Age-era lake; nearby lakes Pihkva and Teploe were formed from the same massive body. The lake is a popular tourist destination in the summer months; in the winter and for about half a year, the lake is known to freeze over.^{25, 26, 27}

Lake Peipus is home to approximately 54 aquatic plant species and 42 fish species. On the Estonian side, the lake is home to two minority groups: the Setu people and the Russian Old-Believers, who are Russians that fled to Estonia because of religious persecution starting in the 16th century.²⁸ Life in and around the lake faces several ecological threats: pollution with phosphorous and nitrogen compounds from the Ema and Velikaya rivers; toxic algae; and pollution from nearby thermal power stations.^{29, 30, 31}

Lake Võrtsjärv

Located in south-central Estonia's Haanja region, Lake Võrtsjärv covers approximately 280 sq km (110 sq mi) of land. Its water is characterized as shallow and swampy; the lake is believed to be the remnants of a much larger lake. Large quantities of phosphorous, nitrogen, and chlorophyll are found in the lake. Its main tributary is the Ema River, which connects Võrtsjärv to Peipus. Lake Võrtsjärv is home to 35 fish species and the largest natural eel breeding farm in Europe.^{32, 33, 34}

Kaali Järv

The Kaali Järv is a series of eight meteorite craters on Saaremaa island, the largest of which contains a pond of approximately 16 m (53 ft) in depth. Based on fossil evidence found in these craters, it is believed they were formed by meteor impact some 4–7,500 years ago. It is estimated that the impact was comparable to the detonation of an atomic bomb. Archeological evidence suggests that the craters were a location where sacrificial ceremonies were held.^{35, 36, 37}

- 23 Estonica, "Hydrology," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Nature/Lake_Peipsi_and_Narva_River/Hydrology/
- 24 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Narva," 22 September 2010, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Narva>
- 25 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Lake Peipus," 30 November 2010, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Lake-Peipus>
- 26 Lakepedia, "Lake Peipus: The Largest European Transboundary Lake," n.d., <https://www.lakepedia.com/lake/peipus.html>
- 27 Visit Estonia, "Peipsi Area," n.d., <https://www.visitestonia.com/en/where-to-go/south-estonia/peipsi-area>
- 28 Estonia Today, "Russian Old Believers in Estonia," November 2004, https://vm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/web-static/160/Russian_Old_Believers.pdf
- 29 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Lake Peipus," 30 November 2010, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Lake-Peipus>
- 30 Lakepedia, "Lake Peipus: The Largest European Transboundary Lake," n.d., <https://www.lakepedia.com/lake/peipus.html>
- 31 Visit Estonia, "Peipsi Area," n.d., <https://www.visitestonia.com/en/where-to-go/south-estonia/peipsi-area>
- 32 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Võrtsjärv," 19 September 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Vortsjarv>
- 33 Visit Estonia, "Lake Võrtsjärv," n.d., <https://www.visitestonia.com/en/lake-vortsjarv>
- 34 Fabien Cremona, "Võrtsjärv," Freshwater Information System, n.d., <http://fis.freshwatertools.eu/index.php/casestudies/vortsjaerv.html>
- 35 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Kaali Järv Craters," 19 January 2015, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kaali-jarv-Craters>
- 36 Visit Estonia, "Kaali Field of Meteorite Craters," n.d., <https://www.visitestonia.com/en/kaali-field-of-meteorite-craters>
- 37 Atlas Obscura, "Kaali Meteorite Crater Field," n.d., <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/kaali-meteorite-crater-field>

Baltic Sea

The Baltic Sea is a major body of water that connects Estonia to eight other countries. The sea stretches 1,600 km (1,000 mi) length from north to south and averages 193 km (120 mi) in width. Estonia's territorial waters in the Baltic stretch 22.2 km (13.8 mi). The sea's average depth is 55 m (180 ft), and it has a surface area of approximately 386,000 sq km (149,000 sq mi). The islands Hiiumaa and Saaremaa and Estonia's northwesternmost coastline compose the country's Baltic coastline. Portions of the Baltic near the islands are particularly shallow and contain several shoals and reefs that are a danger to passing ships. The Baltic is the second-largest body of brackish water in the world in terms of volume. It is the result of glacial erosion, in which fresh and ocean waters mixed. The Baltic's seafloor is largely a dead zone, as the saline-concentrated waters remain trapped below the surface waters; bacteria primarily thrive in this ecological zone. The Gulfs of Bothnia, Finland, and Riga are subdivisions of the sea.^{38, 39}

Gulf of Finland

The Gulf of Finland is a subdivision of the Baltic Sea, positioned on its eastern side and encompassing an area of 30,000 sq km (11,583 sq mi). The gulf is relatively shallow, with an uneven ground level that averages 40 m (131 ft) and reaches a maximum depth of 121 m (397 ft). From west to east, the gulf extends 400 km (250 mi), bordering Estonia, Finland, and Russia. The gulf's western border connects from the Põõsaspea Cape in Estonia to the Hanko Cape in Finland. The waters of the gulf are brackish, ranging from 6% salinity in the west to 2% in the east. The eastern portion of the gulf is known to freeze over during the winter for approximately 3–5 months.^{40, 41} The gulf has contributed to the strong bond between Finland and Estonia throughout history.⁴²

Gulf of Riga

The Gulf of Riga is a large offshoot of the Baltic Sea, with an area of 18,000 sq km (7,000 sq mi) and a maximum depth of 54 m (177 ft). Its coastline along Estonia is primarily low and sandy with several rivers emptying into it.⁴³ Its temperature varies significantly during the year—from June to mid-August, temperatures average above 18°C (64.4°F); in warm summers, it will reach 26–28°C (78.8–82.4°F); and some portions get cold enough to freeze over in the winter months, particularly in the Pärnu Bay area. The gulf is an important location for migrating birds and its northern and eastern coastal waters are spawning grounds for the Baltic herring.⁴⁴

38 New World Encyclopedia, "Baltic Sea," n.d., https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Baltic_Sea

39 Estonica, "The Baltic Sea," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Nature/The_Baltic_Sea/The_Baltic_Sea/

40 Estonica, "The Gulf of Finland," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Nature/Gulf_of_Finland_and_the_North-Estonian_coastal_plain/The_Gulf_of_Finland/

41 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Gulf of Finland," 5 January 2012, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Gulf-of-Finland>

42 Kimmo Kallonen, "100 Years of Independence for Estonia—The Gulf of Finland Connects," Port of Helsinki Magazine, 29 May 2018, <https://portofhelsinki.fi/en/emagazine/100-years-independence-estonia-gulf-finland-connects>

43 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Gulf of Riga," 16 May 2007, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Gulf-of-Riga>

44 Estonica, "The Gulf of Riga," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Nature/The_Baltic_Sea/The_Gulf_of_Riga/

Major Cities

Tallinn

Tallinn is the largest city in Estonia, its capital, and one of the oldest capitals in Northern Europe. It is a coastal city along the Gulf of Finland with a population of approximately 445,000 as of 2020. It covers an area of 159 sq km (61 sq mi) and stretches 46 km (29 mi) along the coast. Tallinn is home to several lakes, with Lake Ülemiste its largest and primary source of drinking water. A limestone cliff cuts through the city and can be seen from several points throughout it. Its highest point in the southwestern portion of the city reaches 64 m (210 ft). The city has always been a major trade hub and seaport, dating back to the 14th century; it is also a significant cultural, educational, and financial center for the country. Today, Tallinn is known as the “Silicon Valley of Europe,” home to the continent’s highest number of tech startups and the headquarters for the European Union’s (EU’s) IT agency.^{45, 46, 47}

Human activity in the area dates back at least 5,000 years; the first significant structures began to appear around the 10th or 11th century and the name Tallinn first appears in records dating back to the 13th century. While known as Tallinn today, it spent a significant portion of its history known as Reval, a German word meaning “deer fall” and originating from a local legend. Tallinn’s Old Town district is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the best-preserved medieval cities in Europe, despite significant damage sustained during World War II. The Old Town features popular tourist destinations like the Raekoja Plats town square, Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, and Raeapteek, the oldest continuously operated pharmacy in Europe.^{48, 49, 50, 51}

Tartu

Tartu is Estonia’s second-largest city, covering approximately 38.8 sq km (15 sq mi). It is situated in southern Estonia along the Ema River; as of 2020, its population was 92,972. The city has a reputation for being Estonia’s intellectual center, as it is home to the University of Tartu, which opened in 1632 and has survived the city’s tumultuous history.⁵² Settlements in the area date back to the fifth century; first written records emerged in 1030, making Tartu the oldest city in the Baltic States.⁵³ The city has been ruled by several different countries over the years, including the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Russia, and Sweden. The city’s ethnic composition is primarily Estonians and Russians.^{54, 55, 56}

45 Central Intelligence Agency, “Estonia: People and Society,” *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>

46 Just Fun Facts, “Interesting Facts about Tallinn,” n.d., <http://justfunfacts.com/interesting-facts-about-tallinn/>

47 World Capital Cities, “Capital Facts for Tallinn, Estonia,” n.d., <https://www.worldscapitalcities.com/capital-facts-for-tallinn-estonia/>

48 Central Intelligence Agency, “Estonia: People and Society,” *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>

49 Just Fun Facts, “Interesting Facts about Tallinn,” n.d., <http://justfunfacts.com/interesting-facts-about-tallinn/>

50 Insight Guides, “Tallinn Profile,” n.d., <https://www.insightguides.com/destinations/europe/estonia/tallinn/profile>

51 Kasparas Asmonaitis, “A History Buff’s Guide to Tallinn’s Old Town,” Culture Trip, 20 June 2017, <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/estonia/articles/a-history-buffs-guide-to-tallinns-old-town/>

52 Isolated TravellerTraveler, “10 Interesting Facts About Tartu,” n.d., <https://www.isolatedtraveller.com/10-interesting-facts-about-tartu/>

53 Visit Tartu, “History and Interesting Facts,” n.d., <https://visittartu.com/history-and-interesting-facts>

54 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Tartu,” 22 March 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Tartu>

55 Data Commons, “Tartu,” n.d., <https://datacommons.org/place/wikidataid/Q13972>

56 Tartu, “Tartu—City of Good Thoughts,” n.d., <https://www.tartu.ee/en/why-tartu>

Narva

The city of Narva lies along the Narva River in northeastern Estonia, the easternmost location of the country. It is the third-largest city in Estonia and situated about 14 km (9 mi) from the river's outflow into the Gulf of Finland.⁵⁷ It has a population of approximately 70,000 and covers an area of approximately 85 sq km (33 sq mi). Narva was founded in the 13th century and rose quickly to become a significant commercial city. It has had multiple rulers throughout history, most significantly Sweden and Russia. Its proximity to Russia has brought about a considerable Russian cultural influence.⁵⁸ The city has been a major cotton textile hub since the mid-19th century; it is also known for jute, hemp, and furniture production.^{59, 60}

Pärnu

Pärnu is Estonia's fourth-largest city and the namesake for its largest municipality. Situated in the southwest, it encompasses an area of 32 sq km (12 sq mi) and had a population of approximately 39,620 residents as of 2017. Known as the summer capital of Estonia, Pärnu is a major seaport and tourist destination along the Gulf of Riga's Pärnu Bay. The city was founded in 1251 and like many other Estonian cities was subject to invasions and different rulers throughout history. As Estonia's largest resort, the city is renowned for its sunny weather; its swimming season has been known to last until September.⁶¹ The city is also known as a hub for light industry—food, leather, and wood processing among others.^{62, 63, 64}

Kohtla-Järve

Kohtla-Järve, Estonia's fifth-largest city, sits near its northern coast, west of Narva. The city is divided into four administrative districts spread throughout the immediate region, totaling 39.4 sq km (15.2 sq mi).⁶⁵ As of 2017, its population reached 35,187. The city was founded in 1924, although mentions of the Järve and Kukruse villages date back to 1241. It was incorporated in 1946 and grew to include the nearby towns of Ahtme, Kukruse, Oru, Sompä, and Viivikonna in 1993. It is a hub for chemical production and oil shale processing, with shale-gas pipelines connecting it to St. Petersburg and Tallinn. Kohtla-Järve is very diverse, containing more than 40 ethnic groups.^{66, 67}

57 Estonian World, "Estonia's Third Largest City—Four Reasons to Visit Narva," 20 December 2012, <https://estonianworld.com/life/estonias-third-largest-city-4-reasons-to-visit-narva/>

58 Ilya Koval, "Narva: The EU's 'Russian' City," *Deutsche Welle*, 26 May 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/narva-the-eus-russian-city/a-48878744>

59 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Narva," 22 September 2010, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Narva>

60 World Guides, "Narva Tourist Information and Tourism," n.d., <http://www.world-guides.com/europe/estonia/ida-virumaa/narva/>

61 Visit Estonia, "Pärnu," n.d., <https://www.visitestonia.com/en/where-to-go/west-estonia/parnu>

62 Data Commons Place Explorer, "Pärnu," n.d., <https://datacommons.org/place/wikidataId/Q102365>

63 Adventuring Europe, "Ranking the Best Small Town Travel Destinations in Europe: 20. Pärnu [Estonia]," 2018, <https://www.adventuringeurope.com>

64 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Pärnu," 29 November 2010, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Pärnu>

65 City-Facts, "Kohtla-Järve," n.d., <https://www.city-facts.com/kohtla-järve>

66 Isolated TravellerTraveler, "10 Interesting Facts About Kohtla-Järve," n.d., <https://www.isolatedtraveller.com/10-interesting-facts-about-kohtla-järve/>

67 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Kohtla-Järve," 18 September 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kohtla-Järve>

History

Early History

Estonians trace their roots back to the Finno-Ugric tribes that inhabited the region more than 10,000 years ago. The first written mention of the Estonian people came from Roman historian Tacitus' text *Germania*. Tacitus described the Estonians as a patriarchal society that was divided into clans with a hierarchy of elders.⁶⁸

Foreign Conquests

Estonia has been subject to numerous invasions and conquests throughout its history. In the mid-ninth century, the Vikings invaded the land where modern-day Estonia sits, moving through on their way to the Slavonic hinterland.⁶⁹ Over the following centuries, other foreign entities invaded the territory, most notably the Russians on several occasions and the Danes and Swedes in the 11th and 12th centuries; the Swedes tried to convert the Estonians to Christianity.^{70, 71}

Germans began their incursion in the region in the 12th century, when Germanic monks arrived with the intent of converting the Finno-Ugric tribes to Christianity. The Germans were largely successful in their efforts, often resorting to warfare to bring the tribes under their control. In 1202, they solidified their conquest by establishing the Order of the Brothers of the Sword, controlling most of modern-day Estonia and Latvia. The Estonian population decreased dramatically during their rule. A decisive victory against the Estonians came in 1217, and two years later an alliance with Denmark strengthened German control of the region.^{72, 73}

The Order of the Brothers of the Sword did not maintain their power for long, as other Germanic groups would assume power and come to dominate the region for centuries. In 1237, the pope ordered the Brothers of the Sword to be absorbed into the more favorable Teutonic Order. Despite attempts to resist, the Order of the Brothers of the Sword was dissolved, and territory turned over to the Teutonic Order. The Danes retained control over Northern Estonia and its islands until 1346, when they sold their territory to the Teutonic Order, granting it full control of Estonia. German rule dominated the region for approximately five centuries, subjugating the Estonians and other ethnic groups and transforming them into serfs.^{74, 75}

German dominance began to erode around the end of the 15th century as Poland-Lithuania and Moscovy rapidly grew in power. The northern Estonian territory capitulated to Sweden in 1558. That same year, the Muscovite tsar Ivan IV invaded Estonia, captured the Narva region, and eradicated the remnants of the Teutonic Knights, which dissolved three years later. By 1581, Swedish and Polish intervention repelled the Russians back to the east side of Lake Peipus. The Swedes and Poles fought a war for domination, which concluded in 1629 with Swedish control of the Livonia territory, including all of Estonia. Estonia's islands, which had been owned by

68 Visit Estonia, "Estonian History and Culture," 5 October 2020, <https://www.visitestonia.com/en/why-estonia/estonian-history-and-culture>

69 Visit Estonia, "Estonian History and Culture," 5 October 2020, <https://www.visitestonia.com/en/why-estonia/estonian-history-and-culture>

70 Kazimierz Maciej Smogorzewski et al., "Estonia: History," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia/History>

71 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

72 Kazimierz Maciej Smogorzewski et al., "Estonia: History," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia/History>

73 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

74 Kazimierz Maciej Smogorzewski et al., "Estonia: History," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia/History>

75 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

Denmark, were transferred to the Swedes in 1645. Swedish rule was not peaceful, however; extensive warfare devastated Estonia, leaving much of its fertile farmland unoccupied. Germans sought to exploit the misfortunes of the Swedes by expanding their estates in the region. Russia saw an opportunity to conquer the Baltic provinces and did so in 1709 when Russian forces seized all of Livonia. In 1721, Sweden officially ceded all of its Baltic territories to Russia.^{76, 77, 78}

Russian rule brought about some reforms that benefited the lower classes, such as the right to private property and inheritance, as well as the abolishment of serfdom in 1819. By the end of the 19th century, the Estonian peasant class owned 40% of private land in Estonia. Industrialization contributed to a population boom among Estonians; this, coupled with educational advancements, led to a renewed interest in Estonian national identity in 1905, Russia was in the throes of a revolution that found its way to Estonia as well. Estonians founded the national Liberal Party, which organized a congress that immediately voted for Estonia's political autonomy. Russia pushed back by declaring martial law; however, protests and riots ensued. True autonomy would not be achieved until 1917 when the Estonian National Council established a provisional government as Russia contended with the Russian Revolution.^{79, 80}

Independence

On 28 November 1917, Estonia formally broke ties with Russia. A power struggle ensued that was further complicated by invading German forces; nevertheless, Estonia declared itself independent on 24 February 1918. Independence did not last, however, as Germans seized power and maintained it until the end of World War I. With Germany's defeat, Estonia once again declared independence. Russia responded by immediately trying to recapture Estonia, but with Allied support, Estonia was able to push back and reclaim its freedom. In 1920, Russia recognized Estonia's independence through the Treaty of Tartu. That same year Estonia adopted a new constitution, which established a government by coalition. Peace was not achieved at this time, as communist conspirators from Russia unsuccessfully sought to facilitate a Soviet takeover. The Great Depression severely affected Estonians and created significant political instability.^{81, 82}

Soviet Rule

The onset of World War II effectively dismantled Estonia's independence. The German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact of 1939 gave the Soviets control of several Estonian military bases. In 1940, Soviet forces occupied the whole country, and a new Soviet-backed government passed a resolution for Estonia to join the Soviet Union (USSR) as a constituent republic. Estonian politicians were promptly arrested and deported; it is estimated that more than 60,000 were deported or killed in 1941 as the USSR assumed control. Warfare prevented full stability within Estonia until 1944 when the Soviets pushed out Nazi Germany and took control of Tallinn.^{83, 84}

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- 76 Kazimierz Maciej Smogorzewski et al., "Estonia: History," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia/History>
 - 77 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>
 - 78 Walter R. Iwaskiw, ed., *Estonia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1995), <http://countrystudies.us/estonia/>
 - 79 Kazimierz Maciej Smogorzewski et al., "Estonia: History," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia/History>
 - 80 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>
 - 81 Kazimierz Maciej Smogorzewski et al., "Estonia: History," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia/History>
 - 82 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>
 - 83 Kazimierz Maciej Smogorzewski et al., "Estonia: History," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia/History>
 - 84 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

Repression and Russification defined the early years of Soviet rule. The Soviets used violent oppression and waves of mass deportation to control the population; an estimated 80,000 Estonians were deported from 1945 to 1953. At the same time, Russians immigrated in massive numbers to Estonia. Ethnic Estonians went from composing approximately 90% of the population pre-World War II to around 60% by the time the Soviet Union collapsed in 1990. Estonians were purged from governmental positions for many years. By the 1980s, resistance began to solidify with the emergence of opposition groups such as the Popular Front. Largely through legislation, Estonians mounted a successful push for sovereignty.^{85, 86}

Independence Restored

Estonians were inspired by the successes of the opposition groups and staged demonstrations in which they sang outlawed cultural and nationalistic songs. After the USSR collapsed, Estonia formally declared independence in August 1991. A new constitution was adopted in June of 1992, followed in September by elections. Lennart Meri was elected president of the newly independent Estonia. Nonethnic Estonians were required to apply for citizenship under the new government and had to demonstrate proficiency in the Estonian language.^{87, 88, 89}

Estonia's economy grew during the 1990s and 2000s. Estonia focused on opening toward the West as well as normalizing relations with Russia. Estonia joined the World Trade Organization in 1999 and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union in 2004. The country held regular elections and engaged with the international community, particularly during the European financial crisis of 2009. The center-left Social Democratic Party rose to power in 2014. Russian aggression persisted throughout the 2010s, spurring the rise of the center-right Reform Party and seeing an influx of NATO forces in response to Russian threats.^{90, 91, 92}

85 Kazimierz Maciej Smogorzewski et al., "Estonia: History," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia/History>

86 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

87 Kazimierz Maciej Smogorzewski et al., "Estonia: History," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia/History>

88 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

89 BBC News, "Estonia Profile—Timeline," 4 March 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17220814>

90 Kazimierz Maciej Smogorzewski et al., "Estonia: History," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia/History>

91 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

92 BBC News, "Estonia Profile—Timeline," 4 March 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17220814>

Government

Estonia is a parliamentary republic; a defining characteristic of this system of government is that after an election, the political party with the greatest representation in parliament is responsible for forming the government and its leader assumes the role of prime minister.^{93, 94} Estonia's constitution established a unicameral parliament (riigikogu). Members of parliament serve four-year terms; presidents serve as head of state and commander of armed forces for five-year terms and are limited to two consecutive terms.⁹⁵

Estonia's highest court is the Supreme Court, consisting of 19 justices appointed for life. The court is organized into chambers for civil, criminal, and administrative law, as well as constitutional review. The court's chief justice is proposed by the president and appointed by the legislature. The other justices are proposed by the chief justice and appointed by the legislature. Estonia's judiciary also features rural, city, administrative, appellate, and criminal courts at the national and regional levels.^{96, 97}

Estonia is well-known for its successful digitization of government services. Starting in the mid-1990s, the country began building the foundation for egovernment by digitizing public registers, allowing for the sharing of information across disparate public and private systems, and providing digital ID cards and signatures that allowed citizens to securely access online services. Today, 99% of government services—including voting, setting up companies, and making tax declarations—can be accessed online.^{98, 99, 100}

Media

Estonia's mass media is modern, with numerous print, radio, and television outlets. FM radio is particularly popular, with many stations available. Deregulation and consolidation of media organizations were common in the aftermath of Soviet rule; today, Estonia's media market enjoys light regulations and restrictions. Freedom House and Reporters without Borders classify Estonia's media as free. A Freedom of the Net report in 2016 characterized Estonia as being one of the most digitally advanced countries in the world. Television is the most popular medium. Digital television provides stations in Finnish, Latvian, Russian, and Swedish. Print media is losing popularity to online outlets. By 2016, approximately 91% of the Estonian population had regular access to the internet. Facebook is the leading social network site; some Russian social media outlets are also popular among the Russian population in the country.^{101, 102, 103}

93 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Parliamentary System," 1 April 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/parliamentary-system>

94 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia: Government," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>

95 Kazimierz Maciej Smogorzewski et al., "Estonia: Government and Society," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia/Trade#ref37281>

96 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia," *World Factbook*, 21 October 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>

97 Kazimierz Maciej Smogorzewski et al., "Estonia: Government and Society," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia/Trade#ref37281>

98 *Economist*, "Estonia Is Trying to Convert the EU to Its Digital Creed," 6 July 2017, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2017/07/06/estonia-is-trying-to-convert-the-eu-to-its-digital-creed>

99 E-Estonia, "Estonia Is the World's First Country to Also Function as a Digital Service." 27 September 2018, <https://estonia.ee/enter/>

100 Nick Heath, "How Estonia Became an E-government Powerhouse," *Tech Republic*, 19 February 2019, <https://www.techrepublic.com/article/how-estonia-became-an-e-government-powerhouse/>

101 Kazimierz Maciej Smogorzewski et al., "Estonia: Media," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia/Cultural-life>

102 BBC News, "Estonia Profile—Media," 20 April 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17220813>

103 Urmas Loit and Halliki Harro-Loit, "Estonia," *Center for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom*, December 2016, <https://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/mpm-2016-results/estonia/>

Economy

Since independence, Estonia has sought to establish a free market, pro-business economy. Today, that economy stands out as the most liberal in Europe. The per-capita income level, USD 31,700 in 2017, is one of the highest in the Baltic region and central Europe. Estonia maintains balanced budgets and has the lowest debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratio in the EU. The economy is heavily reliant upon trade, which makes it susceptible to the economic strengths and weaknesses of the international community. In recent years, Estonia's GDP has shown steady growth, with a 4–5% growth each year since 2017. However, the COVID-19 worldwide crisis has thrown the GDP into disarray, with significant losses in 2020.^{104, 105, 106, 107}

The services sector, driven by telecommunications, dominates Estonia's economy and makes up 68.1% of GDP. Electronics manufacturing is also a crucial industry. Estonia is also one of the world's strongest producers of oil shale, fuel, and various natural resources. Most trade activities within these industries are with Finland, Germany, Russia, and Sweden. Estonia has used oil shale to bolster its electric power generation abilities, which it sells to neighbors such as Latvia and Russia. While most businesses were privatized by the turn of the 21st century, the government still controls some energy and seaport activities.^{108, 109}

Ethnic Groups

Estonians

As of 2011 estimates, Estonians account for 68.7% of the total population in Estonia. On Estonia's islands, their share of the population reaches approximately 95%. In pre-Soviet times, Estonians accounted for around 90% of the population, but mass deportations and Russian immigration permanently reduced their portion of the population.¹¹⁰ Modern-day Estonians are believed to have originated from the Finno-Ugric tribes that lived in the Baltic region during its early human history. Ethnic Estonians and approximately two-thirds of all Estonian citizens speak the Estonian language, part of the Finno-Ugric branch of the Uralic language family.^{111, 112, 113, 114}

Russians

While Ethnic Russians have always been neighbors to Estonia, their population did not increase to significant numbers until the Soviet era's mass immigration from Russia. Today, Russians account for 24.8% of the population as of 2011, making them the largest ethnic minority group in the country. The Russian language is taught in

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- 104 Focus Economics, "Estonia Economic Growth," 29 September 2020, <https://www.focus-economics.com/countries/estonia>
 - 105 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia: Economy," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>
 - 106 Kazimierz Maciej Smogorzewski et al., "Estonia: Economy," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia/Demographic-trends#ref37274>
 - 107 Trading Economics, "Estonia GDP Growth Rate," n.d., <https://tradingeconomics.com/estonia/gdp-growth>
 - 108 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia: Economy," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>
 - 109 Kazimierz Maciej Smogorzewski et al., "Estonia: Economy," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia/Demographic-trends#ref37274>
 - 110 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Largest Ethnic Groups in Estonia," *World Atlas*, 5 June 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/largest-ethnic-groups-in-estonia.html>
 - 111 iGENEA, "Ancient Tribe Finno-Ugric Peoples—Ancestry and Origin," n.d., <https://www.igenea.com/en/ancient-tribes/finno-ugric>
 - 112 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia: Economy," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>
 - 113 Kazimierz Maciej Smogorzewski et al., "Estonia: Ethnic Groups," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia#ref261359>
 - 114 StateUniversity.com, "Estonia: History & Background," n.d., <https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/445/Estonia-HISTORY-BACKGROUND.html>

schools and spoken by approximately 29.6% of the population. Russian language television programs, radio stations, and newspapers are prominent.^{115, 116}

Ukrainians

Ukrainians are the third-largest ethnic group in Estonia, making up 1.7% of the population as of 2011. Ukrainians primarily arrived in Estonia during the Soviet era, although many also arrived during World War I. The largest concentrations of Ukrainians in Estonia are found in the northeast and major cities like Tallinn, Pärnu, or Tartu. Estonia has several Ukrainian schools and religious centers. The Ukrainian language is spoken by approximately 0.6% of the population.^{117, 118}

Other Groups

Estonia is home to several other ethnic groups, including Belarusian, Finnish, German, Latvian, and Tartar peoples. The Estonian constitution protects ethnic minorities and the country's multiethnic society generally enjoys a harmonious relationship.^{119, 120}

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- 115 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Largest Ethnic Groups in Estonia," World Atlas, 5 June 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/largest-ethnic-groups-in-estonia.html>
- 116 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia: Economy," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>
- 117 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Largest Ethnic Groups in Estonia," World Atlas, 5 June 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/largest-ethnic-groups-in-estonia.html>
- 118 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia: Economy," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>
- 119 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Largest Ethnic Groups in Estonia," World Atlas, 5 June 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/largest-ethnic-groups-in-estonia.html>
- 120 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia: Economy," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>

Estonian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 1 | Profile, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. Estonia is roughly the size of Alaska. ☐ True ☐ False
2. The Võhandu River is the longest in Estonia. ☐ True ☐ False
3. The Gulf of Estonia forms most of the country's coastline. ☐ True ☐ False
4. Estonians trace their ethnic roots back to ancient Russian tribes. ☐ True ☐ False
5. Estonia maintains a strong economy with steady GDP growth. ☐ True ☐ False

Estonian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 1 | Profile, Assessment Answers

1. False:
Estonia covers territory approximately twice the size of New Jersey.
2. True:
The Võhandu River is located in the southeastern portion of the country. It measures 162 km (101 mi), has several tributaries, and is home to approximately 22 fish species.
3. True:
Estonia's coastline touches the Gulfs of Finland and Riga as well as the Baltic Sea.
4. True:
Estonians originated from the Finno-Ugric tribes that lived in the Baltic region more than 10,000 years ago.
5. False:
Estonia's market-based economy is characterized as pro-business and is lightly regulated. The electronics and telecommunications sectors dominate the economy.

Chapter 2 | Religion



The Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Tallinn.
Wikimedia / Georg Mittenecker

Introduction

As in the rest of Europe, religion has played a major role in Estonia's history. Yet the people who crowd its historic churches and cathedrals are more likely to be tourists than residents, as a majority of Estonians are not active in any particular religion. Christianity dominates the country's religious landscape—specifically, Lutheran and Orthodox—with the denominations enjoying pleasant relations with each other. Historically, ethnic Estonians have primarily belonged to the Lutheran church. Over decades of oppressive control over religious activities by the Soviet Union, however, the country's religious population has steadily declined, even after attaining independence and religious freedom. Today, Estonia has a reputation as one of the world's least religious countries.¹

¹ Sten Hankewitz, "Estonian Youngsters Second Least Religious in Europe," *Estonian World*, 24 March 2018, <https://estonianworld.com/life/estonian-youngsters-second-least-religious-europe/>

Major Religions

Estonia was one of the last European countries to convert to Christianity. Today, Estonians are primarily Lutheran or Orthodox, although several other Christian denominations have a presence in the country. Beliefs involving the worship of nature were common before the region was either conquered by foreign invaders or Christian missionaries converted the population. Small pockets of other faiths do operate in Estonia as well. Estonia's secular population, which accounts for more than half of its citizens, is steadily growing.^{2, 3, 4, 5}

Lutheran

Lutherans compose a significant portion of the Christian population in Estonia; most are ethnic Estonians.^{6, 7} The Lutheran population alternates in size to be either the largest Christian denomination in the country or the second-largest, behind Orthodox believers. As of 2011 estimates, Lutherans composed 9.9% of the Estonian population.⁸ Christianity, specifically Roman Catholicism, arrived in the region during the 13th century, believed to have been brought there from Germany by the Teutonic Order.^{9, 10} After the onset and spread of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, Lutheranism became Estonia's largest religion.^{11, 12}

Lutheranism has been characterized as the “free people's church” and part of the ethnic Estonian identity. In the early 20th century, it is estimated that one-third of the population was Lutheran, although political strife and later Soviet rule severely impacted its numbers. Lutherans enjoy wide public support and have warm relations with other Christian denominations in the country.^{13, 14, 15}

Orthodox

Orthodox Christianity is the oldest form of Christianity in Estonia. It claims the largest portion of the Christian population—16.2% as of 2011—although its numbers have fluctuated over time, making it fall below the Lutheran population.¹⁶ Most Orthodox Estonians are from the Russian-speaking population. The primary Orthodox church in the country, the Estonian Orthodox Church, maintains ties with the Moscow Patriarchate. The Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church, the country's other Orthodox offshoot, was founded upon the collapse of the Soviet Union and has the largest ethnic Estonian population of the two Orthodox churches.^{17, 18}

- 2 CultureGrams, “Estonia,” 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>
- 3 U.S. Department of State, “2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Estonia,” 2019, <https://ee.usembassy.gov/2020-06-26-2/>
- 4 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, “Religious Beliefs in Estonia,” World Atlas, 25 April 2017, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-estonia.html>
- 5 Ringo Ringvee, “Pre-Christian Native Religion and Attempts of Restoration,” *Estonica*, 27 September 2012, http://www.estonica.org/en/Culture/Religion/Pre-Christian_native_religion_and_attempts_of_restoration/
- 6 Association of Religion Data Archives, “Estonia,” n.d., https://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_77_4.asp
- 7 EveryCulture, “Estonia: Religion,” n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Estonia.html>
- 8 Central Intelligence Agency, “Estonia: People and Society,” *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>
- 9 New World Encyclopedia, “Teutonic Knights,” 23 January 2020, https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Teutonic_Knights
- 10 Mark Cartwright, “Northern Crusades,” *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, 4 October 2018, https://www.ancient.eu/Northern_Crusades/
- 11 Aivars Stranga et al., “Estonia: Religion,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia>
- 12 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, “Religious Beliefs in Estonia,” World Atlas, 25 April 2017, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-estonia.html>
- 13 *Estonica*, “Lutheranism,” n.d., <http://www.estonica.org/en/Culture/Religion/Lutheranism/>
- 14 Aivars Stranga et al., “Estonia: Religion,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia>
- 15 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, “Religious Beliefs in Estonia,” World Atlas, 25 April 2017, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-estonia.html>
- 16 Central Intelligence Agency, “Estonia: People and Society,” *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>
- 17 Association of Religion Data Archives, “Estonia: Religious Demography,” n.d., https://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_77_2.asp
- 18 Global Road Warrior, “Estonia: Religion Overview,” n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/religion-overview.html>

Eastern Orthodox missionaries arrived in the region during the 10th and 11th centuries, but it wasn't until the 13th century, during Denmark's rule, that Christianity took significant hold in the region. Forced conversions during Russian rule in the 19th century affected many citizens, with many Estonians opting to flee instead. Soviet-era Estonia was largely successful in its efforts to remove all religious influence in the country. Despite the fragmenting of the church in 1992, the Orthodox denomination experienced a resurgence in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union and Estonia's independence.^{19, 20, 21}

Judaism

The Jewish community in Estonia has historically been a minority; it is estimated that their presence in the country is the smallest in the Baltic states and has never exceeded 4,500 members. Judaism first arrived in Estonia in the 14th century, but it wouldn't be until 1865 for it to be possible for Jews to have permanent residence within the territory. World War II devastated the Jewish community, virtually destroying the communities that existed in Estonia's urban centers. Today, a majority of Estonian Jews arrived from Russia during the Soviet era. The community has grown in recent years; in 1988, a Jewish Cultural Society was established, along with other resources such as schools and gyms. Official numbers indicate that approximately 1,000 Jews live in Estonia today.²²

Other Religions

Estonia is also home to smaller Christian groups such as Roman Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals, and other Protestants.²³ Muslims number approximately 1,300 and originated mostly from other former Soviet states during the Soviet era.²⁴ Other religious beliefs, such as Taara, Estonian Neopaganism, or Mausk, account for approximately 0.3% of the population.²⁵ Some of these beliefs are pagan or animistic, with Estonia's forests often featuring prominently in their beliefs.^{26, 27, 28, 29, 30}

- 19 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Religious Beliefs in Estonia," World Atlas, 25 April 2017, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-estonia.html>
- 20 Aivars Stranga et al., "Estonia: Religion," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 6 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia>
- 21 EveryCulture, "Estonia: Religion," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Estonia.html>
- 22 JGuideEurope, "Estonia," n.d., <https://jguideeurope.org/en/region/estonia/>
- 23 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>
- 24 Navanti Group, <https://medium.com/@NavantiGroup/tallinn-s-muslim-community-embraces-estonian-identity-through-successful-integration-c8a08df1deac>
- 25 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Religious Beliefs in Estonia," World Atlas, 25 April 2017, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-estonia.html>
- 26 Anna-Maria Zarembok, "Estonians—The Nation of Neo-Pagans," *Estonian World*, 24 April 2016, <https://estonianworld.com/life/estonians-the-nation-of-neo-pagans/>
- 27 EveryCulture, "Estonia: Religion," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Estonia.html>
- 28 Kadri Metsma, "Religion in Estonia," *Estonian World*, 22 March 2016, <https://estonianworld.com/life/religion-in-estonia/>
- 29 Discover Estonia, "Religion in Estonia," n.d., <https://discover-estonia.com/religion-in-estonia/>
- 30 Tom Esslemont, "Spirituality in Estonia—The World's 'Least Religious' Country," BBC News, 26 August 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-14635021>

Religion and Government

Estonia is considered a highly secularized, liberal country with approximately 60% of the population not identifying with any religion. Soviet-era policies suppressing religion had long-lasting effects on Estonian society. When Estonia's current constitution was adopted in 1992, it established that there would be no state religion and enabled religious freedom; hatred, violence, and discrimination based on religion were strictly prohibited. Acts passed in 1993 and 2002 further established the country's principles of equality for religious groups.^{31, 32, 33}

Estonian law provides a system of registration for religious entities and organizations. Registration provides tax benefits but is not required for a group to practice. Religious associations must meet certain size criteria to qualify for registration; there are more than 500 groups registered in the country. The government's strongest ties to the religious community are primarily through its partnerships with the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Council of Churches, the latter of which is an independent organization that promotes Christian principles in Estonian society.^{34, 35, 36, 37}

Religious freedom in Estonia is also protected by international law, as the country adheres to the "universally recognized principles and standards of international law" that protect it. Estonia has adopted most European human rights documents and ratified conventions that protect religious beliefs. Estonia ranks generally lower than the rest of the world concerning religious legislation, preference, and religious minority discrimination.³⁸ Despite these strong protections for religious freedom and separation of church and state, there is still debate over the influence Christianity has over the country, such as the use of Christian terminology, religious symbols in public places, or matters concerning finances and land ownership.^{39, 40, 41}

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- 31 Ringo Ringvee, "State, Religion, and the Legal Framework in Estonia," Taylor and Francis Online, 12 May 2008, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09637490802013255?src=recsys&journalCode=crss20>
 - 32 Discover Estonia, "Religion in Estonia," n.d., <https://discover-estonia.com/religion-in-estonia/>
 - 33 Estonica, "The Eastern Orthodox Church and Estonia," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Eastern_orthodoxy_in_Estonia_-_a_brief_overview_of_religious_controversy/The_Eastern_Orthodox_Church_and_Estonia/
 - 34 U.S. Department of State, "2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Estonia," 2019, <https://ee.usembassy.gov/2020-06-26-2/>
 - 35 Marilyn Kiviorg, "Religion and the Secular State in Estonia," BYU International Center for Law and Religious Studies, n.d., <https://classic.iclrs.org/content/blurb/files/Estonia.pdf>
 - 36 Republic of Estonia, "Religious Associations," Ministry of the Interior, n.d., <https://www.siseministeerium.ee/en/activities/religious-associations>
 - 37 World Council of Churches, "Estonian Council of Churches," n.d., <https://www.oikoumene.org/organization/estonian-council-of-churches>
 - 38 Association of Religion Data Archives, "Estonia," n.d., https://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_77_4.asp
 - 39 U.S. Department of State, "2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Estonia," 2019, <https://ee.usembassy.gov/2020-06-26-2/>
 - 40 Marilyn Kiviorg, "Religion and the Secular State in Estonia," BYU International Center for Law and Religious Studies, n.d., <https://classic.iclrs.org/content/blurb/files/Estonia.pdf>
 - 41 Republic of Estonia, "Religious Associations," Ministry of the Interior, n.d., <https://www.siseministeerium.ee/en/activities/religious-associations>

Influence of Religion on Daily Life

Ethnic Estonians are primarily Lutheran; those active in the religion are usually baptized at infancy and attend regular services.⁴² Many televised religious events or holidays in Estonia have traditionally featured Lutheran characteristics; in recent years, however, there has been a concerted effort to incorporate other Christian denominations within the publicly observed religious celebrations.^{43, 44, 45}

With approximately 59.2% of the population declaring itself not religious and an additional 11.4% of unknown affiliation, religion does not significantly impact the daily lives of Estonians. A 2009 poll supported this assertion as 78% of those polled responded that religion plays no role in their daily lives. Some public school curricula do contain religious elements, however, and Estonian law requires schools to offer religious studies.^{46, 47}

Estonia's religious groups generally experience minimal discrimination within the country, to the point that it is virtually nonexistent by some measures.⁴⁸ However, Estonia's LGBT community does face some discrimination. Support for the Registered Partnership Act, which was enacted in 2016 to recognize same-sex unions, faced opposition from conservative religious groups but has shown steady improvement in support in recent years.^{49, 50} A 2019 survey indicated that approximately 59% of the population considered homosexuality unacceptable.^{51, 52, 53}

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- 42 Patheos, "Religion Library Lutheran: Rituals and Worship: Worship and Devotion in Daily Life," n.d., <https://www.patheos.com/library/lutheran/ritual-worship-devotion-symbolism/worship-and-devotion-in-daily-life>
- 43 Estonica, "Lutheranism," n.d., <http://www.estonica.org/en/Culture/Religion/Lutheranism/>
- 44 U.S. Department of State, "2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Estonia," 2019, <https://ee.usembassy.gov/2020-06-26-2/>
- 45 Association of Religion Data Archives, "Estonia," n.d., https://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_77_4.asp
- 46 Global Road Warrior, "Estonia: Religion Overview," n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/religion-overview.html>
- 47 U.S. Department of State, "2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Estonia," 2019, <https://ee.usembassy.gov/2020-06-26-2/>
- 48 Steve Crabtree, "Religiosity Highest in World's Poorest Nations," Gallup, 31 August 2010, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/142727/religiosity-highest-world-poorest-nations.aspx>
- 49 Charlotte McDonald-Gibson, "Estonia Becomes First Former Soviet State to Legalise Gay Marriage," *Independent*, 9 October 2014, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/estonia-becomes-first-former-soviet-state-legalise-gay-marriage-9785869.html>
- 50 Equaldex, "LGBT Rights in Estonia," n.d., <https://www.equaldex.com/region/estonia>
- 51 U.S. Department of State, "2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Estonia," 2019, <https://ee.usembassy.gov/2020-06-26-2/>
- 52 Association of Religion Data Archives, "Estonia," n.d., https://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_77_4.asp
- 53 Human Rights Centre, "Attitudes Towards LGBT Topics in Estonia," n.d., <https://humanrights.ee/en/topics-main/equal-treatment/attitudes-towards-lgbt-topics-estonia/>

Religious Events and Holidays

Good Friday

Good Friday is a Christian holiday that is held the Friday before Easter to commemorate the crucifixion and death of Jesus. It is believed that the use of “good” in the name of the holiday derives from an earlier meaning of the word that was closer to “holy.” Many also believe that the use of “good” is because the events recognized on the day led to Jesus’ resurrection. Some traditions for Good Friday include re-enactments of Jesus’ crucifixion or the veneration of the cross, in which followers reaffirm their faith.⁵⁴

Easter

Easter is one of the more important Christian holidays and marks the discovery that Jesus rose from the dead. The holiday falls on different Sundays each year, from the 22nd of March to the 25th of April.⁵⁵ The name Easter is derived from the pagan goddess of fertility Ostara/Eostre, whose holiday is held on the Vernal Equinox. Like in the United States, the Easter Bunny tradition is common throughout Europe. Lamb is commonly served for dinner.⁵⁶

Pentecost Sunday

Pentecost Sunday—also known as Whit Sunday or Whitsunday—occurs on the seventh Sunday following Easter, marking the end of the Easter cycle. The earliest day it can occur is the 10th of May and the latest is the 13th of June. Orthodox churches may base the dates on a different calendar and celebrate it on a different day.⁵⁷

St. John's Day

St. John's Day is a Christian holiday that is held every the 24th of June. It is a celebration of the birthday of St. John the Baptist, who is traditionally believed to have been born six months before Jesus. Saints are typically celebrated on the day they died, but St. John and the Virgin Mary are exceptions for some Christian denominations. The day is a common religious feast day with traces of pre-Christian pagan traditions that celebrated the summer solstice, such as the lighting of bonfires.⁵⁸ The day is also known as Midsummer's day (Jaanipäev).⁵⁹

Christmas

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are religious holidays in Estonia, celebrated the 24th and 25th of December. Christmas Day is recognized as the birthday of Jesus. Many Christmas traditions in Estonia are similar to those found in the United States. On Christmas Eve, children are told that elves spy on them at home to determine how they have been behaving. Children will also leave socks on windowsills for the elves to stuff with candy and small gifts. Children traditionally receive Christmas gifts from Old Yule (Jõuluvana), the name for Santa Claus in Estonia. He will commonly deliver the gifts on Christmas Eve.⁶⁰ Christmas lights and trees are common decorations. Families usually hold Christmas feasts where foods like blood sausage, sauerkraut, tangerines, and gingerbread are served.^{61, 62, 63}

54 Office Holidays, “Good Friday in Estonia in 2021,” n.d., <https://www.officeholidays.com/holidays/estonia/good-friday>

55 Lindsay Dodgson, “Easter is Later than It Should Be This Year, According to Ancient Calendars. Here’s How You Can Work Out When It Will Fall Each Year,” Insider, 16 April 2019, <https://www.insider.com/why-is-easter-different-every-year-2017-4>

56 Office Holidays, “Easter Sunday in Estonia in 2021,” n.d., <https://www.officeholidays.com/holidays/estonia/easter-sunday>

57 Office Holidays, “Pentecost Sunday in Estonia in 2021,” n.d., <https://www.officeholidays.com/holidays/estonia/pentecost-sunday>

58 Office Holidays, “St. John's Day in Estonia in 2021,” n.d., <https://www.officeholidays.com/holidays/estonia/st-johns-day>

59 CultureGrams, “Estonia,” 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

60 Andres Simonson, “Old Yule, the Estonian Santa Claus,” Estonian World, 23 December 2014, <https://estonianworld.com/life/old-yule-estonian-santa-claus/>

61 Office Holidays, “Christmas Eve in Estonia in 2020,” n.d., <https://www.officeholidays.com/holidays/estonia/christmas-eve>

62 Office Holidays, “Christmas Day in Estonia in 2020,” n.d., <https://www.officeholidays.com/holidays/estonia/christmas-day>

63 Why Christmas, “Christmas in Estonia,” n.d., <https://www.whychristmas.com/cultures/estonia.shtml>

Places of Worship

Estonia is home to several churches for its many faiths. A majority of these places of worship are Christian churches and cathedrals, some of which date back hundreds of years and are found primarily in major cities like Tallinn, Parnu, and Narva.⁶⁴ Notable churches and cathedrals in Tallin include St. Mary's Cathedral, the Church of the Holy Spirit, St. Olaf's Church, the Cathedrals of Saints Peter and Paul, and the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral.⁶⁵

⁶⁶ Estonia is also home to several ruins from former convents and sacred locations.^{67, 68}

Jewish communities began to form in Estonia during the 19th century after a ban put in place by Russia was lifted. All Jewish synagogues were destroyed during World War II; a modern synagogue was erected in Tallinn in 2007, the first to be built in more than a century.^{69, 70} There is also a mosque in Tallinn.⁷¹

Behavior in Places of Worship

Many places of worship allow for visitors—it is commonly said that churches and cathedrals are more likely to be filled with tourists than Estonian citizens. The most prominent faiths in Estonia—Lutheranism and Orthodoxy—are generally welcoming of visitors to their facilities.^{72, 73, 74} Religious services are usually delivered in Estonian but are generally open to anyone who would like to attend.⁷⁵

Access to a church will vary depending on its policy for when visitors may tour the facilities. Those places of worship that are also historic sites, such as St. Mary's Cathedral in Tallinn, will often grant visitors access to special areas such as the Baroque bell.^{76, 77} Lutheran churches do not typically have strict guidelines for visitors; it is best to dress modestly and be deferential to the church and its staff when visiting.^{78, 79}

Orthodox churches do generally expect certain behavior from guests. Visitors are expected to dress appropriately, with men removing hats indoors and women covering their head with veils; enter calmly and quietly; perform any

64 Visit Estonia, "Churches," n.d., <https://www.visitestonia.com/en/what-to-see-do/history-culture/churches>

65 Ethan Doyle White, "Historic Churches in Tallinn's Old Town: From Lutheranism to Russian Orthodoxy," Archaeology Travel, n.d., <https://archaeology-travel.com/estonia/historic-churches-in-tallinn/>

66 U.S. Department of State, "Places of Worship in Tallinn," U.S. Embassy in Estonia, n.d., <https://ee.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/local-resources-of-u-s-citizens/places-worship-tallinn/>

67 Jewish Heritage Europe, "Estonia," n.d., <https://jewish-heritage-europe.eu/estonia/>

68 Visit Estonia, "The Most Spiritual Sites in Estonia," n.d., <https://www.visitestonia.com/en/why-estonia/most-spiritual-sites-in-estonia>

69 JGuideEurope, "Estonia," n.d., <https://jguideeurope.org/en/region/estonia/>

70 Estonian Jewish Center, Welcome to our Synagogue," n.d., https://www.ejc.ee/templates/articlecco_cdo/aid/304664/jewish/Welcome-to-our-Synagogue.htm

71 Islampriee, "Mosque in Tallinn," n.d., <http://www.islam.pri.ee/index.php?lang=2>

72 Tom Esslemont, "Spirituality in Estonia—The World's 'Least Religious' Country," BBC News, 26 August 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-14635021>

73 Love Exploring, "Countries and Places with More Tourists Than Residents," n.d., <https://www.loveexploring.com/gallerylist/93953/countries-and-places-with-more-tourists-than-residents>

74 Ringo Ringvee, "Is Estonia Really the Least Religious Country in the World?" *Guardian*, 16 September 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2011/sep/16/estonia-least-religious-country-world>

75 Catholic Travel Guide, "Tallinn, Estonia: Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul," n.d., <https://thecatholictravelguide.com/destinations/estonia-tallinn-estonia/>

76 Immanuel-Trinity Lutheran Church, "Frequently Asked Questions," n.d., <https://www.immanueltrinity.org/seek/questions.cfm>

77 Visit Tallinn, "St. Mary's Cathedral (Dome Church) and Tower," n.d., <https://www.visittallinn.ee/eng/visitor/see-do/things-to-do/attractions-museums/177138/st-marys-cathedral-dome-church-and-tower>

78 Debby Mayne, "Mind Your Manners in Church: Follow Proper Etiquette in a House of Worship," *Spruce*, 23 September 2019, <https://www.thespruce.com/mind-your-manners-in-church-1216636>

79 Christianity Today, "Becoming a Welcoming Church," n.d., <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2017/september-web-exclusives/6-dos-and-donts-for-welcoming-church-guests.html>

expected rituals upon entrance, such as bowing or making the sign of the cross; be respectful to believers; refrain from eating; and switch off cell phones and electronic devices. Altars in Orthodox churches are generally off-limits to visitors.⁸⁰

80 Andrey Lyubimov, "How to Behave in a Russian Orthodox Church," Russia Beyond, 19 January 2018, <https://www.rbth.com/lifestyle/327302-how-behave-orthodox-church>

Estonian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 2 | Religion, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. Lutheranism arrived in Estonia during Russian rule in the 19th century. ☐ True ☐ False
2. Religious freedom in Estonia is guaranteed by the constitution and international law. ☐ True ☐ False
3. Since 1991, religious discrimination has risen dramatically in Estonia. ☐ True ☐ False
4. St. John's Day is celebrated every 24 June. ☐ True ☐ False
5. Most historic churches and cathedrals were either destroyed or converted during Soviet rule. ☐ True ☐ False

Estonian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 2 | Religion, Assessment Answers

1. False:
Lutheranism arrived in Estonia during the 13th century. It is believed to have migrated to the region with Germans and the Teutonic Order.
2. True:
Estonia recognizes the religious freedom established through international law and has written it into its constitution. The country has also adopted several related human rights documents and ratified conventions.
3. False:
Religious discrimination is minimal in Estonia, to the point that it is virtually nonexistent by some measures.
4. True:
While most holidays for saints commemorate their death or martyrdom, St. John's Day honors the birthday of John the Baptist. It is also known as Midsummer's day (*Jaanipäev*).
5. False:
Tallinn is home to several historic churches and cathedrals, such as St. Mary's Cathedral, the Cathedrals of Saints Peter and Paul, and the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral.

Chapter 3 | Traditions



A folk dance group from Viljandi, Viljandi County.
Wikipedia / Calle Eklund/V-wolf

Introduction

Estonia is positioned at the cultural crossroads of northeastern Europe and features characteristics from surrounding regions. Similarly, the country is a crossroads within itself, as historically the northern portion has been more open to interacting with other cultures and the international community; southern Estonia has been characterized as provincial and insular. The country began to form its national identity in earnest during the 19th century under foreign rule, centered around its agricultural tradition and cultural reverence for its widespread forests.^{1, 2}

1 Endel Aruja, "Estonia: Culture Life," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 3 November 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia/Cultural-life>

2 Sven Zacek, "The Story of Estonian Forest," Visit Estonia, 16 April 2019, <https://www.visitestonia.com/en/why-estonia/estonian-forest>

Honors and Values

As a patriarchal society, Estonia places significant importance on the family unit.³ Another integral element to the Estonian identity is the native Finno-Ugric language, Estonian. The language has combined with a reverence for Estonia's landscape to create strong mother and father metaphors, respectively, and reinforce the importance of the family unit in Estonian culture. With the country's varied ecological landscapes, nature is also highly valued in Estonian society. Cornflowers, barn swallows, stones, and wood are symbols used to represent the Estonian identity.^{4, 5}

Formulaic Codes of Politeness

Greetings

Handshakes are the common way of greeting someone for the first time, whether it be two men, two women, or a man and a woman. It is also common for two women or a man and a woman to nod to each other in acknowledgment.⁶ Greetings are typically formal; it is expected that men will initiate greetings with women and younger people will initiate with older people. It is considered appropriate to make eye contact and stand when greeting someone.⁷

Tere (hello) is the most common spoken greeting. More casual greetings include *Kuidas läheb?* (How's it going?) and *Kuidas elate?* (How's life?), which may elicit a literal response. It is important to also use titles when possible, such as *härä* (mister), (prova) (missus), or *preili* (miss). First names are appropriate when told by the person it is okay to use them or with friends and colleagues. The "you" pronoun has two variations based on formality: *teie* for formal situations, such as addressing elders or authority figures, and *sina* for informal situations, such as talking to relatives, friends, and colleagues.^{8, 9}

Male/Female Interactions

Men and women in Estonia value their personal space. Keeping an arm's length distance is considered appropriate. During conversations, there is rarely any touching, as this is considered flirting if the two are not good friends. Women commonly hold hands with other female friends. The most popular places that men and women go to socialize are bars, clubs, or parties. While Estonian society is patriarchal, it is common for men or women to ask each other for a date. Swearing, rude gestures, or exposing intimate areas of the body are considered taboo. In relationships, women are expected to defer to men in discussions or decisions. In domestic settings, women are generally expected to handle all household responsibilities. It is common for people in relationships to live together before getting married.^{10, 11, 12}

3 Commisceo Global, "Estonia—Language, Culture, Customs, and Etiquette," n.d., <https://www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides/estonia-guide>

4 Every Culture, "Estonia: Orientation: Linguistic Affiliation," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Estonia.html>

5 Expeditionary Culture Field Guide, "Estonia," n.d., <https://www.usanato.army.mil/Portals/31/documents/Country%20Culture%20Field%20Guides/estonia-2018.pdf?ver=2018-08-07-090404-003>

6 Culture Crossing Guide, "Estonia," n.d., https://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?id=7&CID=65

7 Commisceo Global, "Estonia—Language, Culture, Customs, and Etiquette," n.d., <https://www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides/estonia-guide>

8 Commisceo Global, "Estonia—Language, Culture, Customs, and Etiquette," n.d., <https://www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides/estonia-guide>

9 Expeditionary Culture Field Guide, "Estonia," n.d., <https://www.usanato.army.mil/Portals/31/documents/Country%20Culture%20Field%20Guides/estonia-2018.pdf?ver=2018-08-07-090404-003>

10 Culture Crossing Guide, "Estonia," n.d., https://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?id=7&CID=65

11 Every Culture, "Estonia: Orientation: Linguistic Affiliation," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Estonia.html>

12 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

Hospitality and Gift-Giving

Estonia is a popular tourist destination and known for its hospitality. Generally, Estonians are characterized as friendly, warm, and effusive within their social circles, while professional and reserved when meeting strangers.¹³ Its society has some general guidelines for how guests and friends interact in social settings. Punctuality is expected in social scenarios as in professional settings. Formality is valued in many social gatherings, such as dinners or invitations to a person's home.^{14, 15}

Estonia has a minor tradition of gift-giving for special occasions, such as birthdays or Christmas. Gifts are usually opened when received, except with children, who commonly open gifts in private. Birthday gift-giving is similar to customs in the United States—gifts are stacked on a table and a cake is made. However, a key difference is that the child will receive gifts on the morning of their birthday. If invited to a party celebrating a birth, common gifts include odd-numbered flowers, cakes if the newborn is a girl, and pastries if the newborn is a boy.^{16, 17, 18, 19}

Hospitality gifts are more common than those given for holidays or birthdays. The value of the gift is not as important as the thought put into it. For house guests, an acceptable gift would be chocolates, beverages, or an odd number of flowers. Chrysanthemums and yellow flowers are also not appropriate as they are most common at funerals. A follow-up thank you card is appropriate after a gathering. In professional settings, gifts are sometimes appropriate and are usually stationery items, watches, or alcohol. It is common for gifts to be exchanged when contracts are signed.^{20, 21, 22}

Eating Habits and Types of Food

The traditional meals of breakfast, lunch, and dinner are the most common dining habits of Estonians. Breakfast consists of bread, eggs, cheese, pastries, sandwiches, fried potatoes, or porridge. Dark rye bread is very popular and a daily part of many people's diets. Cafés serve cold options for breakfast. Lunch is taken at midday and can be the largest meal of the day. Lunch features bread and a hot dish, often meat or a vegetable soup thickened with cream or yogurt. Potatoes are a staple ingredient in Estonian soups and stews. Dinners are not always a family affair, depending on the professional demands upon family members; family dinners are much more common on the weekends than during the week. Estonian dinners feature several separate courses: A cold course opener featuring meats or seafood-themed foods is usually followed by the main dinner consisting of meat- or seafood-based items.^{23, 24, 25}

- 13 Global Road Warrior, "Estonia," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/stereotypes.html>
- 14 Commisceo Global, "Estonia—Language, Culture, Customs, and Etiquette," n.d., <https://www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides/estonia-guide>
- 15 Culture Crossing Guide, "Estonia: Gift Giving," n.d., https://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?id=23&CID=65
- 16 Global Road Warrior, "Estonia," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/stereotypes.html>
- 17 Commisceo Global, "Estonia—Language, Culture, Customs, and Etiquette," n.d., <https://www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides/estonia-guide>
- 18 Culture Crossing Guide, "Estonia: Gift Giving," n.d., https://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?id=23&CID=65
- 19 Expeditionary Culture Field Guide, "Estonia," n.d., <https://www.usanato.army.mil/Portals/31/documents/Country%20Culture%20Field%20Guides/estonia-2018.pdf?ver=2018-08-07-090404-003>
- 20 Commisceo Global, "Estonia—Language, Culture, Customs, and Etiquette," n.d., <https://www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides/estonia-guide>
- 21 Culture Crossing Guide, "Estonia: Gift Giving," n.d., https://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?id=23&CID=65
- 22 Expeditionary Culture Field Guide, "Estonia," n.d., <https://www.usanato.army.mil/Portals/31/documents/Country%20Culture%20Field%20Guides/estonia-2018.pdf?ver=2018-08-07-090404-003>
- 23 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>
- 24 Lonely Planet, "Estonia in Detail: Eating," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/estonia/narratives/in-location/eating>
- 25 A to Z World Food, "Food Culture: Daily Meals," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.atozworldfood.com/estonia/daily-meals.html>

Special occasions feature standard dishes and food arrangements. Christmas is a major food-focused holiday that involves special preparations and includes many traditional foods. Christmas dinners feature dishes of roast pork or goose with sauerkraut, hard cheese, roasted potatoes, and apples. *Verivorst*, a blood sausage mixed with grain and stuffed in casings, is another popular Christmas dish. Mandarin oranges and gingerbread cookies are common treats. Weddings and birthdays also involve feasts of special foods. Weddings, which can last multiple days, are often catered with open-faced sandwiches of sprat fish fillets, butter, and hard-boiled eggs on rye bread.²⁶ Sprat sandwiches are considered a national dish, with the country holding the world record for the longest sprat sandwich ever documented.²⁷

Etiquette

Meals are traditionally formal affairs in Estonia. Semiformal, conservative clothing is recommended at social meals. Table manners during formal dining situations are important—attendees should stand until invited to sit at the table. Silverware customs follow the continental style of dining, with forks held in the left hand and knives in the right. Meals are traditionally started after the host or hostess declares, *Head isu!* (Good appetite!). It is appropriate to compliment the host or hostess and all the food should be eaten. It is inappropriate to place elbows on the table or discuss business. If bread is dropped on the floor, tradition dictates that it should be immediately picked up, kissed, and eaten. If eating in a restaurant, tipping is voluntary, with 10% of the bill considered a polite tip.^{28, 29}

Cuisine

Estonian cuisine bears influences from German and Russian traditions, a reflection of the country's history with its neighbors that once ruled portions of the region.^{30, 31} Estonians are known to snack on *kohuke* curd cakes or black bread with butter.^{32, 33} Vodka is commonly served to adults during evening meals; fruit juice is the most common beverage for underage diners. The Estonian restaurant industry has expanded significantly since independence, especially in Tallinn. Fusion cuisine is very popular, as is cuisine originating from the more impoverished regions of the country.³⁴

Estonian cuisine offerings differ throughout the year, mostly in line with seasonal crops. Springtime produces rhubarb, dock, and radishes, as well as goat cheese. Tomatoes, cucumbers, and wild berries are primarily consumed during the summertime. Winters are when preserved foods, such as root vegetables, are common ingredients with roasts, casseroles, and slow-cooked hot dishes.^{35, 36}

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- 26 Taste Atlas, "Kiluvõileib (Estonian Sprat Sandwich)," n.d., <https://www.tasteatlas.com/kiluvoileib>
- 27 A to Z World Food, "Food Culture: Special Occasion Foods," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.atozworldfood.com/estonia/special-occasion-foods.html>
- 28 Commisceo Global, "Estonia—Language, Culture, Customs, and Etiquette," n.d., <https://www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides/estonia-guide>
- 29 A to Z World Food, "Food Culture: Daily Meals," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.atozworldfood.com/estonia/daily-meals.html>
- 30 Lonely Planet, "Estonia in Detail: Eating," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/estonia/narratives/in-location/eating>
- 31 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>
- 32 Taste Atlas, "What to Eat in Estonia: Top 10 Most Popular Estonian Foods," 6 November 2020, <https://www.tasteatlas.com/most-popular-food-in-estonia>
- 33 A to Z World Food, "Food Culture: Daily Meals," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.atozworldfood.com/estonia/daily-meals.html>
- 34 A to Z World Food, "Food Culture: Daily Meals," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.atozworldfood.com/estonia/daily-meals.html>
- 35 A to Z World Food, "Food Culture: Special Occasion Foods," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.atozworldfood.com/estonia/special-occasion-foods.html>
- 36 Every Culture, "Estonia: Orientation: Linguistic Affiliation," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Estonia.html>

Popular and traditional Estonian dishes include *keel hernerstega*, a cold appetizer of cow's tongue and horseradish; *nõgesesupp*, an herb and nettle soup with chives, dill, and an egg; *rosolje* salad, consisting of potatoes and beets seasoned with dill pickles, herring, and sour cream; *sült*, jellied pork; and *mulgikapsad*, a sauerkraut stew. Popular desserts include *karasak*, a whole wheat sweet cake, and *kissel*, a pudding made of sweetened milk, cream, or juice that is thickened with starch. Beer is the most common adult beverage in the country; Vana Tallinn is a popular liqueur flavored with spices.^{37, 38}

Dress Codes

Estonians typically prefer a “smart casual” dress style that reflects current European fashion trends, although this varies by region and demographic. Estonian women prefer formal clothing more than men; older women wear dresses while younger women often wear pants or dresses. Men wear long-sleeved collared shirts and pants.³⁹ In rural areas, clothing styles are more standard and relaxed than what is seen in urban settings. Estonian counties have distinct traditional costumes that are worn for special occasions, such as festivals and holidays. Outside of holidays and special events, traditional costumes are more commonly observed in rural Estonia than in the cities.⁴⁰

In professional settings, conservative formal wear is expected. Men wear dark or medium-colored suits with conservatively patterned ties. Women wear business suits or dresses and pants with blouses and accessories. In some professional environments, business casual is appropriate. Displays of wealth, such as expensive jewelry or accessories, are not appropriate. It is expected that foreigners should adhere to these standards when conducting business within the country.^{41, 42}

Non-Religious Celebrations

Independence Day

Independence Day in Estonia is celebrated every 24 February, commemorating the country attaining freedom from Russia in 1918. Common celebrations include military parades, speeches, and other events. At sunrise the national flag is hoisted on top of Tall Hermann tower in Toompea; the national anthem is then played and the declaration of independence is recited. Many festivities are also broadcast on television.^{43, 44}

Spring Day (Kevadpüha)

Spring Day is observed every 1 May and is most closely associated with Labor Day celebrations. However, it is a holiday with roots in several other traditional celebrations held on the same day, such as paganistic fertility festivals, ancient witchcraft festivals, and the holiday honoring Saint Walpurga. Some celebrations include dressing up as witches on the eve of Spring Day and attending parties; the next day is known as “Hangover Day” (*Kaatripäev*).^{45, 46, 47}

37 Global Road Warrior, “Estonia,” World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/stereotypes.html>

38 Lonely Planet, “Estonia in Detail: Eating,” n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/estonia/narratives/in-location/eating>

39 Global Road Warrior, “Estonia: Attire,” World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/attire.html>

40 CultureGrams, “Estonia,” 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

41 Culture Crossing Guide, “Estonia,” n.d., https://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?id=7&CID=65

42 Expeditionary Culture Field Guide, “Estonia,” n.d., <https://www.usanato.army.mil/Portals/31/documents/Country%20Culture%20Field%20Guides/estonia-2018.pdf?ver=2018-08-07-090404-003>

43 Global Road Warrior, “Estonia: Holidays and Festivals,” World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/festivals.html>

44 CultureGrams, “Estonia,” 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

45 Office Holidays, “Spring Day in Estonia in 2021,” n.d., <https://www.officeholidays.com/holidays/estonia/labour-day>

46 Global Road Warrior, “Estonia: Holidays and Festivals,” World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/festivals.html>

47 CultureGrams, “Estonia,” 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

Independence Restoration Day (Tasiseseisvumispäev)

Held every 20 August, this holiday differs from the Independence Day held in February as it marks Estonia's declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Celebrations are similar to those held in February, with speeches, ceremonies, parades, and memorial events at monuments.^{48, 49, 50}

Baltic International Folklore Festival

The Baltic International Folklore Festival is a week-long celebration that travels throughout the region, staged in either Estonia, Lithuania, or Latvia each year in May or June. The festival's goal is to promote cultural traditions within the Baltic region, given the shared history of the three countries that host the festival. Festivities include performances by dancers, artists, and musicians, both regionally and from around the world. The festival also features vendors selling handicrafts and workshops.⁵¹

Estonian Song Festival

This festival is a multiday event held every five years in July. It is staged exclusively in Tallinn and is a celebration of traditional music. Singers from across the country are invited to perform at the event, which dates back to 1869 when it became a way for Estonians to express their political and economic struggles. In 1988, the "Singing Revolution" took hold in Estonia when thousands gathered in Tallinn to sing patriotic songs and demand political reforms. Many Estonians will take a week off to travel to Tallinn and participate in the festival. The event features singing, dancing, exhibitions, and displays of folk costumes; it attracts approximately 25,000 participants and 100,000 attendees.⁵²

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- 48 Global Road Warrior, "Estonia: Holidays and Festivals," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/festivals.html>
- 49 Office Holidays, "Independence Restoration Day in Estonia in 2021," n.d., <https://www.officeholidays.com/holidays/estonia/independence-restoration-day>
- 50 Any Day Guide, "Independence Restoration Day in Estonia," n.d., <https://anydayguide.com/calendar/1304>
- 51 Global Road Warrior, "Estonia: Holidays and Festivals," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/festivals.html>
- 52 Global Road Warrior, "Estonia: Holidays and Festivals," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/festivals.html>

Do's and Don'ts^{53, 54, 55}

Do's

- Do offer a handshake when meeting someone for the first time.
- Do stand when meeting someone in a formal setting.
- Do maintain at least an arm's length of personal space from others.
- Do pay attention to prices in restaurants, as they might be raised for tourists.
- Do take your shoes off when entering an Estonian's home.
- Do use insect repellent when visiting parks and forests.

Don'ts

- Don't be general or vague when asking questions.
- Don't take offense to any dry or sarcastic attempts at humor.
- Don't discuss history as this may offend Estonians.
- Don't interpret aloof behavior when meeting new people as offensive.
- Don't use your cell phone while driving.
- Don't mention Russia or Russian culture to locals.
- Don't raise your voice or show anger in public.
- Don't swear, use rude hand gestures, or stick your tongue out.

53 Global Road Warrior, "Estonia: Culture and Society," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/greetings-courtesies.html>

54 Destination Tips, "13 Things Not to Do in Estonia," 6 November 2017, <https://www.destinationtips.com/destinations/europe/13-things-not-estonia/?listview=all>

55 Invisible Tourist, "Travelling to Tallinn, Estonia? 10 Essential Tips to Know before You Go," 13 May 2019, <https://www.theinvisibletourist.com/travel-tallinn-tips-know-before-you-go/>

Estonian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 3 | Traditions, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. The Estonian language is rarely used in Estonian society. ☐ True ☐ False
2. Hospitality is integral to Estonian society. ☐ True ☐ False
3. Weddings are religious events and do not feature a reception. ☐ True ☐ False
4. Russian cuisine is banned in Estonia. ☐ True ☐ False
5. Estonia shares hosting duties of the Baltica International Folklore Festival with other Baltic region countries. ☐ True ☐ False

Estonian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 3 | Traditions, Assessment Answers

1. False:
The Estonian language is a key element of the Estonian identity.
2. True:
Estonia is a popular tourist destination and known to be generally hospitable. Estonians are characterized as friendly, warm, and effusive in social settings.
3. False:
Weddings are multiday events that feature numerous celebratory feasts.
4. False:
Estonian cuisine features influences from German and Russian traditions, a reflection of the country's history.
5. True:
Each year, the festival is staged in either Estonia, Lithuania, or Latvia. It is a week-long event that celebrates regional culture.

Chapter 4 | Urban Life



Visitors on the streets of Tallinn.
Flickr / Pedro Szekely

Introduction

Life in Estonia's urban areas generally shares the same advantages and struggles of life in similar urban settings throughout the world. Estonian city streets are diverse, with architecture showing the influence of the country's past rulers. Modern developments coexist with ancient buildings in cities like Tallinn or Narva. Estonian cities boast the best healthcare, education options, and social activities available in the country, as well as a variety of restaurants and stores that line its city streets. However, city life in Estonia is not without its problems or challenges, but its quality of life and infrastructure set the standard for the region.¹

¹ Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia," *World Factbook*, 18 November 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>

Urbanization Issues

Urban Development

Estonia's urban development grew exponentially in the aftermath of the Soviet era. Estonia is home to 30 cities or towns within approximately 215 municipalities. Urban housing is primarily apartments that were constructed in the 1970s and 1980s.² In 2020, the urban population made up 69.2% of the total population.^{3, 4} While there is not a unified national policy for urban development, the Association of Estonian Cities represents cities and towns and offers assistance in development initiatives. Tallinn is the largest city by far and leads the country's urban development; Narva and Tartu are the only other cities with more than 50,000 residents. While urban development has been largely successful, it has also faced challenges: Urbanization has concentrated populations and economic activity, weakening development elsewhere in the country and causing urban depopulation trends; progress has been hindered by inadequate administrative and financial planning; and the divide between rural and urban Estonia remains to be addressed, with improvements needed in all functional areas. The Regional Development Strategy 2020 seeks to address the challenges facing urban development by providing a framework for regional and urban incentive programs.^{5, 6, 7}

Employment

The services and industry sectors dominate Estonia's economy, employing 76.8% and 20.5% of the labor force respectively. Major subsectors include engineering, electronics, information technology, telecommunications, and various food, wood, and textile products. Industrial growth was 9.5% in 2017, ranking Estonia 17th in the world; the United States ranked 122nd the same year. The tech industry is dominant in Estonian cities like Tallinn, where internet access is considered a human right. Estonia is a hotspot for tech startups, ranking among the highest per capita in Europe; the country as a whole—nicknamed e-Estonia—has pioneered the concept of e-residency in the region, in which EU-based entrepreneurs launch businesses online based in the country, regardless of the person's residency. Launched in 2014, the program has been a success and received more than 50,000 applicants.^{8, 9, 10} Despite the strength of the tech industry, salaries are often lower than in comparable European cities.^{11, 12}

- 2 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>
- 3 Statista, "Estonia: Urbanization from 2009 to 2019," n.d., <https://www.statista.com/statistics/455822/urbanization-in-estonia/>
- 4 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia," *World Factbook*, 18 November 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>
- 5 URBACT, "URBACT in Estonia," n.d., <https://urbact.eu/estonia>
- 6 Vaike Haas, "A Review of Urban Planning in Tallinn, Estonia: Post-Soviet Planning Initiatives in Historic and Cultural Context," University of Michigan, August 2006, <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/41228/VaikeHaasMLAThesis.pdf?sequence=2>
- 7 Mihkel Servinski et al., "Population and Distribution of Population," Census Snapshots, n.d., <https://www.stat.ee/dokumentid/71348>
- 8 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia: Geography," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>
- 9 Work Estonia, "Living in Estonia," n.d., <https://www.workinestonia.com/living-in-estonia/>
- 10 Elizabeth Schulze, "How a Tiny Country Bordering Russia Became One of the Most Tech-Savvy Societies in the World," CNBC, 8 February 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/02/08/how-estonia-became-a-digital-society.html>
- 11 Nomad Lane, "The World's Best Up-and-Coming Tech Cities—And How to Enjoy Them," n.d., <https://nomadlane.com/blogs/thelounge/the-worlds-best-up-and-coming-tech-cities-and-how-to-enjoy-them>
- 12 Teleport, "Quality of Life in Tallinn," n.d., <https://teleport.org/cities/tallinn/>

Poverty

Poverty has proven to be a significant concern in Estonian society. Upon independence in the early 1990s, the country had 25.5% of its population earning under USD 5.50 per day. By 2017, that percentage was reduced to 1.1%.¹³ In 2018, it was estimated that 21.7% of all Estonians were at risk of poverty and 2.4% were living in poverty. Citizens ages 18–64 were the lowest group at risk, with those 65-years-old and older at the highest risk, roughly double the overall percentage.¹⁴ Estonia's in-work at-risk-of-poverty rate in 2017 was 9.8%, matching the European Union (EU) average. The rate was less severe for urban populations and those with higher educational attainment. Estonians who are single parents and self- or part-time employed typically skewed higher than the rest of the population. Estonia does have a minimum wage with scheduled increases set through at least 2022. The gender pay gap adversely affects Estonia's female population and is the highest throughout the EU.¹⁵

Estonia's social protection system is designed to help alleviate poverty through financial assistance—a subsistence benefit is provided to those who are unemployed or underemployed. Once a person obtains significant employment, they are phased out of the benefit. A workability allowance is offered to Estonians who have a disability that prevents them from obtaining substantial employment.¹⁶

Pollution

While pollution is relatively uniform throughout the country, urban areas are slightly more affected due to their larger populations.¹⁷ Industrial waste produced during the Soviet era has contributed significantly to Estonia's overall pollution problems. The Soviet military routinely dumped toxic chemicals into coastal and inland bodies of water; despite massive cleanup efforts, some regions still have contaminated soil. Air pollution is also a significant risk factor in the areas surrounding oil shale power plants.¹⁸ Estonia's four largest cities—Tallinn, Tartu, Narva, and Pärnu—all registered Low or Very Low pollution level ratings according to the World Health Organization.¹⁹

Migration

Several groups have migrated to Estonia and the Baltic region throughout history. Settlements began to appear in the 13th century, centered around modern-day Tartu, Tallinn, Pärnu, and Narva. German occupation of the northern territory resulted in the formation of many towns and urban areas. Narva maintains a significant Russian population due to its proximity to Russia and the migration that occurred during periods of Russian rule. Upon independence in 1991, Estonian citizenry was recognized only as those who were citizens prior to Soviet occupation, making thousands of ethnic Russians effectively stateless.^{20, 21, 22}

13 Macrotrends, "Estonia Poverty Rate 1993–2020," n.d., <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/EST/estonia/poverty-rate>

14 ERR News, "More than One Fifth of Estonian Population at Risk of Poverty in 2018," 18 December 2019, <https://news.err.ee/1015170/more-than-one-fifth-of-estonian-population-at-risk-of-poverty-in-2018>

15 Märt Masso et al., "In-Work Poverty in Estonia," European Social Policy Network (ESPN), 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=21115&langId=en>

16 Märt Masso et al., "In-Work Poverty in Estonia," European Social Policy Network (ESPN), 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=21115&langId=en>

17 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia: Geography," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>

18 Expeditionary Culture Field Guide, "Estonia," n.d., <https://www.usanato.army.mil/Portals/31/documents/Country%20Culture%20Field%20Guides/estonia-2018.pdf?ver=2018-08-07-090404-003>

19 Numbeo, "Pollution in Estonia," n.d., https://www.numbeo.com/pollution/country_result.jsp?country=Estonia

20 Estonica, "Town and Urbanisation," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Society/Settlement/Towns_and_urbanisation/

21 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia: Geography," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>

22 World Population Review, "Tallinn Population 2020," n.d., <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/tallinn-population>

Today, the most populated regions in Estonia are its cities and the northern and coastal areas of the country. Approximately 69% of Estonians live in or immediately around towns or cities. Estonia's open borders have allowed for ease of migration—in 2019, immigration rose 4.1% and emigration rose 22.2%. Emigration has risen in recent years as unskilled workers and rural residents have moved abroad seeking better opportunities.^{23, 24} The country's annual rate of urbanization is expected to average 0.01% for 2015–2020. The capital Tallinn is the most populated city in Estonia and representative of its migration history, with populations originating from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Finland, Poland, Latvia, and Germany.^{25, 26, 27}

Healthcare and Health Issues

Healthcare in Estonia is available through either public or private systems.²⁸ The Estonian Health Insurance Fund provides the public option, which is made available to residents who work for an employer that pays into the system. Private insurance is offered through two major companies and consultation services are also made available to people for medical advice and access. Health insurance is a solidarity-based program, guaranteeing healthcare for everyone. Today, approximately 94% of Estonians are insured.²⁹ Those who qualify for state health insurance include eligible employees, students, pregnant women, people under 19 years old, parents or guardians of children under three years old, and people registered as unemployed through the Unemployment Insurance Fund.^{30, 31}

While Estonia's healthcare system is characterized as stable, it does have some notable deficiencies along socioeconomic lines. The 1990s were a relatively turbulent time for the healthcare system, leading to a series of reforms spearheaded by the Ministry of Social Affairs to bolster the national framework.³² Estonians living in some urban areas reportedly have longer life expectancy rates. Urban areas are generally more attractive environments for medical professionals to work in because of the financial incentives and the abundance of educational opportunities and services found there. While urban areas have more availability in healthcare services, there is no statistically significant difference in the utilization of medical services between urban and rural residents.^{33, 34, 35, 36}

Statistics show that residents in urban areas are only slightly less susceptible to health problems than their rural counterparts. Long-term illnesses are less common in urban areas than in rural environments.³⁷ Ischemic heart disease was the leading cause of death in Estonia in 2016, representing approximately 20% of all deaths; this is

- 23 Statistics Estonia, "Migration," n.d., <https://www.stat.ee/en/find-statistics/statistics-theme/population/migration>
- 24 Tiit Tammaru et al., "Estonia at the Ages of Migration," Estonian Human Development Report, 2019, <https://2017.inimareng.ee/en/estonia-at-the-age-of-migration/>
- 25 Estonica, "Town and Urbanisation," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Society/Settlement/Towns_and_urbanisation/
- 26 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia: Geography," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>
- 27 World Population Review, "Tallinn Population 2020," n.d., <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/tallinn-population>
- 28 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>
- 29 Kurt Thiele, "Top 10 Facts About Living Conditions in Estonia," Borgen Project, 23 December 2018, <https://borgenproject.org/top-10-facts-about-living-conditions-in-estonia/>
- 30 Work Estonia, "Living in Estonia/Healthcare," n.d., <https://www.workinestonia.com/living-in-estonia/healthcare-overview/>
- 31 European Commission, "State of Health in the EU: Estonia: Country Health Profile 2019," 2019, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/0b94102e-en.pdf?expires=1605829570&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=739E85D41078856D0147C1119B8CE932>
- 32 Maris Jesse et al., "Health Care Systems in Transition," European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2004, https://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/80690/E85516.pdf
- 33 Work Estonia, "Living in Estonia/Healthcare," n.d., <https://www.workinestonia.com/living-in-estonia/healthcare-overview/>
- 34 European Union, "State of Health in the EU: Estonia: Country Health Profile 2019," 2019, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/0b94102e-en.pdf?expires=1605829570&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=739E85D41078856D0147C1119B8CE932>
- 35 Kaja Põlluste, "Health Reforms in Estonia—Acceptability, Satisfaction, and Impact," Nordic School of Public Health, 2007, <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:749206/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- 36 K. Põlluste and M. Lember, "Building Primary Care in a Changing Europe: Case Studies: Estonia," European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2015, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK459022/>
- 37 Postimees, "Almost a Third of Estonians Have Long-Term Health Problems," 31 July 2013, <https://news.postimees.ee/1317166/almost-a-third-of-estonians-have-long-term-health-problems>

more than double the EU average. Despite this, the country's overall mortality rate has decreased by more than 50% since 2000 in response to healthcare reform and antismoking campaigns. Lung cancer is the most common cause of death from cancer; HIV, strokes, tuberculosis, colorectal cancer, and liver disease are also significant health risks.^{38, 39, 40}

Education and Schools in Cities

Education in Estonia begins with preprimary for ages 3–6 years old, then moves to basic (ages 7–16), and secondary (ages 16–19). Higher education is well established, with 15 public and nine private universities.⁴¹ All municipalities are required to provide childcare and preschool opportunities to children ages 1.5–7 years old. Attendance is compulsory until either the completion of basic school or the student turns 17 years old. The Ministry of Education and Research sets the national curriculum for all Estonian schools. Estonia's school system is divided into two broad sectors: urban (*linn*) and rural (*vald*). Urban schools are more abundant and higher performing than schools in rural municipalities. Private schools are also found throughout the country and are often subsidized by the government.^{42, 43, 44, 45}

Estonia has one of the highest levels of educational attainment in the world.⁴⁶ Approximately 90% of Estonians ages 25–64 have completed upper secondary education. High school graduation rates were 91% overall in recent years and 60% for tertiary schools. Approximately 45% of Estonian women have completed tertiary education, eclipsing the men at a 28% completion rate respectively. Data is incomplete on the number of out of school children, but it is estimated that up to 11% of female children are not enrolled in a preprimary school.⁴⁷ Dropout rates have remained relatively steady in recent years, with basic education at 0.2% overall and secondary shrinking mildly from 1.4% to 1.1% from 2010–2014.⁴⁸

Since 2006, Estonia's basic education schools have been providing students with a hot lunch meal, textbooks, and learning materials. Approximately 5.2% of the GDP is devoted to education expenditures. The school life expectancy, covering primary to tertiary education, averages 16 years, with men at 15 years and women at 17 years respectively.^{49, 50}

- 38 European Commission, "State of Health in the EU: Estonia: Country Health Profile 2019," 2019, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/0b94102e-en.pdf?expires=1605829570&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=739E85D41078856D0147C1119B8CE932>
- 39 Charlie Tomb, "Public Health Challenge: Combating the Top Diseases in Estonia," Borgen Project, 4 October 2016, <https://borgenproject.org/top-diseases-in-estonia/>
- 40 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>
- 41 Top Universities, "Study in Estonia," n.d., <https://www.topuniversities.com/where-to-study/europe/estonia/guide>
- 42 International Education News, "10 Surprises in the High-Performing Estonian Education System," 2 August 2017, <https://internationalednews.com/2017/08/02/10-surprises-in-the-high-performing-estonian-education-system/>
- 43 OECD, "School Education in Estonia," 2016, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264251731-5-en.pdf?expires=1605907235&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=9E6E9B2D6EA905318A10DD6A984B4F30>
- 44 National Center on Education and the Economy, "Estonia: Supporting Equity," 2015, <https://ncee.org/what-we-do/center-on-international-education-benchmarking/top-performing-countries/estonia-overview/estonia-equity/>
- 45 National Center on Education and the Economy, "Estonia: Learning Systems," n.d., <https://ncee.org/what-we-do/center-on-international-education-benchmarking/top-performing-countries/estonia-overview/estonia-learning-systems/>
- 46 International Education News, "10 Surprises in the High-Performing Estonian Education System," 2 August 2017, <https://internationalednews.com/2017/08/02/10-surprises-in-the-high-performing-estonian-education-system/>
- 47 World Top 20 Project, "Estonia: Education Data," n.d., <https://worldtop20.org/estonia>
- 48 CEDEFOP, "Leaving Education Early: Putting Vocational Education and Training in Centre Stage," July 2016, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/estonia_leaving_education_early.pdf
- 49 Kurt Thiele, "Top 10 Facts About Living Conditions in Estonia," Borgen Project, 23 December 2018, <https://borgenproject.org/top-10-facts-about-living-conditions-in-estonia/>
- 50 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 24 September 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>

Restaurants

Restaurant culture is significant in Estonian society and has been expanding in cities in recent years. Cuisine from Scandinavia, Russia, and Germany has highly influenced Estonian cuisine—popular dishes from abroad include potato salad from Russia and aspic and sauerkraut from Germany. Seasonal variations also greatly influence what foods are available in Estonian restaurants throughout the year. Food hygiene is considered very safe within the country.⁵¹ There are several types of restaurants and food offerings in Estonian cities, from cafés to fine dining. Formality is expected at moderate to high-priced restaurants; most commonly, diners follow the continental style of eating and mannerisms.^{52, 53} Drinking is a popular pastime in Estonian cities, with beer- (*õlu*) and vodka- (*viin*)-based drinks as the most popular alcoholic beverages. Coffee (*kohvi*) and tea (*teed*) are popular nonalcoholic beverages. A local craft beer scene has grown in recent years.⁵⁴ Tipping in restaurants is not required but is customary in Estonia, usually at 10% of the bill.^{55, 56, 57}

Marketplaces and Street Vendors

Estonia's cities have a long history of craftsmen and tradesmen selling goods on their streets. Tallinn's Town Hall Square is one of the most popular and longstanding markets in the country; the market is part of the Old Town district and still sits on the same streets that have existed for centuries. The Lounakeskus shopping complex in Tartu is also popular for tourists and residents.⁵⁸ Popular goods include traditional handicrafts, found in most large shopping centers or boutique stores in cities. Knitted, crocheted, and embroidered goods are also common in Estonian culture and usually feature ethnic designs. Bargaining is generally not conducted; the prices listed are what customers are expected to pay. All stores accept euros and most major credit cards.^{59, 60, 61}

- 51 On the Go Tours, "Estonia Travel Tips & Useful Info," n.d., <https://www.onthegotours.com/Estonia/Travel-Tips-and-Useful-Information#What's-the-food-like-in-Estonia>?
- 52 Piret Saar, "Introduction to Estonian Cuisine," Visit Estonia, n.d., <https://www.visitestonia.com/en/why-estonia/introduction-to-estonian-cuisine>
- 53 ABC World Food, "Food Culture: Dining Etiquette," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.abeworldfood.com/estonia/dining-etiquette.html>
- 54 Rough Guides, "Eating and Drinking in Estonia," n.d., <https://www.roughguides.com/estonia/eating-drinking/>
- 55 Alvar Hanson, "Why Is It Always Exciting to Dine in Estonia?" Visit Tallinn, 10 June 2020, <https://www.visittallinn.ee/eng/visitor/ideas-tips/tips-and-guides/dining-in-tallinn>
- 56 Culinary Travel Guide, "Dining Etiquette: A Pocket Guide to Table Manners & Tipping in 46 Countries," n.d., <https://theculinarytravelguide.com/dining-etiquette-around-the-world/>
- 57 Commisceo Global, "Estonia—Language, Culture, Customs, and Etiquette," n.d., <https://www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides/estonia-guide>
- 58 Orange Smile, "Shopping in Estonia—Outlets, Shopping Streets and Boutiques," n.d., <http://www.orangesmile.com/travelguide/estonia/shopping.htm>
- 59 Vaike Haas, "A Review of Urban Planning in Tallinn, Estonia: Post-Soviet Planning Initiatives in Historic and Cultural Context," University of Michigan, August 2006, <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/41228/VaikeHaasMLAThesis.pdf?sequence=2>
- 60 On the Go Tours, "Estonia Travel Tips & Useful Info," n.d., <https://www.onthegotours.com/Estonia/Travel-Tips-and-Useful-Information#What-souvenirs-are-good-to-shop-for-in-Estonia>?
- 61 Paymentwall, "Estonian Payment Options," n.d., <https://www.paymentwall.com/en/payment-methods/estonia>

Money and ATMs

The official currency of Estonia is the euro. In November 2020, USD 1 was equivalent to EUR 0.84. Official money exchanges are available throughout the country—particularly in cities and towns—to exchange currency. It is advised to ask about any fees associated with currency exchange at the time of the transaction, as many offices may charge hidden fees. It is best to exchange currency at places other than airports and hotels as they will often have the highest fees. Credit and debit cards are popular payment options in the country; all major credit cards that are accepted in the United States are accepted in Estonian cities and tourist areas. ATMs are very common in city and town streets as Estonia has an extensive banking network in its urban areas. The most common banks are Big Bank, Handelsbanken, SEB, Swedbank, and Nordea. Traveler's cheques are not as common anymore in Estonia.^{62, 63}

Urban Transportation and Traffic

Public Transportation

Public transportation in the form of buses, trolleys, and trams is found in most cities and towns and considered reliable. Public transportation services are not available in the more rural areas of the country. Each municipality operates a bus service. Fare can be purchased on the vehicle or ahead of time with a prepaid travel card from an R-kiosk, which can be found in most shopping centers and urban areas.⁶⁴ Buses and other public transportation commonly offer free wireless internet connectivity. Tallinn offers free public transportation to certain eligible residents. Buses are the most common method of transportation between cities.^{65, 66, 67}

Trains are generally operated by two organizations: Elron for domestic service and Go Rail for service destined for Russia. Tickets can be purchased online or through ticket agents at the train station; occasionally, tickets are sold on the train themselves. Train service, like public transport, is free within the Tallinn city limits. Express train service is available and free wireless internet connectivity is provided on most trains.^{68, 69, 70}

Personal Cars

Cars are the second-most common method of transportation for people in urban centers. Automobiles became readily available in Estonia upon independence in 1991 and have, with a few periodic exceptions, increased in overall numbers each year. In urban settings like Tallinn, public transportation is still the primary method of transportation, but personal cars are a significant second option. Traffic volume has increased in urban centers with the advent of personal car purchases. Parking is regulated in most cities and towns; municipal-controlled parking lots or private lots are available to drivers.^{71, 72}

62 TransferWise, "Money in Estonia: Banks, ATMs, Cards & Currency Exchange," 24 July 2018, <https://transferwise.com/us/blog/money-and-banks-in-estonia>

63 Xe, "XE Currency Converter: 1 USD to EUR = 0.843172 Euros," 21 November 2020, <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=1&From=USD&To=EUR>

64 Anastasiia, "Like a Local: Estonian Public Transport," Study in Estonia, 21 February 2020, <https://studyinestonia.ee/blog/local-estonian-public-transport>

65 Tallin, "Services—Transport," n.d., https://www.tallinn.ee/est/Indicator-2_Transport_Tallinn

66 Work Estonia, "Transportation," n.d., <https://www.workinestonia.com/living-in-estonia/transportation/>

67 iExplore, "Estonia — Transportation," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/europe/estonia/transportation>

68 Tallin, "Services—Transport," n.d., https://www.tallinn.ee/est/Indicator-2_Transport_Tallinn

69 Work Estonia, "Transportation," n.d., <https://www.workinestonia.com/living-in-estonia/transportation/>

70 iExplore, "Estonia — Transportation," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/europe/estonia/transportation>

71 Tallin, "Services—Transport," n.d., https://www.tallinn.ee/est/Indicator-2_Transport_Tallinn

72 Work Estonia, "Transportation," n.d., <https://www.workinestonia.com/living-in-estonia/transportation/>

To combat automobile congestion, Estonia's cities and towns have implemented initiatives to bolster public transportation or encourage cycling and walking, with some success. Some initiatives include Park & Ride systems that encourage mixed transportation, as well as carpooling. Each year in September, Tallinn organizes and promotes events such as Car Free Day and Car Free Week, as part of European Mobility Week, to encourage alternative means of transportation. Electric cars are found in some urban areas and have been adopted by some government agencies as their official vehicles. Some cities offer incentives such as free parking for electric cars.^{73, 74}

Taxi service is also available in Estonian cities and towns. To hire a taxi, customers do not hail them from the street but instead use an ordering service or apps like Taxify. It is advised to call for a taxi service and not hire any that wait outside of popular tourist destinations or hotspots to avoid high rates and scams.^{75, 76}

Airplanes

The main airport in Estonia is the Lennart Meri Tallinn airport near downtown Tallinn. It has a strong reputation throughout Europe and has been praised in customer satisfaction polls. Tartu, Pärnu, Kuressaare, and Kärdla also have airports. Estonian Air is the largest airline in Estonia and offers 14 destinations to travelers.^{77, 78, 79}

Ports

Water transportation is a significant method of travel for many Estonians. The Port of Tallinn is considered one of the largest and busiest passenger ports in the region as it processes more than eight million passengers through its terminals each year. Ferries operated by several companies offer transportation to places such as Finland, Sweden, and Russia. In the summer tourist season, waterway transportation expands to other nearby destinations. Estonia's three largest islands—Saaremaa, Hiiumaa, and Muhu—offer regular ferry service to the mainland. There is no internal waterway service available.^{80, 81, 82}

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- 73 Tallin, "Services—Transport," n.d., https://www.tallinn.ee/est/Indicator-2_Transport_Tallinn
 - 74 Work Estonia, "Transportation," n.d., <https://www.workinestonia.com/living-in-estonia/transportation/>
 - 75 Work Estonia, "Transportation," n.d., <https://www.workinestonia.com/living-in-estonia/transportation/>
 - 76 iExplore, "Estonia—Transportation," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/europe/estonia/transportation>
 - 77 Tallin, "Services—Transport," n.d., https://www.tallinn.ee/est/Indicator-2_Transport_Tallinn
 - 78 Work Estonia, "Transportation," n.d., <https://www.workinestonia.com/living-in-estonia/transportation/>
 - 79 World Data, "The 3 Largest Airports and Airlines in Estonia," n.d., <https://www.worlddata.info/europe/estonia/airports.php>
 - 80 Tallin, "Services—Transport," n.d., https://www.tallinn.ee/est/Indicator-2_Transport_Tallinn
 - 81 Work Estonia, "Transportation," n.d., <https://www.workinestonia.com/living-in-estonia/transportation/>
 - 82 iExplore, "Estonia—Transportation," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/europe/estonia/transportation>

Street Crime

Crime in any form is generally considered a low concern in Estonia. The most common location for crime to occur is in congested areas like cities and other urban regions with high-density populations. The most common street crimes are pickpocketing, theft, and various other petty crimes, which usually happen in areas with a high number of tourists or foreign visitors such as the Tallinn city center, Lasnamäe, or Kopli. Summertime brings the most reported incidences of street crime as pickpockets sometimes work in teams to try and steal from distracted people. Harassment has also been reported by tourists or foreign visitors, but incidences are rare. Property and domestic violence incidences have risen in recent years, although homicide dropped by 13% from 2018–2019. Overall crime throughout the country has trended downward after peaking in 1994.⁸³ Walking alone in the daytime or night is considered generally very safe. Economic crimes such as money laundering are on the rise. ATMs are generally considered safe as credit card crimes are rare and usually occur outside of the country. The police emergency line is 112.^{84, 85, 86}

Estonian law allows for prostitution but bans forced prostitution and human trafficking activity.⁸⁷ Prostitution is generally accepted by the Estonian society—the idea that prostitution is necessary because it alleviates stress for male Estonians is believed by approximately 54% of the population (63% of men and 46% of women).⁸⁸ The country has been the setting for transit and the destination for victims subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor. The problem persists despite the Estonian government funding and implementing initiatives to reduce trafficking activity. The Victim Support Act, in particular, allows victims to receive support and services regardless of their cooperation with law enforcement or criminal proceedings. However, the infrastructure to combat trafficking is currently inadequate and in need of expansion and reform.⁸⁹

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- 83 Macrotrends, “Estonia Crime Rate & Statistics 1990–2020,” n.d., <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/EST/estonia/crime-rate-statistics>
- 84 Numbeo, “Crime in Estonia,” November 2020, https://www.numbeo.com/crime/country_result.jsp?country=Estonia
- 85 OSAC, “Estonia 2020 Crime & Safety Report,” Country Security Report, 1 May 2020, <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Estonia/Content/Detail/Report/6432d6f1-e685-4980-b1f9-18940523eabd>
- 86 Global Road Warrior, “Estonia Crime,” World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/crime.html>
- 87 Jari Tanner, “Estonia Makes Human Trafficking Illegal,” Boston.com, 21 March 2012, http://archive.boston.com/news/world/europe/articles/2012/03/21/estonia_makes_human_trafficking_illegal/
- 88 Iris Pettai et al., “Prostitution in Estonia: A Survey of the Situation of Women Involved in Prostitution,” EQUAL, n.d., https://intra.tai.ee/images/prints/documents/132066180373_Prostitution_in_Estonia.ENG.pdf
- 89 Refworld, “2018 Trafficking in Persons Report – Estonia,” 28 June 2018, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b3e0b49a.html>

Estonian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 4 | Urban Life, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. Agriculture, driven by strong domestic and export demand for potatoes, is the largest sector of the economy. ☐ True ☐ False
2. Air pollution is a significant hazard in certain regions of Estonia. ☐ True ☐ False
3. Estonia does not have a private healthcare system. ☐ True ☐ False
4. School attendance is compulsory for Estonians until they turn 17 years old or complete basic school. ☐ True ☐ False
5. The most common criminal activity in Estonian cities is human trafficking. ☐ True ☐ False

Estonian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 4 | Urban Life, Assessment Answers

1. False:
The services and industrial sectors dominate Estonia's economy, contributing 68.1% and 29.2% to GDP respectively.
2. True:
Areas bordering oil shale power plants are potentially exposed to air pollution. Despite this, Estonia's four largest cities have "Very Low" pollution levels according to the World Health Organization.
3. False:
Healthcare in Estonia is available through either public or private options. The Estonian government provides healthcare to eligible candidates, such as certain employees or people registered with the Unemployment Insurance Fund.
4. True:
Estonian schools are divided into three sections: preprimary, basic, and secondary. Estonia is also home to many respected universities and other tertiary schools.
5. False:
Estonian cities generally experience low crime; pickpocketing and other petty crimes are the most common crimes reported.

Chapter 5 | Rural Life



The landscape of Viljandi.
Flickr / Märt Sildvee

Introduction

Estonia's rural areas are where its traditions abide and thrive. From villages among expansive forests and agricultural landscapes to ethnic subgroups that have continued their cultural customs for centuries, life in rural Estonia is distinct from and growing in popularity within the greater society. Rural life has its shortcomings; infrastructure is aging and funding is an ever-present problem, but the countryside continues to be a draw for both retirees and holidaymakers.¹

¹ Aivars Stranga et al., "Estonia," Encyclopædia Britannica, 6 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia>

Tribal Distribution and Rural Migration

Ethnic Estonians are a homogeneous group, but there is some regional linguistic and cultural variation. Near Estonia's border with Russia in the southeastern portion of the country live the Seto people. Numbering around 3,000 within Estonia, the Seto are considered a subgroup of ethnic Estonians and feature cultural influences from the larger Estonia group and ethnic Russians. They speak a distinct dialect of the Estonian language and are largely Eastern Orthodox. Approximately 12,600 people speak the Seto dialect.² In 1994, the Seto people declared themselves separate from Estonia and Russia by establishing the Kingdom of Setomaa, although this entity is not legally recognized. Approximately three-fourths of the known Seto population reside in Russia.^{3, 4, 5}

The Võros are another significant indigenous group in southern Estonia. They generally speak the Võro language and are part of a worldwide population of approximately 70,000. Võros culture is preserved in part because of Võro-language media and the Võro Institute, which offers Võro language and culture studies, as well as a rich literary tradition. The Võros have historically been associated with rural Estonian culture.^{6, 7} Muhu island between the Gulf of Riga and the Baltic Sea is also home to a small ethnic subgroup. The Muhu islanders developed a distinct Estonian dialect and are culturally influenced by Scandinavia.⁸

Land Distribution and Ownership

Estonia is home to extensive stretches of land featuring dense forests and agricultural regions. Land ownership was generally divided between state-sanctioned manors, owned by the wealthier population, and settlement farms that consisted of family smallholdings, joint ownership properties, and sharecropping operations. Ownership reforms implemented after independence in 1991 allowed for land ownership rights to be restored to pre-Soviet landowners or their heirs. In recent years, the country's rural population and land holdings have shrunk; agricultural households have decreased while the land owned by agricultural entities, especially corporate ones, has increased.^{9, 10, 11, 12}

- 2 Lonely Planet, "The Seto Way," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/estonia/setomaa/background/other-features/ab444326-8c82-4031-becca-58ba099af729/a/nar/ab444326-8c82-4031-becca-58ba099af729/359124>
- 3 Visit Estonia, "Know About Setomaa, Estonia's Hidden Treasure, From a Local," 29 April 2020, <https://www.visitestonia.com/en/why-estonia/know-about-setomaa-estonias-hidden-treasure-from-a-local>
- 4 Aivars Stranga et al., "Estonia: Ethnic Groups," Encyclopædia Britannica, 6 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia>
- 5 Eve Conant, "A Fairytale Kingdom Faces Real-Life Troubles," National Geographic, 11 November 2016, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2016/10/setomaa-culture-estonia-russia-photographs/#close>
- 6 Fenno-Ugria, "Võros," n.d., <https://eng.fennougria.ee/peoples/baltic-finnic-peoples/estonians/voros/>
- 7 Deep Baltic, "The Other Estonian Language: Preserving and Promoting Võro," 26 April 2019, <https://deepbaltic.com/2019/04/26/the-other-estonian-language-preserving-and-promoting-voro/>
- 8 Aivars Stranga et al., "Estonia: Ethnic Groups," Encyclopædia Britannica, 6 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia>
- 9 Evelin Jürgenson and Marii Rasva, "The Changing Structure and Concentration of Agricultural Land Holdings in Estonia and Possible Threat for Rural Areas," Estonian University of Life Sciences, 2 February 2020, <https://www.mdpi.com/2073-445X/9/2/41/pdf>
- 10 Estonica, "Land Ownership in Estonia in the 20th Century," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Land_ownership_in_Estonia_in_the_20th_century/
- 11 FAO.org, "Estonian Land Board: Chapter 3: The Structure of Agriculture," n.d., <http://www.fao.org/3/ag147e/AG147E04.htm>
- 12 Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, "Land Reform and Taxation in Estonia," July 1997, <https://www.lincolnst.edu/es/publications/articles/land-reform-taxation-estonia>

Rural Economy

Agriculture, the largest economic sector of rural Estonia, accounts for a small portion of the GDP—approximately 2.8% in 2017. Top agricultural products include livestock, dairy items, potatoes, various vegetables and grains, and fish.¹³ In 2019, Estonia's agricultural sector exported USD 142 million in goods and imported USD 150 million. Estonian forests also contribute to the rural economy through natural resource production, primarily wood construction materials and furniture.^{14, 15, 16} The COVID-19 crisis has placed an extreme strain on agricultural production, particularly farms that rely on foreign labor.^{17, 18}

Agriculture dominated the economy in Estonia for much of the country's history and was once the main occupation for all Estonians. Its importance to rural Estonians is reflected in the series of major reform efforts pushed through during periods of political and social strife, such as the Land Act of 1919 on the heels of World War I, in which German-owned manors were expropriated and awarded to Estonians; this created approximately 54,000 farms in the subsequent decades. By 1939, more than 342,000 people worked on approximately 139,824 farms in rural Estonia. Smaller farms soon found it more economically viable to join with other farms, but World War II soon erupted and then the landscape of rural Estonia shifted dramatically.^{19, 20}

The Soviet-era transformed the rural economy completely as farmers were stripped of ownership rights. The thousands of private farms shrunk to just 100 fish farms and 127 state farms during this era. Wages were abolished by 1959, effectively ending the economic system of the region. As agricultural technology evolved, so did Soviet Estonia's hold over the agricultural sector. The Farm Act of 1989 allowed for traditional farms to begin production again and the Land Reform Act of 1991 returned farmland to previous owners or heirs. The Agricultural Reform Act of 1992 further liquidated the state-controlled farms and expanded the opportunity for individuals and companies to begin farm operations, effectively kickstarting the rural economy after decades of Soviet control.²¹ The Estonian Rural Development Programme was adopted in 2015 by the European Commission to invest funds in environmental protection initiatives, committing 70% of the country's farmland to agri-environmental projects.²²

- 13 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia," *World Factbook*, 18 November 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>
- 14 Estonica, "Structure of the Economy," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Economy/General_overview_of_Estonian_economy/Structure_of_the_economy/
- 15 Estonica, "Agriculture and Forestry," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Economy/General_overview_of_Estonian_economy/Agriculture_and_forestry/
- 16 European Commission, "Statistical Factsheet: Estonia," June 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/farming/documents/agri-statistical-factsheet-ee_en.pdf
- 17 The Baltic Course, "Border Closures Have Exacerbated Labor Shortage on Estonian Dairy Farms," 1 June 2020, http://www.baltic-course.com/eng/markets_and_companies/?doc=156287
- 18 The Baltic Times, "Minister: Foreign Farm Workers Can Stay in Estonia For Now," 7 April 2020, https://www.baltictimes.com/minister_foreign_farm_workers_can_stay_in_estonia_for_now/
- 19 Estonica, "The Development of the Rural Economy," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/The_rural_economy_in_Estonia_until_2001/The_development_of_the_rural_economy/
- 20 Estonica, "Agriculture and Forestry," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Economy/General_overview_of_Estonian_economy/Agriculture_and_forestry/
- 21 Estonica, "The Development of the Rural Economy," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/The_rural_economy_in_Estonia_until_2001/The_development_of_the_rural_economy/
- 22 European Commission, "Factsheet on 2014–2020 Rural Development Programme for Estonia," October 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/key_policies/documents/rdp-factsheet-estonia_en.pdf

Rural Transportation

Roads in Estonia are generally in good condition, except in some rural areas, where roads are in disrepair and therefore potentially dangerous. Rural areas present other driving hazards like wild animals or icy conditions in winter. Rural roads are often poorly lit, making driving difficult at night. To help mitigate the danger, Estonian law requires everyone to wear personal reflective devices from 1 December until 31 March.^{23, 24, 25}

In addition to roadways, there are several methods of transportation throughout Estonia: air, rail, and maritime transport. The government-owned Estonian Railways Ltd. offers rail service across 1,200 km (745.6 mi). The only rail corridor in the country is the North Sea–Baltic Corridor, which passes through Estonia from Latvia and terminates in Tallinn.²⁶ Public transportation has recently undergone a major transformation as the country seeks to make all public transit on buses free for Estonians. In 2013 Tallin pioneered a pilot program that offered free transit for citizens. The countrywide program is expected to include all state-run bus travel in rural municipalities and will not provide free transit to visitors. The program is not without its critics, as 57% of rural residents opposed the notion, with just 25% voicing direct approval. One of the main reasons for the proposal's unpopularity in rural areas is that the quality of public transit has historically been poor, with gaps in service and efficiency.^{27, 28, 29}

Rural Healthcare

Healthcare services in rural Estonia benefit from the country's overall stable healthcare system, although it is not without its shortfalls. Rural healthcare facilities are generally easier to access than urban facilities, which are prone to long wait times. It is common for rural clinics to lack sufficient funding and staffing—particularly in family care—and be housed in aging Soviet-era buildings.³⁰ Underfunding has been a persistent problem that has only recently begun to receive significant relief. Lower-income Estonians nationwide encounter financial barriers when accessing healthcare services more frequently than wealthier urban citizens; this problem is most pronounced in dental care, which is not included in the healthcare services covered through state insurance. Despite these setbacks, rural healthcare is generally utilized as much by rural residents as their urban counterparts.^{31, 32, 33}

- 23 Phil Sylvester, "How to Get Around Estonia: Travel Safety Tips," World Nomads, 20 December 2018, <https://www.worldnomads.com/travel-safety/northern-europe/estonia/guide-to-estonia>
- 24 Country Reports, "Traffic and Road Conditions in Estonia," n.d., <https://www.countryreports.org/country/Estonia/traffic.htm>
- 25 OSAC, "Estonia 2019 Crime & Safety Report," 1 April 2019, <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Estonia/Content/Detail/Report/27b2b3e7-3e4b-4a51-8744-15f4aebf2f55>
- 26 European Commission, "Rail – Estonia," n.d., https://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/rail/ertms/countries/estonia_en
- 27 Feargus O'Sullivan, "Estonia Will Roll Out Free Public Transit Nationwide," Bloomberg CityLab, 17 May 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-17/estonia-will-roll-out-free-public-transit-nationwide>
- 28 Michiel Modijefsky, "Estonia Launches the Largest Free Public Transport Scheme in the World," Eltis, 18 July 2018, <https://www.eltis.org/discover/news/estonia-launches-largest-free-public-transport-scheme-world>
- 29 The Economist, "Free Public Transport in Estonia," 9 May 2019, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/05/09/free-public-transport-in-estonia>
- 30 Eesti Haigekassa, "Physician Shortage Poses Challenges to Health Care," 8 October 2019, <https://www.haigekassa.ee/en/uudised/physician-shortage-poses-challenges-health-care>
- 31 Jasper Frese, "An Insight into Rural Health Care in Estonia," Interreg Volunteer Youth, n.d., <https://www.interregyouth.com/single-post/2017/11/27/an-insight-into-rural-health-care-in-estonia>
- 32 Ingel Kadarik et al., "ESPN Thematic Report on Inequalities in Access to Healthcare – Estonia," European Commission, 2018, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=20368&langId=en>
- 33 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

Estonia was an early adopter of online healthcare services, which has proven to be crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic; virtual consultations can reach rural residents faster while minimizing potential risks.^{34, 35, 36, 37, 38}

Rural Education

Public school in Estonia is divided into four levels: preschool, primary education, basic education, and secondary education.³⁹ Estonia's rural municipalities are responsible for the administration of public education in their region; either the municipality itself or an employee of the Ministry of Education and Research is required for general education schools. Religious education is allowed as part of Estonia's national curriculum, with three courses offered during basic school and two in secondary; however, schools are not compelled to provide the classes.⁴⁰ Russian language and private schools may also operate throughout the country and are not required to have municipal or state employees on staff. Rural municipalities have the authority to combine resources for schools and other agencies at their discretion.^{41, 42, 43}

While rural agencies generally face funding challenges, rural school staff generally share positive views of their facilities and infrastructure. In 2012, it was estimated that the average class size in rural schools was 14.9 students, with urban schools averaging 23.4 students. Estonia generally has the smallest teacher-to-student class ratios in countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The number of students per teacher overall has trended downward in recent years. While students in urban settings generally outperform those in rural regions, rural schools shine in one particular area—mathematics. Rural Estonia's mathematics performance ranks among the highest in OECD countries.^{44, 45, 46}

- 34 OECD, "State of Health in the EU: Estonia Country Health Profile 2017," European Commission, 2017, https://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/355978/Health-Profile-Estonia-Eng.pdf
- 35 K. Põlluste and M. Lember, "Building Primary Care in a Changing Europe: Case Studies: Estonia," European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2015, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK459022/>
- 36 Kristina Lupp, "Estonia Opens the First Virtual Clinic Suited for Expats," Estonia World, 25 October 2018, <https://estonianworld.com/business/estonia-opens-the-first-virtual-clinic-suited-perfectly-for-expats/>
- 37 Amy Lewin, "Inside Estonia's Pioneering Digital Health Service," Sifted, 8 July 2020, <https://sifted.eu/articles/estonia-digital-health/>
- 38 Ministry of Social Affairs, "Factsheet: E-health in Estonia," Republic of Estonia, n.d., https://na.eventscloud.com/file_uploads/c5da2a5e465f932e6debe55020e70899_E-health-factsheet.pdf
- 39 Stateuniversity.com, "Estonia: Educational System—Overview," n.d., <https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/447/Estonia-EDUCATIONAL-SYSTEM-OVERVIEW.html>
- 40 Olga Schihalejev, "Religious Education in Eesti: Estonia," EFTRE, August 2016, <https://eftre.weebly.com/eesti-estonia.html>
- 41 OECD, "Chapter 1: School Education in Estonia," 2016, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264251731-5-en.pdf?expires=1607032269&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=9B08CD6FA0361178D61010DAA707407E>
- 42 OECD, "Chapter 4: School Organisation and Operating Schools in Estonia," 2016, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264251731-8-en.pdf?expires=1607032277&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=4F2C6FFA8CDDFC5F4CE92916C36541FB>
- 43 International Education News, "10 Surprises in the High-Performing Estonian Education System," 2 August 2017, <https://internationalelednews.com/2017/08/02/10-surprises-in-the-high-performing-estonian-education-system/>
- 44 OECD, "Chapter 1: School Education in Estonia," 2016, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264251731-5-en.pdf?expires=1607032269&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=9B08CD6FA0361178D61010DAA707407E>
- 45 OECD, "Chapter 4: School Organisation and Operating Schools in Estonia," 2016, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264251731-8-en.pdf?expires=1607032277&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=4F2C6FFA8CDDFC5F4CE92916C36541FB>
- 46 International Education News, "10 Surprises in the High-Performing Estonian Education System," 2 August 2017, <https://internationalelednews.com/2017/08/02/10-surprises-in-the-high-performing-estonian-education-system/>

Rural Life

As of 2018, approximately 31.1% of Estonia's population reside in rural areas of the country. The average rural family has an annual income of USD 918, nearly 22% less than urban families.⁴⁷ Rural areas have seen population fluctuations in the last 60 years; reaching its lowest point in 1989, the rural population grew steadily until a slight downward trend started around 2012.⁴⁸ Rural life is popular among retired Estonians. Rural households skew larger than their urban counterparts and can encompass multiple buildings, such as storehouses, gardens, or saunas. Classic rural homes were commonly constructed from logs, a defining architectural characteristic of rural life.^{49, 50}

Estonian villages commonly feature farmhouses on farmlands of various sizes. Culturally, village life has grown in popularity since independence as many Estonians have sought to re-engage with forgotten traditions and renovate older culturally relevant residences. Village homes are also popular vacation properties where people spend the summer season tending to farmland.^{51, 52, 53, 54} Southern Estonia's rural settlements are scattered across land featuring massive forests, rivers, and marshes; several natural spaces in rural regions are popular for tourism.⁵⁵

The distribution of Estonia's rural settlements reflects the country's geographical divisions and political and economic developments throughout history. Many rural municipalities maintain boundaries historically set in place by state manors; northern manors were generally smaller but closer in proximity to their corresponding villages than their larger southern counterparts. Land reforms in the 20th century converted manors into agricultural smallholdings. Rural life was significantly affected by the Soviet era in Estonia as Soviet rulers sought to exert control over rural life by encouraging residents to move into apartments and other dense housing facilities, changing the landscape of villages. When the Soviet era ended and reforms sought to restore seized land to owners and their heirs, there was also a concerted effort to encourage citizens to move to rural areas and help revitalize the agricultural sector.^{56, 57, 58}

47 Every Culture, "Estonians," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/wc/Costa-Rica-to-Georgia/Estonians.html>

48 Index Mundi, "Estonia – Rural Population (% of Total Population)," n.d., <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/estonia/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS>

49 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

50 Aivars Stranga et al., "Estonia: Settlement Patterns," Encyclopædia Britannica, 6 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia>

51 Estonica, "Rural Settlement and Changing Village," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Society/Settlement/Rural_settlement_and_the_changing_village/

52 Anika Mikkelsen, "Experiencing Life in Estonia," 23 August 2016, <https://medium.com/@MissMaps/experiencing-life-in-rural-estonia-f1c6ddde9e54>

53 Claudia Patricolo, "The Increasing Attractiveness of Rural Life," Emerging Europe, 18 January 2020, <https://emerging-europe.com/after-hours/the-increasing-attractiveness-of-rural-life/>

54 Internations, "Living in Estonia," 6 December 2018, <https://www.internations.org/go/moving-to-estonia/living>

55 Estonica, "Developing Settlements of Lower Estonia," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Society/Settlement/Developing_settlements_of_Lower_Estonia/

56 Estonica, "Rural Settlement and Changing Village," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Society/Settlement/Rural_settlement_and_the_changing_village/

57 Anika Mikkelsen, "Experiencing Life in Estonia," 23 August 2016, <https://medium.com/@MissMaps/experiencing-life-in-rural-estonia-f1c6ddde9e54>

58 Claudia Patricolo, "The Increasing Attractiveness of Rural Life," Emerging Europe, 18 January 2020, <https://emerging-europe.com/after-hours/the-increasing-attractiveness-of-rural-life/>

Who's in Charge?

Estonia is divided into 15 counties (*maakonnad*), which are subdivided into 15 towns and 64 parishes or rural municipalities (singular *vald*, plural *vallad*). *Vallad* are sometimes divided further into villages (*külad*) and townships (*asulad*). In some towns and independent municipalities, special administrative bodies manage government affairs.^{59, 60}

Municipal councils are the executive body of local government. The size of each council is determined by the size of the municipality, but it must be no less than seven members and always an odd number. Council members are popularly elected to four-year terms. The council is responsible for administering local matters concerning social welfare, education, public health, and culture. It also controls the municipality's finances, including taxes, budget, and fees.⁶¹

The municipal council elects a mayor and a team of municipal employees and administrators who work under the mayor and are distinct from the council. The council also determines the organizational structure of the mayor's office. Every municipality must have a standing plan for long-term social, economic, environmental, and cultural development.⁶²

Border Crossings and Checkpoints

Estonia has land borders with Latvia and Russia and maritime borders with Finland and Sweden.⁶³ The Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs oversees how border crossings operate. Estonia is part of the Schengen Agreement, which allows for visa-free travel throughout participating European countries.^{64, 65} Travelers from non-Schengen countries must have a passport or national ID to gain entrance to the country. Estonia's border with Russia has extra precautions; it is patrolled and has two crossing points that allow for approved visitors. A queue system was developed in 2011 to better control traffic across the border with Russia.⁶⁶ Travel to and from Latvia occurs through two major routes, the Via Baltika and the E264 highway. While Estonia features several large ports, the only foreign travel is possible through ports in Tallinn or Paldiski.^{67, 68}

The COVID-19 worldwide pandemic significantly affected the criteria for entry into Estonia. Estonia established that it would only accept citizens from the EU or Schengen countries that were not exhibiting any virus symptoms. The government also implemented an isolation obligation, which could be shortened if travelers voluntarily took a COVID-19 test.^{69, 70}

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- 59 Kazimierz Maciej Smogorzewski et al., "Estonia: Government and Society," Encyclopædia Britannica, 20 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Estonia/Trade#ref37281>
 - 60 Rahandusministeerium, "Local Governments," 1 November 2019, <https://www.rahandusministeerium.ee/en/local-governments-and-administrative-territorial-reform>
 - 61 Rahandusministeerium, "Local Governments," 1 November 2019, <https://www.rahandusministeerium.ee/en/local-governments-and-administrative-territorial-reform>
 - 62 Rahandusministeerium, "Local Governments," 1 November 2019, <https://www.rahandusministeerium.ee/en/local-governments-and-administrative-territorial-reform>
 - 63 One World Nations Online, "Estonia," 2018, <https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/estonia.htm>
 - 64 Politsei, "Information on Border Crossing," 12 May 2020, <https://www2.politsei.ee/en/nouanded/piiruletusinfo/>
 - 65 Estonian Government, "Crossing the Estonian Border," 18 September 2020, <https://www.kriis.ee/en/crossing-estonian-border>
 - 66 Politsei, "The Procedure for Crossing the Estonian-Russian Border (The Direction of Exiting Estonia)," 12 May 2020, <https://www2.politsei.ee/en/nouanded/piiruletusinfo/new-border-crossing-procedure-at-estonian-russian-road-border-points-from-1-august-2011.dot>
 - 67 Trip Advisor, "Estonia: Crossing the Border," n.d., <https://www.tripadvisor.com/Travel-g274952-s602/Estonia:Crossing.The.Border.html>
 - 68 Go Swift, "Principles of Entry in Estonia from 17 March 2020," 17 March 2020, <https://www.estonianborder.eu/yphis/index.action>
 - 69 Estonian Government, "Crossing the Estonian Border," 18 September 2020, <https://www.kriis.ee/en/crossing-estonian-border>
 - 70 Visit Estonia, "COVID-19 and Travelling to Estonia," 4 December 2020, <https://www.visitestonia.com/en/why-estonia/coronavirus-and-travelling-to-estonia>

Landmines

Estonia signed the Mine Ban Treaty in 2004 and is regularly in attendance at conferences and meetings for the treaty. The country claims to have never used, produced, imported or exported any type of landmines. The Estonian government acknowledges a stockpile of up to 1,000 antipersonnel mines, which are claimed to be for training use only. Mainland Estonia does not have any landmine dangers; mines are believed to be present in the Gulf of Finland on several uninhabited islands, remnants of World War II, that are not considered serious risks as they are protected from visitors.⁷¹

Estonia has not signed the Cluster Munition Ban Policy, despite acknowledging the humanitarian risk of these types of munitions. It defends its position by claiming that it has never used or produced cluster munitions, although it does acknowledge its inventory of cluster munitions. Estonia has abstained from UN votes and meetings specific to the Convention on Cluster Munitions.⁷²

71 Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, “Estonia: Cluster Munition Ban Policy,” 4 September 2020, <http://www.the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2020/estonia/view-all.aspx>

72 Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, “Estonia: Cluster Munition Ban Policy,” 4 September 2020, <http://www.the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2020/estonia/view-all.aspx>

Estonian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 5 | Rural Life, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. Ethnic Estonians have no ethnic subgroups. ☐ True ☐ False
2. Agriculture accounts for the largest economic sector in rural Estonia. ☐ True ☐ False
3. Rural Estonia is known throughout the European Union for its advanced transportation system. ☐ True ☐ False
4. Rural healthcare is virtually nonexistent and most residents must travel to urban areas for care. ☐ True ☐ False
5. Rural life is popular for Estonian retirees and vacationers. ☐ True ☐ False

Estonian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 5 | Rural Life, Assessment Answers

1. False:
Estonian ethnic subgroups include the Seto people in southeastern Estonia, the Võros in southern Estonia, and the Muhu people on Muhu island.
2. True:
While agriculture is the largest sector in rural Estonia, it accounts for just 2.8% of GDP. At one time, agriculture was the dominant economic sector in Estonia.
3. False:
Rural roads are not always well maintained or lit. Public transportation is also often inconsistent and unreliable, depending on the location.
4. False:
While often understaffed and underfunded, rural healthcare facilities are generally well-utilized by citizens and feature shorter wait periods than their urban counterparts.
5. True:
Southern Estonia's rural settlements are scattered throughout massive forested lands with rivers and marshes and are attractive natural spaces for tourism. It is popular for Estonians to spend summer months in rural areas and tend to farmland.

Chapter 6 | Family Life



An older couple on a walk in the snow.
Flickr / Visit Estonia

Introduction

Family life in Estonian culture is very similar in most aspects to the West. Nuclear families are the norm, with most households composed of parents and children. In Estonia's patriarchal society, women are expected to take charge of domestic matters and children's upbringing, with the latter sometimes assisted by grandparents if available. A special emphasis is placed on children learning to be independent. While the elderly are revered, shortfalls in social programs have placed the aging society at increasing risk. Life events like weddings and funerals are accompanied by some unique traditions but mostly resemble the ceremonies of Western countries today. Estonian naming conventions stand out as unique, and the country encourages foreign residents to "Estonianize" their names.¹

¹ Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia," *World Factbook*, 18 November 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>

Typical Household and Family Structure

The average Estonian household fits the nuclear family structure and is relatively small—one or two parents and one or two children is the most common size. It is estimated that the average Estonian family would like an average of 2.3 children.^{2, 3} Urban family sizes typically skew smaller than those in rural areas.⁴ Extended family members do not typically live with the average family unit, although it is not uncommon and they generally hold a significant position within the family. It is common for newlywed Estonians to live with family until they are financially stable enough to afford a household. In these shared households, the adult children assume caretaker roles and contribute financially to the upkeep of the house.^{5, 6}

Estonia has been experiencing a low birth rate in recent years, a troubling sign to its government that is complicated further by high divorce rates.⁷ It is somewhat common for a household to have no children or unmarried couples to reside together. In 2015, Estonia had the lowest percentage of married citizens of marrying age in the EU.⁸ However, the country has some of the most child-friendly policies in the world.⁹ Estonian culture does not have a rigid consensus on a preferred gender when couples decide to have a child, particularly in households with more than one child.^{10, 11, 12}

Male and Female Interactions within the Family

Estonian society is traditionally patriarchal despite constitutional protections against gender discrimination. Within a household, men are not expected to share in upkeep or other domestic duties.¹³ Women are expected to show deference to men in domestic and professional situations. Estonian women are commonly employed at a young age in highly visible service sector positions such as retail, banking, or secretarial work. Men are selected more often than women for executive roles and are the primary gender represented in politics. Estonia also has one of the EU's largest pay gaps between men and women.^{14, 15, 16, 17}

- 2 Euraxess, "Family Life in Estonia," n.d., <https://www.euraxess.ee/estonia/information-assistance/family-daily-life-estonia/family-life-estonia>
- 3 Estonica, "Family and Birth of Children," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Society/Population/Family_and_birth_of_children/
- 4 Ene-Margit Tilt, "Marriage and Childbirth Trends among Estonian Residents," Statistics Estonia, n.d., <https://www.stat.ee/dokumendid/71347>
- 5 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>
- 6 Global Road Warrior, "Estonia: Family and Parenting," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/family-parenting.html>
- 7 Estonica, "Family and Birth of Children," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Society/Population/Family_and_birth_of_children/
- 8 ERR News, "Estonia Stands Out for Single Mothers and Unmarried Couples," 23 January 2015, <https://news.err.ee/114948/estonia-stands-out-for-single-mothers-and-unmarried-couples>
- 9 Work Estonia, "Estonia, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland Rank Highest for Family-Friendly Policies According to UNICEF," 18 June 2019, <https://www.workinestonia.com/sweden-norway-iceland-estonia-and-portugal-rank-highest-for-family-friendly-policies-according-to-unicef/>
- 10 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>
- 11 Global Road Warrior, "Estonia: Family and Parenting," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/family-parenting.html>
- 12 EveryCulture, "Estonia: Marriage, Family, and Kinship," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Estonia.html>
- 13 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>
- 14 EveryCulture, "Estonia: Religion," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Estonia.html>
- 15 Jeana Jorgensen, "Gender in Estonia: Observations from a Foreign Feminist," University of Tartu Blog, 24 May 2012, <http://blog.ut.ee/gender-in-estonia-observations-from-a-foreign-feminist/>
- 16 European Institute for Gender Equality, "Gender Equality Index 2019: Estonia," 7 October 2019, <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2019-estonia>
- 17 GenPORT, "Gender Equality Act Estonia," n.d., <https://www.genderportal.eu/resources/gender-equality-act-estonia>

Estonia has generous parental leave benefits—employed women are entitled to 140 days of paid maternity leave while employed men are entitled to 10 days of paid paternal leave within two months before or after the child's birth. Once these benefits expire, Estonian law guarantees that one parent may remain at home for a maximum of 435 days of additional leave; once this benefit is exhausted, one parent may also receive one of several available childcare allowances. Family benefits are authorized until the child turns 16 years old.¹⁸ It is also common for grandmothers to assist in care for small children in a household.^{19, 20}

While Estonia skews generally low for gender equality, it has demonstrated steady growth toward equality in recent years and sought some political solutions, such as the Estonian Gender Equality Act. This act was adopted in 2004 and amended in 2014 and provides for gender equality training and education in professional settings.^{21,}

22, 23, 24

Status of Elders, Adolescents, and Children

Elders

Estonia's population is increasing in age.²⁵ The median age is 42.4 years old, a steady increase from 30.2 years old in 1955. Approximately 20% of the population in the early years of the 21st century was over 64 years of age. Overall life expectancy is 77.4 years. Elders are generally respected and often live on their own. Elders commonly play a support role for newlyweds and grandchildren. When elders need care, families often allow them to reside with them or ensure they find an appropriate care facility. Elder Estonians are eligible to receive social security payments, although these benefits are not considered sufficient for the cost of living requirements.^{26, 27, 28, 29, 30}

Despite their revered social status, elders still experience significant poverty, among the highest such rates in the EU. Several factors present risks to the elderly population, particularly the inadequate pension system. Approximately 40% of Estonians 65 years old or older were at risk of poverty in 2017, a dramatic increase from the 2013 figure of 2.4%.³¹

- 18 Work Estonia, "Estonia, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland Rank Highest for Family-Friendly Policies According to UNICEF," 18 June 2019, <https://www.workinestonia.com/sweden-norway-iceland-estonia-and-portugal-rank-highest-for-family-friendly-policies-according-to-unicef/>
- 19 CultureGrams, "Estonia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>
- 20 Global Road Warrior, "Estonia: Family and Parenting," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/family-parenting.html>
- 21 EveryCulture, "Estonia: Religion," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Estonia.html>
- 22 Jeana Jorgensen, "Gender in Estonia: Observations from a Foreign Feminist," University of Tartu Blog, 24 May 2012, <http://blog.ut.ee/gender-in-estonia-observations-from-a-foreign-feminist/>
- 23 European Institute for Gender Equality, "Gender Equality Index 2019: Estonia," 7 October 2019, <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2019-estonia>
- 24 GenPORT, "Gender Equality Act Estonia," n.d., <https://www.genderportal.eu/resources/gender-equality-act-estonia>
- 25 Estonica, "An Ageing Population," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Sub-contracting_in_the_big_wide_world/An_ageing_population/
- 26 Global Road Warrior, "Old Age," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/old-age.html>
- 27 Calbright College, "Estonia Population (Live)," 1 July 2020, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/estonia-population/>
- 28 Global Road Warrior, "Estonia: Family and Parenting," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/family-parenting.html>
- 29 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia," *World Factbook*, 18 November 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>
- 30 EveryCulture, "Estonia: Social Welfare and Change Programs," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Estonia.html>
- 31 Silver Tambur, "Estonia Needs to Address the Poverty Risk of Its Elderly," *Estonian World*, 1 December 2017, <https://estonianworld.com/opinion/estonia-needs-address-poverty-risk-elderly/>

Adolescents

Approximately 9% of Estonia's population was aged 15–24 years old as of 2020.³² There are no specific Estonian coming-of-age ceremonies for children. Christians traditionally administer confirmation as a rite of passage, but given that the country is largely nonreligious, this is not a defining characteristic of adolescence. Young Estonians are allowed to work jobs with parental permission starting at 15 years old, but it is unusual for a child to contribute their income to the household. Many young Estonians complete high school and move on to higher education.³³ The Estonian government has implemented reforms and initiatives to promote youth employment and provide better opportunities, such as the National Youth Work Strategy 2006–2013. The initiative sought to coordinate resources to better address the needs of the youth and inform policymaking.^{34, 35}

Children

Estonia's children—ages 0–14—accounted for approximately 16% of the population in 2020.³⁶ Children are usually cared for by their mothers, or grandparents in households where both parents work. Independence is a common trait taught to Estonian children as they grow up; children are expected to spend portions of the day alone, such as the time between school ending and parents returning home from work. Generally, children are expected to entertain themselves or play with other children. Outdoor activities and sports like soccer are popular, particularly among boys. Chores are sometimes expected of children but they are usually not too complex.^{37, 38}

Small children usually do not leave the house except for walks with parents or guardians. Education is highly valued for children; the first day of school, usually at the age of seven, is an important cultural milestone.^{39, 40, 41}

Marriage, Divorce, and Birth

Marriage

The typical age of marriage in Estonia is 25–30 years old; Estonians are legally able to marry starting at 18 years old as directed by the Family Law Act. However, children as young as 15 are legally allowed to marry with court permission, making the country's marriage age minimum the lowest in the EU. Legal amendments passed in 2017 criminalized forced marriage, which has been used as a form of human trafficking.⁴² A civil ceremony is required for a marriage to be legally recognized. It is common for couples to live together before getting married. Marriage is allowed without restrictions in the country. Culturally, there is a stigma around ethnic Estonians marrying ethnic Russians.^{43, 44}

32 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia," *World Factbook*, 18 November 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>

33 Global Road Warrior, "Coming of Age," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/coming-of-age.html>

34 Simon Bart et al., "Youth and Public Policy in Estonia," Youth Policy Press, 2014, https://www.youthpolicy.org/pdfs/Youth_Public_Policy_Estonia_En.pdf

35 European Commission, "Estonia: National Report: First Cooperation Cycle of the EU Youth Strategy 2010–2012," n.d., <https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/youth/policy/documents/estonia.pdf>

36 Central Intelligence Agency, "Estonia," *World Factbook*, 18 November 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>

37 EveryCulture, "Estonia: Social Welfare and Change Programs," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Estonia.html>

38 Global Road Warrior, "Childhood," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/childhood.html>

39 Global Road Warrior, "Birth," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/birth.html>

40 EveryCulture, "Estonia: Social Welfare and Change Programs," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Estonia.html>

41 Global Road Warrior, "Childhood," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/childhood.html>

42 Girls Not Brides, "Estonia," n.d., <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/estonia/>

43 EveryCulture, "Estonia: Marriage, Family, and Kinship," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Estonia.html>

44 Global Road Warrior, "Estonia: Marriage," World Trade Press, n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/marriage.html>

Divorce

More than half of all marriages in Estonia today are estimated to end in divorce. A common cause of divorce is extramarital affairs, which no longer carry as much stigma as in the past. The divorce process is relatively simple—when neither spouse contests the divorce, a registry office or notarized mutual agreement can formalize the request; if there is a dispute between the spouses, courts become involved. The Vital Statistics Department in Tallinn ultimately processes all the divorce petitions in the country.^{45, 46} Both men and women have equal claim to marital property and child custody. There are no restrictions on widows or divorcees remarrying.^{47, 48} Divorce petitions must be filed in-person, a process complicated recently by the COVID-19 pandemic.^{49, 50}

Birth

As of 2020, Estonia's birth rate was 9.3 births per 1,000 people; the country ranked 181 out of 224 countries for its total fertility rate in 2017.⁵¹ At birth, Estonia averages 1.05 male babies for every female and has an infant mortality rate of 3.7 deaths per 1,000 births. The average age of Estonian first-time mothers at the birth of their child is 27.4 years old. For a child to be an Estonian citizen at birth, one of their parents must already be a citizen.^{52, 53} Concern over children in Estonia without citizenship rights has risen in recent years, prompting calls for revisions to the Citizenship Act.⁵⁴

There are several taboos and customs concerning pregnancy and childbirth in traditional Estonian culture. Expectant mothers believed it to be bad luck to become angry, argue, or laugh. Certain days of the week were considered bad luck for births, while Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and especially Sundays were considered fortunate for births. Babies born in the evening were considered lucky but those born in the morning were expected to have to work hard throughout their life. When a baby was born, they would traditionally be wrapped in clothing for the opposite sex, a gesture meant to ensure that they get married as adults. Most of these taboos and traditions are no longer observed.⁵⁵ Baby showers have grown in popularity, staged similarly to baby showers in the West.⁵⁶

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54 Human Rights Centre, "Human Rights in Estonia 2013: Rights of the Child," 2013, <https://humanrights.ee/en/topics-main/inimoiigused-eestis/inimoiiguste-aruanne/human-rights-in-estonia-2013/rights-of-the-child/>

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Family Social Events

Weddings

Estonian weddings are commonly festive and colorful. The event traditionally has two portions: a celebration at the bride's home known as *saunjarahvas* and another at the groom's home known as *saajarahvas*. Autumn and early winter are popular times for weddings.⁵⁷

Estonian weddings can be multiday events and often incorporate traditional rituals.⁵⁸ Wedding receptions typically include a large variety of food, games, and dancing. Wedding traditions commonly involve nature, such as planting a tree or performing a symbolic ritual in a natural setting. The first dance at a wedding is known as the Opening Waltz. "Patching the Apron" is a common tradition in which the bride walks among the guests as they throw money into her apron. At midnight, a bridal wreath is passed—the bride begins the tradition wearing a flower crown while the groom dons a hat. The crown and hat are passed onto the couple deemed the most likely to marry next as the group sings a song.^{59, 60, 61}

Funerals

Estonian tradition viewed death as a person's passage from one form of existence to another; several rituals developed over time, primarily from Christian influences. Traditionally, family members provided direct care for the remains, but in modern Estonia, funeral preparations are most commonly handled by professionals.^{62, 63}

The body of the deceased is washed and placed in a coffin. The use of special white burial garments is another tradition that has been supplanted in modern times; today, remains are usually dressed in modern clothing.⁶⁴ It is common for the deceased to be dressed in comfortable shoes and a scarf; some still uphold the tradition of avoiding any clothing with knots based on the belief that knots can "tie" a spirit down or otherwise prevent its passing into the afterlife. Viewings are commonplace and often held in churches, despite the lack of religious influence on funeral ceremonies. Coffins are buried in cemeteries. It is customary to place coins in the coffin. Allowing tears to fall inside the casket is seen as a bad omen. Funeral feasts are often staged after a funeral ceremony; pastries and bread are served, with some food set aside in honor of the deceased. Post-funeral dinners commonly consist of roast pork and cabbage rolls.^{65, 66}

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- 57 Estonica, "Wedding," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Culture/Traditional_folk_culture/Wedding/
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 - 63 Jenny Goldade, "Cultural Spotlight: Estonian Funeral Traditions," Frazer Consultants, 27 April 2018, <https://frazerconsultants.com/2018/04/cultural-spotlight-estonian-funeral-traditions/>
 - 64 Estonica, "Death," n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Culture/Traditional_folk_culture/Death/
 - 65 Global Road Warrior, "Death," n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/death.html>
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Rites of Passage

Estonian culture does not have strong rites of passage traditions. Christians typically engage their children in confirmation traditions as a rite of passage while nonreligious traditions include graduation from high school or college. Some school graduations may even be staged as multiday events. Estonians are considered adults upon turning 18 years old.^{67, 68}

Naming Conventions

Estonians are traditionally given 1–3 names at birth followed by a surname, which is most commonly inherited from the father. Estonian women traditionally also take their husband's last name but it is not uncommon for a married woman to retain her maiden name or use both names in the hyphenated form. A given name is required by law to be gender-specific.^{69, 70} The most popular baby names in 2019 were Mia for girls and Robin for boys.⁷¹

Given names primarily are derived from Estonian culture, although many Estonian names also have Finnish origins because of their shared language origin. Russian names are still very common, as are foreign names interpreted into Estonian—for example, Thomas becomes Toomas. Surnames commonly descend from Estonian or Russian culture. Estonian surnames traditionally represented occupations, geography, or nature. A social movement in the 1930s sought to encourage people of foreign descent to “Estonianize” their names. Modern Estonia has instituted a similar campaign to encourage people to alter their surnames.⁷²

Nicknames are popular in Estonian culture. The suffix *-ke* or *-kene* is applied to a given name to make it a nickname. Another popular way to give someone a nickname is to shorten their names, such as Katariina becoming *Kala* or *Kaja*. Honorifics are common in formal settings: *härre* for Mr., *proua* for Mrs. or Ms., and *preili* for miss, although *preili* is falling out of use. Professional titles in conjunction with a person's surname are also common in the appropriate settings—examples include *doktor* for doctors and professor or *proua* for educators, with “*proua professor*” also acceptable.⁷³

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- 67 Global Road Warrior, “Coming of Age,” n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/coming-of-age.html>
 68 EveryCulture, “Estonians: 7. Rites of Passage,” n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/wc/Costa-Rica-to-Georgia/Estonians.html>
 69 Global Road Warrior, “Name Structure,” n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/name-structure.html>
 70 Estonica, “Personal Names,” n.d., http://www.estonica.org/en/Society/The_Estonian_Language/Personal_names/
 71 Nancy’s Baby Names, “Popular Baby Names in Estonia, 2019,” 25 February 2020, <http://www.nancy.cc/2020/02/25/popular-baby-names-estonia-2019/>
 72 Global Road Warrior, “Name Structure,” n.d., <https://www.globalroadwarrior.com/estonia/name-structure.html>
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Estonian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 6 | Family Life, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. Estonia is experiencing a baby boom in part because of its recent economic successes. ☐ True ☐ False
2. Elders are revered in Estonian society. ☐ True ☐ False
3. The term “helicopter parenting” is popular in Estonia as many parents are extensively involved in their children’s lives. ☐ True ☐ False
4. For a newborn child to obtain Estonian citizenship, one parent must already be a citizen. ☐ True ☐ False
5. Estonian naming conventions dictate one given name and surname and no middle names. ☐ True ☐ False

Estonian Cultural Orientation

Chapter 6 | Family Life, Assessment Answers

1. False:
Estonia has been experiencing a low birth rate in recent years, complicated further by high divorce rates.
2. True:
Elders are generally respected in Estonian society and families will either allow them to reside with them or place them in an appropriate care facility when needed.
3. False:
Estonian children commonly are independent and are expected to entertain themselves by playing outdoors or with other children.
4. True:
The Citizenship Act establishes how a person becomes an Estonian citizen. Controversy over the citizenship process has led to calls for revisions in recent years.
5. False:
Estonian names may have 1–3 given names and a surname. Given names are required to be gender-specific and are primarily derived from Estonian culture.

Estonian Cultural Orientation

Further Readings and Resources

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Estonian Cultural Orientation

Final Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. There are two primary seasons in Estonia, a cloudy warm season and a mild and rainy cold season. ☐ True ☐ False
2. Lake Peipus is bisected by Estonia's border with Russia. ☐ True ☐ False
3. Tartu is Estonia's largest city and its capital. ☐ True ☐ False
4. Estonia's government is a parliamentary republic. ☐ True ☐ False
5. Soviet rule nearly erased the Estonian ethnic population and turned the group into a small minority population. ☐ True ☐ False
6. Estonia is considered one of the most religiously devout countries in Europe. ☐ True ☐ False
7. Approximately 60% of the population does not identify with any religion. ☐ True ☐ False
8. Separation of church and state is absolute in Estonia. ☐ True ☐ False
9. Estonian society exhibits some of the strongest gender equality in the EU. ☐ True ☐ False
10. According to tradition, Santa Claus visits Estonian homes on Christmas Eve. ☐ True ☐ False

11. By tradition, Estonians do not engage in any kind of physical greetings. ☐ True ☐ False
12. Gift-giving is a relatively minor tradition in Estonia. ☐ True ☐ False
13. Formality is not exercised or valued in social and professional settings. ☐ True ☐ False
14. Estonia has two holidays celebrating the country's independence. ☐ True ☐ False
15. The Estonian Song Festival is the country's version of American Idol. ☐ True ☐ False
16. Estonia has two major urban centers. ☐ True ☐ False
17. Estonia has a social protection system to help alleviate poverty. ☐ True ☐ False
18. Most of Estonia's population moved there from neighboring countries. ☐ True ☐ False
19. There is a significant divide in health quality between rural and urban Estonians. ☐ True ☐ False
20. Estonian cuisine features characteristics from many cultures. ☐ True ☐ False
21. Estonia's land is owned and controlled by the government. ☐ True ☐ False
22. Estonia's farms went from more than 139,000 in operation to just a couple hundred during the Soviet era.seized during the communist era. ☐ True ☐ False

23. Public transportation in rural Estonia is significantly more expensive than in urban areas for Estonian citizens. ☐ True ☐ False
24. Rural education suffers from funding and other shortcomings but enjoys popular support. ☐ True ☐ False
25. Estonia does not patrol any of its borders. ☐ True ☐ False
26. The extended family is the most common family type found in Estonia. ☐ True ☐ False
27. Estonia has generous parental leave programs. ☐ True ☐ False
28. Adolescents financially contribute to the average household starting at an early age. ☐ True ☐ False
29. Estonians can record marriages and file for divorces online. ☐ True ☐ False
30. Estonian weddings may be multiday events featuring several traditions. ☐ True ☐ False

Estonian Cultural Orientation

Final Assessment Answers

1. False:
Estonia experiences the typical four seasons: transitional springs, fair summers, rainy autumns, and cold winters. Many bodies of water are known to freeze over in the winter months.
2. True:
Peipus was formed by Ice Age-era activity. It has approximately 30 small islands and an abundance of plant and fish life. The lake is known to freeze over in the winter months.
3. False:
Tallinn is Estonia's largest city and capital, and one of the oldest capitals in Northern Europe. Tartu is Estonia's second-largest city and sits along the Ema River.
4. True:
With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Estonia adopted a new constitution, held elections, and established its current government with a legislature, parliament (*riigikogu*), and a judiciary.
5. False:
Estonians make up approximately 68.7% of the country's population. Before Soviet rule, they composed approximately 90% of the population, but mass deportations and Russian immigration lowered their numbers.
6. False:
Estonia has an extensive history with Christianity—primarily Lutheranism and Orthodoxy—but it is largely a nonreligious country.
7. True:
Estonia is a highly secularized country. Soviet rule in the 20th century was marked by hostility toward religion.
8. False:
Many Christian symbols and terminology are observed in public places, and many religious holidays feature Lutheran characteristics.
9. False:
Gender inequality is a serious social issue in Estonia, which is a traditionally patriarchal country. Estonia has one of the largest pay gaps between men and women in the EU.
10. True:
Tradition dictates that Santa, known as Old Yule (Jõuluvana), delivers gifts to homes on Christmas Eve. Elves fill children's shoes with gifts overnight into Christmas Day.

11. False:
Handshakes are a common way of greeting someone for the first time.
12. True:
Gift-giving is mostly done on birthdays and the Christmas holiday. Gifts are usually opened when received.
13. False:
Traditional formalities are prevalent in social and professional settings. Estonians generally wear semiformal, conservative clothing for social events.
14. True:
Independence Day, on 24 February, honors Estonia's independence from Russia in 1918. Independence Restoration Day, on 20 August, honors the country's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.
15. False:
The festival, held every five years in July, began in 1869 as a form of political protest. Today, it features singing, dancing, exhibitions, and folk costumes.
16. False:
Estonia is home to 30 cities or towns within approximately 215 municipalities.
17. True:
Estonia's social protection system is designed to provide financial assistance to those in poverty or who are under- or unemployed.
18. False:
The Estonian ethnic group is the largest portion of the country's population. Estonian cities are home to residents from abroad.
19. False:
Statistics show that residents in urban areas are only slightly less susceptible to health problems than their rural counterparts.
20. True:
Cuisine in Estonia evolved in part from its storied history, featuring influences from Scandinavia, Russia, and Germany.
21. False:
Estonia transitioned back to allowing for private land ownership upon independence in 1991. Land reforms have allowed for land ownership to be restored to pre-Soviet landowners or their heirs.
22. True:
Approximately 140,000 farms employed more than 342,000 Estonians before the Soviet revolution. After the country came under Soviet control, just 100 fish farms and 127 state farms operated in Estonia. reinstating land property rights.

23. False:
Estonia has begun rolling out a free transportation initiative for Estonian residents to help reduce automobile congestion. This plan is unpopular in rural areas, where public transportation is considered poor with gaps in service and efficiency.
24. True:
Average class sizes in rural schools are less than in urban schools and while some metrics place rural education behind urban, rural students have demonstrated a stronger proficiency in mathematics.
25. False:
While most of Estonia's borders are relatively easy to cross, its border with Russia is controlled and monitored by patrols. A queue system was implemented in 2011 to better control traffic to and from Russia.
26. False:
Estonian families are primarily nuclear families with 1–2 parents and 1–2 children.
27. True:
Employed women are entitled to 140 days of paid maternity leave. Employed men may take 10 days of paid paternal leave within two months before or after the child's birth.
28. False:
Estonian adolescents may begin working at 15 years old, but they are not expected to contribute financially until they become adults at 18 years old.
29. False:
A marriage requires a civil ceremony to be recognized. Divorces must be petitioned through registry offices or courts. Both must be conducted in-person.
30. True:
Common Estonian wedding traditions include the Opening Waltz, "patching the apron" (when attendees throw money into the bride's apron), and the passing of the bridal wreath at midnight.