



ESTONIA

EU MEMBER SINCE 2004

OTHER MEMBERSHIPS NATO, Schengen Area, Eurozone, Bologna Process, OECD

CURRENCY € (EURO)

CAPITAL Tallinn

AREA 45,228 sq km

POPULATION 1,266,375 (July 2013 est.)

LANGUAGE Estonian (67%) Russian (29.7%)

RELIGION Evangelical Lutheran 13.6%, Orthodox 12.8%, other Christian (including Methodist, Seventh-Day Adventist, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal) 1.4%, unaffiliated 34.1%, other and unspecified 32%, none 6.1% (2000 census)

GDP \$ 16,534 (2011)

GNI \$ 20,850 (2011)

SGI N/A

CPI 64 out of 100 (2012)

ARCHITECTURE Eclecticism, Neo-Gothic, Art Nouveau, 19th Century Russian Revival, Tudor, Neo-Baroque, Neo-Classicist, Art Nouveau, Stalinist

LITERATURE Lydia Koidula, Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald, Jaan Kross, Jaan Kaplinski

MUSIC Runic songs; Arvo Pärt, Ewert and The Two Dragons, Metsatoll, Raud-ants, Kerli Kõiv

PAINTING Nikolai Triik, Konrad Mägi, Kristjan Raud, Eduard Wiiralt, Jüri Arrak, Jaan Toomik

CUISINE Rosolke, Rääim, Kama (fine flour mix), Mulgikapsad (Sauerkraut stew with pork), Marinated eel, Keel hernerstega (tongue with horseradish). **Delicacies:** Kohuke (Curd snack), Siilt (boiled pork jelly), Verivorst (Black pudding)

DRINKS Kali, Mõdu, Fruit wine, beer, vodka, Vana Tallinn (herbal liquor)

CONSUMPTION 15.57 equivalent liters of pure ethyl alcohol per capita per year (WHO, 2005)

SPORTS Kiiking (new sport), Soccer, Ice Hockey, Cycling, Skiing, Tennis, Track

Robert A. Saunders *On Estonia*

24 May 2014

The smallest and northernmost of the Baltic States, the Republic of Estonia (*Eesti*) is a Nordic country with cultural and linguistic ties to Finland. With a tech-savvy population, a reputation for innovation, and a free market economy, this former Soviet republic has moved quickly to distinguish itself as a site for foreign investment, as well as a fairytale-like, eco-friendly tourist destination.

Situated on the Gulf of Finland, the Baltic Sea, and the Gulf of Riga, Estonia's possesses a humid continental climate with fairly cold winters. A country that is mostly flat, this Baltic land is peppered by small lakes and countless bogs. Almost two-thirds of Estonia is covered by forests and the nation lays claim the world's second-largest amount of plant diversity per square meter. Russia lies on the Estonia's eastern border (the two countries sit astride Lake Peipus/Peipsi), while Latvia is the country's southern neighbor. The enchanting capital of Tallinn possesses excellent maritime and air transportation links with Helsinki, Finland, as well as other Baltic ports. The islands of Saaremaa and Hiiumaa are defining characteristic of the country's geography, along with more than 1,500 smaller islands. Estonia emotes a decidedly Nordic character, and seeks to align itself with nearby Finland and Scandinavian countries rather than be identified with the post-Soviet Baltic region. Like their Finnish cousins, Estonians speak a Uralic tongue of the Finnic subfamily which is unrelated to other European languages (with the exception of Hungarian and the Sámi dialects). Estonia possesses a significant minority of Russian-speakers as well. Evangelic Lutheranism is the ancestral faith of most ethnic Estonians, though religious adherence in the country is the lowest in Europe. However, traditional beliefs systems—a form of secular paganism (often referred to [Mausk](#))—remain prevalent in the country, with many Estonians continuing to revere sacred groves, stones, springs, and other natural sites. A country with strong agrarian roots, the national commitment to environmental preservation is profound, and citizens of the country tend to spend much of their free time engaged in outdoor activities or lounging in the sauna. Estonians tend to have few children and the divorce rate is quite high, resulting large numbers of single-parent families. Buffeted by a strong work ethic, self-

sufficiency is an important cultural value in this small country.



General view of Tallinn © EU 2013

Recent History

Ethnically related to the Finns, the Estonians are descendants of ancient settlers from the Ural Mountains in modern-day Russia. The region was dominated by local or foreign Viking earls during the Middle Ages, before coming under the rule of the Teutonic Knights as part of the Terra Mariana, a principality of the Holy Roman Empire. The country was later split between the Kingdom of Sweden and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Russia claimed the province as part of the Treaty of Nystad (1721). During Romanov rule, Baltic Germans constituted the political and economic elite, whereas ethnic Estonians made up the peasantry.

After the Bolshevik Revolution, Estonia moved toward independence, ultimately establishing a parliamentary democracy that would last until 1934. The country fell victim to the privations of the global depression of the interwar period and was then blockaded, occupied, and annexed by the USSR under the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939. The Axis powers invaded in 1941, occupying Estonia until the Red Army retook the country reestablishing Soviet control in 1944 and subsequently deporting more than 20,000 ethnic Estonians to other parts of the USSR (primarily Siberia). Simultaneously, tens of thousands fled to Western countries while other Estonians, labeled the “Forest Brothers,” took up arms against the regime and fought a guerrilla-style war until the early 1950s.

In the post-war period, much of the country was militarized due to its long coastline and exposure to influence from Finland, Sweden, and NATO countries; however, radio and television signals from these countries were readily available to significant portions of the population resulting in a steady Westernization of certain quarters of the population. Initially, Estonia suffered under collectivization and a de-kulakization campaign, yet over time, the republic emerged as a leader in technological innovation and served as laboratory for agricultural and economic experimentation partially outside of the Soviet Union’s command-and-control economy. Stalinist Russification and the settlement of non-Estonians in the country led to a dilution of the indigenous population’s influence; however, in the 1980s, a strong ethnic revival gained steam, building on a national renaissance dating to the 1960s. Under the banner of *perestroika*, the Estonian Popular Front quickly emerged as a dominant force in the country alongside a variety of other nationalist and environmentalist parties. In 1988, the Estonians declared their own sovereignty during the so-called “Singing Revolution,” triggering a sustained crisis with the Kremlin that only ended with international recognition of independence following the failed Soviet coup of August 1991.

After independence, Estonia moved rapidly to integrate its economy with the Nordic region and the European Union as a whole. However, [fiscal policy](#) in the country diverged quite sharply from these nations as Estonia took the radical step of establishing a flat tax in 1994 and dismantling much of its social welfare system. In an effort to seek tourists and foreign direct investment, Estonia undertook a major campaign to burnish its national image in the 1990s, which continues today in the form of a [unified nation branding campaign](#) including a national logo, a country slogan, and a Facebook page. Information technology has emerged as a key component of the new economy, signified by the remarkable success of the global voice-over-IP company Skype which had its start in Tallinn and Tartu. The country is recognized leader in e-government and access to the Internet is considered a basic human right; however, this proved a liability in 2007 when a [dispute over a statue honoring Soviet soldiers](#) led to a massive cyber-attack on Estonian businesses and government services by hackers sympathetic to the Russian Federation. Estonia is a parliamentary democracy, with power vested in the Riigikogu, a unicameral body with 101 members. Six major parties vie for power, though nearly all are centrist in orientation.

Like other Baltic republics, Estonia’s foreign policy since 1991 has been focused on limiting Russian influence, including negotiating troop withdrawals in the early 1990s and [NATO admission](#) in 2004. The status of a sizeable Russophone minority, especially in the eastern city of Narva, has created tensions with Moscow, particularly over the question of “non-citizens” (descendants of non-Estonians who immigrated to the country after 1940), lingering disputes over

territory annexed by Russia after WWII, and the aforementioned Bronze Soldier controversy.

The EU Connection

Hoping to jumpstart its economy, Estonia quickly moved to enter the European Union, doing so on 1 May 2004 shortly after a referendum in which two-thirds of the citizenry supported accession. The country is an active member of the EU's Baltic Sea Strategy and Northern Dimension projects which are aimed at facilitating greater integration across the Nordic countries. Estonia has distinguished itself as a leading voice on cross-border banking regulation, as well as e-procurement and other digital initiatives. On 1 January 2011, Estonia became the first Baltic state to join the [Eurozone](#), formally abandoning its currency the *kroon*. Today, approximately 80% of Estonia's FDI and external trade in with the European Union.

Cultural Traits

Love of and respect for nature figure highly in the national consciousness. Most Estonians readily seek natural remedies for ailments and are highly attuned to the seasonal cycle, marking the changing weather patterns with outdoor celebrations, berry-picking, sledding, or other pastoral activities. Personal attachment to the Estonian language (*emakeel*) and homeland (*isamaa*) is often intense.

Folk-singing and other forms of [music](#) are central to Estonians' ethnic identity, with nearly half of all Estonians having participated in a song festival during their lifetime. Various events are held throughout the year representing all genres, but particularly contemporary, classical, and choral. Estonian composer, Arvo Pärt, is perhaps the most well-known musical figure outside the country. There has been a push to revive the tradition of [rune-songs](#) (*regilaul*) in the country, as well as the use of traditional instruments such as the bagpipe (*torupill*) and zither (*kannel*). Perhaps most interesting is the manifestation of this trend is the use of such traditional lyrics and instruments by the folk-metal band [Metsatöll](#).

Like other Nordic countries, Estonia is a major contributor to minimalist art, fashion, and [architecture](#); however, designers tend to be diligent about maintaining the country's bucolic character in their works which is often reflected in themes that glorify the peasantry, nature, and the medieval aesthetic. Nearly every town, no matter the size, will boast a museum and/or art gallery.

In line with their embrace of a "Nordic identity," Estonians tend to be quite reserved—even aloof—and emotional displays are uncommon, although Estonians can be quite headstrong in their own quiet way. Formality is rather common in relationships outside of family and close friends.

A sporting nation, cross-country skiing is particularly popular. Estonia is also home to one of the world's newest competitive sports, [kiiking](#). Invented in 1996, the activity involves swinging on a 360° fulcrum; as the arms of the swing are made longer, the sport becomes increasingly difficult.

Food and Drink

Estonian cuisine is reflective of the country's northern orientation with classic dishes including marinated eel (*marineeritud angerjas*), boiled pork in jelly (*sült*), and blood and barley sausage (*verivorst*). However, the country's long subjugation to foreign rule also manifests in the kitchen with an abundance of Scandinavian, German, and Slavic influences, including liberal helpings of black bread, salted fish, piroshky, sauerkraut, and potato salad. Local products—including perch, goat's cheese, rhubarb, leeks, and sorrel—figure heavily in the diet, thus reflecting the national commitment to sustainability.

Estonia possesses its own unique form of soft drink known as *kali*, an unfermented, non-alcoholic beer with a sweet taste and a passing resemblance to Coca-Cola. Estonians are dedicated beer-drinkers with [Saku](#) and [A. Le Coq](#) being the two most popular brands. Mead (*mõdu*) and vodka (*viin*) are also common tipples.

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