ESTONIA
Look and you will see!
Estonia

Estonia is like a wild strawberry: small, pristine, difficult to find... and those who don’t know how to, fail to recognise and value it. But once we possess it, once it’s ours, then it’s one of the best things of all.”

Toomas Hendrik Ilves, President of the Republic of Estonia

Official name: Republic of Estonia
Anthem: Mu isamaa, mu õnn ja rõõm
/My Fatherland, My Happiness and Joy/
(Fredrik Pacius)
Capital: Tallinn
Area: 45,227 km²
Population: 1,311,870
Official language: Estonian
Head of state: President Toomas Hendrik Ilves
System of government: Parliamentary republic
National day: 24 February (Independence Day, 1918)

Currency: Euro (EUR)
Flag: Blue-black-and-white
National bird: Barn swallow
National flower: Cornflower
Number of islands: 1521
Highest point: Suur Munamägi / Great Egg Hill/, 318 m
Member of NATO, EU, UN, OSCE, OECD & WTO

See more:
- www.eesti.ee
- www.estonia.eu
- https://www.facebook.com/eesti.ee
- http://xgis.maaamet.ee/xGis/XGis
- www.president.ee
- https://twitter.com/IlvesToomas
- www.valitsus.ee
- www.tallinn.ee
- www.estonianworld.com
What country is this? There are no mountains, just endless forests and swamps. But the people here are full of magic power and their songs are mysterious.”

Peeter Volkonski, musician, actor and poet

The population of Estonia is a little over a million – roughly as much as in cities like Milan, Dallas or Munich. Since there are so few of us, we’re almost like a family, because everyone knows almost everyone else. It can actually happen that the head of government was your classmate; that your neighbour’s an Olympic medallist; that your uncle’s been nominated for a Grammy; that your brother was a founder of Skype; and that your professor’s a nominee for the Nobel Prize in Literature this year.
What country is this, that seems so mysterious, like the setting of a fairytale, and where miracles and stories with happy endings are possible? Estonians work hard and try to figure out how to make everything they do even more efficient. Thanks to the development of IT, cutting-edge banking and government services are available here. Opening a bank account, starting a company, declaring taxes and registering your car is all a matter of minutes. Estonia has a painful history: independence was violently robbed from us, but it was also regained without a drop of blood. Scars do not disappear easily, but Estonians were given lemons and made lemonade. At one point, when our country became free again, we were handed a clean slate. Everything had to start from scratch again; decisions had to be made, risks had to be taken and rebuilding had to be done.

Efficient day-to-day living arrangements give Estonians more free time. However, instead of partying or going on holiday, Estonians are often drawn to the forest, an island or a deserted beach – to silence, purity and freedom. Feeling one’s roots and being in harmony with nature is a means of recharging your batteries, coming up with new ideas and securing a holistic and healthy way of life.

Estonians celebrate the longest day of the year with a party. On Midsummer Eve (23 June), people eat outdoors, jump over bonfires and search for an elusive fern blossom.
In order to understand the roots of Estonians and their loyalty to their country, it’s worth taking a look at their history. Estonians as a people are among those in Europe who have lived in their current area of settlement for the longest period. The first settlers came to this corner of the world around 11,000 years ago. Time and time again, Estonia has been ruled by foreign powers. Against all odds, the Republic of Estonia was proclaimed on 24 February 1918. Both the economy and culture of Estonia developed during the years of independence. Some two decades later, lashed by the winds of global politics, Estonia lost its independence for more than 50 years. A new national awakening began in the late 1980s. The so-called Singing Revolution culminated in the restoration of Estonia’s independence on 20 August 1991.

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

Arvo Pärt, composer

An estimated 49% of Estonians have taken part in the Song and Dance festival at least once in their lives.
Love of their native land is like a deep-rooted tree within Estonians. The Song festival has played a crucial role in the creation and preservation of national identity. While the first concert in 1869 was mostly a celebration dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the abolition of serfdom in Livonia, subsequent festivals were a source of unity and patriotism. During the turbulent years of the late 1980s, the Singing Revolution became a weapon in the bloodless fight for Estonia’s freedom. During the celebration, which has been added to UNESCO’s World Heritage List, tens of thousands of people participate as performers, and two to three times more take part as spectators. Besides enjoying the music, people come to the concert to share the magic of being together and breathing as one people.

- Folk costume from Western Hiiumaa island which is still worn on festive days and at important events.
- Farmhouses and barns are among Estonia’s contribution to the history of world architecture. People still live in renovated old buildings.

Muhu slippers – national footwear from Muhu island, made of leather and woollen cloth and adorned with floral embroidery
“There is at least one Estonian in every port.” What Ernest Hemingway once wrote is true, all over the world. Estonians have an inherent interest in what is happening elsewhere. Through the ages there have been those who came here, those who left and those who remained. Many different nationalities and ethnic groups – such as Estonian Swedes, Russian Old Believers, Baltic Germans and Jews – have lived here side by side and enriched the ways of life in Estonia with their culture and customs. Estonia is currently a home or workplace to 142 nationalities.

Great figures from the past and their deeds have had a role in shaping the future. Krusenstern, a four-masted sailing ship which traverses the world’s oceans, is like a tribute to Adam Johann von Krusenstern, who was born and raised in Estonia and who led an expedition around the globe in which scientific research – particularly the exploration of the shores of the Pacific Ocean and the native peoples living there – played an important role. Estonians’ curiosity about mountains, seas, space and unknown lands is just as passionate today as it was centuries ago when Fabian Gottlieb Benjamin von Bellingshausen from Saaremaa became one of the first people to reach Antarctica.

Greetings from the end of the world! The western part of the island of Hiiumaa is exposed to the sea, with the closest point beyond the horizon being 120 km away, in Finland.

See more:
- www.arvopart.ee
- www.erm.ee
- www.vm.ee
For young Estonians, the Internet is more than a service – it’s a symbol of democracy and freedom.”

Linnar Viik, IT visionary

**Access to the Internet** is considered a basic human right in Estonia. 98% of the country has Internet coverage, and there is high-speed WiFi in every library, café and long-distance bus. After Estonia regained its independence, an infrastructure was created which enabled people’s dealings with public authorities to be conducted online. Today, no Estonian could imagine spending hours, fraying their nerves and wasting money and paper on essential everyday affairs. Instead, they declare their taxes online, check their children’s grades in the e-school and vote in e-elections. We have e-government, an e-health system, an e-system for border crossing, mobile parking and a platform on which a company can be set up in just 15 minutes.

Paper-free meetings: e-government sessions save people time and are good for the environment, with all decisions made being available to interested parties online.
Estonia has shared its e-government technology and experience in Europe and beyond. The Estonian and Finnish governments have entered into reportedly the world’s first digitally signed agreement, according to which e-services will be ‘exported’ to Finland. This means that Estonia’s X-Road environment is already operating across national borders.

**Success stories sprout in Estonia.**
We have capable start-ups that are determined to emerge victorious from among the global competition of millions of young companies. The virtual fitting room Fits.me, the collapsible electric moped Stigo and the non-bank money transfer and currency exchange technology Transferwise are gaining popularity. You’re sure to hear about Plumbr, Weekdone, Marineexplore, Cloutex and many more new ideas as well.

“To come up with the next best thing in the world, it has to be a bit better than the best thing in the world today.”

Kristo Käärmann, founder of Transferwise
We all use **Skype**. Created by young Estonian technology enthusiasts and classmates, Skype has a symbolic value for Estonia. On the day Skype was launched, it was downloaded by 10,000 people; within two months that number had reached one million. The software, developed in Estonia, is now used around the world. Skype’s employees explain their idea: “We wanted to make it so simple that anyone would be able to install and use it, without having to know anything about firewalls, IP addresses or other technical concepts.”

Estonian children are as smart and eager to learn as their parents. This is evident from constantly improving results in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). In particular, Estonian kids excel in the field of science.

**HOW DO YOU RECOGNISE AN ESTONIAN?**

Humorous sites tend to list a number of ways that make it easy to recognise Estonians:

- it’s been ages since they last saw their actual passports or paper bus tickets;
- it’s been a long time since they held cash in their hands;
- they expect the Internet to be instantly accessible everywhere, in every country;
- they don’t recall there being other ways of paying for things besides electronically.

See more:

- http://www.skype.com/
- www.emta.ee
- www.valitsus.ee
- www.digilugu.ee
- http://fits.me/
- http://stigobike.com/
- https://transferwise.com/
- www.e-estonia.com
- www.vaatamaailma.ee
- www.studyinestonia.ee
A touch of nature

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

There’s still so much space and pristine nature in Estonia, while electricity and the Internet are available in just about every part of the country. This gives people the chance to lead a lifestyle that has long since become a rarity in many ‘old’ European countries. At my summer cottage I can take a shower in the morning, stick the dishes in the dishwasher, read the news on my tablet and then take a basket and spend hours in the forest or the bog picking mushrooms and cranberries without seeing a single person.”

Tiia Toomet, writer and founder of the Tartu Toy Museum

Estonia is one of the most densely forested countries in the world, with nearly half of its territory covered in firs, birches, pines, aspens and more. If all of this wealth were divided between the Estonian people, everyone would get 1.3 hectares. Forests form part of the Estonian identity. Respect for nature is instilled at an early age, which is why children are also involved in the “Estonia’s 100 Oaks” project – the result of which will be young oak groves towering in different parts of the country by the time we reach the 100th anniversary of our republic.

There can be no Christmas, no skiing, no winter sculptures – no real Estonian winter, in a word – without snow. People in Estonia are lucky to have the opportunity to experience four distinct seasons.

www.eesti.ee/ev95/et/ev100/Eesti-100-tamme
Estonians subconsciously share their ancestors’ belief that everything in nature – be it a tree, a stone, an animal or a bird – has a soul. Estonians have inherited skills for finding their way with the help of nature’s signs, predicting the weather and taking seasons into account. Every Estonian mother has natural remedies at home for colds: linden blossoms, raspberry canes, calendula and primroses. Tea made with these plants, together with your own honey, is the best way to fight the flu. Using edible forest and agricultural plants is a trend in cooking. Early nettles go into soups and ground elders into pastries, while spruce shoots are used to make wonderful syrup and rowan berries are used to make jam. Wild strawberries, chanterelles and sorrel grow on roadsides waiting to be picked. Estonia still has a pristine environment, and ‘eco’ has become a key word in food production and agriculture. Thus, everyone can share in these treats.

www.visitestonia.com

Estonia’s coastline in kilometres is as long as the journey from one end of Estonia to the other.
Estonians aren’t afraid of nature. On the contrary: if they want to relax, they go for a run in the forest or skating on the sea ice. As the ice can be quite thick in the depths of winter, the sea is often difficult to navigate. However, many hundreds of years have passed since people let themselves be isolated from the outside world – in the olden days, they used horse-drawn sleighs and ice routes for trading. The ice road from the island of Hiiumaa to the mainland is the longest in Europe (26 km). Skating marathons, skating trips and ice-fishing contests are held on the ice. Not even the bitter cold can stop enthusiasts from winter swimming and ice-hole bathing.

So that people and nature get along, it’s important to contribute to nature and take care of your surroundings. The clean-up campaign “Let’s do it!” – which was launched in Estonia as a civil initiative and attracted 50,000 volunteers in its first year, who came together on one day and collected litter from roadsides and forests – has now spread to every continent following Estonia’s lead. More than 100 countries and millions of volunteers have joined in. The new mission of “Let’s do it!” is to clean up the world’s seas as well.
Although Estonia does not have any high mountains or deep valleys, the landscape is nevertheless diverse with bogs, virgin forests, meadows, alvars, islets, limestone cliffs, islands and peninsulas. Many remain untouched by human hands and are abundant in species. There are five national parks in Estonia, where countless kilometres of boardwalks, recreation areas and camping and bonfire sites have been built for hikers. In Soomaa – the ‘Land of Bogs’ – for example, you can experience a fifth season: during the spring floods this area resembles Venice, with boats becoming the only means of transport for the local population. The national parks of Matsalu and Vilsandi are among the most important nesting and migratory stop-over points for waterfowl in Europe.

See more:
- http://letsdoitworld.org/
- www.looduskalender.ee
- www.rmk.ee
- www.eestitoit.ee
- www.en.eki.ee

A traditional summer treat – wild strawberries with milk and sugar.
Creativity

• music • literature • education • good deeds •

“...We strive to be trees in the soil of the world and to feel and take root in the place where our language and culture lie.”

Tõnu Kaljuste, conductor

This small patch of land on the shores of the Baltic Sea gives birth to creativity, enables spirituality to develop naturally and allows ideas to be expressed. To generate new ideas, brainstorming sessions, opinion festivals and the TeamLab, Brainstorm and Garage48 contests are held. Tradition and innovation are intertwined. Tallinn Music Week, the Black Nights Film Festival PÖFF, the Tallinn Architecture Biennale, Jazzkaar, Design Night and the Saaremaa Opera Days have become international meeting points. Estonia has a lot of talented people, whose creative work has made a name for the country around the world. Arvo Pärt, whose music speaks to many people, is without a doubt the most distinguished of them.

www.tmw.ee
www.looveesti.ee
www.arvopart.ee
2014.poff.ee/
Estonian design, fashion design, music and art are increasingly well-known and recognised around the world. One of the best examples of this is the International Fashion Showcase, which is organised during London Fashion Week and in which Estonia has twice won the prize for the best display.

Grammy awards, the most desired prize in international music, have been awarded to Estonian musicians on three occasions – always in the Choral Performance category, which testifies to the high level and traditions of our choral singing.

‘Estonia’ pianos and ‘Estelon’ speakers also present Estonia to the world.

WEAR ESTONIAN DESIGN
Karl Annus (wooden spectacle frames), Stuudio Nahk (designer footwear and accessories), Kriss Soonik (lingerie), Reet Aus (environmentally sustainable fashion), Marit Ilison (designer clothing), Mare Kelpman (textiles), Sille Sikmann (footwear)

Marit Ilison’s coats made of woollen blankets have won recognition on the international fashion design scene.

Every small idea can eventually grow into something big. To this end, the ‘Hooandja’ (‘Kick Start’) joint financing platform was created where everyone can contribute to the creation of a board game, a debut album or an art book, or make a donation to help build the roof of a community centre, construct a schooner or advance a project in which shabby walls are covered with (street) art.

See more:
- www.saaremaaopera.eu/et
- www.ajujaht.ee
- www.hooandja.ee
- www.lennusadam.eu
- www.ajaloomuuseum.ee
- www.teletorn.ee
- www.cca.ee/en/center
- www.disainikeskus.ee
- www.edl.ee/et
- www.jazzkaar.ee/et
- www.tab.ee/et
- garage48.org

‘Scheckmann’ is the unique and distinctive brand of footwear for chic men by Estonian designer Sille Sikmann.
You can really sense a medieval flavour in the Estonian capital, where the network of streets and boundaries of plots developed from the 11th to the 15th centuries have survived in virtually all of their beauty. And life abounds! You can drink coffee or taste the treats of chefs and confectioners, walk through the studios of textile and glass artists, visit a museum, enjoy a concert, drop in to the oldest operating pharmacy in Europe or admire the wonderful silhouettes of the city from a viewing platform. The modern architecture of Estonia is characterised by Nordic and minimalist features along with influences from coastal villages and farmsteads. The favourite materials are wood, brick and concrete. These were also the favourite materials of Louis Kahn, a world-renowned architect from Saaremaa in whose remembrance special days have been organised on the island.
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PRACTISE YOUR ESTONIAN!
- kuu-uurija – one who explores the Moon
- piparkook – gingerbread
- öökuninganna – night-blooming cereus
  (literally: queen of the night)
- önnelik – happy
- jääätis – ice cream
- terviseks! – cheers!
- torupill – bagpipe

READ SOME ESTONIAN LITERATURE
- Truth and Justice (A. H. Tammsaare)
- Border State (Tõnu Önnepalu)
- Sailing Against the Wind (Jaan Kross)
- The Poet and the Idiot, and other stories (Friedebert Tuglas)
- Selected poems (Jaan Kaplinski)
- Things in the Night (Mati Unt)
- The Scent of your Shadow (Kristiina Ehin)
- Mees, kes teadis uussisõnu /The Man Who Spoke Snakish/ (Andrus Kivirähk)
- Apteeker Melchior ja Oleviste mõistatus /Melchior the Apothecary and the Mystery of St Olaf’s Church/ (Indrek Hargla)
- The Shape of Time (Doris Kareva)

WATCH SOME ESTONIAN FILMS
- Tuukrid vihmas /Divers in the Rain/ (Priit & Olga Pärn)
- Sügisball /Autumn Ball/ (Veiko Õunpuu)
- Leiutajateküla Lotte /Lotte from Gadget-ville/ (Heiki Ernits & Janno Põldma)
- Kertu (Ilmar Raag)
- Õlimäe õied /Flowers from the Mount of Olives/ (Heilika Pikkov)
- Free Range (Veiko Õunpuu)
- Laulev revolutsioon /The Singing Revolution/ (James & Maureen Trusty)

Wild strawberry ice cream

600 g of wild strawberries
600 ml of 35% cream
250 g of sugar
1 tablespoon of vanilla sugar

Puree the wild strawberries and whisk, adding the cream and sugar. Freeze the mixture in an ice cream maker. If you don’t have an ice cream maker, pour the mixture into a container, whisk until fluffy and then freeze.