



Estonia

Introduction

Official Name: Republic of Estonia
Nationality: Estonian
Area: 45,226 square kilometers (17,462 square miles)
Languages: Estonian (official), Russian
Currency: kroon (EEK)
Location: Eastern Europe, bordered by Latvia and Russia with coastline on the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Finland

Statistical Information

Population	1.32 million
0-14 years	15 percent
15-64 years	67.5 percent
65+ years	17.5 percent
Birth rate	10 births/1,000
Death rate	13 deaths/1,000
Fertility rate	1.4 children/woman
Pop. growth rate	-0.635 percent
Life expectancy	72.3 years
Literacy	99.8 percent
HIV/AIDS rate	1.1 percent
Below poverty line	5 percent
Ethnic groups	67.9 percent Estonian 25.6 percent Russian 2.1 percent Ukrainian 1.3 percent Belarusian 0.9 percent Finn 2.2 percent other
Religion	13.6 percent Evangelical Lutheran 12.8 percent Orthodox 1.4 percent Baptist, other Christian 34.1 percent unaffiliated 32 percent other 6.1 percent none

Economy

Estonia entered the European Union in 2004. It has a modern, market-based economy and one of the highest per capita income levels in Central and

Eastern Europe. Estonia has very strong electronics and telecommunications sectors, and has strong trade relationships with Finland, Sweden, and Germany. The country has enjoyed balanced budgets and low public debt under the current government.

Government

Capital: Tallinn

Estonia is a parliamentary republic. The president is chief of state and is elected by Parliament to serve a five-year term. The prime minister serves as head of government and is nominated by the president and approved by Parliament. The legislature consists of the unicameral Parliament, or Riigikogu, which has 101 members elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms.

Climate

Estonia has a temperate maritime climate, with wet, moderate winters and cool summers. The country experiences four seasons of nearly equal length. July is the warmest month, and February the coldest. Rainfall is heaviest during late summer.

Environmental Concerns

Estonia experiences air pollution due to sulfur dioxide emissions from oil-shale burning plants in the northeast. The country has been successfully working to improve emission levels; emissions in 2000 were 80 percent less than in 1980. The amount of unpurified wastewater discharged into clean bodies of water in 2000 was only one twentieth of the 1980 amount. Estonia has started up new wastewater treatment plants, which will continue to reduce the pollution levels of wastewater. In some areas, coastal seawater is also polluted.

History

Ethnic Estonians settled in the country before the time of Christ. In the first century A.D., they were mentioned by the Roman historian Tacitus, who called them Aesti.

In the 13th century, the Danes formed an alliance with the German order of the Livonian Brothers of the Sword, a military and religious order founded in 1202 for the purpose of the conquest and Christianization of the Baltic lands. The alliance entered Estonia with the intention of conquering the region and bringing Christianity to the pagan tribes.

The Danes founded the city of Reval (now Tallinn) in 1219, and proceeded to introduce Christianity and Western European culture to the Estonians. Denmark claimed the northern portion of Estonia, while the Livonian knights occupied the southern territory. In 1346, the Danes sold their portion of Estonia to the Livonian Brothers of the Sword.

The Protestant Reformation, which began in 1517, resulted in great change in the Baltic regions. By the 1520s, Reformation ideas were well known, and language, education, religion, and politics were transformed. Church services were conducted in the vernacular, rather than in Latin.

Estonia remained under feudal rule by the knights and Hanseatic merchants until 1561, when the order of the Livonian Brothers of the Sword was dissolved. The knights ceased to rule, but most retained their large estates.

Northern Estonia passed to Swedish rule, while Poland ruled the remainder of the country for a brief period. The Treaty of Altmark in 1629 ended the first Polish-Swedish War and ceded all of Estonia to the Swedes. The lives of Estonian peasants, who had been reduced to virtual serfdom under the rule of the German knights, began to improve under Swedish rule.

In 1710, Peter I of Russia conquered the territory. Russian possession was made official in 1721 by the Treaty of Nystad. The Russians instituted some land reforms, but the German nobles, or Baltic barons, continued to treat Estonian peasants as serfs. German nobles and merchants continued to control the majority of the region's wealth.

During the 19th century, Estonia began to industrialize. Many rail lines were laid, and the port city of Tallinn increased in importance. In the mid-19th century, Estonian feelings of nationalism began to arise, but they were countered by Russification, Russia's attempt to force Russian culture and customs on its conquered territories. The policy of Russification sparked rebellions and prompted emigration, mostly to the United States and Canada.

Estonia played an important role in the Russian Revolution of 1905, a series of strikes and protests against Tsarist rule. After the revolution was

suppressed, Russia severely repressed the instigators; Estonia suffered heavily for its role in the revolution.

In the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1917, which toppled the tsar and placed the Bolsheviks in power, the Russian government set up a puppet Communist government led by Jaan Anvelt to rule Estonia. The puppet government failed to extend its authority beyond the city of Tallinn.

In February of 1918, Estonia proclaimed its independence from Russia. Shortly thereafter, in the course of World War I, the Germans invaded and occupied the country. After Germany surrendered to the Allies in November of 1918, Estonia again proclaimed itself an independent democratic republic. The Estonians proceeded to drive out the invading Russian Red Army.

Soviet Russia recognized Estonia's independence in 1920, in the Peace of Tartu. The new republic was unable to achieve political stability, and experienced a succession of 20 short-lived coalition governments from 1920 to 1933. In 1933, a new constitution granted the president immense authority. Political parties were outlawed in 1934, and President Konstantin Päts set up an authoritarian regime.

A more democratic constitution was written in 1938, but the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939 placed the Baltic countries once again under Soviet hegemony. In September, the Soviet Union set up military bases in Estonia. By June 1940, Estonia was completely occupied by Soviet troops. Estonia was annexed by the Soviet Union as a constituent republic. During the first year of Soviet occupation, over 60,000 residents of Estonia were killed or deported.

In June 1941, Estonian soldiers fought alongside German troops as part of the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Estonia was occupied by Germany for much of World War II.

In 1944, Estonia was reoccupied by the Soviets. As in 1940, Soviet troops killed or deported thousands of Estonians. In the late 1940s, the Soviet Union began to collectivize Estonia's agriculture and nationalize industry. The Estonian economy was steadily integrated into the economy of the Soviet Union, despite strong resistance and protests from the Estonians.

In March of 1990, the Estonian Supreme Soviet declared that the 1940 annexation of Estonia by the Soviet Union was invalid. In 1991, Estonia declared its independence from the Soviet Union. A new constitution was written and put into effect in 1992, and Estonia elected Lennart Meri as president. The last Russian troops were withdrawn in 1994.

In 2004, Estonia joined the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

In March of 2007, the decision to move a Soviet war memorial (and soldiers buried there) from downtown Tallinn caused several days of rioting by ethnic Russians. Russia retaliated economically, and Estonian government and computer facilities experienced cyberattacks.

Ethnic Groups

Ethnic Estonians comprise roughly 67.9 percent of Estonia's total population. Estonians are closely related to the Finns. Many belong to the Lutheran tradition of Christianity, due to the strong influence of the Protestant Reformation in Estonia.

Around 25.6 percent of Estonians are Russian. Many ethnic Russians in Estonia live in the capital city of Tallinn or in urban industrial regions in northeast Estonia. In 2006, it was estimated that a little over a third of these people are Estonian citizens, just under a third are Russian citizens, and the remaining third have undefined citizenship.

Estonia also has populations of Ukrainians and Belarusians, along with smaller groups of Jews, Latvians, Lithuanians, and Finns.

Religion

Many Estonians are not affiliated with a church, or do not consider themselves religious. When the Soviet Union occupied Estonia in 1940, most Christian churches and organizations were disbanded, church property was confiscated, and church leaders were sent to Siberia. Many church buildings were extensively damaged as a result of fighting during World War II.

The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church has the largest number of congregants in Estonia, with around 13.6 percent of the population. This is due to the strong influence of the Protestant Reformation and the teachings of Martin Luther in Estonia during the 16th century.

About 12.8 percent of the population belongs to the Estonian Orthodox Church, which is divided into two distinct branches. During Soviet occupation in the 1940s, Estonian Orthodox congregations, once part of an autonomous Orthodox church under the patriarchy of Constantinople, were turned into a diocese within the Russian Orthodox Church, called the Estonian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate. The leadership of the autonomous Estonian Orthodox Church went into exile in Sweden, and set up the synod of the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church as an exarchate under Constantinople. In 1993, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Estonian independence, the

Orthodox Church of Estonia in Exile was once again recognized by Constantinople as the successor of the pre-1940 autonomous Estonian Orthodox Church. That decision increased deeply felt tensions between the Russian Orthodox Church and the ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople. Individual Estonian congregations had to decide whether they wished to remain under Moscow's patriarchate or return to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The majority of Estonian Orthodox believers, as ethnic Russians, chose to remain under the patriarchate of Moscow.

There is also a strong Baptist community in Estonia. Though there is no Reformed church in Estonia, the Reformed Church in America has assigned a pastor to work with the Baptist church and supports Baptist youth and outreach work. There is a strong Methodist Church in Estonia as well as several Seventh-Day Adventist congregations. Estonia's small Roman Catholic community was visited by Pope John Paul II during a tour of the Baltic states in September 1993. There is a Jewish synagogue in Tallinn.

Culture

Food—In the fall and winter, soups and stews are common fare, and potatoes are a staple. During the spring and summer, fresh tomatoes and cucumbers are favorites. Sandwiches are commonly seen as breakfast food, and coffee is a very popular drink. Many people grow fruits and vegetables during the summer, and can what remains in the fall. Vodka is one of the most common alcoholic beverages in Estonia.

Social status—Economic inequality increased rapidly from 1991 to 1996. Wealthy Estonians enjoy expensive cars, designer clothes, and other tokens of material wealth. Nearly all Estonians have cell phones and internet access.

Marriage—There are very few restrictions on marriage, although marriage to a non-Estonian, especially to a Russian, is often not welcomed. It is estimated that half of all Estonian marriages end in divorce.

Education—Education is highly valued, and many children learn to read, write, and do simple math at home before even entering school. Higher education is similarly valued and raises one's social status.

Etiquette—Estonians generally maintain space between their bodies in public interaction, and speak in relatively low voices. Some Estonians see Russians as being disrespectful of personal space.

Dress

Estonians today dress in Western styles. Traditional clothing is reserved for festivals and national holidays. Traditional dress varies slightly in different

areas of Estonia. Women generally wear wide skirts, which can be solid-colored or striped, and a long-sleeved blouse with embroidery on the cuffs. Pot-caps and stocking caps are common traditional headgear. Married women wear aprons and cover their heads, while unmarried women do not wear aprons and used only ribbons as decoration in their hair. Traditionally, Estonian women wore strings of beads made of colorful glass or stone; these beads were worn on every occasion.

Travel/Transportation

Many rural roads in Estonia are not well-lit at night. Additional hazards on rural roads can include large wild animals, such as deer or moose, and icy roads during the winter. Roads are usually treated and cleared of snow during the winter, but can still be slippery, as in the U.S. and Canada.

Estonian law requires all drivers to stop for pedestrians in marked crosswalks. By law, cars must always drive with headlights turned on, and all occupants of a car must wear seatbelts. The speed limit is 50 kilometers per hour in urban areas and 90 kilometers per hour in rural areas. Right turns on red lights are not allowed, unless a green arrow is displayed.

Illness/Injury

The quality of medical care in Estonia is continually improving. Estonia has many highly trained doctors and other medical professionals. Some hospitals and clinics struggle with a lack of resources and equipment.

Crime

Estonia has a relatively low rate of crime. Travelers should take the same precautions against pickpockets as in any major city, especially in Tallinn's Old Town area. Many Estonian police officers speak very limited or no English.

Safety and Security

There is occasional unrest in Estonia between people of Estonian and Russian ethnicity. Extreme conservative elements in the Estonian community attacked gay protesters during a recent demonstration in Tallinn's Old Town. Some tourists were injured in the resulting turmoil. Estonia has not experienced any terrorist incidents or threats.

Entry/Exit Requirements

A valid passport is required to enter Estonia. American and Canadian citizens do not need a visa to travel to Estonia for business or pleasure for up to 90 days.

Estonia is a member of a group of countries known as the Schengen Zone. By law, American or Canadian visitors may enter any one of the Schengen countries

and travel freely among them for a period of 90 days. Non-EU visitors should obtain a stamp in their passport at the initial port of entry to the Schengen Zone, but as some airports do not have an official on staff to stamp passports, travelers may have to ask for the stamp. Schengen Zone countries include Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, and Sweden.

For more information on visas and Estonian entry and exit regulations, contact the Estonian Embassy at 2131 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20008.

Immunizations

There are no required immunizations to enter Estonia. Consult a travel health professional to determine if you should consider anything beyond routine vaccinations.

Special Circumstances

After dark, pedestrians in Estonia are legally required to wear reflectors. Reflectors are inexpensive and can be purchased at most supermarkets and shops. Reflectors that meet legal requirements will include a reference to European safety standard EN13356 on the packaging.

Cash is acceptable nearly everywhere in Estonia; the country plans to adopt the euro in 2009 or 2010, but for the present time, the kroon remains the standard Estonian unit of money. Credit cards are widely accepted, and ATMs will accept most major U.S. and Canadian bankcards. Most establishments in Estonia will not accept a check drawn on a U.S. or Canadian bank.

Electricity

Estonia uses 230V/50Hz power, so a power converter will be necessary to use many American appliances in Estonia. Recently made cell-phone chargers and laptop computers are designed to work with multiple types of power sources and should not need a converter. The most common plug type found in Estonia is type F; type C outlets may be found in older buildings. Travelers will need a set of adapter plugs to fit American types A and B plugs in Estonian outlets.