



Estonia

A small, green northern country of forests, bogs and more than two thousand islands, with a medieval capital, a famous love of choral singing and some of the most digital public services in the world.

AT A GLANCE

Facts to know

CAPITAL

Tallinn

POPULATION

About 1.36 million (1 January 2026)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Estonian

CURRENCY

Euro, since 1 January 2011

AREA

About 45,300 km²

GOVERNMENT

Parliamentary republic

HIGHEST MOUNTAIN

Suur Munamägi ('Big Egg Mountain'), 318 m, in the south-east near the borders with Latvia and Russia. It is also the highest point in the Baltic states

LONGEST RIVER

The Võhandu, a little over 160 km, the longest river that lies entirely within Estonia. It flows into Lake Peipus

NEIGHBOURS

Latvia and Russia by land. Finland lies across the Gulf of Finland, only about 80 km from Tallinn to Helsinki, and Sweden across the Baltic Sea to the west

DRIVES ON THE

Right

CALLING CODE

+372

A 45-minute trip to Estonia

Everything you need is in this pack. No preparation beyond printing. Adapt the timing to your group.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 0 to 5 min | Welcome. Show the map page and find Estonia together. Ask: who has been there, or knows someone from there? |
| 5 to 15 min | Read the facts at a glance, then three moments from the story:
9000 BC: First settlers at Pulli; 1869: The first song festival; 2011: The euro arrives. |
| 15 to 25 min | At the table: talk about Mulgi porridge and Mulgi sauerkraut. Idea: bring a small taste (bread, cheese, fruit, tea) if your kitchen can help. |
| 25 to 30 min | Say it like a local: practise "Tere" (Hello), "Tere hommikust" (Good morning), "Tere õhtust" (Good evening). Everyone says them together. |
| 30 to 40 min | Quiz: read the questions aloud, or play the big-screen version at https://worldstroll.com/countries/estonia/group . No scores needed. |
| 40 to 45 min | Talk about it (questions page), then stamp or sign everyone's passport page. |

You will need

- This printed pack (one per table, or one each)
- Pens for the quiz
- Optional: a world map or globe, a small tasting, music from the country

Estonia and its cities



- Tallinn (Harju County): The Old Town and Toompea hill, Kadriorg Palace and park, Tech companies such as Bolt and Wise
- Tartu (Tartu County): The University of Tartu, founded in 1632, The Estonian National Museum, The birthplace of the song festivals
- Narva (Ida-Viru County): Hermann Castle, facing Ivangorod fortress across the river, Its border location
- Pärnu (Pärnu County): Its long sandy beach, Spas and rehabilitation centres, The nickname 'Summer Capital'
- Viljandi (Viljandi County): The Viljandi Folk Music Festival in late July, The castle ruins, White roses, the town symbol
- Rakvere (Lääne-Viru County): Rakvere Castle, with medieval life shown for visitors, The Aurochs sculpture
- Kuressaare (Saare County (Saaremaa)): Kuressaare Castle, Spas, Trips to the Kaali meteorite crater
- Haapsalu (Lääne County): Healing sea mud, used since 1825, The bishop's castle, The August Blues Festival
- Võru (Võru County): Kalevipoeg and Kreutzwald, The Võro dialect and culture, The nearby hill Suur Munamägi

A short history of Estonia

Estonia's story runs from Stone Age hunters on the Pärnu river, through crusades, Hanseatic trade and centuries of Danish, German, Swedish and Russian rule, to a national awakening in song, two declarations of independence and a peaceful return to freedom in 1991.

9000 BC **First settlers at Pulli**

About 11,000 years ago, after the ice of the last glacial era had melted, people settled at Pulli on the banks of the Pärnu river in south-west Estonia. It is the oldest known settlement in the country.

1219 **Danes capture Lindanise**

King Valdemar II of Denmark landed at Lindanise, on the site of today's Tallinn, and defeated the Estonians. A Danish legend says the Danish flag fell from the sky during the battle, and the name Tallinn is often explained as 'Danish castle'.

1227 **Saaremaa is the last to fall**

After years of raids and revolts, the island county of Saaremaa surrendered to the crusaders, the last Estonian county to do so. The land was divided between Denmark, the German knights and bishops.

1248 **Tallinn gets town rights**

Reval, as Tallinn was then called, adopted the law of Lübeck and received full town rights. It became a rich member of the Hanseatic League, trading between Novgorod and the cities of the west.

1343 **St George's Night Uprising**

On St George's Night, 23 April 1343, Estonians in the north, and later on the islands, rose up against their foreign rulers. The rebellion was crushed by 1345, and in 1346 the Danish king sold his Estonian lands to the Teutonic Order.

1561 **Northern Estonia turns to Sweden**

During the Livonian War, Tallinn and the nobles of northern Estonia swore loyalty to the Swedish king. Swedish rule, later remembered as 'the good old Swedish time', lasted until the early 18th century.

- 1632** **University of Tartu founded**
King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden signed the founding act of a university in Tartu, then called Dorpat. It is still the country's oldest and best-known university.
- 1710** **Russia takes Estonia**
During the Great Northern War, Russia under Peter the Great conquered the whole of Estonia. It remained part of the Russian Empire for the next two centuries.
- 1869** **The first song festival**
The first Estonia-wide song festival was held in Tartu, with 822 singers and 56 brass players. It became a symbol of the national awakening, and the tradition continues today.
- 1918** **Independence declared**
On 24 February 1918, between the retreat of the Russian troops and the arrival of the German army, the Salvation Committee declared the independent Republic of Estonia. The day is still the national holiday.
- 1920** **Peace Treaty of Tartu**
After the War of Independence, Estonia and Soviet Russia signed a peace treaty in Tartu on 2 February 1920. Russia promised to give up all claims to Estonia for ever.
- 1940** **Soviet occupation**
Following the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviet Union occupied Estonia in June 1940 and annexed it in August. Occupation, war and deportations followed, and Estonia lost about a quarter of its population in the Second World War.
- 1989** **The Baltic Way**
On 23 August 1989 about two million Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians joined hands in a human chain about 675 km long across the three countries, a peaceful protest against Soviet rule.
- 1991** **Independence restored**
During the failed coup in Moscow, Estonia declared the restoration of its independence on 20 August 1991, crowning the 'Singing Revolution'. It joined the United Nations the following month.

2004

Joins the EU and NATO

Estonia joined NATO on 29 March 2004 and the European Union later the same year.

2011

The euro arrives

On 1 January 2011 Estonia adopted the euro, replacing the kroon and becoming the 17th member of the eurozone.

What people eat in Estonia

Estonian food is northern farm and coast cooking: dark rye bread, pork, potatoes, barley, dairy and fish from the sea and lakes, with German, Swedish, Russian and Finnish influences. A festive meal starts with a cold table of pickles, cold meats, sausages, potato salad, herring and the pink beetroot and herring salad called rosolje. Then comes a soup or a hot main course, always with rye bread on the side, and it ends with something sweet with coffee. In summer people eat everything fresh from the garden and grill outdoors, and in winter jams, pickles and preserves come to the table.

Mulgi porridge (mulgipuder)

Mulgimaa, in southern Estonia

Mashed potatoes cooked together with pearl barley and topped with fried pork. It is simple, filling farm food from the south.

Mulgi sauerkraut (mulgikapsad)

Mulgimaa, in southern Estonia

Sauerkraut slowly stewed with lard, pork and pearl barley until soft. It is often served with potatoes.

Sprat sandwich (kiluvõileib)

The Baltic coast, now eaten all over Estonia

An open sandwich of dark rye bread with butter, spiced salted sprats and a slice of boiled egg.

Blood sausage (verivorst)

All of Estonia, above all at Christmas

Sausage made of pig's blood, barley groats, pork and marjoram, baked in the oven until the skin is crisp. It is eaten with lingonberry jam, and sometimes with butter or sour cream.

Jellied pork (sült)

All of Estonia

Pieces of pork set in a soft, clear aspic made from the gelatinous parts of the pig. It is served cold with horseradish or strong mustard, or with a little diluted vinegar poured over.

Dark rye bread (leib, or rukkileib)

All of Estonia

Dense, dark sourdough bread made from rye. It is eaten with almost every savoury meal, from breakfast to dinner.

Small savoury pies (pirukad)

All of Estonia

Small pastries, often made with puff pastry, filled with meat, cabbage, carrots, rice and egg, cheese or fish. They are sold in every bakery and are often served with a cup of clear broth.

Grilled pork skewers (šāšlōkk)

Arrived from the Soviet Union, now eaten all over Estonia

Chunks of marinated pork grilled on skewers over an open fire. It is a favourite at summer barbecues, including Midsummer.

Kama (kama)

Southern Estonia, now eaten everywhere

A fine flour of roasted barley, rye, oats and peas, stirred into buttermilk, kefir or milk and eaten without cooking. With sugar and berries it becomes a light, nutty dessert or breakfast.

Curd snack (kohuke)

Popular across the former Soviet Union, much loved in Estonia

A small bar of sweetened curd cheese, often filled with jam or caramel and coated in chocolate. It is sold in the dairy section of every shop and must be kept cold.

Kringel (kringel)

All of Estonia

A large, braided ring of sweet yeast dough, often flavoured with cardamom. It is one of the most popular Estonian cakes and is served in slices with coffee.

Gingerbread biscuits (piparkoogid)

All of Estonia, at Christmas

Thin, crisp, spiced gingerbread biscuits in many shapes, sometimes decorated with white icing. They are baked and eaten above all at Christmas.

Birch sap (kasemahl)

Forests and farms all over Estonia

The clear, slightly sweet sap tapped from birch trees. It is drunk fresh, or left to ferment for a few days, when it turns pleasantly sour.

Vana Tallinn (Vana Tallinn)

Tallinn

A sweet, dark liqueur made with Jamaican rum, herbs and spices. It is served on the rocks, in coffee, in cocktails or in mulled wine.

GOOD MANNERS

At the table

- Before eating, people wish each other 'Head isu' (enjoy your meal).
- When glasses are raised, people say 'Terviseks', which means 'to your health'.
- Dark rye bread comes to the table with almost every savoury dish.
- A festive meal begins with a cold table of pickles, cold meats, potato salad and herring before any hot dish.
- At Midsummer, on the night of 23 to 24 June, people gather around bonfires to grill, eat and drink late into the light night.

Mulgi porridge

Mashed potatoes cooked together with pearl barley and topped with fried pork. It is simple, filling farm food from the south.

Ingredients

- 150 g pearl barley, rinsed
- 1 kg floury potatoes, peeled and cut in chunks
- 200 g smoked streaky bacon or pork belly, diced
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 30 g butter
- Salt

Method

1. Put the barley in a large pot with about 1 litre of salted water and simmer for 20 minutes.
2. Add the potatoes and a little more water if needed, so that everything is just covered. Cook for another 25 to 30 minutes, until the potatoes and barley are soft.
3. Meanwhile, fry the bacon in a pan until golden, then add the onion and fry gently until soft and lightly browned.
4. Drain off most of the remaining cooking water, keeping a little. Mash the potatoes and barley together with the butter, adding some of the cooking water to make a soft porridge. Season with salt.
5. Serve in bowls with the hot bacon, onion and fat spooned over the top.

Mulgi sauerkraut

Sauerkraut slowly stewed with lard, pork and pearl barley until soft. It is often served with potatoes.

Ingredients

- 1 kg sauerkraut
- 600 g pork belly or pork shoulder, cut in large pieces
- 100 g pearl barley, rinsed
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- About 700 ml water
- Salt, and boiled potatoes to serve

Method

1. Put the sauerkraut, pork, barley and onion in a heavy pot and pour over the water.
2. Bring to the boil, then cover and simmer very gently for about 1.5 hours, stirring now and then and adding a little water if it gets dry.
3. When the pork is tender and the barley soft, stir in the sugar and taste for salt.
4. Serve hot with boiled potatoes. It tastes even better reheated the next day.

Sprat sandwich

An open sandwich of dark rye bread with butter, spiced salted sprats and a slice of boiled egg.

Ingredients

- 8 slices of dark rye bread
- Soft butter
- 16 to 24 spiced salted sprat fillets (or canned smoked sprats, see the last step)
- 3 hard-boiled eggs, sliced
- A small red onion, finely chopped, and some fresh dill or chives

Method

1. Butter the slices of rye bread.
2. Lay two or three sprat fillets on each slice.
3. Put a slice of hard-boiled egg on top of the fish.
4. Finish with a little red onion and chopped dill or chives, and serve at once.
5. Spiced sprats are cured in salt and spices, not cooked. Pregnant women, young children, older people and anyone with a weak immune system should use canned smoked sprats instead, which are cooked.

Kama

A fine flour of roasted barley, rye, oats and peas, stirred into buttermilk, kefir or milk and eaten without cooking. With sugar and berries it becomes a light, nutty dessert or breakfast.

Ingredients

- 8 tablespoons kama flour (sold in Baltic and Nordic shops)
- 500 ml kefir or buttermilk
- 2 to 3 tablespoons sugar or honey
- 200 g blueberries or other berries
- Whipped cream, if you like

Method

1. Put the kefir or buttermilk in a bowl and stir in the sugar or honey.
2. Add the kama flour a spoonful at a time, stirring well so that no lumps form. It should be thick like a yoghurt.
3. Fold in most of the berries.
4. Spoon into glasses, top with the rest of the berries and a little whipped cream if you like, and serve at once.

Kringel

A large, braided ring of sweet yeast dough, often flavoured with cardamom. It is one of the most popular Estonian cakes and is served in slices with coffee.

Ingredients

- 500 g plain flour
- 250 ml lukewarm milk and 7 g dried yeast
- 1 egg, 75 g sugar, 75 g soft butter and a pinch of salt
- 1 teaspoon ground cardamom
- For the filling: 100 g soft butter, 80 g sugar and 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 1 beaten egg for brushing

Method

1. Mix the yeast into the warm milk. Add the flour, egg, sugar, butter, salt and cardamom and knead into a soft, smooth dough. Cover and leave to rise for about 1 hour, until doubled.
2. Roll the dough out into a rectangle about 30 by 50 cm. Spread with the soft butter and sprinkle with the sugar and cinnamon.
3. Roll it up from the long side into a tight log. Cut the log in half along its length with a sharp knife, leaving one end joined.
4. Twist the two halves around each other with the cut sides facing up, then shape into a ring or a figure of eight on a lined baking tray.
5. Leave to rise for 30 minutes, brush with beaten egg and bake at 200°C for 20 to 25 minutes, until golden. Cool a little before slicing.

Useful phrases

Tere

TEH-reh · Hello

Tere hommikust

TEH-reh HOHM-mee-koost · Good morning

Tere õhtust

TEH-reh UHH-toost · Good evening

Head ööd

HEH-ahd URD · Good night

Head aega

HEH-ahd AH-eh-gah · Goodbye (literally 'have a good time')

Nägemist

NA-geh-meest · See you, goodbye

Kuidas läheb?

KOO-ee-dahs LA-hehb · How are you?

Hästi, aitäh

HAS-tee, AI-tah · Fine, thank you

Minu nimi on ...

MEE-noo NEE-mee ohn · My name is ...

Meeldiv tutvuda

MEHL-deev TOOT-voo-dah · Nice to meet you

Kas te räägite inglise keelt?

KAHS teh RAA-gee-teh EENG-lee-seh KEHLT · Do you speak English?

Ma ei saa aru

MAH ay SAH AH-roo · I don't understand

Kui palju see maksab?

KOO-ee PAHL-yoo SEH MAHK-sahb · How much does this cost?

Kus on tualett?

KOOS ohn TWAH-let · Where is the toilet?

Arve, palun

AHR-veh, PAH-loon · The bill, please

See oli maitsev

SEH OH-lee MAIT-sehv · It was delicious

Head isu!

HEH-ahd EE-soo · Enjoy your meal!

Terviseks!

TEHR-vee-sehks · Cheers! (literally 'to health')

Appi!

AHP-pee · Help!

Things you might not know

1. The Skype software was written by four Estonian developers, Ahti Heinla, Priit Kasesalu, Jaan Tallinn and Toivo Annus, for founders from Sweden and Denmark. It was first released in 2003 and retired by Microsoft in 2025.
2. In 2005 Estonia became the first country in the world to hold nationwide binding internet voting, in its local elections. In the 2023 parliamentary election, more than half of all votes were cast online.
3. Since 1 December 2014, people from anywhere in the world can apply to become an 'e-resident' of Estonia and use its online services to run a company, without living there.
4. Estonia has 2,355 islands, counting those in lakes and rivers, and 2,222 of them are in the Baltic Sea. The largest is Saaremaa.
5. Kiiking, an Estonian sport invented by Ado Kosk in 1993, means swinging a giant steel swing all the way over the top in a full circle. The winner is the one who can do it with the longest swing arms.
6. The national song festival has been held since 1869, usually every five years. The joint choir has had more than 30,000 singers performing for an audience of 80,000.
7. On 23 August 1989, about two million people held hands in the Baltic Way, a human chain about 675 km long through Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.
8. The Kaali crater on Saaremaa was made by a meteorite, by the main estimate about 3,500 years ago. It is one of the few meteorite impacts known to have happened in a populated area.
9. The highest point in Estonia, and in all three Baltic states, is only 318 metres high. Its name, Suur Munamägi, means 'Big Egg Mountain' because of its round shape.
10. Unlike Latvian and Russian, the languages of its land neighbours, Estonian is not an Indo-European language; its close relative is Finnish. It has no grammatical gender, no separate future tense and fourteen noun cases.
11. The Estonian flag is called 'sinimustvalge', simply 'blue-black-white'. It flies from the Tall Hermann tower in Tallinn, raised every day at sunrise to the sound of the national anthem.

12. Forests cover about half of Estonia. The national bird is the barn swallow, and the cornflower has been the national flower since 1969.
13. Lake Peipus, on the border with Russia, is the largest lake in Europe shared by two countries and the fifth-largest lake in Europe.

TALK ABOUT IT

Questions for the group

- Have you ever been to Estonia, or has someone in your family? What do you remember?
- Have you ever tasted Mulgi porridge or Mulgi sauerkraut? What is a dish you remember from a trip?
- The Baltic Way (1989). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Independence restored (1991). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Have you seen Historic Centre (Old Town) of Tallinn, in person or in pictures? Which famous place would you most like to see?
- If you could spend one day in any city of Estonia, which would it be and why?

QUIZ

How well do you know Estonia?

Circle the right answer. The answers are on the last page.

1. What are the colours of the Estonian flag, from top to bottom?

- A) White, blue, red
- B) Blue, white, black
- C) Black, blue, white
- D) Blue, black, white

2. The University of Tartu was founded by a king of Sweden.

- A) True
- B) False

3. 'Head isu' is said before a meal and means 'enjoy your meal'.

- A) True
- B) False

4. Which fortress stands directly across the river from Hermann Castle in Narva?

- A) Rakvere
- B) Toompea
- C) Ivangorod
- D) Kuressaare

5. What goes on top of the rye bread in a classic Estonian kiluvõileib?

- A) Smoked salmon and cream cheese
- B) Spiced sprats and a slice of boiled egg
- C) Blood sausage and lingonberry jam
- D) Ham and pickled cucumber

6. Estonia adopted the euro on 1 January 2011.

- A) True
- B) False

7. Estonian is a close relative of which language?

- A) Finnish
- B) Swedish
- C) Russian
- D) Latvian

8. Which country's king captured the site of today's Tallinn in 1219?

- A) Sweden
- B) Poland
- C) Denmark
- D) Norway

9. What does Toompea Castle in Tallinn house today?

- A) The Estonian parliament
- B) The president's summer home
- C) The University of Tallinn
- D) The national art museum

10. The Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Tallinn was built in the Middle Ages.

- A) True
- B) False

11. What do you do in the Estonian sport of kiiking?

- A) Swing a giant swing all the way over the top
- B) Carry your wife over an obstacle course
- C) Race across a frozen lake on skates
- D) Throw a heavy log as far as possible

12. Which of these is a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Estonia?

- A) Lahemaa National Park
- B) Rakvere Castle
- C) The Historic Centre (Old Town) of Tallinn
- D) Kadriorg Palace

Quiz answers

1. D) Blue, black, white

The flag is blue, black and white, and Estonians call it 'sinimustvalge', blue-black-white.

2. True

True. King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden signed the university's founding act in 1632.

3. True

True. 'Head isu' is the Estonian way of wishing everyone at the table a good meal.

4. C) Ivangorod

The Russian fortress of Ivangorod faces Hermann Castle across the Narva river, where the border runs today.

5. B) Spiced sprats and a slice of boiled egg

A kiluvõileib is rye bread with butter, spiced sprats and a slice of boiled egg, a must on Independence Day.

6. True

True. The euro replaced the Estonian kroon on 1 January 2011, making Estonia the 17th eurozone member.

7. A) Finnish

Estonian and Finnish are closely related Finnic languages. Latvian, Russian and Swedish are Indo-European.

8. C) Denmark

King Valdemar II of Denmark defeated the Estonians at Lindanise in 1219. A Danish legend says the Danish flag fell from the sky during the battle.

9. A) The Estonian parliament

Toompea Castle houses the Estonian parliament, the Riigikogu, and the national flag flies from its Tall Hermann tower.

10. False

False. The Orthodox cathedral was built in 1894 to 1900, when Estonia was part of the Russian Empire.

11. A) Swing a giant swing all the way over the top

In kiiking you swing a giant swing all the way over the top in a full circle. It was invented by Ado Kosk in 1993.

12. C) The Historic Centre (Old Town) of Tallinn

The Historic Centre (Old Town) of Tallinn has been on the list since 1997. The Struve Geodetic Arc is Estonia's other site.

Estonia visa page

Name: _____ Date: _____



Next stops

Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____
Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____

Play the interactive version, collect a stamp in your passport:

<https://worldstroll.com/countries/estonia>