

work
estonia

RELO CATI ON

guide
to **estonia**

Winter.

You will miss it when it's gone.



Photo by Kaupo Kaldia

Spring.

Alright spring, do your thing.



Photo by Kristjan Lust

Summer.

In summer, the song sings itself.



Photo by Kaupo Kaldia

Autumn.

I might love fall most of all.

Estonia.

the e-state of mind.

In here, clean and
untouched nature
co-exists with the
world's most digitally
advanced society.

It is a place for
independent minds
where bright ideas
meet a can-do spirit.



International House of Estonia

Tere tulemast! Welcome!

This is your quick-start guide to live and work in Estonia. You can begin your journey into Estonia by browsing this book. Or, if you are not that much into reading, you can also start with a visit to the International House of Estonia, a one-stop shop service centre located in Tallinn for internationals – specialists as well as spouses- to communicate with the state, get counselling and build networks.

Counsellors at the International House can help you with common topics such as finding housing, work, or kindergarten spots. You can register your residence and apply for an ID code there too. There are also events, training, and classes to help you get settled.

We look forward to see you in Estonia!



More information:
workinestonia.com/internationalhouse/

The most advanced digital society in the world

— Wired

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Country overview

Key facts and figures

Official name:
Republic of Estonia
Official language:
Estonian

National flag:
blue-black-white tricolor
(the "sinimustvalge")



Population:
1.3 million
(2017)

Capital city:
Tallinn
population 450,305 (2018)

Total area:
45,339 km²
(17,505 sq. mi.)

Time zone:
GMT/UTC +3

Metric system

Right-hand traffic

24-hour clock

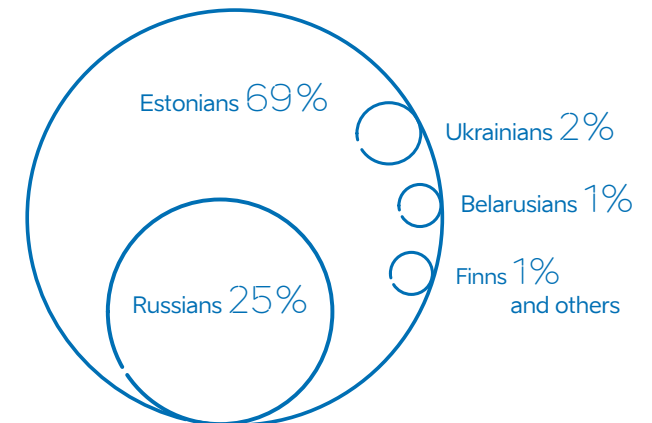
Government:
Parliamentary democracy

Emergency number:
112
(for ambulance, rescue workers, and the police)

Calling code:
+372

Internet TLD:
.ee

Ethnic groups:



Member of the European Union, NATO, OECD, WTO, and Schengen Area



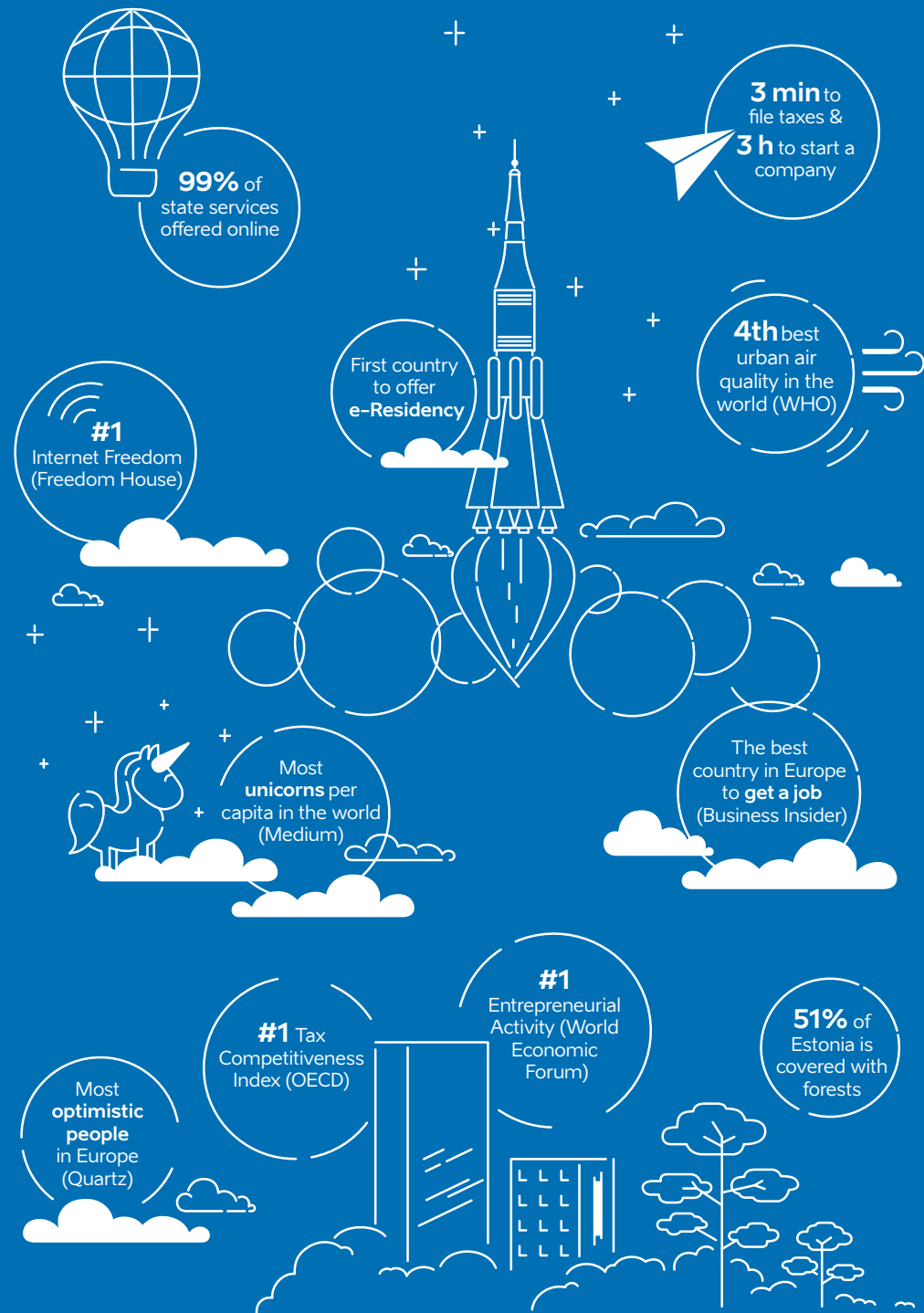
Electricity:
220 V



Currency:
the euro

GDP:
\$25,98 B
(2017)

GDP per capita:
\$19,751
(2017)



Geography

Small enough to fit that special place in your heart.



Estonia, one of Europe's smallest countries, lies on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. Nestled between Russia, Latvia, Finland, and Sweden, this relatively flat and stunningly green little country is about **51% forest, 20% wetlands, and 100% worth moving to**. Despite having the world's largest exploited deposits of oil shale (raw material for power production and the chemical industry), Estonia somehow manages to have some of the cleanest air on the planet, according to the World Health Organization.

Fun fact:

The biggest of our lakes, Lake Peipsi (Peipus), is the fifth-largest in Europe. More than a third of the Estonian-Russian border runs across it.

Fun fact:

In 2018, Lonely Planet named Tallinn the number one best-value destination in the world.



Estonians usually call themselves Northern rather than Eastern Europeans. Locals will love it if you do the same.



Photo by Paul Meisaar



Mid-June, we get up to 19 hours of daylight a day. This can disrupt sleep patterns, so make sure your bedroom has really good blinds/curtains.

Particularly in the spring and autumn, the weather can change suddenly. Wear layers to peel off and add as needed.

Take vitamin D supplements.

Attach a small reflector ("helkur", widely available in grocery stores) to your clothes **for visibility** in winter, when nights are long and dark. This is legally required outside of inhabited areas and strongly recommended in cities and towns.



Climate and weather

Estonian weather will keep you guessing.

Estonia is in the northern part of the temperate zone, somewhere between maritime and continental. This means we see a little bit of everything, often over the course of one day. There are four distinct seasons and practically no danger of natural disasters.

- Winter freezes us in our tracks from November to February, occasionally dipping below -20°C.
- Spring brings the sun back already in March, but the season lasts until May.
- Summer warms our bones from June to August, in the balmy 20-25°C range.
- Autumn delivers the rain from September to October.

Language

The language that makes you say, "Mida?*"

*What?

Estonian is the official language of the country and a source of great national pride.

Closely related to Finnish (and distantly to Hungarian), Estonian is a Finno-Ugric language, fundamentally different from most European languages. It uses the Latin alphabet, spicing it up with some extra vowels: ä, ö, ü and the very unique õ (pronounced roughly like "eeuuugh," but not quite).

Estonian is highly rewarding to learn. Some say it's quite a challenge—there are 14 grammatical cases, lots of exceptions to every rule, and if you say "õ" when you mean "ö," no one will know what you're going on about. **So your sense of accomplishment once you master it will probably be enormous!**

Estonians are proud of their language and will applaud any efforts to learn it.

- **Keeletee.ee** offers A2 and B1 courses.
- **Welcoming programme (settleinestonia.ee)** offers a free A1 level Estonian class.
- **Essential Estonian by Lingvist (Lingvist.com)** is a free course of 100 essential phrases.
- **Speakly.me** teaches Estonian for free with the code **WorkinEstonia**.
- **Integration Foundation (integratsioon.ee/eng)** offers different opportunities for learning the language.

Russian is the native language of about a third of the population, and English is also widely spoken. Do not assume that every Estonian speaks Russian. Many do, but that's not the point.

Fun fact:

Estonians tend to slip up between he and she, with hilarious results. You might hear statements like "My brother is coming with her girlfriend who's also bringing his sister." This is because Estonian famously has no sex and no future—grammatically speaking.



' ___ For me, learning Estonian is not just my way of showing respect for Estonians, I also enjoy it from a linguistic perspective. Estonian is my fifth foreign language and it still amazes me on a daily basis. There is no verb for "to have", no future tense and instead of "welcome" you say "hello for coming" - Estonian will always challenge the way your mind works. ___ '

Florian, Germany



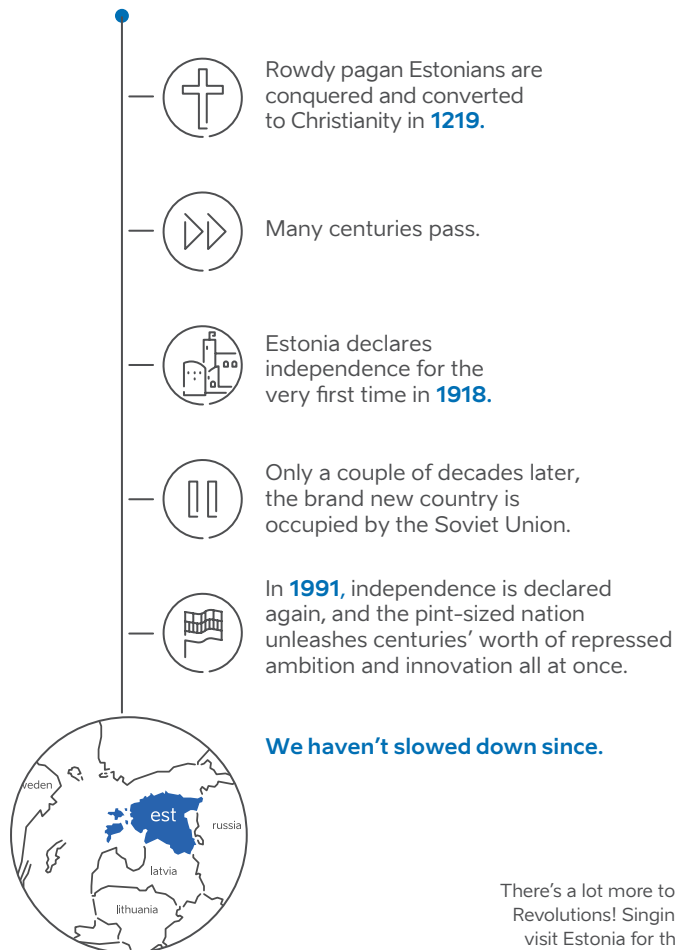
There are no silent letters in Estonian. Everything that is written down is pronounced, not a syllable wasted.

History and society

Complex past, bright future.

History

The territory we now proudly call the Republic of Estonia has a long history of developing and fighting to maintain a national identity. Here's the most outrageously simplified timeline of Estonian history you'll ever see:



There's a lot more to the story (Wars! Revolutions! Singing!), so be sure to visit Estonia for the whole picture!

Religion, cultural tolerance, and equality

Small, but not small-minded.

Technically predominantly Christian, Estonia is one of the world's least religious countries—only about 16% of people say they “feel religious.” But freedom of religion is guaranteed for all, so you can practise your faith as usual.

Estonia recognises same-sex unions, but older generations are still more socially conservative. Public opinion is shifting in favour of LGBTQ+ equality and tolerance of other cultures and religions.

EU citizens can vote in Estonia's local elections and European Parliament elections.

Non-EU citizens with a permanent residence permit can vote in Estonia's local elections.

‘__ One of the thrilling parts of the Estonian culture that you can feel in a daily life is — belief in a karma. Estonians believe that if you are good to others and share kindness, you will get the same back. This simple wisdom has taught me a lot in life.__’

Alexander, Georgia



Politics and government

Estonia is a parliamentary democracy. The prime minister is the head of government, and the head of state is the president, elected by the parliament (“Riigikogu”) for a five-year term. Estonia has a multi-party system and a relatively stable political landscape.

Estonia is regularly ranked among the most liberal countries in the world for its political, economic, internet, and press freedom.

Fun fact:
In 2017, close to one-third of Estonians casted their ballots electronically in local elections, famously known as **i-Voting**.

Holidays and traditions

The most beloved holidays in Estonia are Independence Day and Midsummer. Christmas and Easter are also widely celebrated but have lost much of their religious significance.

Public holidays

Something happened on these days a long time ago, and now you don't have to go to work!

Fun fact:

On the day immediately before New Year's Day, Independence Day, Victory Day, and Christmas Eve, you can leave work three hours early. It's the law!

- **1 January, New Year's Day** — New Year's Eve is a big party, and the nation rests the next day.
- **24 February** — Independence Day ("Eesti Vabariigi aastapäev") is celebrated with parades, concerts, and family dinners.
- **Good Friday** ("suur reede"), the Friday before Easter Sunday. Easter Monday isn't a day off, but Good Friday is. We don't question it.
- **Easter Sunday**, a moveable feast ("ülestõusmispüha"). Families gather to paint eggs in vivid colours. We don't question this either.
- **1 May — Spring Day** ("kevadpüha"). A celebration of spring. The night before, fires are lit for Walpurgis Night. You may see children dressed up as witches.
- **20 May** — Pentecost ("nelipüha"), the seventh Sunday after Easter. Because it falls on a Sunday, this day may go unnoticed by the heathens of Estonia.
- **23 and 24 June** — Victory Day ("võidupüha") and Midsummer ("jaanipäev") have merged into one mega-holiday that's all about freedom, summer, sauna, bonfires, beer, and ridiculous amounts of grilled meat.
- **20 August** — Day of Restoration of Independence ("taasiseseisvumispäev"). All three Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) won back their sovereignty in 1991.
- **24 December** — Christmas Eve ("jõulu-laupäev"). The main event is Christmas dinner, traditionally heavy on pork, potatoes, sauerkraut, blood sausage, and pickled pumpkin. Frosted gingerbread rounds up the meal; everyone falls into a food coma.
- **25 December** — Christmas Day ("esimene jõulupüha"). More accurately, Christmas dinner recovery day.
- **26 December** — Boxing Day ("teine jõulupüha"). 2nd Christmas dinner recovery day.

Moving to Estonia.

A country to move to and be moved by.



Photo by Sven Zacek



All new residents are included in a comprehensive **Welcoming programme** that covers many important topics like studying, family life, language, and more. The Police and Border Guard Board will tell you all about it once you get your residence permit or ID card.



More information:
settleinestonia.ee

If everything you've read here so far sounds like
your cup of tea,
you're ready to move to Estonia—and
you can be sure
Estonia is ready to
welcome you.

As you may already know, EEA and Swiss nationals can move freely without a visa in the EU. Some non-EU citizens, however, need a visa to enter Estonia.

Currently, citizens of 60+ non-EU countries (find the list on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) can reside here for up to 90 days without a visa.

If you're not sure how to get started, a handy tool on the Work in Estonia website will give you a step-by-step guide based on three quick questions.



More information:
workinestonia.com/coming-to-estonia/

Long-term stay in Estonia

EU citizens

EU, EEA, and Swiss nationals can travel and reside in Estonia for up to three months without registration. After three months, you have to:

- Register your permanent Estonian address (not a hotel or Airbnb) in the population register;
- Apply for the world-famous Estonian ID-card that will allow you to live even more of your life online than you already do.

Once you've had temporary residence for five years, you can register your right of permanent residence.

Non-EU citizens

For **long-term stay**, you'll basically have **two options**:

- 1 **long-term (D) visa**
granted for **up to** 360 days
- 2 **temporary residence permit**
for stays **longer than** 360 days

You can apply for these before moving to Estonia at an Estonian foreign representation.



In a pinch, the **Police Board's migration advisors** can help you (via phone, email, Skype, or by appointment at the International House) find answers you can't figure out for yourself.

You can schedule an appointment at the Police Board online before you even travel to Estonia. Once you arrive, submit all the required documents at once, to make sure the processing time fits into the two-month period.

Alternatively, you can submit your documentation for a temporary residence permit in person at the Police and Border Guard Board offices (**you need to make an appointment**). This should take around 2 months from the moment all documentation is correctly submitted.

A temporary residence permit allows you to live and work in Estonia and travel in the Schengen area without a visa. **But it's not a travel document, so you still have to carry your passport while travelling.**



The alternative is possible only if you can visit Estonia with a visa or under a visa-free regime. There's a risk of exhausting your time of stay before you get a definite answer on your application.

Fun fact:

Estonia also has a Startup Visa program, which is meant for non-EU startup founders who wish to come and be a part of one of the smallest but liveliest startup communities in Europe as a founder. More information: startupestonia.ee/visa



'...The residence permit process for our family of four was fairly simple. We were able to have all of our required documents apostilled in time, or at least have the process started before relocating, which was the most complicated portion. The process was smooth and much better than we would have expected....'

Adrian, USA

You can apply for a temporary residence permit:

For employment.

The permit is linked to your employment in Estonia. If your contract is terminated, you'll lose the permit.

- If you find a new employer (sponsor) in Estonia, you have to get a new permit.
- You can stay in Estonia legally while you apply for a new permit.
- If your permit simply expires, your stay in Estonia will be legal for the next 90 days.

For study. And in case your residence permit expires, you can legally stay in Estonia for the next 270 days.

For settling with a spouse.

Your permit is connected to your spouse's. As long as their residence permit is valid, you're good. Also, if your spouse changes their employer, you don't have to change your residence permit.

You are allowed to work in Estonia with any of these permits

For business, if you've invested at least 65,000 euros of capital in business activity in Estonia.

For settling permanently, if you have a degree from an Estonian university or have lived in Estonia for at least three years. This permit has the benefit of not being linked to a specific employer, so you can change jobs more easily (but you need proof of adequate income to apply).



More information:
www2.politsei.ee/en/teenused/residence-permit/tahtajaline-elamisluba/



Some non-EU nationals fall under the annual immigration quota. This includes non-tech employees and those not considered top specialists. In one year, the number of new residence permits given under the quota can't exceed 0,1% of Estonia's permanent population.



Don't overestimate the amount of stuff you need to bring with you. Selling your property and replacing it here could be the smart thing to do. **You'll be able to buy all you need here**, and most rental apartments are fully furnished.

Things to keep in mind after getting your residence permit:

- Register your address within 30 days of receiving your residence permit card (more on this under Residency address registration);
- Notify the Tax and Customs Board about the change in your tax residency by submitting **Form R**;
- Find and register at a general doctor;
- Apply for any social benefits you need at eesti.ee;
- Enroll in the **Welcoming programme**.



More information:
settleinestonia.ee

Moving your belongings

International shipping companies can help you bring your belongings to Estonia. Shipping times vary depending of your country of origin.

If you're moving from an EU country, there are no tax restrictions.

If you move from a non-EU country, the elephant in the room is import tax. You can import your personal property (such as household items) by applying for tax exemption. Clothes and other necessities aren't taxed.

Oddly specifically, items you've had for less than six months will be subject to import duties and taxes. Find a detailed list of required documents on the Tax and Customs Board website (emta.ee/eng).

Moving pets

When moving within the EU, your dog, cat or ferret needs to have:

- A microchip
- A valid rabies vaccination
- A pet passport

If you're moving from outside the EU, additional rules apply. They can make a noticeable difference, so be sure to **check them out** on the Estonian Veterinary and Food Board website. (vet.agri.ee)

'___The surprising part of moving our two cats from Ukraine to Estonia was a complete absence of hassle on the Estonian side. We went through a long process of getting all the required certification in Ukraine. But on the border, no one cared if we had the certificates (or even the cats, for that matter). Entering the country with the cats went smoother and faster than we had ever expected.___'

Kirill, Ukraine



Moving your car

Moving from the EU

You have to register your car within 12 months of your arrival, or as soon as you get your right of residence in Estonia. Here's how:

- Take your car to the local Road Administration service bureau for a check-up;
- Fill out an application to register your vehicle;
- Bring proof of ownership and the car's registration certificate form your country of origin;
- Pay the state fee and registration plate fee;
- **Drive around the country in style!**

Moving from outside the EU

After you get your residence permit, you can import your car duty-free if you've had it for at least six months. If you sell the car within your first year in Estonia, it'll be subject to import tax and VAT.

- Start the importation declaration from the Tax and Customs board;
- After passing customs and having received your residence permit, take your car to your local Road Administration bureau within five working days;
- Fill out an application to register your vehicle;
- Bring proof of ownership and the car's registration certificate form your country of origin;
- Pay the state fee and registration plate fee;
- Drive around the country in style!



More information:
mnt.ee/eng

Housing.

Make yourself at home
(please take off your shoes*).

* Estonians remove their shoes in homes and in some offices.



Photo by Stina Kase



If you can, bring an Estonian friend with you to view apartments. They will be able to explain and translate for you if needed, and having a local to vouch for you may help you secure a lease.

Properties are listed by total number of rooms (minus the bathroom and kitchen), so a one-bedroom apartment with a living-room is considered a two-room.

Renting Property

Finding suitable housing

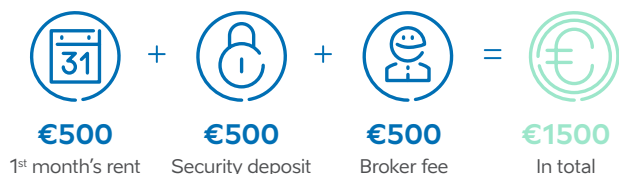
Renting is the easiest way to find a home when you first arrive in Estonia. The rental market is quite lively in Tallinn and Tartu, and good properties don't stay on the market for long.

Broadly speaking, if in San Francisco or Amsterdam you might spend around half of your monthly salary on rent, in Tallinn it'll probably be much less, at around 35%.

The **go-to sources** for rentals are city24.ee and kv.ee, but the selection largely overlaps. When you find a property you're interested in, contact the broker listed on the site. Most brokers will have no problem speaking English, and many speak Russian. You can then make an appointment to view the property.

Leases tend to be signed for at least a year. You will usually be charged a broker's fee equivalent to a month's rent.

For example, if you're renting a one-bedroom + living room apartment for €500 a month, expect to pay up front:



Some real estate sites let you filter rental properties by "otse omanikult" (directly from owner). In these cases there's no pesky broker fee. Often, these properties are snatched up so quickly that they don't reach the general public. There are also Facebook groups that list such rentals.

Things to talk to the broker/owner about

Non-EU citizens can travel and reside in Estonia on the basis of a long-stay (D) visa for up to 360 days. While in Estonia, you can apply for a temporary residence permit for up to 5 years.

- Sample utility bills (one for summer and one for winter) to get an understanding of potential costs.
- A rundown of the items in the utility bill, to make sure you know what's included and what you're expected to pay for separately (electricity or gas, for example).
- You may be able to negotiate on the rent, but if demand is high, don't get your hopes up.
- Ask if it is OK to register the apartment as your residence address. Although it is your right, it is better to confirm this to avoid any issues in the future.



More information:
www.workinestonia.com/coming-to-estonia/housing-general/



Read the fine print. Pay attention to lease renewal conditions and the lease termination notice period. Get a trustworthy local to help you.



Although the repair fund ("remondifond") item in the utility bill is technically the owner's responsibility, it's usually the tenant who actually pays this monthly fee.

Fun fact:

You might be able to negotiate on the rent (but if demand is high, don't get your hopes up).



Utilities

Utility bills (normally including water, electricity, recycling, etc.) can run up to €150 or more during the winter months and significantly less in the summer, depending on the type of building.

Recycling

Most residential buildings have different waste containers: general waste, clean paper/cardboard, and biodegradable waste. Recyclable, sorted waste can be taken to public containers:



Glass



Paper



Mixed packaging
(plastic, metal)



Clothes

If you're not sure where to take other types of waste (a broken TV set, batteries...), the kuhuvia.ee map will point you in the right direction.

Residency address registration

Everyone living in Estonia in the long term has to register their permanent address in the population register, even if it's a rented home. This gives you access to public and social services, such as a general practitioner/family doctor, free public transportation, and social benefits.

EU members

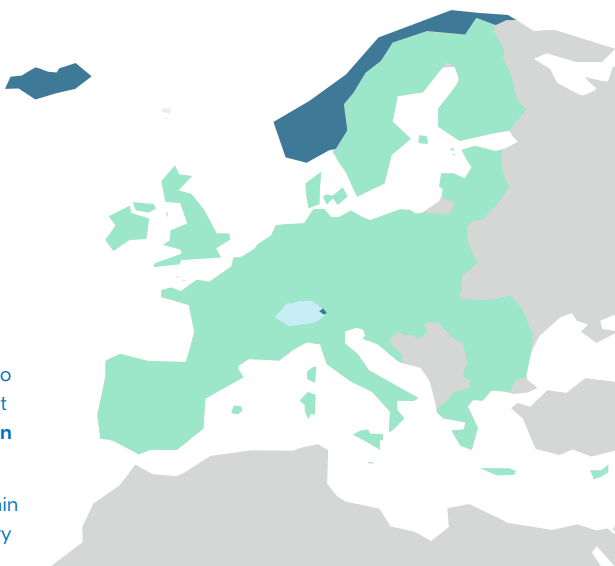
EEA members

Switzerland

Non-EU members

EU, EEA, and Swiss citizens have to register their address within the first 3 months. **The first registration can only be done in person.**

Non-EU citizens must register within 30 days of receiving their temporary residence permit card.



Ways to register:

- Submit the residence notice form in person at the local government unit or the International House of Estonia, if you live in Tallinn.
- If you have an Estonian residence permit card/ID-card, you can email the residence notice form and signed rental agreement to the local government, digitally signed with your ID-card.
- If you have an Estonian residence permit card/ID-card, you can register online via eesti.ee and the owner of your home can confirm the registration. Note that the portal is partially in Estonian!

If you move from your registered address, you have to register again.

'__When I rented an apartment, we signed the rental agreement with our landlord manually. But then she provided me a digitally signed contract upon my request to register in Tallinn. Voilà: one document and an application later, I'm officially a Tallinn resident. Everything was done digitally!__'

Alex, Ukraine



If you moved here with family, you can submit a joint address registration form.

You can use your phone to pay for parking and public transport, sign documents, make bank transfers, and even donate to charity.

Telecom services

Estonia has one of the **world's highest numbers of mobile phones per capita**. Needless to say that landlines and phone booths are a thing of the past.

Until you get your temporary residence permit, your only mobile option is a prepaid SIM.

- Good prepaid options are Smart by Tele2, Super and Simpeli from Telia.
- Prices range from 3€-10€, depending on the size of the package.
- You can get these directly from the provider or from R-kiosk (a chain of tiny convenience stores scattered around the city).

Once you're officially a temporary resident, you can get a contract from these three major carriers:

- Telia
- Elisa
- Tele2



Estonian banks tend to give mortgage loans to temporary residents until the expiry date of their residence permit. This means a realistic loan term of up to five years. Different rules may apply if you have a long-term residence permit or right of temporary residence.

TV/Internet

87% of Estonia's population uses the internet daily.

Internet connections are generally reliable and speedy: We're 15th in the world at a mean download speed of 27.91Mbps, according to [Cable.co.uk](https://cable.co.uk).

The average internet + TV package should cost you around €30, depending on your needs (bandwidth, cable). Enter your address on the providers' websites to check what services are available in your location.

Internet and TV providers:

- Telia
- Elisa
- STV



Without a residence card, you'll have to make a security deposit that you'll get back once you have your card. If your home has a connection with the provider, activation usually takes 3-4 hours. If a connection is not set up in the apartment, it might take up to a week to get it done.

Buying and selling immovable property

Buying and selling property in Estonia is relatively quick, taking an average of 65 days to wrap up the necessary procedures.

Working.

Work hard and love will follow.*

* Estonian author Anton Hansen Tammsaare's quote from his novel "Truth and Justice".



Photo by Renee Altrov

Photo by Rasmus Jurkatam

If you somehow got this far into the guide without making up your mind about whether or not you want to work in Estonia, here are just some of the reasons to **do it**:

Fun fact:

In 2016, Glassdoor chose Estonia as the best country in Europe to find a job.



An entrepreneurial work culture perfect for accelerating your career.



A forward-thinking digital society where innovation never stops.



Some of the world's best air quality and a lot of open space to enjoy it in.



A safe environment for you and your family.



An affordable lifestyle compared to other tech hubs.

Source: foreigners living in Estonia, 2018

EU, EAA, and Swiss citizens

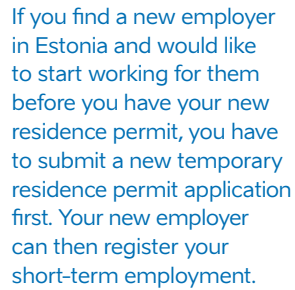
European citizens can start working in Estonia without any special permit, just like locals.

The employer does have to register your employment at the Tax and Customs Board employment registry. For that, you need to have an Estonian personal identification code (isikukood).

Checklist:

step-by-step guide to work in Estonia for EU, EAA, and Swiss citizens:

-
- ☐ Find an employer
- ☐ Travel to Estonia
- ☐ Start working
- ☐ Apply for a personal identification code
(to be covered by state health care from your 15th day of employment)
- ☐ Open a bank account
- ☐ Find a home
- ☐ Register your address
- ☐ Apply for an ID-card
- ☒ Get settled in and enjoy!



- 1 For a short period (up to a year), a non-EU citizen has the option of residing and working in Estonia on the basis of:
 - a long-stay (D) visa and
 - a short-term employment registration.

This will not give you an Estonian residence permit card or the social benefits that come with registering your address.

- ② For a longer period (more than a year) you can always apply for a temporary residence permit for employment. There are two ways to do it:



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graph TD; Start(( )) --> Step1[Get a job offer from an employer (sponsor)]; Step1 --> A((A)); Step1 --> B((B)); A --> A1[Apply for a temporary residence permit for employment at an Estonian foreign representation]; A1 --> A2[Travel to Estonia once you receive your temporary residence permit and ID code]; A2 --> A3[Register your address]; B --> B1[Travel to Estonia on the basis of a visa/visa freedom*]; B1 --> B2[Start working on the basis of short-term employment registration]; B2 --> B3[Apply for a personal ID code (remember, this gives you health insurance!)] ; B3 --> B4[Apply for a residence permit for employment in Estonia]; B4 --> B5[Register your address once you receive your permit]; A3 --> C(( )); B5 --> C; C --> D[Open a bank account]; D --> E(( )); E --> F[Change your tax residency by submitting Form R]; F --> G(( )); G --> H[Register at a general doctor]; H --> I(( )); I --> J[Get settled in and enjoy!];
```

Get a job offer from an employer (sponsor)

Path A:

- Apply for a temporary residence permit for employment at an Estonian foreign representation
- Travel to Estonia once you receive your temporary residence permit and ID code
- Register your address

Path B:

- Travel to Estonia on the basis of a visa/visa freedom*
- Start working on the basis of short-term employment registration
- Apply for a personal ID code (remember, this gives you health insurance!)
- Apply for a residence permit for employment in Estonia
- Register your address once you receive your permit

Open a bank account

Change your tax residency by submitting Form R

Register at a general doctor

Get settled in and enjoy!

* The residence permit process might take quite a while. If there's an Estonian Embassy close to you, applying for a D-visa makes sense even if you have visa freedom for entering Estonia

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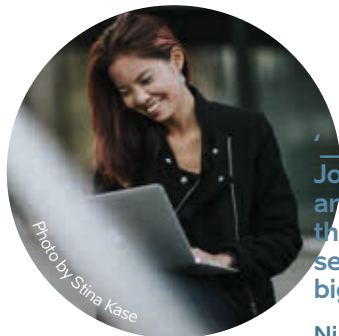


Estonia is so tiny that networking can be particularly helpful here. Many jobs are filled through personal references, and employers often use executive search companies or their employees' networks.

Spouses of international specialists can get free, personalised career counselling at the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund.



More information:
workinestonia.com/working-in-estonia/international-spouse-career-counselling/



Finding a job

Finding a job you like is a challenge wherever you are, and Estonia is no exception. Many positions advertised locally require Estonian and/or Russian language skills.

The good news is that more and more English-speaking roles are opening up, especially in the IT and hospitality sectors.

The most common ways to look for a job in Estonia:

- » Go to workinestonia.com to see all available English-speaking jobs (this includes CV.ee, cvkeskus.ee and Jobbatical, biggest local job boards in Estonia)
- » Use your **LinkedIn** network and follow job boards that list English-speaking positions.
- » Contact executive search companies in Estonia (e.g. **Fontes**, **Ariko Reserv**, **Amrop**, **Mercuri Urval**, **MPS**).
- » Establish a professional network locally, making it known that you are looking for work. This can lead to useful contacts and eventually a job.
- » Contact the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (**Eesti Töötukassa**) for individual job mediation and career counselling.
- » Join expat groups on Facebook (such as **Expats in Tallinn, Estonia**) or InterNations.org.
- » For job opportunities and useful information on employment and living conditions in Estonia, check out **EURES** (European Employment Services).

'___ I found my first job in Estonia through **Jobbatical**. I decided to include a short video and I believe this helped improve my standing in the application round. I did the same for my second job and was told people love it. So my big tip? Do something different to stand out!___'

Nikki Tan, Singapore

Employment contracts

Work relations in Estonia are mainly regulated by the Employment Contracts Act and the Law of Obligations Act.

Highlights:

- Wages are freely negotiable.
- Wages are paid at least once a month directly to your bank account.
- Full-time working hours are 40 hours a week. Special conditions apply for overtime work, nighttime work, and public holidays.
- The probationary period for a job can last up to four months.
- You're entitled to at least 28 calendar days of vacation in a calendar year.
- Special conditions apply for pregnant or breast-feeding women and parents of small children. Women can take 140 days of pregnancy and maternity leave.

Fun fact:

Estonians take rest seriously. By law, you **have** to take 14 consecutive days off once a year.

Recognition of diplomas and qualifications

To apply for an EU Blue Card (a residence permit for employment in a position that requires higher qualification), you have to get your foreign diplomas recognised by the Estonian ENIC/NARIC Centre. This takes around 30 days.

You can also apply for the EU Blue Card if you have more than five years of work experience in the required field. More info on the Police Board website.



Salaries change quickly and really depend on the job position, but if you are really curious about these numbers check the latest stats at Work in Estonia website or compare cities in Teleport.org



More information:
teleport.org



If you already have approval from an ENIC/NARIC Centre abroad, you still have to do it here too.



There is no corporate income tax on retained and reinvested profits.

If you are looking for investment opportunities, be sure to check out Invest in Estonia



More information:
investinestonia.com

Setting up a company

Estonia has Europe's third-highest number of startups per capita, and we want more. Setting up a company is easy, especially if you have e-Residency—a government-issued transnational digital identity available to everyone in the world.

- 1 Choose your company's business name. You can check its **availability at the e-Business Register**.
- 2 If you have an Estonian ID-card or e-Residency card, **register your company online**.

OR

- 1 Register your company with a **notary**.
- 2 Check at the **Register of Economic Activities** if your company's area of activity is subject to special requirements. If yes, you'll need a special licence.
- 3 Register your employees at the **Tax and Customs Board**.
- 4 If your taxable turnover exceeds €40,000 from the start of the calendar year, you have to register your company as a VAT payer at the **Tax and Customs Board**.

Want to know more about the new digital nation?
Visit the e-Residency site: e-resident.gov.ee



Healthcare.

For when you need more than just a cup of tea with honey.



Photo by Aron Urb

Photo by Rasmus Jurkatam



If you don't fall under any of the the above categories, you'll need private health insurance.

Health insurance

The Estonian healthcare system is built on solidarity-based health financing. Everyone covered is entitled to the same quality healthcare, regardless of how much social tax is paid for them.

Estonia provides state health insurance for:

- Employees paid at least the minimum monthly salary
- Students
- Pregnant women
- People under 19
- People raising a child under three
- People registered as unemployed at the Unemployment Fund

To be covered by state health insurance, your employer needs to register you in the employment register and you need an Estonian ID code. To get access to a family doctor, and for your family to be covered by health insurance, your address needs to be registered.



More information:
haigekassa.ee

Fun fact:

Dental care is free for everyone under 19. Adults aren't fully covered by the state, but there's a yearly benefit for essential procedures.

Family physicians (general doctors)



Residents have the right to choose a family physician in their area to be their first point of contact in case of illness.

Your family physician is there to:

- Diagnose and treat acute and chronic conditions and refer you to a specialist if needed.
- Start and end your sick leave in case of illness. Your employer can see this in the eesti.ee portal.
- Digitally prescribe medications that you can buy from the pharmacy ("apteek") showing your Estonian ID-card.



While in theory you can choose a physician to register with, the number of English-speaking doctors will limit your options. When you're booking an appointment, keep in mind that not all of the nurses speak English.

At Apteegiinfo.ee you can find pharmacies near you, compare prices, and check which types of medication require a prescription.

Family doctors in Estonia don't perform health checks if you're not experiencing any symptoms. If you just feel like getting your health checked, turn to a private clinic like Qualitas for a health audit or SYNLAB for blood tests.

'___The Estonian healthcare system is amazing: emergency room wait times are very small compared to other countries, and seeing a doctor, specialist, or filling a prescription are made incredibly easy by the centralised and digitised healthcare system.___'

Chris, Australia



Photo by Stina Kase

Sick leave

The first thing you have to do when you get sick (yes, even before tweeting about it) is to contact your doctor who can then start your sick leave in the system.

When you're on sick leave, keep in mind:

- Estonian law requires no sickness benefit for the first 3 days.
- For days 4-8, your employer will pay your sickness benefits.
- Starting from day 9, the Health Insurance Fund will cover your sick leave.
- The benefit rate is 70% of your daily salary

The doctor can't start your sick leave retroactively, so contact them on the very **first day** you get sick and can't go to work. Your doctor will also schedule an appointment to examine you.



Digilugu health portal

Forgot who your doctor is or what they prescribed you? Digilugu ([Digilugu.ee](https://digilugu.ee)) is a health portal (available in English!) that lets you access medical data that health care service providers have submitted about you (referrals, prescriptions, etc.). Log in using your ID-card or Mobile-ID.

Photo by Renee Altrov

Specialised medical care

To see most health specialists, you need a compelling reason and a referral letter from your family doctor.

You **do not** need a referral to see a...

- Psychiatrist
- Gynaecologist
- Dermatologist
- Sexual health specialist
- Pulmonologist (in cases of suspected tuberculosis)
- Ophthalmologist
- Dentist
- Trauma specialist (within the first 24 hours of the trauma occurring) or surgeon



Whenever you see a specialist, you have to pay a standard appointment fee of **5€** (or more) at the reception desk before your appointment.

Eyesight

The easiest way to get your eyesight checked is to go to an eyewear retailer and book an appointment with their in-house optometrist. Most hospitals also have an ophthalmologist, and you can make an appointment by calling reception.



Emergency medicine

In a medical emergency, call **112**. Ambulance ("kiirabi") transport is free.

If you can, go directly to the accident ward ("erakorralise meditsiini osakond, EMO") of your nearest hospital (easily googleable). There will be a small consultation fee, and if you're hospitalised, the in-patient fee is up to 2.50 EUR per day.

EU health insurance card

If you're insured in Estonia and temporarily staying in another EU country, you will receive the same healthcare as insured people in that country. You can get your free EU health insurance card from eesti.ee.



You'll still have to pay any self-liability fees that apply, so travel insurance is always a good idea. Read more about the EU health insurance card on the "Haigekassa" website.

Photo by Renee Altroy

Taxes and social benefits.

Estonian taxes are super simple. No, really!



Photo by Roman Nerman



Your tax residency does not change automatically. It's your responsibility to inform the tax authorities by submitting Form R via email (if you have an Estonian ID-card for digital signing) or in person.

General taxation

The Estonian tax system consists of..

- **National taxes** such as income tax, social tax, land tax, gambling tax, value added tax (VAT), duty and excise taxes and heavy goods vehicle tax.
- **Local taxes** that local governments have the authority to impose but only a few have introduced.

Fun fact:
VAT 20% is always included in the price, so when you're shopping, you won't be hit with surprise taxes at checkout!

Tax residency

According to the Estonian Income Tax Act, you're considered an Estonian tax resident from your day of arrival (retroactively) if:

- Your place of residence is in Estonia, **or**
- You stay here for at least 183 days over 12 consecutive calendar months.

Estonian tax residents have to declare and pay tax on income from all sources **from all over the world** (e.g. income received when selling shares, dividends, etc.).

Filing an annual tax declaration

The fastest things in the universe:

- ① Light
- ② Estonian tax returns

You only have to submit an income tax return if you have tax incentives (housing loan interests, training expenses, gifts, donations) to claim, or any income other than your regular job (such as foreign employment income, rental income, or profit from selling stocks).

The annual deadline for submitting tax returns is **March 31st**.

Mark it in your calendar as the last chance to:

- Make your way to the e-Tax Board to do your taxes.
- Realise that most of the declaration is prefilled and it'll only take you a few minutes.
- Wonder what to do with all this time on your hands.
- Go for a walk?



More information:
emta.ee/eng

'___Estonia and its automation in government never cease to amaze me. I was astonished when I filed my first year's taxes in Estonia online within 15 minutes. It is a big step forward as a country to have transparent calculations and benefits.___'

Param, India



Photo by Stina Kase

Labour taxes

In Estonia, the employer pays all the taxes on behalf of the employee. This leaves you with your net salary and nothing to worry about.

Taxes withheld from your gross salary:

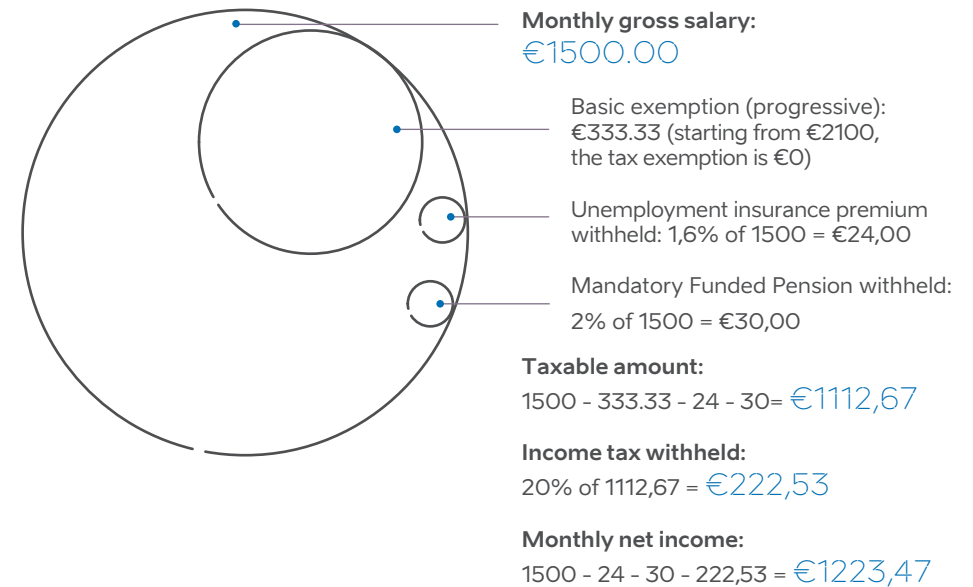
Contributions to Mandatory Funded Pension (II Pillar) for tax residents:	2%
Unemployment insurance premium:	1,6%
Income tax:	20%

Taxes paid extra (on top of the gross salary) by the employer:

Unemployment insurance premium:	0,8%
Social tax:	33%

Wait, what?

Let's use this handy example to break it down



Still with us? Almost done...

Taxes paid extra (on top of your salary) by the employer to the government:

Unemployment insurance premium: 0,8% of 1500 = €12
Social tax: 33% of 1500 = €495

Or just use a **tax calculator** to see what's what.



More information:
kalkulaator.ee/en/salary-calculator

Family benefits

If you're in Estonia with your child(ren), you can apply for a number of different benefits to make your life a bit easier.

In addition to monthly child benefits and child care allowances, Estonia offers generous parental leave that lets one parent (at a time—you can take turns) stay at home until the child turns three.

The size of the allowance will be based on your income in the previous year.



More information:
sm.ee/en/children-and-families

Photo by Renee Altrov

Education.

In Estonia all people are super smart ... ;)



Photo by Erik Riikeja



Your child can only go to a public preschool in your area, so to request a public preschool spot, your family's address needs to be registered. If your child can't go to a public preschool and needs to enroll at an international one because of a language barrier, **you may be eligible for benefits from the local government.**

The Estonian school year starts on September 1st and lasts for 135 school days, with four holiday breaks in between.

Like everything else in the country, much of the school system has moved online. e-School is a web-based school-home communication environment and the SAIS system unites higher-education databases with students' exam results.

While there are options available for children to learn in English, your kids will realistically have to learn Estonian to make the most of the education system.

Fun fact:

OECD ranks Estonia's school system among the world's best.

Preschool education

18 months – 7 years of age

Public preschools (kindergarten, "lasteaed") are generally free. Parents pay for the children's meals and some schools might charge monthly fees.

Most **public preschools** operate in Estonian, some in Russian and some in both, so if you want your kid to pick up the local languages, this is the way to go. **There are also some private English-speaking preschools:** International Kindergarten, Tallinn European School and International School of Estonia.

Photo by Tõnu Runnel

Basic education

7 – 15 years of age

Basic education is the mandatory minimum education requirement, covering grades 1 through 9. School costs are covered by the school manager (usually local governments).

Tallinn English College and Miina Härma Gymnasium are the only public schools in Estonia where kids can get their basic education in English. Three private schools have English programs: International School of Estonia, International School of Tallinn and Tallinn European School.

All children are ensured a place in a public school in their area of residence. When applying for some more popular schools, additional tests may be required. To apply for a private school, you have to fill out an application and contact the school directly.



More information:
workinestonia.com/living-in-estonia/basic-to-higher-education/

Secondary education

16 – 19 years of age

The study programme at upper secondary school is arranged into mandatory and voluntary courses. Requirements for entry (usually a test and an interview) can be found on the school's website. For private schools, enrolment documents need to be submitted directly to the school.



If your child is attending an Estonian school and if at least ten children there have the same native language, they're entitled to two lessons in their native language each week.



Photo by Renee Altov



Some International programmes at Estonian universities have a tuition fee. You can search for suitable scholarship options in the scholarship database.

If you want to continue your studies in Estonia on the basis of a foreign academic certificate, apply directly to the higher education institution for admission and to the ENIC/NARIC Centre in Estonia to have your studies recognised.

Higher education

There are more than 150 unique, high-quality degree programmes taught fully in English, available at these universities:

- Tallinn University
- Tallinn University of Technology
- University of Tartu
- Estonian Business School (private)
- Estonian Academy of Arts
- Estonian University of Life Sciences
- Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre
- Estonian Entrepreneurship University of Applied Sciences (private higher education institution)

Continuous education

Adult students have flexible options. Several universities let you put together an individual study programme of your favourite subjects, either for self-improvement or to get a higher education.



More information:
studyinestonia.ee

Photo by Rasmus Jurkatam

Transport.

We'd rather you didn't leave,
but if you have to...



Photo by Siri Kumari

Airport

Tallinn Airport is the biggest gateway into Estonia and in 2018 was named the best small airport in Europe by Airport Council International. Most people in Estonia, as biased as we may be, agree.

- Around 3 million people pass through the airport each year.
- There are 40-something direct destinations.
- It's so close to the city that stories are told of people who have left for the airport when boarding has already started. But please don't do this.
- In peak season, be at the airport two hours before your flight.
- Even if you're too early, you won't regret it. This is the cosiest airport ever.

The most popular direct flights:



More information:
tallinn-airport.ee/en/about-us/statistics/

Tartu Airport is located 11 km from the city centre of Tartu and has regular direct flights with Helsinki, from where you can reach many other global destinations.

Photo by Remo Roonet

Driving in Estonia

Driving licences

EU, EEA and Swiss citizens

Driving licences issued by EU, EEA and Swiss Confederation countries are valid in Estonia. You don't have to change them unless they're valid for longer than 15 years or for an unspecified term.

As a rule, you don't need to take any tests to renew your licence, unless it expired more than five years ago.

Non-EU citizens

Driving licences issued by non-EU countries are valid for 12 months after you become a permanent resident of Estonia. After that, you need to replace it with an Estonian one.

'___ I had to renew my foreign driving licence and was surprised how easy the process is. I got a health certificate from my GP and an appointment with the Road Administration really quickly. The service people were really helpful and you can even do part of the application online. Within a week I had my new Estonian licence. ___'

Jim, The Netherlands

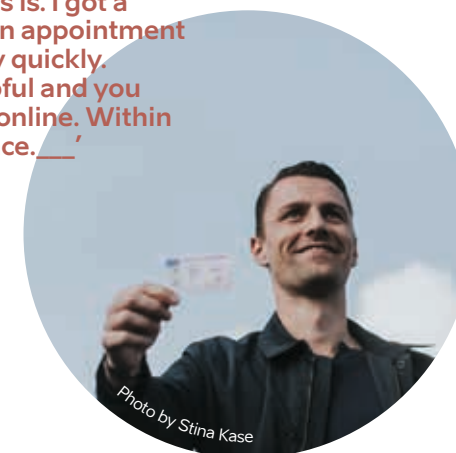


Photo by Stina Kase



Check which rules apply to your driving licence on the Road Administration website



More information:
mnt.ee/eng/driver/driving-licence/foreign-driving-licence



A driving licence can also be replaced online via the Road Administration's e-service



You can apply for an Estonian driving licence once you've been living in Estonia for at least 185 days.

To replace or apply for a driving licence, you'll need a valid **medical certificate**. Your family doctor or an occupational health doctor can provide you with this.



Although cyclists and pedestrians must wear reflectors in the dark, they sometimes don't. Drive extra carefully in winter months to avoid accidents.

Getting a driving licence

To apply for a driving licence, you have to go to driving school. The minimum course time is 6 weeks, after which you have to take the theoretical and practical exams. English examiners aren't guaranteed, so you might have to bring a friend to translate.

More information:
Estonian Road Administration
mnt.ee/eng/driver/driving-licence/foreign-driving-licence#2



Fun fact:

Temporary ice roads are open between some islands and the mainland in winter, weather permitting. Seatbelts have to be unfastened here, and driving between 25-40 km/h can cause the ice to break, so be hyper-aware of all the rules before you go out on the ice!

Basic road rules

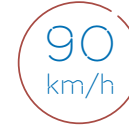
- Drive on the right.
- Headlights must be on at all times.
- Pedestrians at marked crosswalks have right of way.
- No right turns at a red light.
- Never cross a solid white line.
- Some lanes are for public transport only.
- When entering a roundabout, cars already on the roundabout have right of way.
- Vehicles coming from the right have priority, unless otherwise regulated.

Speed limits

TOWNS AND SMALLER URBAN AREAS:



HIGHWAYS:



In summer, speed limits are raised to 110 km/h on some two-lane highways. Main roads are equipped with speed cameras and speeding is frequently monitored by the police.



Don't speed. Seriously.

Regulations for drivers and passengers

- The driver must have their licence and registration with them. If the licence is issued in Estonia and the driver is registered as the vehicle's owner, an ID is enough.
- There is zero tolerance for blood alcohol levels for drivers. That glass of wine with dinner? Forget about it.
- The minimum age for driving a car is 18.
- Everyone in the car has to fasten their seatbelt (back seat and taxis included).
- You must have a first aid kit, warning triangle, fire extinguisher, reflective vest and wheel chocks in your car.
- Strictly no hand-held mobile phones while driving. Hands-free sets are OK.
- Winter tires are compulsory between 1 December and 1 March. Studded tires can be used from 15 October until 30 March.
- You can check parking zones, fine information, and other parking-related things at parkimine.ee.

'___ It was so weird to me that here in Estonia people have the habit of fastening their seat belts also in their cars' back seats and on buses. It is compulsory in my country too, but we don't take it as seriously as Estonians do.___'

Roberto, Italy



Your car

Buying a car

If you buy a new or used car from an authorised car dealer, the dealer will take care of the registration procedure for you.

If you buy a car from an individual, the change of ownership of a vehicle must be registered within five working days. After you submit all the documents, the Estonian Road Administration will issue the vehicle's new Registration Card and licence plate number.

auto24.ee is a good place to start looking for cars.

'___ Our car buying experience was simple. We were able to look up the car histories in terms of both inspections and insurance documents (accidents). The actual ownership transfer took 10 minutes. We signed the transfer using our mobile phones.___'

Adrian, USA

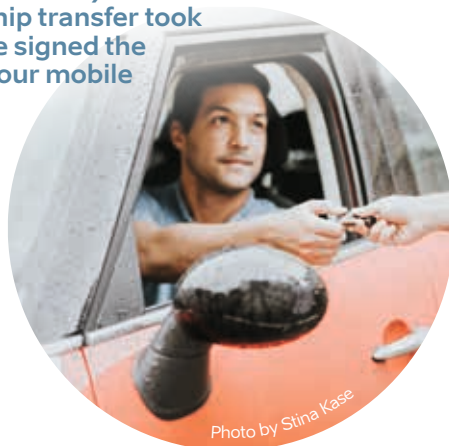


Photo by Stina Kase

Selling a car

When you sell your car, the change of ownership of a vehicle must be registered with the Estonian Road Administration.

Customs and taxes will be assessed for the sale of a car imported from a non-EU country and sold within one year of its date of registration in Estonia. This applies both to new and used cars.

After the sale, don't forget to cancel your insurance and get a refund for what you've already paid.

Car insurance

Third-party liability insurance

Immediately after registering in Estonia, all vehicles must have third-party liability insurance issued by a licensed Estonian insurance company or by a local branch of a foreign insurance company.

The insurance must be valid in Estonia, the EEA, the EU, and in Switzerland and the insurer must be a member of Estonian Traffic Insurance Fund:

- IF
- Seesam
- ERGO
- Salva



You can use lizi.ee to compare offers from different insurance providers. Not super confident in your driving?

Casco is voluntary insurance (compulsory for leased cars) that covers damage you cause. Generally, Casco is valid in all European countries.



Photo by Mariam Limal



Mobile parking is the most convenient and by far the most popular way to pay for parking.



In Tallinn, public transport is free for the city's registered residents, but you still need to get an Ühiskaart and validate it every time you ride.

In spring, summer, and autumn, cycling is a great way to get around. Most of Estonia is conveniently flat and the towns are small.

Even if you're an avid app user, you may still need to call (Call! On the phone!) a regular taxi if there are no cars available on Uber or Taxify. It's not that we don't want to list all the taxi companies in the country... but it's easier to google it.

Parking

Third-party liability insurance

- Parking in town centres is usually paid. Signs indicate the prices for different times and parking zones.
- Blue lines on a parking space mean that it's in a paid parking area.
- In some car parks, you can use street-side parking meters to pay.
- Parking fines are placed under wiper blades or otherwise attached to windshields.
- Parking garages are marked with a blue sign with a large white "P".
- You can check parking zones, fine information, and other parking-related information at parkimine.ee.
- Your first 15 minutes are free in municipal parking areas if you indicate the starting time with a parking clock.

Public transport

Though most places in Tallinn (not to mention the smaller towns) are within about a 30-minute walking distance from each other, there are other options for getting around:

- Tram (Tallinn only)
- Bus
- Trolleybus (Tallinn only)
- Train

You can buy a single ticket from the driver in cash, but it's much more convenient to get an Ühiskaart travelcard from your nearest post office, supermarket, or R-Kiosk, which you can use on all forms of public transportation in Tallinn (other towns have equivalent travelcards).

Validate your card **every time** you ride and it'll charge you the right fare. A single fare is valid for an hour, so you can change within that time without getting charged again. You can top up your card online or at an R-Kiosk.

Taxis and car sharing

The most popular apps for rides are [Taxify](#) (developed by Estonians!) and [Uber](#).

If you need a taxi ("takso") stand, you'll find them in front of the airport, bigger hotels, and shopping malls.

Car rental

Most car rentals have a pick-up point next to the airport. You will need a driving licence (valid in Estonia), passport, and credit card. The driver must be at least 21, with at least 2 years of driving experience.



Feel like being kind to the environment? Rent an electric car from [ELMO RENT](#). Parking is free for their cars in parts of Tallinn, Tartu, and Pärnu.



Photo by Rasmus Jurkatam



If you're planning an island weekend, it's smart to book round trip tickets as soon as the thought enters your head. In summer, especially around public holidays like Jaanipäev (23-24 June), the islands are popular destinations. Expect long lines for the ferries. It's worth it, though.

Other ways to get around

Buses

Of all the ways to get around Estonia (that isn't a private car), buses will take you to the most places. Main bus lines have free wifi. The Tallinn Bus Station (Autobussijaam) is Estonia's main hub for bus travel. For timetables and tickets, visit bussijaam.ee and tpilet.ee.

Trains

The Baltic Station (Balti jaam) in Tallinn is Estonia's main train station. For timetables and tickets, visit elron.ee.

Ferry

Estonia's biggest islands (Saaremaa, Hiiumaa, and Muhu) have regular ferry connections with the mainland. For timetables and tickets, visit praamid.ee.

Everyday life.

Live the best version of your life in the cosiest tech hub on the planet.



Photo by Tõnu Runnel

Photo by Rasmus Jurkatam

Life in Estonia is...
Well, like life anywhere
else, really. Probably just
a little bit easier and more
laid-back than in most
places that identify as
tech hubs.



The Estonian Integration
Foundation is a good source
for activities, language
courses, and other advice to
start your #estonianlife
off on the right foot.

More information:
integratsioon.ee/eng



e-Estonia

Estonia is one of the most advanced digital societies in the world, and e-services are now the norm. Your average Estonian may cringe if you ask them to “mail” something or (gasp!) sign a physical document like some sort of prehistoric creature. Everyone can provide legally valid digital signatures using their ID-card, Mobile-ID, or Smart-ID.

The e-Estonia website will tell you everything you need to know about this digital fairy tale.



More information:
e-estonia.com

Everyday banking

Many Estonians hardly ever use cash anymore and much of the banking is done online.

The largest banks in Estonia are LHV, Swedbank, SEB and Luminor. All of them have convenient online banking options and apps.

Opening a **debit** account is affordable/free for residents and EU nationals.

For non-EU nationals who don't have a residence permit yet, opening a **debit** account comes with a fee.

Most banks don't open **credit** accounts for people whose residence permit is valid for less than five years.



You can open a Transferwise
Borderless bank account
and get a debit card before
you have your temporary
residence permit.

There are several parcel
terminals (SmartPOST,
Omniva) for sending
and receiving packages
conveniently, including
when shopping online.



You can start banking
online once you
have your residence
permit/ID-card.

Postal services

Post offices are open on weekdays and some on Saturdays. Find information and opening hours on the website of Omniva, the national postal service provider.

Mailboxes in Estonia are orange.
You can find them outside all post
offices, in shopping centres, and
at most gas stations.



Photo by Rasmus Jurkatam



Media

To get your local news in English, check out:

- news.err.ee
- news.postimees.ee
- estonianworld.com

Much of the content on local TV is in Estonian. The good news is that aside from children's programming and some soap operas, most foreign-language content (and at the cinema) is subtitled, not dubbed. International channels are available too, of course.

Printed media is predominantly in Estonian/Russian, but malls and kiosks usually carry a selection of international magazines, too.

Shopping

Groceries

Larger shops are open seven days a week. Shopping malls are typically open from 9:00 to 21:00 (a couple of hours longer for supermarkets).

Selver, Rimi, Prisma, Maxima, and Coop are the most popular supermarket chains, and you'll probably end up living close to at least one of them.

Most malls have free parking, wifi, ATMs, a currency exchange or bank, a pharmacy, and places to eat and drink. Major cards are accepted, and American Express can be used in banks and larger supermarkets, but not in smaller shops.

Opening hours of small village shops can vary greatly, and some may not be open year-round. The selection can be limited, so when travelling to more remote corners of the country, stock up on any specialised items (Fancy cheeses? Kale? Quinoa?) you'll need.

Market stalls, where you can buy fresh fruit and vegetables, meat and dairy products, handicrafts and household necessities, may accept cash only.



On important holidays, most malls close earlier. Supermarkets usually remain open.

Across the country, alcohol is sold in shops between 10:00–22:00.

Prisma supermarkets in Sikupilli and Mustamäe (Tallinn) are open 24/7.

Check out Keskurg, Balti Jaam, and Nõmme markets in Tallinn for fresh vegetables and fruits.

Cities and towns have a decent number of ATMs, but if you're travelling to the countryside or the smaller islands, bring cash.



Most products don't have ingredient lists in English.



The online store FreshGo delivers food and other goods from different supermarkets, farmers' markets and other suppliers such as pet shops. Registering is easy and they also offer to take away your empty bottles.

The Estonian Consumer Protection Board can help you deal with any complaints that aren't adequately addressed.

Translations of some of the most cherished Estonian literature are available in larger bookshops. To immerse yourself in the culture, watch out for novels by Jaan Kross, Andrus Kivirähk, and Indrek Hargla.

Residents of Tallinn can register at the Central Library to access a vast collection of books in English and other languages.

Online shopping

Online shopping is less popular in Estonia than in the rest of Europe on average, but slowly gaining ground. If you're used to ordering from Amazon, expect longer delivery times. Local options include hansapost.ee, kaup24.ee, and 1a.ee.

Clothes, gadgets, home

Tallinn is Estonia's undisputed capital of shopping. Remember the names of Kaubamaja, Viru Keskus, Solaris, Stockmann, Kristiine, Ülemiste, and Rocca al Mare, the most popular malls that should cover most of your needs.

Narva, Tartu, and Rakvere are also home to large shopping centres that attract people from nearby areas.

Books

Bigger bookshops (Rahva Raamat and Apollo) have reasonably-sized (for a country this small) foreign-language sections.

Food

Would you like sour cream with that?

Estonians might tell you, with a mixture of pride and self-deprecation, that our cuisine is mostly based on simple peasant food, heavily influenced over the centuries by German and Russian cooking.

The holy trinity of traditional Estonian food:



Pork



Potatoes



Sour cream

In supporting roles:



Smoked or salted fish



Root vegetables



Rye bread



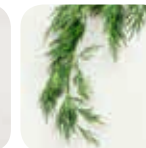
Pickles



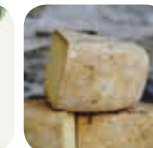
Beer



Dairy



Dill



Smoked cheese



Look out for beloved local delicacies when they're in season. Here are some favourites:

July:

Wild and garden strawberries (and other berries), chanterelles (and other mushrooms)

Late July–September:
New potatoes

August–October:

Apples, damsons and plums

Some varieties of apple are in particularly high demand. Keep an eye out for classics like "Liivi kuldrenett", "Martsipan", and "Valge klaar". (Granny Smith who?)

Fun fact:

Many households spend a lot of time pickling things and making jam in late summer/early autumn. Expect to hear about people drowning in apples and pumpkins.



Explore the the Telliskivi neighbourhood of Tallinn for the most vibrant food scene in town.

Some ingredients (less common spices, condiments, vegetables, fruits, etc.) may be tricky to track down. If you're struggling to maintain variety in your diet, consider a day trip to Helsinki to stock up.

Vegetarian, vegan, and halal food

In general, restaurant menus in Estonia still tend to be heavy on meat and fish, but the variety of vegetarian and vegan options is growing.

Maintaining a halal diet can be slightly more challenging, but entirely possible once you get to know the community and the options.



'___If you come from a predominantly vegetarian society, it can feel a bit disappointing in the beginning. With time it becomes a lot easier and even exciting when you get to check out cool new places. There are more than 7 Indian restaurants in Tallinn, all serving a variety of vegetarian options! There's even an Indian restaurant in Narva!'

Most supermarkets in Estonia have the product information and ingredients written in Estonian or Russian. Once you get past the language barrier or pick up some basics, it's great to discover new vegetarian options from the supermarket that you might not have had the opportunity to in your region (including, but not limited to, exotic fruits, berries and loads of mushrooms!).___'

Vandesh, India

Eating out



Breakfast

Popular breakfast foods include porridge (often with jam), eggs, toast, and yoghurt. Many restaurants serve breakfast (all-day breakfast isn't very common), but most people eat it at home. Pancakes are a popular weekend morning meal.

Brunch is a thing at a growing number of restaurants. Book ahead.

Lunch specials

Lunch is an important part of the day and people enjoy eating together, although packing a lunch for the office is also popular.

Dinner, booking, and tipping

Dinner is usually eaten relatively early (18:00-19:00). Many restaurants accept walk-ins, but keep in mind the season and time of day (summer evenings can be quite busy).

If you want to eat late, note that kitchens close about an hour or so before official closing time.

Service culture in Estonia is developing, so expect varying levels of service, from the indifferent to the exuberant.

Many restaurants offer daily **lunch** specials ("päevapakkumine/päevapraad") starting around noon, usually for around 3-6 EUR. If you arrive too late, the specials may be finished for the day.

Restaurants normally announce these menus on their websites or Facebook pages (for which you might have to use Google Translate, often with hilarious results).

On a regular work day, don't expect a two-hour leisurely **lunch** with a glass of wine as you might in France or Spain!

Booking ahead for **dinner** is always a smart move. In summer, some restaurants don't accept bookings on their outdoor terraces, so if you want a dinner with a view, you may have to wait.

Tipping is appreciated, but not considered an absolute necessity by most people. 10% is the norm, 20% if you're really impressed.

Tap water is OK to drink in most places.





Check out wife-carrying and kiiking if more traditional sports bore you.

Find groups of like-minded people at [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com).

Sports and leisure

Estonians love the outdoors—we do have a lot of it. People run, cycle, and hike in warm(er) seasons, swapping their running shoes for cross-country skis in winter.

On a hot summer's day, Estonians love their beaches. Water temperatures fluctuate like crazy, but +22°C is considered warm water, so adjust your expectations accordingly.

If you're not outdoorsy, there are plenty of gyms and spas. Estonia's coastal towns are popular spa destinations for locals and tourists alike.



More information:
estonianspas.eu

Fun facts

Around 1000 people practice winter swimming, which is exactly what it sounds like.

Family activities

Estonia will make it easy for you to raise your children to respect nature and live a down-to-earth lifestyle.

There is a lot of life-affirming entertainment available for the whole family. To get started, check out...

- Theatres that put on popular kids' shows.
- Theme parks like Pokumaa and Lottemaa, based on beloved animated characters.
- The many hiking trails, museums, water parks, playgrounds, beaches, and activity centres that will keep your kids busy for hours.

Culture

The pillars of Estonian culture are arguably singing, sauna, summer, and a startling lack of small talk.

Even though they have a reputation as a reserved people, Estonians are, in fact, only human like everyone else. So give them time and they'll make excellent friends.

Estonians value their work-life balance. Downtime is sacred, especially summer holidays.

Sauna

Even if your Estonian colleagues hate chit-chat or don't use facial expressions to communicate with you, do not assume they don't like you. You may suddenly find yourself invited to a sauna evening where people strut around in their bathing suits like it's no big deal.

Laulupidu

Estonians express perhaps unexpected amounts of emotion at Laulupidu, the Estonian Song Festival. One of the world's largest amateur choral events, this is a huge celebration of the country's cultural heritage. Every five years in July, as many as 30,000 singers gather to perform choir songs, many of which have Estonians in tears.

Tartu International House

If you happen to be located in Tartu, there is a non-profit organization named Tartu International House, which can also be a place for you where to get advice or meet new people. Visit www.internationalhouse.ee or look in FB for International House of Tartu.



There's a lot to see and do around the country. Check out the Visit Estonia website for all the must-see destinations and unmissable events.



More information:
visitestonia.com

A popular sauna tradition involves a gentle beating with a bunch of branches. It's more fun than it sounds.



More information:
visitestonia.com/en/why-estonia/sauna-ice-breakers



Photo by Katrina Tang



Tallinn is a very safe city in general, but partying in Old Town can get rowdy. Have your wits about you. Don't follow the crowds blindly. Like anywhere else, the best way to experience nightlife is to get locals (or more experienced expats) to show you around.

People will probably try to get you to drink the infamous millimallikas shot. Make your own decisions, but remember that we warned you.

Nightlife

Tallinn is Estonia's party central. Bars, clubs, and ultra-cool speakeasies are scattered around the city and open pretty late.

Want to take your partying off the beaten track?

- In summer, much of the action moves to the beach town of Pärnu.
- Tartu, a university town, also has its fair share of vibrant nightlife.
- Music festivals at varying levels of craziness are cropping up across the country.

Museums and music

Towns and villages across the country are bursting with culture, from street festivals and concerts to theatres and museums.

The Art Museum of Estonia has expanded across several locations in Tallinn. The Estonian National Opera starts its season in August.

The recently revamped Estonian National Museum in Tartu is the perfect place to take a look into everyday life in Estonia throughout history.

Nature

Nature is an important part of life in Estonia. In summer, people often go to the countryside to enjoy the forests — picking berries and mushrooms is a popular national pastime.

Many Estonians have country houses or ancestral homes with gardens that need tending, and getting out of the city is an almost universal drive whenever the weather allows. And with so much lush greenery (or fluffy snow, depending on the season) all around, who can blame us?



The Estonian countryside is generally very safe. Just use bug spray to keep away ticks and mosquitoes. There's also one species of venomous snake ("rästik"), but they mainly keep to themselves.

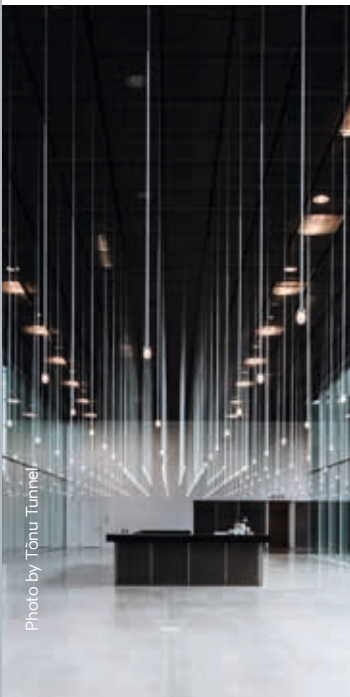


Photo by Tõnu Tunnel




Photo by Sven Zacek


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