

# 5 questions about Estonia

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE:

24 February 1918

RESTORATION OF INDEPENDENCE:

20 August 1991

GOVERNMENT:

Parliamentary democracy

HIGHEST JUDICIAL AUTHORITY:

Supreme Court

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE:

Estonian

MEMBER OF:

UN (since 17 September 1991)

EU (since 1 May 2004)

NATO (since 29 March 2004)

POPULATION:

1,329,460

MAIN ETHNIC GROUPS:

Estonians 69%,  
Russians 25%

AREA:

45,339 km<sup>2</sup>

CAPITAL:

Tallinn

LARGEST CITIES:

Tartu, Narva, Pärnu,  
Kohtla-Järve

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS:

15

CURRENCY:

Euro



Eesti Instituut



VÄLISMINISTEERIUM



# How old is Estonia?

**Estonians have lived on these Baltic Sea shores for the past 11,000 years, but their own state was declared in 1918. Following the Christianisation of the local tribes in the thirteenth century, Estonia, or parts of it, has belonged to Danish, Swedish, and Polish Crowns, and to Russian tsars.**

The Republic of Estonia was first declared on February 24, 1918. It became fastened during the War of Independence in 1920, when the peace Treaty of Tartu between Soviet Russia and Estonia was signed and Estonia was internationally recognised. After just two decades of independence, during which the country flourished, Estonia was annexed by the USSR in 1940 following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

Following the Singing Revolution at the end of the 1980s and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Estonian statehood was restored on the basis of de jure continuity in 1991. In 2004, Estonia joined both the European Union and NATO.

The Estonian blue-black-white national flag dates from the nineteenth century. Estonian students at the University of Tartu had chosen those colours for the flag of their fraternity, and pretty soon, most Estonians had accepted it as theirs. By the beginning of the twentieth century, it had become a national symbol.

Punk Song Festival in Rakvere, Estonia

Photo by Aron Urb



# Is Estonia the smallest country in the world?

**Certainly not. With its slightly less than 45,000 km<sup>2</sup> territory, Estonia is bigger than Denmark, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, and almost twice the size of Israel.**

Estonia covers 0.03% of Earth's land area, but with regards to population, Estonia, with its 1,330,000 people, is most definitely one of the smallest states in the world. The first humans arrived in Estonia at the end of the last Ice Age, some 11,000 years ago. Although some words from their language, such as the name of the largest Estonian lake, Peipus, have allegedly survived, it is not known what they called themselves or the land they inhabited.

What can be taken as the first account of Estonians originates from classical authors: the Greek explorer Pytheas mentions 'ostiatoi' around 320 BCE, followed by the Roman historian Tacitus, who writes about the amber-rich 'aesti' at the end of the 1st century CE.

Girl in the national clothes of Kihnu island

Photo by Meelika Lehola



# Can Estonians get married online?

**They don't just yet, luckily! Although Estonia is one of the most digitally advanced countries globally, some life decisions do require raising the eyes off the screen.**

The same goes for divorce, too. But for most other public services, it's quite difficult to find one without the prefix 'e-'. Prescriptions, education, taxes, creating and managing companies, signing documents: anything one might need is digital. In 2005, Estonia became the first country in the world where e-voting was used at general elections. Next to ordinary citizens, Estonia is also inhabited by tens of thousands of e-residents, many of whom have never set foot on Estonian soil.

Estonia is sharing its experience in building its e-state with other countries from Asia to Africa. One of the most important lessons to learn is that technology is useful when it is not an end in itself but helps people and communities function better and becomes a natural part of life. Estonians are often reminded of the benefits of their e-state when they have to deal with bureaucracy abroad.

Heart shaped lake in Viiandimaa, Southern Estonia.

Photo by Priidu Saart



# Why don't Estonians cry wolf?

**Wolves have lived in Estonia at least as long as humans, and Estonia folklore about wolves is very diverse and abundant, overshadowing other wildlife, including the bear.**

People have always feared the wolf but also admired and respected it. Back in the day, people preferred to use euphemisms when talking about wolves, hoping that this way they would not show up. Estonian bogs and larger forests have often been called wolf lands. In 2018, the wolf was named the Estonian national animal. There are many reasons for that: the wolf symbolises wild, untouched nature. The wolf is also very resilient, graceful, and extremely clever.

In addition to wolves, Estonian forests are homes to brown bears, lynxes, and smaller animals. And of course, Estonians have developed an app which helps to identify different wild birds by their song.

Forests are an important landscape with regard to the Estonian psyche: prior to Christianisation, sacred rituals took place in the forest in sacred groves, where people communicated with the spirits of nature. To this day Estonians are some of the most non-religious people in the world, but their beliefs are often linked to nature, spirituality, or folk tradition.

Lone wolf in the Estonian nature

Photo by Eleri Lopp-Valdma



# Does it rain iron in Estonia?

**It does, albeit very occasionally. Estonia could well have the highest number of meteorite craters per area in the world.**

The best known of them is located in the island of Saaremaa, in Kaali, where the heavenly iron fell between 1530–1450 BCE. Some suggest that the image of 'the sun' hurtling towards the earth like a gigantic fireball might have left lasting impressions on the inhabitants of the North and found a place in the folklore of the region.

The first president of the re-independent Estonia, Lennart Meri has theorised that Saaremaa could have been described by Pytheas of Massalia in the fourth century BCE as the northernmost place in the world – Ultima Thule as the place where the sun goes to rest.

Similarly to the phenomena of Kaali, the more distant Estonian history is also primarily known to us through archaeology and linguistics. The first in-depth written documents about Estonian history date from the Christianisation period in the 13th century. Included in this documentation by Christian chroniclers, was the conquering of Estonia in 1227, with Saaremaa being the last to fall. It took Estonia almost seven hundred years from then to become an independent state. And yet Estonians have kept their language and culture through all that.

Night sky in Estonia

Photo by Simo Sepp

