

## **Estonia**

### **Facts and Statistics**

**Location:** Eastern Europe, bordering the Baltic Sea and Gulf of Finland, between Latvia and Russia

**Capital:** Tallinn

**Climate:** Maritime, wet, moderate winters, cool summers

**Population:** 1,341,664 (July 2004 est.)

**Ethnic groups:** Estonian 65.3%, Russian 28.1%, Ukrainian 2.5%, Belarusian 1.5%, Finn 1%, other 1.6% (1998)

**Religions:** Evangelical Lutheran, Russian Orthodox, Estonian Orthodox, Baptist, Methodist, Seventh-Day Adventist, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Word of Life, Jewish

### **Language in Estonia**

Estonian is the official language of Estonia. It is spoken by about 1.1 million people in the country itself and then thousands of others outside it too. Estonian is a Finno-Ugric language and is closely related to Finnish and distantly to Hungarian. It has been influenced by German, Russian, Swedish and Latvian, though it is not related to them.

### **Estonian Culture & Society**

#### **Religion**

- o During Soviet administration religion became a form of silent protest for most Estonians.
  - o Since independence religious organizations have again begun to appear.
- The largest church is the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church.
- o In 1989, the largest churches established the Council of Estonian Churches (CEC) with the purpose of uniting the different churches to promote spiritual development for all Estonians

#### **The Role of the Family**

- o The family is still the central focus of social life.
- o The make up of the family is usually "nuclear" in cities and "extended" in rural areas although this is a slight generalization.
- o Family ties are very close which means newly weds will often live with parents until on their feet and the old are generally looked after rather than put in care homes.

#### **Hierarchy in Estonian Society**

- o Estonia is a hierarchical society.
- o Age, experience and position earn respect.
- o Older people are generally viewed as wiser and as a result revered and honored. Elders are introduced first and in general are treated much like royalty.
- o Those in senior positions bear the responsibility to make decisions in the interest of the group.
- o Due to seniority titles are very important when addressing people.
- o It is expected that you will use a person's title and their surname until invited to use their first name.

#### **Cultural Traditions**

- o Estonian culture as an identity is very strong.
- o Oral traditions especially have played a key role in preserving traditions, stories and customs during Soviet administration.
- o Singing is a very Estonian activity and the Estonians are known to have sung their way to freedom during the "Singing Revolution" of 1989-91.

### **Manners**

- o Estonians on the whole are quiet and reserved.
- o They tend to speak softly and do not like to draw attention to themselves.
- o Being rational, calm and not going to emotional extremes are all qualities that respected.
- o At first Estonians can come across as aloof. Once a relationship warms up this becomes less so.