ESTONIA (Eesti Vabariik)

Estonia is the northernmost of the Baltic Republics, situated across the Gulf of Finland between Russia and Latvia. Historically noted for Viking raider tribes and pirates, Estonia has been ruled by a number of empires and kingdoms over the centuries, including the Danes, Germans, Swedes, and most recently, the Russians. The capital city, Tallinn, was known as Reval for most of its history and was founded on the site of the Danish victory that marked the transition out of the Viking era. Estonia gained its independence in fits and starts over the course of the twentieth century, finally securing it during the “Singing Revolution” in 1991.

RELIGION
Estonia, according to many polling sources, is one of the least religious countries in the world. Historically, Christianity came to Estonia in the Middle Ages and during the Protestant Reformation, Lutheranism came to dominate the religious landscape. During the period of Russian and Soviet domination, the Eastern Orthodox branch of Christianity grew in Estonia as well, which is why today, the Lutheran and Orthodox Churches represent the two largest religious groups in the country by far. Their percentage of the total, however, is still small, with as few as 16% of Estonians claiming to “believe in god.”

ETHNICITY
Ethnic Estonians make up 69% of the population of the Estonian Republic, with ethnic Russians representing the largest minority (25%). Tensions between the Estonian government and the large ethnic Russian minority persist, especially inasmuch as they represent a political lever for Russian expansionist ambitions. Other ethnic groups in Estonia include Ukrainians (1.7%), Belarusians (.9%) and Jews (.2%). The Estonian language is related to Finnish and, distantly, to Hungarian, however, it is not closely related to Latvian, Lithuanian, or Russian.

FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS & CUSTOMS
Estonian gender and family relations are similar to the rest of Europe, emerging out of a Christian and paternalistic past and assuming increasingly egalitarian and individualistic characteristics in the 20th and 21st centuries. Family sizes tend to be small, with birth rates in the country well below the replenishing rate. The Soviet legacy of equalizing educational opportunity for men and women holds true in Estonia as well. National holidays include traditional religious holidays, such as Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, as well as a Victory Day on June 23, to commemorate Estonian Independence, which is distinct from the WWII Victory Day celebration of most of the former Soviet Republics (May 9).
**Contemporary Estonia**

Estonia has fared exceedingly well in the aftermath of its independence in 1991. During the Soviet period, Tartu and Tallinn were centers of electronics and computing industries and they continued to expand as such in the 1990’s and 2000’s as a flood of Western and Northern European investment helped grow the economy. Today Estonia is seen as a country with an e-economy, providing free broadband internet and WiFi access in most places and being the first country to allow online voting in 2007. The Estonian economy was hit hard by the 2008 economic crisis, like most of Europe, and it adopted austerity measures and has recuperated rather successfully in the ensuing years. In October of 2016, Kersti Kaljulaid was elected as Estonia’s first female president.

Estonia has actively pursued close ties with West European and Atlantic countries, eschewing its post-Soviet neighbors. It has joined NATO, the EU, signed the Lisbon Treaty, and switched to the Euro currency over the last 20 years. In 2004 Estonia sent troops to Afghanistan through the NATO alliance.

Estonia has a rich cultural heritage of singing and choral music, which intertwined with the Estonian national identity quite thoroughly. During the collapse of the Soviet Empire, Estonian independence came with what is known as the Singing Revolution, which galvanized the public and brought them together in opposition to Soviet rule.

**Estonians in the USA**

Estonians have come to the United States primarily as war refugees during WWII. The number of Estonian Americans is roughly 26,000 and their largest numbers can be found in California, New York, New Jersey, and Washington. Since Estonian independence the number of Estonian Americans has shrunk as a significant number of them have returned to their homeland.

**Names**

Estonian is of the Finnic branch of the Uralic languages. Thus, Estonian names resemble to a large degree those found in Finland. Female names include Anu and Kadri. Male names include Juhan and Paavo.

**Famous Estonians**

Famous minimalist composer, Arvo Pärt, is of Estonian heritage and resides in both Berlin and Tallinn. Lennart Meri was an Estonian filmmaker turned statesman, who served as the second president of the Estonian Republic in the 1990s. Georg Ots was an Estonian Opera singer and Kerli is a contemporary electronic pop musician and singer from Estonia who resides in the United States.

**Estonian Words**

Hi…………………………………... tervist
Bye …………………………...head aega
Good morning …………….. tere hommikust
Yes ………………………………... Jah
No …………………………………... ei
Please/You’re welcome ……… Palun
Thank you ………………………aitäh
How are you? ……….. kuidas sinul läheb?
I do not understand ……….. ma ei saa aru
I understand …………………..ma saan aru
What is your name?….. mis on teie nimi?
My name is ………… minu nimi on ....
Excuse me …………………. vabanda

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http://news.err.ee/