



## Estonia and Tallinn



**Estonia** lies in the north-eastern edge of the European Union. Its closest neighbours are the bordering Russian Federation and Latvia while Finland and Sweden situate across the sea nearby. Estonia has a population of just 1.3 million but the land area is larger than for example in Denmark or Netherlands – 45226 km<sup>2</sup>. Estonians speak their own national language, Estonian, which belongs to the Finno-Ugric language group and is therefore quite similar to Finnish. Since 2011, when Estonia joined the Euro zone, euro is the official currency used in the country. Estonia also belongs to NATO and OECD.

Known globally as one of the three Baltic Tigers that from 1940-1992 were occupied by the Soviet Union (USSR), Estonia is culturally and historically inasmuch tied with the Northern European countries Sweden, Denmark and Finland; influenced to an extensive degree also by the Germans since the crusades in 1200s and especially due to the Baltic special order under the Great Russian Empire from 1721 up until Estonia's independence in 1918. Estonia regained its independence peacefully in 1992, both as a result of the efforts of the country's active civil and political society in 1980s and the collapse of the USSR. It is one of the fastest-developing ex-soviet countries today.

Estonia's tricolour blue-black-white **flag** can be interpreted historically as representing ancient freedom (blue), lost independence (black) and the promise of a brighter future (white); another popular interpretation points to the blue sky above native land, black soil of the homeland, and to white as a symbol of purity and commitment.

Barn swallow is Estonia's national **bird** and corn flower the national **flower**.



## Ten interesting facts about Estonia:

- ❖ Almost 50% of Estonia is covered by forest and it hosts over 1500 islands.
- ❖ Estonia's highest point, Munamägi ("Great Egg Hill") stretches a mere 318 metres above sea level.
- ❖ In deep winter, the Baltic Sea freezes and ice roads are created between the mainland and islands.
- ❖ Estonia is home to Skype and e-government; access to wireless, free internet is approaching 100% in Tallinn. Almost no hotel dares charge for it.
- ❖ Estonians are very fond of saunas – every other private house accommodates one. Smoke saunas, earliest forms of sauna without chimney, are still popular today, especially in South Estonia.
- ❖ For Estonians, "bread" stands for a dark rye bread while the food referred to as bread in the rest of the world has a separate name - "sai".
- ❖ As a legacy from the Baltic German era, approximately 400 manor houses can be found, scattered all over the country. At its peak, almost 2000 manors were established on the area of modern Estonia.
- ❖ Estonia has most meteorite craters per land area. A 3000-year-old crater of an iron meteorite Kaali in Saaremaa reminds us the great influence of this rock on religions and customs of the people in the Baltic Sea region.
- ❖ Approximately 90% of Estonia's power is generated from oil shale, an organic-rich sedimentary rock. Estonia has the largest oil shale mining and processing industry in the world.
- ❖ Travelling to Helsinki, capital of Finland is very easy as it lies only 80 kilometres from Tallinn. Ferry ride takes less than two hours.



The oldest known record of **Tallinn**, the capital city of Estonia dates back to 1154 when the Arab geographer Muhammad Al-Idrisi marked it on his map of the known world. In Medieval times, it used to be a major centre of the Hanseatic League due to its good location on a maritime trading route. Tallinn has one of the most authentic Medieval Old Towns (photo), a protected UNESCO heritage site special for its high degree of preservation.

Modern city of Tallinn has evolved around the Old Town and is more varied in style with urban architecture, business buildings, hotels, shops and restaurants. Getting around on foot in the heart of the city is easy as the distances are short. Public transportation and taxis take the visitor to more remote landmarks, such as the Song Festival Grounds and Kadrioru Park.

Coinciding with the WG15 meeting, the XXXII Tallinn Old Town Days will be held from 1-8 June. The Old Town is then filled with music, art, theater and many other festive events. It is one of the merriest times for paying a visit!

For more information on Estonia and Tallinn:

<http://www.visitestonia.com/en/>

<http://www.tourism.tallinn.ee/eng>