

Returning



home 2021



Photo: Eve Kruluse



Practical information about returning to Estonia
and the stories of people who have returned

Back in Estonia?
We are here for you!



Integration Foundation



integratsioon.ee
integratsioon.ee/tagasipöördujale



tagasieestisse@integratsioon.ee

**Irene Käosaar**

Director of the Integration Foundation

We all have our roots. Being in touch with them is important, sometimes even in ways that are hard to describe. Every year, there are increasingly more Estonians, whether born, raised, or living abroad, that have made the decision to answer the call of their roots and return to Estonia. Surely, there are all kinds of days here in Estonia – some sunny and golden, others foggy and rainy. However, the feeling of being at home, in your own country and with your own people, is something that everyone cherishes.

The Integration Foundation is here to offer you any support that you might need in coming back home to your roots.

Every year, more than 7,000 people with Estonian roots are returning to Estonia. Interested in life here in Estonia, many of them also contact the Integration Foundation. Sometimes, they get in touch with us before returning to Estonia so that they can plan their return in more detail.

The stories in the booklet introduce you to some of the people who have returned. You can read about their everyday life and how they have adjusted to Estonian society. All returnees will always be welcome at the Integration Foundation: we are here to answer your questions, help you learn Estonian, or just hear the story you want to share with us.

**Kaire Cocker**

Head of Returnee Advising Service,
Integration Estonia

Living in Estonia was Marina's dream



Marina, who was born and raised in Kazakhstan, has known her entire life that she is of Estonian origin. His grandfather Oskar shared the fate of thousands of fellow Estonians – he was a victim of Soviet repressions and deported from Estonia.

As a child, Marina also knew some words in Estonian and in the summer, her mother and grandmother sometimes visited their relatives in Estonia – but after the collapse of the Soviet Union, they lost all contact with their Estonian relatives.

One day Marina noticed an article on how the descendants of Estonian citizens are automatically eligible for Estonian citizenship. Marina then found out from the Estonian Integration Foundation that indeed, she could apply for Estonian citizenship, but in order to do so, she needed her grandfather's birth certificate, which, of course, she did not have. 'I was thrilled to know that I could have the opportunity to be granted Estonian citizenship and come to live to Estonia – a country I had heard so much about,' exclaims Marina.

She asked her mother for the old documents that she had carefully been storing between a leather folder. Marina investigated the matter further and found out that back in 1924, when her grandfather was born, birth certificates were not issued yet; instead, when a child was born, an entry was made in the local

church records. 'When I read that, I remembered straight away that my grandmother had written down facts about grandfather's family that he dictated for her – probably just so as not to forget. So, it read that upon deportation, the Soviets had taken away two cows, an old horse, ten hens, and an old Chevrolet lorry from them,' tells Marina. The name of the church where her grandfather had been christened was also written down but unfortunately with errors, so she was unable to find the church. Then she looked up the entire list of Estonian churches online, and the names of two churches somewhat resembled the one that her grandmother had jotted down. 'I wrote to these churches and one of them replied, saying that indeed, the names of my ancestors were in their records,' says Marina with delight.

Marina submitted the official application for the document to the Estonian embassy in November and it was ready for her to collect by the beginning January. When picking up the document, she also filed the application for Estonian citizenship for herself and her children. They received Estonian passports in April and in June 2021, she and her children flew to Tallinn, each carrying a suitcase. The rest of their belongings remained in Kazakhstan, packed in boxes, as she did not have enough money to send them to Estonia by post.

'My son asked how we could go and live in a country we had never been to. I told him that living in Estonia had been

my life-long dream as my grandparents and mother used to tell me a lot about Estonia and Tallinn. I fell in love with the country, its capital, and its people on the very first day,' says Marina.

Her 14-year-old son had to leave his friends behind in Kazakhstan. Maybe this is why he was first very unhappy in Estonia, as if he liked nothing here. Luckily, his mother managed to get him into a judo class, as he had done judo back in Kazakhstan, and he could also attend a sports camp. He made new friends there and since then, he has also enjoyed living in Estonia.

The children will start school soon – the son will be attending a Russian-language school; the daughter, however, will start in an Estonian-language school. This way, she will have to start one grade lower than in Kazakhstan but then again, she will have a better chance to study Estonian and adjust to the local circumstances. 'I am impressed by the Estonian school system. I want her to study at a school where more attention is paid on the personal development of students,' explains Marina.


Grass is greener in Estonia

'Up to now, I am only pleasantly surprised about the life in Estonia,' says Marina. 'The way that public authorities work is really amazing – everything is done online and quickly. Whether I have needed help with preparing a document or understanding a legal act – they have helped me in all matters,' Marina says.

'I received a lot of help and support from the advisors at the Integration Foundation. They helped me fill in different documents and follow required procedures. They also gave me information about the local school system and youth camps, and I also received financial return support from them. They have assisted me in matters that might not even be part of their work duties.'

Whereas people who are born here but often lack the experience of living in another country are often complaining about the poor biking facilities in the city, Marina was surprised by the fact that bikers have been taken into consideration in the city traffic in the first place. She loves the children's playgrounds in Tallinn and stresses how clean the city is.

'When speaking about the Estonian nature, after having moved here I can really understand the origin of the phrase 'Grass is always greener on the other side'. Here, in Estonia, the grass really is greener. And the air is incredibly clean!' says Marina, praising her new home country. The only thing that bothers her is the fact that the traffic light cycles are a bit too long. Nothing else.

Marina's husband, who was granted a five-year Estonian residence permit, found a job soon after coming to Estonia but Marina is currently registered as unemployed at the Unemployment Insurance Fund. The jobs that interest her require the knowledge of Estonian. 'I intend to learn Estonian and not make any compromises,' says Marina resolutely. 

The knowledge of language open many doors

You can manage in Estonia without knowing Estonian – most Estonians speak enough foreign languages. Yet, if you can speak Estonian, it gives you the key that opens the door to the hearts of locals, creating an opportunity for you to take part in the local culture.

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Free Estonian courses are provided by the Integration Foundation and the Unemployment Insurance Fund. The consultants at the Integration Foundation help you find the learning opportunity that best suits your needs. Together with our advisor consultant, you can analyse your needs and experience and find a solution that you need and that suits you. This could be free Estonian courses, language cafes or clubs organised by the Integration Foun-




Photo: Pixabay

dation, but also different options provided by other organisations or independent language learning online. The e-mail address of the advisors of the Integration Foundation is info@integratsiooniinfo.ee and the phone number is **+372 659 9025**.

You can also apply for compensation for your Estonian language learning costs from the Education and Youth Board (www.harno.ee). The compensation can be applied on three grounds: compensation for language learning costs to those who are applying for Estonian citizenship, compensation for costs to those who have passed the Estonian language

examination at the Language Inspectorate's request pursuant to the Language Act, and compensation for costs to others. You are eligible for compensation if you study at a language school that has the education licence for the corresponding language level. If you want to check whether the school you want to study at has the required licence, please send an enquiry to sulvi.botker@harno.ee. In order to apply for the compensation, you need to submit an application to the Education and Youth Board together with the copy of your identity document and the documents proving you have paid the tuition.

If you also need a certificate of the Estonian language proficiency examination, make sure that the course you have chosen prepares you for the proficiency examination. There are many private language schools that offer language courses.

Once you are registered as an unemployed person at the Unemployment Insurance Fund, you can approach the consultant there and ask for the opportunities for learning Estonian that they provide. The Unemployment Insurance Fund offers Estonian courses both for individuals and employers. In addition to attending language courses and participating in activities that support language learning, we advise you to learn the language actively by yourself and practice it whenever possible. See additional information at integratsioon.ee/en/studying-estonian-independently. If you need to check the spelling of something, we advise you to use keeleabi.eki.ee. 

Four important questions to ask when choosing a language course

- What is the aim of the course and does it meet your needs and wishes?
- How long and intense is the course and do you have available resources for it?
- How large will the group be?
- How is the group formed and do they take the language level of the participants into consideration?

Good to know!

Pursuant to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act (subsection 37 (2)), students have to be provided with the services of at least a special education teacher, psychologist and social educator, free of charge. If necessary, students also have to be provided with an individualised curriculum, special education support, differentiated teaching support and extra-curriculum support. If these measures are not sufficient, you can also approach the Rajaleidja centre of the Education and Youth Board, which provides study counselling free of charge. This helps to pinpoint the academic or behavioural problems of the child that withhold them from succeeding in their studies. The centres also provide advice on how to support the child's further development and coping. You can book an appointment in the e-booking system (rajaleidja.ee) or by phoning 735 0700.

Sources: integratsioon.ee,
hm.ee/sites/default/files/aruanne_0.pdf

When coming back to your home country, you really end up in a new place

Psychologists say that when you have been away from home for a long time, you should not think about returning as going back but rather as going to a new place, as it is not the same place that you left behind. You have changed and so has the country you once left behind.

This is how Imre Treufeld, who has been away from Estonia for eleven years, feels. The people who have spent some time abroad and consider returning home tend to presume that they are expected there and life has remained the same, as it always does at home.

Actually, the life in the place you return to is different. Life has also gone on there. This might make you feel very disappointed.



The returnee might have a cultural shock that is 'the other way around'.

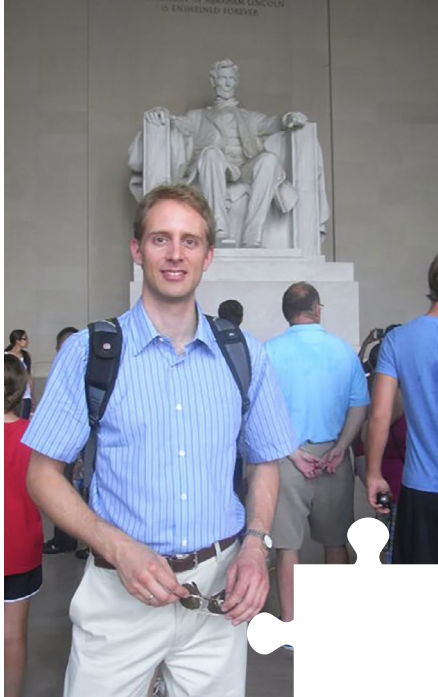
When Imre finished his studies in the USA and returned to Estonia, this is what he tried to keep in mind. In 2008, Imre received a scholarship to study and get a doctoral degree in the United States. This prestigious scholarship was very hard to get – receiving it was like hitting a jackpot.

His studies ended up taking longer than initially planned, due to misunderstandings with his supervisor. Although Imre found working with him to be very interesting, he did not get along well on a personal level. Once he found a new supervisor, things started going well and after having finished his doctoral degree in eight years, Imre took the opportunity to do postdoctoral research at the same university.

At some point, he was planning to stay in the USA permanently as he got married to a Brazilian woman who worked there as a doctor. Unfortunately, their marriage was not destined to succeed.

During his studies, Imre visited Estonia very rarely, altogether maybe three times, and only for a week at a time. This is why he imagined life in Estonia as it was back in 2008 when he left for the US and was hesitant about returning. He did not want to come back, fearing that he would not find any work here. 'I knew that I had changed a lot as a person and it was interesting to think about how I would manage,' explains Imre.

Photos: private collection



When he got back to Estonia, he was actively looking for work and attending seminars, including the picnic-seminar that the Estonian Integration Foundation holds for returnees.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs held a seminar at the Riigikogu, where Imre found out that the Sillamäe-based company Silmet was looking for a specialist just like him. Imre's specialities include supercapacitors and electrochemistry, material science, and instrument engineering but at Silmet, he works with rare earth metals.

'The work that I do at Silmet now is exactly the kind I enjoy – managing people and organising work,' says Imre. 'When I left Estonia, I was very shy and did not feel comfortable dealing with people. In the USA, I improved my communication skills

and to be more empathetic. I find it very exciting that I can implement these new skills in Estonia on a daily basis.

Imre thinks that Estonians are not very eager to talk to strangers. Hi! Who are you? What is it that you do? How is it going? – such open communication is hard to find here according to him. He also finds that people are not very good at resolve conflicts.

'When tensions arise, they just feel angry but do not dare to discuss matters. A passive-aggressive communication style is dominant and often people perceive that to calmly talk about a problem is an inconvenience. When you speak about a problem, you should not attack the other but try and come up with solutions instead. Empathy is always your best bet,' recommends Imre.

Then again, he also sees advantages to living in Estonia. For instance, new digital solutions can be implemented here, which is very positive. An example he brings is filing your tax report: in the USA, it takes from three to seven days, depending on how experienced the person is; in Estonia, you only need a couple of minutes to file a tax return documents.

To raise children in Estonia


Imre said that when he came back to Estonia, several situations came up in which he needed help and more information. For instance, it was very expensive to have his belongings sent over to Estonia from USA. Another difficult situation

arose when he wanted to get an exemption from duty for his personal belongings. 'I have a doctoral degree and yet it took me five hours to understand how to fill in the forms online. The system could be clearer for every user, not aimed at experts in the field,' finds Imre.

When he returned to Estonia with his girlfriend of the time, they did not know how she could stay here for longer than the three months that are allowed without a visa. 'This was troublesome, indeed,' admits Imre.

Most of Imre's acquaintances have returned to Estonia so that their children could grow up in Estonia and attend kindergarten and school here.

It is also very easy to set up a company in Estonia. When comparing the Estonian social system and allowances with other countries, Imre says that the situation in Estonia lags behind. He says that our country has been historically poor, and he feels sorry that now when we are doing a little better, the government does not contribute enough to help the less privileged people.

Imre thinks that the Estonian nature is definitely more beautiful than anywhere else in the world. Differently from the USA, being outdoors and camping is legal and simple. 'It might seem that there is a lot of land and forest in the USA but if you want to go somewhere and camp, you need to have a special permit and you can only camp in designated locations,' he says. 

How to find the right job?

Several studies have shown that the development of the Estonian economy and labour market in the recent years has been positive, and this increases the need for an educated workforce. If you have a good professional background, speak different languages, and have a polished resume, you can probably find a job quite quickly.

Sometimes it might take more time to find a suitable position, which is why its recommended start gathering information about the Estonian labour market and potential employers while you are still abroad. It might also help if you inform your friends and acquaintances that you are looking for work.

If you cannot find a job straight away, you can approach the Unemployment Insurance Fund. 'It does not matter where a person worked until now – everyone has the same rights and obligations when they are registered as unemployed, and they also have the opportunity to use different services,' says Lauri Kool, the communications advisor at the Unemployment Insurance Fund. 'Whether you are entitled to financial benefits depends on you meeting the criteria for benefits/allowances and this is not related to the country where a person used to work before. If you want to register yourself as unemployed in

Good to know! To keep yourself up to date with the expected skills and requirements that employers require for positions in your field, it is a good idea to collect some background information by browsing online job search sites.

Estonia, the advice is the same as to all other unemployed persons. The services are provided to all registered unemployed people,' says Kool. You can also book an appointment with a career counsellor at the Unemployment Insurance Fund, who will help you evaluate your skills and make conscious career decisions. **Career services are free of charge to everyone and meant for students, parents, job seekers, and employed people.** The application for registering yourself as unemployed and necessary additional documents can be submitted online, in the e-service of the Unemployment Insurance Fund at tootukassa.ee.

Job search websites

There is a lot of information about available positions on job search sites. You can see what kind of positions are being offered and skills required. Many employers also briefly introduce their company there. You can apply for jobs with your



electronic resume, which you can either upload to the site or complete online. The largest job search websites are cv.ee and cvkeskus.ee.

Recruitment agencies

Employers also seek employees with the help of recruitment agencies. You can leave your CV in the talent bank of a recruitment agency and if an employer seeks a person with your skills, the agency makes a direct offer to you. If you have a family member whose main language is not Estonian, they can get information about available positions on the website workinestonia.ee.

Go work a bit

If you want to earn some extra money in addition to your main job or are looking for temporary jobs during your studies, you can 'go work a bit'. More information about it can be found on the website goworkabit.com.

Starting a company

If you do not want to work for someone else and prefer setting up your own company and be your own employer, you can approach the **County Developments Centres** (arenduskeskused.ee) to get answers to your questions related to entrepreneurship. They advise you on preparing a successful business plan and tell you how to surround yourself with the necessary people and get a loan for a starting a company. The Unemployment Insurance Fund also provides start-up grants – ask their consultants about this opportunity.

Information about the documents you need to submit to the Estonian ENIC/NARIC centre to assess your foreign education qualifications can be found here: archimedes.ee/enic/akadeemiline-tunnustamine/noutavad-dokumendid.

Sources: tootukassa.ee, arenduskeskused.ee, oska.kutsekoda.ee/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Eesti-t%C3%B6%C3%B6turg-t%C3%A4na-ja-homme2017.pdf

Life in Estonia turned out to be a lot better than expected

It is not very common for a person not to meet their grandparents until they are 24 years old. However, this is exactly what happened to Cristofer, who spent his childhood in Argentina but is now living in his mother's home country, Estonia, and is trying to learn Estonian.

Estonia has always existed for Cristofer, of course – in his thoughts. He got the first chance to visit Estonia in 2014 when he was 24. It was possible back then thanks to the programme 'Back to your roots'. He was one of the twenty lucky people who were selected from 200 applicants and got the opportunity to visit Estonia.

'The first time I got here, I felt like 'Mom! I am home!,' he remembers. 'We visited different places all over Estonia and it all felt as if I was being shown around in a courtyard of my own home where I had, for some reason, never been before,' the young man exclaims.

He was in the midst of an emotional turmoil while in Estonia. His grandparents, who until then had only sent him birth-

day cards and Kalev chocolate bars for Christmas, were together with him. They prepared pancakes with jam, showed him family photos, told stories and anecdotes. 'Had I grown up with them, I would probably have heard these stories for the twentieth time but I was a 'fresh' grandchild, eager to listen to everything they had to tell me,' says Cristofer, remembering meeting his grandparents.

When in Estonia, Cristofer realised that after finishing his master studies in biotechnology and molecular biology in Argentina, he wanted to come to live to Estonia for at least a year. He defended his thesis in August 2019 and by that time, he had already attended a job interview with an Estonian company who wanted to hire him as a client support specialist. The company agreed to compensate for his plane ticket from Buenos Aires to Tallinn and a two-week stay at a hotel.

New life in Estonia

Cristofer quickly found an apartment in the centre of Tallinn, his uncle helped him with registering his place of residence, setting up e-Estonia accounts, and pay-



ing taxes, and in a month's time, his life in Estonia was more or less on the right track. 'It was an excellent opportunity for me to come to Estonia and spend quality time with my grandparents,' says the young man.

As Cristofer had done his homework before coming to Estonia and also had a supportive network of family members, he had no need for the services intended for returnees. What he did have, though, was a strong desire to learn Estonian.

'I had great expectations about learning Estonian but things did not go as well as I had planned,' he says. Cristofer used the language-learning consultation service provided by the Estonian Integration Foundation and started to learn Estonian at the Tallinn Estonian Language House, which belongs to the foundation, in October 2019. He continued until the COVID-19 pandemic struck and all courses went online. He says that right now, his best Estonian teacher is his grandmother, which also means that most of his vocab-

ulary is related to food. 'Oh, I do love my grandma's pancakes!' he exclaims.

When Cristofer left Argentina, he also left his girlfriend behind – they decided to go separate ways. 'After having spent a few months here in Estonia, I realised that she was really the woman I wanted to share everything that was happening in my life,' remembers Cristofer. 'I asked her in January 2020 if she wanted to come live with me in Estonia. Luckily, she said yes! We decided that I would fly back to Argentina in April, we would get married and return to Estonia in May.' Unfortunately, it was not destined to go like this.

They had wanted to have a three-day wedding in Argentina with a hundred guests. Everything had been organised: catering, entertainment for two evenings, a pallet of beer, a booked venue. In March, a month before the wedding, the borders were closed because of COVID. 'In the end, I never made it to Argentina, there was no wedding and Karen came to Estonia in September 2020 but not as my wife but as



Photos: private collection

my girlfriend. We got married in Tallinn on 19 June and the wedding was on the Estonian scale, so we only had forty guests.'

Life in Estonia has turned out to be a lot better than he initially expected. His first visit to Estonia in 2017 seemed more like a dream-like holiday and he did not get the idea of how it feels to lead a regular life here. Now, having lived in Estonia for two years, he feels that he can manage. There are some things that still bring a smile on his face: the lack of red tape, extreme punctuality, pragmatism, directness, and high-tech integrated into everyday life.

Cristofer is a huge fan of Estonia and his friends from the rest of the world are sick

and tired of him telling how great Estonia is. He has also noticed that the Estonians from younger generations are warmer, more open, and considerate. This has made him feel that Estonia truly is his home.

'When I visit my grandmother, the room is full of wonderful food smells; when we celebrated the Independence Day, my grandfather poured me a shot of vodka. My uncle and aunt took me to the woods to see beavers – I had never seen them before. I am bonding with my Estonian family,' says Cristofer with joy.

He has been hiking in the woods near Tallinn but also visited the Lahemaa National Park, the Kuradisaar island, the island of Hiiumaa, Haapsalu, Pärnu, Taevaskoja, Tartu, Keila-Joa, Vääna-Jõesuu, Narva, and the Lake Peipsi.

'What would I say to people who are considering returning to Estonia? Come! Be ready to work hard and be paid for it. Bring warm winter jacket!' adds Cristofer. 🧩🧩

Frequently asked questions

What are the first important steps to take when arriving in Estonia?

Register your place of residence in the Population Register. This gives you access to other things – you can apply for social allowances, enrol your child in a kindergarten or a school, etc. The local government checks whether a person is registered as a resident in the municipality where they want to access services. More information about submitting your notice of residence can be found in the article 'Registering your place of residence' available in the eesti.ee state portal.

How to find a job in Estonia?

Everything related to job seeking and general information about the labour market can be found on the tootukassa.ee website.

At what age do children start school in Estonia?

All children who have turned seven years old before 1 October of an academic must attend school starting from this academic year. The obligation ends



when they either graduate from basic school or turn 17 years old. The minimum compulsory age can be postponed due to health reasons and children can also be home-schooled.

Does a child of a returnee have the right to a kindergarten or school education?

The local government has the task of supporting people in finding a school or a kindergarten. Approach your city government or rural municipality government with these questions at eesti.ee/est/kontaktid/kohalikud_omavalitsused.

Pursuant to Estonian legislation, the local government has to guarantee that all children living in Estonia can attend kindergarten or school near their home. If you would like your child to study at another school, this might be possible if there are vacancies.

Can my child start school with children their own age?

In Estonia, children are legally entitled to study in the same grade with children

who are their age (not in a lower or higher grade). Children from families who return to Estonia sometimes start a year lower, instead of continuing where they left off abroad. This is often due to the lack of Estonian language skills.

The result may be that the child acquires sufficient Estonian very quickly but is bored in other subjects, as they have already learned everything necessary in their previous school.

How to receive medical help

Health insurance is given to people who either work or are registered as unemployed. There are also several other insured social groups who do not work, such as children, pensioners, etc.

With health insurance and family doctor services, it is important that you have registered your address in the Population Register. You can find more information about it on their website haigekassa.ee.

You have the right to choose and change a family doctor. More information about it can be found at terviseamet.ee and in the article 'Healthcare' in the eesti.ee state portal.

How long is a driving licence issued in foreign country valid for in Estonia and how to exchange it for an Estonian driving licence?

A driving licence issued in the European Economic Area and Switzerland is valid


until the date marked on the licence. If the validity period of the licence is longer than 15 years, you need to exchange it for an Estonian driving licence if you move to Estonia, by 18 January 2033 at the latest.

The countries of the Vienna Convention on Road Traffic from 1968 and the Geneva Convention on Road Traffic from 1949: the driving licence is valid in Estonia for 12 months, starting from the date the licence holder becomes a permanent resident in Estonia. More information and the list of countries is available at transpordiamet.ee/valisriigi-juhiluba.

How to get legal aid if I cannot afford the service?

HUGO.legal in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice offers two hours of free legal counselling. The people eligible are all Estonian residents whose average gross income is up to 1,200 euros per month.

Family affairs regarding children's rights are an exception. In the case of these, the income cap is 1,700 euros. Before counselling, you need to conclude a client contract and pay a five-euro contract fee.

You can book an appointment here: hugo.legal/broneeri?hind=soodus. For more information, call +372 688 0400 or e-mail hugo@hugo.legal. 

Sources: eesti.ee, integratsioon.ee, haigekassa.ee, juristaitab.ee, transpordiamet.ee, terviseamet.ee, harno.ee.

If you have a spiritual companion, **you will have the sense of home**

While someone in another corner of the world is playing with the idea of returning to Estonia and weighing its pros and cons, Elin finds that when it comes to making the decision, what matters is your upbringing and spiritual connection – these determine whether you belong to Estonia or not. Without a spiritual companion, you will feel as a stranger in Estonia just as in any other place.

'I have lived in England and the USA but I never belonged there. When you do not feel at home where you currently are, then leave, come home', advises Elin.

'You need to have a spiritual companion that accompanies you to Estonia. This person might be long gone but if they are your spiritual companion, you will come with them. This also creates a spiritual connection with the country. Otherwise, you will feel like a stranger here, just like everywhere else,' finds Elin.

'I am an Estonian citizen, I am Estonian. When I left Estonia decades ago, it was



not a voluntary decision', stresses the experienced woman. After escaping Estonia, she grew up in England. She says that life in England was not too bad, and that at the time moving to the USA was not really considered. She had no plans of going there but when she was 54

and went on a trip to India, she met an American man and fell head over heels in love. They got married. 'After my husband died, I stayed in the USA, as my mother and grandmother had already died in England and I had nowhere else to go,' confesses Elin.

Elin's return to Estonia was partly due to her health. In the USA, her life was becoming difficult as her eyesight deteriorated. She could no longer drive and there was no public transport in area, where she lived. Elin also says that she felt she was getting older and you cannot leave and move to another country at the last minute.

Besides her main job, she was also working as a carer in a nursing home. 'I had a patient of whom I took care for a long time. When she died, she left me a little cottage. It was then when I realised that this was my chance to return to Estonia. I sold the house and came back,' says Elin. 'I did not have that kind of money before that would have enabled me to return.'

Elin had half of her things packed and ready for the move when her health deteriorated and she even ended up in the hospital. She had to postpone everything. Later, her friends from the gymnastics practice helped her finish packing and Jüri Toomepuu, who is also known here in Estonia, drove her to the airport.



Different daily life and beautiful nature

Elin is from Haapsalu. Her grandfather was the famous poet Ernst Enno, whose grave is also in Haapsalu. This is why she wanted to return to her hometown Haapsalu, to her old family home. Unfortunately, this was impossible. 'My childhood home that we had to leave behind with my mother and grandmother no longer exists; there is a promenade here now,' she says, with a hint of regret in her voice.

Although Elin thinks that the situation in the Estonian real estate market is quite difficult (there were few options in Haapsalu and the prices very high), she is more than happy with her new home in

the village of Taebla near Haapsalu and it brings her a lot of joy. 'You can see a beautiful grove from the window of my lovely apartment. Even the street name is beautiful – Nurme! (meadow in English) What more could I ask for!' she exclaims.

Elin first visited Estonia in 1990. 'This was the first time in my life when I felt I was in spiritual contact with people. I lived in the USA for many years but I never had such a deep contact with anyone there. This is very important to me, a shared spirituality,' she stresses. 'I have friends and acquaintances here. I attended Jaan Kaplinski's funeral and saw more familiar faces there than I ever had in the USA.'

Elin says that everyday life in Estonia is very different from the USA, starting from the time zone and ending with the sizing of clothes. It is also difficult to grasp the distances, as everything is measured in kilometres, whereas Elin is used to miles. The food and spices are different. Everything is different.


'For instance, I am used to having two taps but here, cold and hot water come from the same tap. I purchased a new cooker for my kitchen, it is very different from the one I had in the USA. I needed to use the manual,' she sighs.

'The overwhelming feeling that I got upon arriving in Estonia was helplessness. By now I have been here long enough and figured out some issues myself but I also

received help from the Estonian Integration Foundation. I totally understand that the people who have never lived here before might need a lot of help from Integration Foundation,' says Elin.

Elin prepared in advance and contacted an consultant from the Estonian Integration Foundation on Skype while still back in the USA to plan her return. Once she had arrived in Estonia, they were in contact several times and the advisor supported Elin in adjusting to the life here. The Integration Foundation also helped Elin receive financial return support.

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As opposed to everyday problems, Elin finds the Estonian nature very beautiful. 'I have travelled all over the world and there is nothing as beautiful anywhere in the world as the Estonian nature,' says Elin assuredly. 'In the spring, I could hear a nightingale from my window and swallows built a nest on my balcony.' 

What can you do with the ID-card?



ID-card is necessary and easy to use

An ID-card is a compulsory personal identification document for Estonian citizens and the citizens of the European Union who are permanent Estonian residents. An ID-card is valid for five years and it is issued by the Police and Boarder Guard Board (Estonian abbreviation PPA, www.politsei.ee). When you apply for an ID-card, you also need to provide fingerprints. An ID-card is a digital document with wide scope of application.

Identity document

An ID-card is the only digital document that is also valid as a travel document. If you want to travel in the European Union and the European Economic Area, the ID-card is enough and you do not need to bring a passport. Check the validity of your travel documents before the trip.

Digital personal identity document

You can use your ID-card to log into e-services. For instance, when entering the eesti.ee state portal, you can check your information or access other state-provided services.

Digital signing device

In addition to logging into e-services (i.e. electronic authentication), you can also give electronic signatures with your ID-card: sign contracts, confirm transactions, order services, etc. An electronic signature given with the ID-card is legally equal to a hand-written signature. Giving a digital signature is easy.

1. Enter your ID-card into the card reader.
2. Open DigiDoc 4 client in your computer.

3. If someone else has already sent you a document to sign with their signature already there, save it on your computer first and then open DigiDoc4.
4. Once your ID-card data is read correctly, you are ready to sign.
5. Follow the rules and enter PIN1 and PIN2.

Read more about giving a digital signature here: id.ee/artikkel/soovid-arvutis-digiallkirja-anda.

Loyalty card

Many companies use the ID-card as a loyalty card, without issuing a separate plastic card.

Electronic voting

To cast your vote in elections, you do not have to go to the polling station – you can vote online.

@eesti.ee e-mail address

The Republic of Estonia has given every ID-card holder the e-mail address @eesti.ee where official documents are sent by the state if they are unable to contact you by

any other means. You can re-route your incoming mail from the eesti.ee inbox to your regular e-mail address either in the state portal eesti.ee or DigiDoc4!

A tip

If you use your ID-card on a daily basis, it is a good idea to order a **digi-ID**. This way, you can keep your card in a safe place and do not have to worry about it getting lost or damaging the chip due to constant use. **Digi-ID** allows you to use the same e-services as the ID-card but is not valid as an identity document.

Applying for an ID-card at the client service office

To apply for an ID-card, find a client service office near you and bring your identity document. You can also book an appointment online for applying for an ID-card at the client service office (politsei.ee/et/asukohad/teenindused).

Applying for an ID-card for the first time


When you apply for an ID-card for the first time, you need to submit a document proving your Estonian citizenship or if you are an EU citizen, a document proving that you have a living permit. Citizenship can be proven with the following documents:

- Passport of an Estonian citizen,
- Original document that states that one parent or grandparent of the applicant had Estonian citizenship. You also need to submit a document proving that you are related to them (e.g. a birth certificate). In order to find the document, make an enquiry about the citizenship of your parents or grandparents in the National Archives.

Applying for an ID-card in a foreign country

In a foreign country, you can apply for an ID-card either at the self-service or a foreign mission of the Republic of Estonia. To apply for an ID-card, go to the foreign mission and bring your identity document. The list of foreign missions that issue identity documents can be found here: politsei.ee/et/dokumente-vaeljastavad-eesti-vabariigi-vaelisesindused. The information about paying the state fee can be found here: politsei.ee/et/juhend/id-kaardi-taotlemine-taeiskasvanule/kuidas-maksta. Send your digital document photo to the address ppa@politsei.ee. You can find requirements and recommendations: politsei.ee/et/dokumendifotonouded-ja-juhised.

If your ID-card gets lost or stolen

If your ID-card is lost, stolen, or you suspect that someone might abuse it, you can suspend the document certificates. With suspended certificates, no one can use e-services or give a digital signature with your card. To suspend the certificates, you can call 24/7 on **1777** or **+372 677 3377**. If you find your document, you need to go to PPA's client service office to reactivate the certificates. Bring your identity document. 

Sources: www.politsei.ee, www.id.ee

If you forget your PIN-codes, you do not need to apply for a new ID-card to renew them. Just contact the Police and Border Guard Board and they issue new PIN-codes **free of charge**.



In Estonia, there is no need to plant mushrooms in the forest

Amira did not leave Estonia because she was unhappy with her life here or she was missing something. She was doing great, actually. She only left because she wanted to study English. She figured that she would go and have a look around the world and return in a year. However, life had different plans for her.

Amira, whose name in the passport is Kersti Dennis, left Estonia at a very young age and returned to Estonia after living abroad for 21 years. She spent all these years living in Las Vegas, USA, where she worked as a belly dancer and a model.

She started off as a Au Pair – this was the only legal way to go to the USA. Although she did not really like babysitting, she was very good at it. 'Things were very bad in the family I worked in. Once I had learned

enough English to stand for myself, the mother of the family just kicked me out,' Amira recalls. 'After that I started college.'

It was destined for the young Estonian to fall in love with an American and getting married. They had a very long and happy marriage but unfortunately, her husband died unexpectedly. Already a week after his death, she and her daughter Sofie decided to return to Estonia.

'I probably made the decision so quickly because I had been playing with the thought of returning for some years already. I could not come earlier because it would have been very difficult for my husband to find a similar job here,' she explains.

They had almost reached an agreement with her husband that they would have two homes – one in the USA, the other in Estonia – and their daughter would go to school here.

Amira says it was not difficult for her daughter to come to live in Estonia, as she had been here in the summers. She loved it in Estonia, especially the fact that she could be independent here – take a bus or tram without an adult guardian – in the USA, she could not have lived like this until she was 16.

Amira packed up her life in the USA, which she had built for twenty years, within three months, and sent it to Estonia in a sea container. They arrived in Estonia in

July last year, with four suitcases and two cats.

'Moving is absolutely nerve-wrecking. I had my grand piano, furniture, and everything else sent over. Transporting the sea container to Estonia cost me 10,000 dollars. Somehow, I managed but it was really difficult. What made it especially bad was the fact that I was still grieving, having to sort my husband's belongings, selling them, and giving them away. She pauses briefly. „All of these photos. I was like a zombie, I don't even remember certain things." Then the pandemic struck, which made getting things done difficult in the USA. I suppose when you are faced with a hard situation, you find the strength in yourself,' she says.

'When I finally arrived, I had to prove to the Estonian customs that I was not going to sell all the things in the container but that I was going to live in this country. I needed to submit a letter from the school principal that my daughter would really start school here,' sighs Amira. 'I did not qualify for financial benefit but information and recommendations from the Estonian Integration Foundation made my situation a lot easier. They were very helpful.'

Estonians do not beat about the bush

She is very happy with her life in Estonia. Amira says that what makes life special and good here are simple things. For instance, you can go picking berries and

mushrooms in the forest without getting into trouble. In the USA, this is forbidden, as berries and mushrooms belong to the state. 'There was a case in the USA when girls who went mushroom picking were fined and they were told to replant the mushrooms in the forest,' recalls Amira. She thinks that the people in Estonia are more in touch with nature; they pick and dry herbs. She is happy that in addition to science-based medicine, people also use natural remedies here.

Speaking of medicine, Amira gives an example of when she needed to go to the emergency room recently. 'And it cost me just five euros! In the USA, that is unheard of. There it costs you an arm and a leg if you just want to check whether your ribs are broken or not,' she sighs.

Amira's recommendation to young people who do not have a family yet is to travel the world and live in different countries – this is an enriching experience.

A family with children could consider coming to live here in Estonia, as she thinks Estonia is a wonderful place to raise a family. 'It is safe here – I do not feel afraid when my daughter takes the bus by herself,' she says, satisfied.

'The Estonian nature is beautiful and varied, the cultural life is rich. Then again, life here makes you tough because there is no beating about the bush here; people are very direct. When you



live here, it makes you strong,' admits Amira.

Sofie can speak Estonian because her mother has spoken Estonian to her since birth, reading her Estonian books and listening to Entel-tentel songs with her. However, she will still start studying at an English-language private school. It was relatively easy to get a place for her there.

Amira thinks it would have been too hard for her to start at an Estonian-language school straight away. She is sure that her daughter's Estonian will not suffer, though, as children still speak Estonian to each other. She can also practice Estonian with her relatives.

Until her daughter becomes independent, they will live in their lovely Estonian home but Amira is always open to new adventures. Ideally, she would like to spend half a year in Estonia and the winter somewhere else, for example in Portugal. 🧩🧩🧩

How to search for information?

You need a lot of information to start a new life. Where can you find it? One sure way is to rely on the websites of state authorities or local governments. If this is not enough, you can search for keywords online. You can also approach the staff at your local library – they have the necessary information and are kindly willing to help you.

The best place to start your independent search is definitely the eesti.ee state portal. There you can find valid and updated information about state-provided services and different life events, such as the birth of a child, changing the place of residence, starting a company, becoming unemployed, etc. If you have a family member of another nationality, they can find a lot of information on the website settleinestonia.ee.

Should you need information not available on eesti.ee, you can search online.



Photo: Pixabay

How to search for information online?

A web browser is a program that displays websites. There are many different browsers (Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, etc.) but they all work in the same way. You can find the browser in the Start menu of your computer.

When you open the web browser, you can see a box in the middle of the screen where you can type. By typing a keyword there and clicking on the search button, the search engine will look for words you typed online. One of the most common search engines is Google. There are several others

available but Google is the most popular. Always use short keywords. For example, if you want to know how tall a spruce tree can grow, type 'spruce'. If you type a longer phrase, Google will search for all the words you typed and you might not find a good match.

After the search, you will be displayed a page with the results. The websites with your searched keywords are in large blue font. Under the name of the website, some text from the site is also displayed. natukene teksti sellelt veebilehelt.

You can find useful information from these websites

Passport and ID-card

Police and Border Guard Board

politsei.ee

www.politsei.ee/en/estonian-foreign-representations-that-issue-documents

Pensions in Estonia

State portal <https://www.eesti.ee/en/life-events/going-on-pension>

Social Insurance Board

sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/en

Children and education

Education and Youth Board harno.ee

Ministry of Education hm.ee/en

Local governments www.eesti.ee/en/education-and-research/general-education/preschool-basic-and-secondary-education

Place of residence

Real estate website and real estate agencies

Social benefits

Social Insurance Board

sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/en

Local governments www.eesti.ee/en/pensions-social-services-and-allowances/benefits-and-allowances/subsistence-level-and-subsistence-benefit

Language learning

Integration Foundation

integratsioon.ee/en

Unemployment Insurance Fund

tootukassa.ee/eng

Keeltekoolid

Bringing personal items to Estonia and taxation, owning property in another country for renting purposes, allowances and benefits in a foreign country

Tax and Customs Board

emta.ee/en

www.emta.ee/en/private-client/

[consignments-travel-settlement/settlement/settling-estonia](#)

Driving licence and registering a vehicle

Transport Administration

transpordiamet.ee

Academic recognition of a foreign document in Estonia

SA Archimedes archimedes.ee, archimedes.ee/enic

Job seeking and employment

Unemployment Insurance Fund

tootukassa.ee

minukarjaar.ee

Entrepreneurship

County Development Centres

arenduskeskused.ee

Enterprise Estonia

eas.ee

Information about services provided in your area

Local governments www.eesti.ee/en/institutions-contacts/local-governments

Healthcare and family doctor

Health Insurance Fund haigekassa.ee/en/people/health-insurance

Health Board terviseamet.ee/en/healthcare/information-patients/what-family-physician-care/choosing-family-physician-and-switching

Legal aid

juristaitab.ee

notar.ee

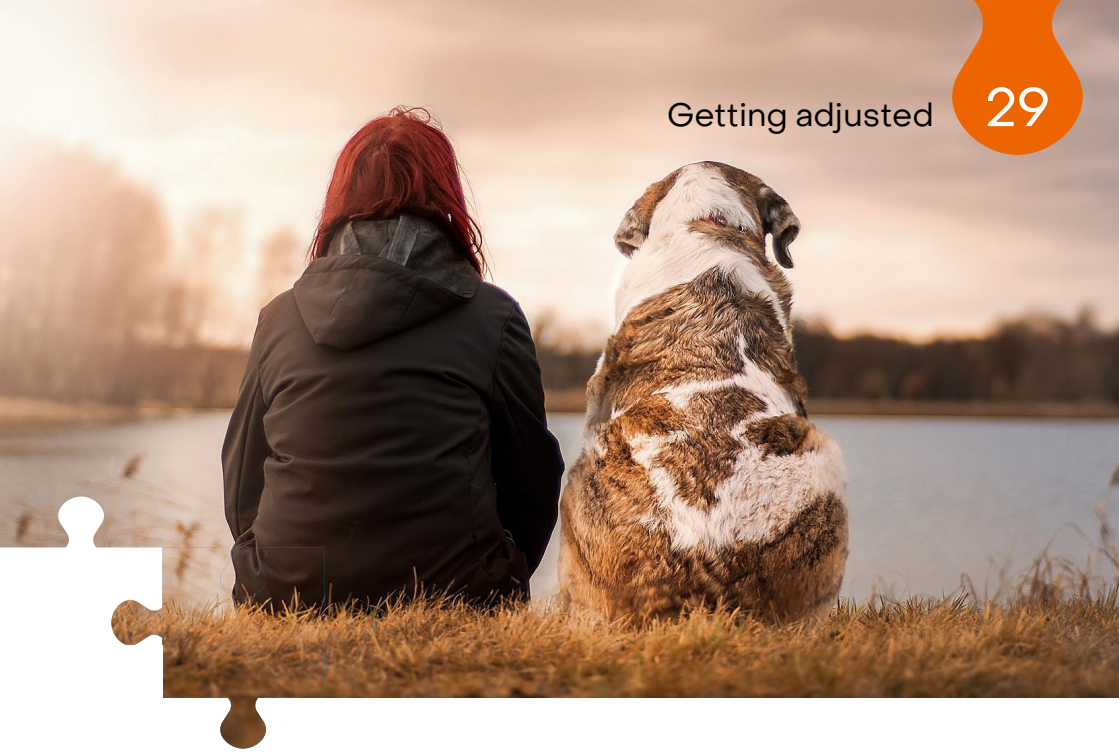
riigikohus.ee

Pets

Agriculture and Food Board

pta.agri.ee

europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/travel/carry/animal-plant/index_en.htm



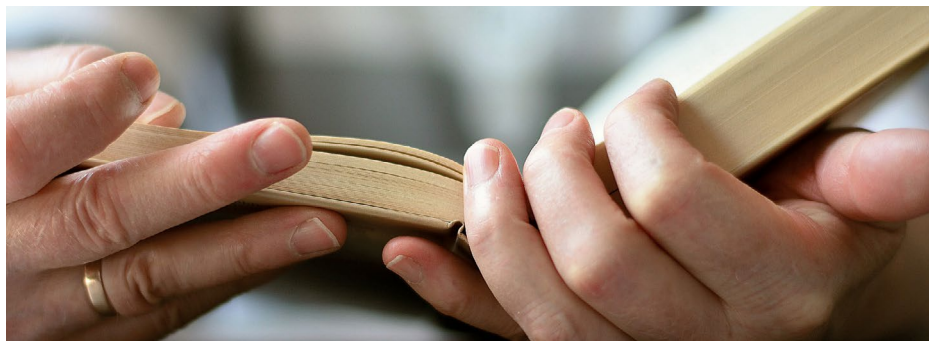
Do what you really love

It is easier to adjust to life in Estonia when you communicate with the locals, participate in different hobby activities, keep up to date with the news, and find emotional support from others.

'It makes it easier to adjust in Estonia if you communicate with the locals,' recommends Aleksander Pulver, the associate professor of personality psychology from the Tallinn University's School of Natural

Sciences and Health. 'New and unusual events and things usually cause more anxiety than familiar things and phenomena. This is why, when trying to get adjusted to a new place, it is important to understand why things are the way they are and to have a support network that offers you emotional support,' he explains.

For young people, it is very important to communicate with their peers and belong somewhere. When you move to



Photos: Pixabay

Tips to get adjusted when returning to Estonia

- Try to find out as much information as possible about moving back to Estonia.
- If you have any friends here, let them know you are returning.
- Rediscover the beauty of local nature.
- Now, you get the chance to do all these things you missed when you were away.
- A good book might help you in difficult times.

What else helps to adjust?

- Try to put yourself in situations where you have the chance to meet new people who share your interests or experiences.
- Try to find activities that you love.

a new place, all old friends are left behind and this could have a devastating effect. 'For teenagers, their network of friends is very important but luckily nowadays, they can also communicate via social media,' the professor recommends.

'When trying to cope with changes, the change itself does not matter – when parents have a close relationship with their children (trust, openness, emotional bond), it makes it easier for the children to adjust,' explains Puhver.

One way to get help with adjusting is to use the one-on-one counselling service provided by the Integration Foundation. They also hold experience meeting where you can contact other returnees. Keep yourself up to date with upcoming events on their website www.integratsioon.ee.



Sources: www.integratsioon.ee,
www.test.tudengiveeb.ut.ee/et/esileht/toeoturule-sisenemine/23-oppimine/praktilised-nouanded-korgkoolis-toimetulekuks/79-uus-algus-kuidas-kohaneda-elumuutustega.

Activities that help you adjust in Estonia

Here you can find some recommendations that might help you get adjusted. Try these out or add your own.

Join a hobby group: a choir, a dance class, a yoga class, a handicraft class.

Do something completely different: winter swimming, painting, horse-back riding.

Visit parks near my home.

Pick berries or mushrooms in the forest.

Start writing a blog.

Volunteer at the animal shelter.

Go hiking outdoors.

Participate in folk university lectures.

Get to know my neighbours.

Go skiing, sledging, ice-skating.

Go to a gym or a sports club.

Visit a cultural event – a cinema, a theatre, a concert.

Enjoying the nature trails

Hiking trails that start and finish in the same place are convenient: you get going, complete the trail, and find yourself again in the place where you started. This way, the entire journey is new and exciting and there is no need to turn around half-way to get back to the car. Here you can find some hiking trails from all over Estonia where you can discover its natural beauty on your own.

NORTHERN ESTONIA

Käsmu hiking and cycling track

Laane road, Käsmu village,

Haljala rural municipality, Lääne-Viru county

The Käsmu hiking and cycling track is situated in the Käsmu captain village in the Lahemaa National Park. The 14-kilometre-long track starts by the local chapel and ends in the car park at the other end of the village. It does a circuit of the peninsula, introducing the Käsmu lake, which separated from the sea 1,500 years ago, and the diverse nature of the Käsmu peninsula.

Metsanurme-Üksnurme history and nature study trail

Lõkke, Metsanurme village,

Saku rural municipality, Harju county

The nine-kilometre-long nature and hiking trail, marked with signs and information boards, begins and ends at the Metsanurme village centre. There are maps of the trail in the mailbox attached to the information stand of the hiking trail building. The rich cultural heritage of the area has been captured in historical studies and findings. In addition, Metsanurme village and its vicinity are of interest to nature enthusiasts. The hiking trail has two recreation sites with shelters, picnic tables, and an outhouse. The hiking

trail is also suitable for various shorter hikes; for these, we recommend the services of a local tour guide.

SOUTHERN ESTONIA

RMK Taevaskoja-Otteni-Taevaskoja hiking trail

Saesaare car park, Taevaskoja village,

Põlva rural municipality, Põlva county

The hiking trail, which starts from Suur Taevaskoda, runs on the high banks of the Ahja River. The sights on the trail include Suur Taevaskoda, the partially preserved Otten or Valgesoo watermill complex, the double arched Otten mill bridge, a tiny canyon, which became famous thanks to the Estonian film *The Last Relic*, picturesque views of the Ahja River, and the hollow of the forest brothers' bunker. The trail is marked with green colour on the trees and signs and there are several information boards on the trail. It is possible to camp and make a campfire at the Otten campfire site.

Kütiorg hiking trail

Car park, Koloreino village

Võru rural municipality, Võru county

The hiking trail starts at the car park near the Kütiorg Ski Resort. The trail is diverse with fairly steep ups and downs and can be dif-

difficult to cross. It takes 4 to 5 hours to complete it. The trail gives a spectacular overview of one of the largest and most powerful glacial valleys in Estonia, Kütiorg, introducing old mill sites and other cultural heritage objects. The slopes of Kütiorg are home to spruce woods that are more than a century old, as well as uniquely thick and high aspens. There is also a campfire site with a barbecue spot near the starting point of the trail.

WESTERN ESTONIA

Orjaku study trail

*Orjaku lighthouse, 715, Orjaku village
Hiiumaa rural municipality, Hiiumaa county*

The Orjaku study trail runs mainly on the shore of the Gulf of Käina. The avifauna of the Gulf of Käina, consisting of 192 species, is interesting and biodiverse. In the autumn, 10,000–15,000 water and coastal birds stop on the Gulf. The trail consists of a longer, Orjaku (3 km), and a shorter, Roostiku, trail (0.7 km). The trail also has a birdwatching tower, three observation platforms, a mud bridge, a recreation site with a shelter, and a boardwalk of approximately 0.4 kilometres over a reed bed. The study trail is perfect for families with children – the shorter trail is manageable even for the very young. Watching the water birds from the observation platform is an interesting experience for both the young and the old. The trail is marked with arrows.

Kaisma recreational trail

Järveniidu, Kaisma village, Põhja-Pärnumaa rural municipality, Pärnu county

Lake Kaisma Suurjärv is a fen lake in the northern part of Pärnu County with a surface area of 1.2 km². It is connected to Lake Kaisma Väikejärv in the middle of the fens and

the area between the two lakes is a prime example of pristine nature. The six-kilometre-long recreational trail runs around Lake Kaisma Suurjärv and gives you the chance to enjoy the beauty of the lake, the fens, and the forests. A total of 1.5 kilometres of the track has boardwalk.

EASTERN ESTONIA


Kurtna hiking trail

*Alutaguse rural municipality, 41209,
Ida-Viru county*

The Kurtna hiking trail starts and ends at Lake Nõmme. A marked trail is situated in the Kurtna Landscape Conservation Area and introduces a variety of plant communities, landscapes, and types of lakes. In total, the trail is 4.5–5.5 km long and along the way, you will pass twelve sights and several lakes. Rest areas and fireplace sites have been established along the trail, where you can swim if you wish.

The longest zip-line in Estonia in the Kiviõli Adventure Park

Mäepealse tee 1, 43125 Lüganduse rural municipality, Ida-Viru county

East Estonia is a special place and this is why we end this article with something special. One of the most exciting attractions of Kiviõli Adventure Park is definitely the longest zip line in Estonia. The ride starts from the tower at the top of the hill and is 600 metres long, reaching the speed of 80 km/h. There is a safe braking system at the end of the ride. The zip line is one of the attractions of a new family adventure park, which offers a day full of activities both for the young and the old. 

More information
www.puhkaeestis.ee

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



RETURNEE!

WE ARE HERE FOR YOU

Our aim is to help the people returning to Estonia adjust smoothly in the society and keep Estonians living abroad tightly connected to Estonia.

SERVICES PROVIDED TO RETURNEES

We advise returnees at our office, on the phone and via e-mail, and on the website
integratsioon.ee/tagasipoordujale

Estonian courses for adults in the Integration Foundation
integratsioon.ee/eesti-keele-ope

Activities supporting Estonian studies in the Integration Foundation
integratsioon.ee/sundmused

Returning application integratsioon.ee/tagasipoordumistoetus

Experience meetings integratsioon.ee/kogemuskohtumised

FOR ESTONIANS LIVING ABROAD

Website connecting Estonians all over the world www.globalestonian.com

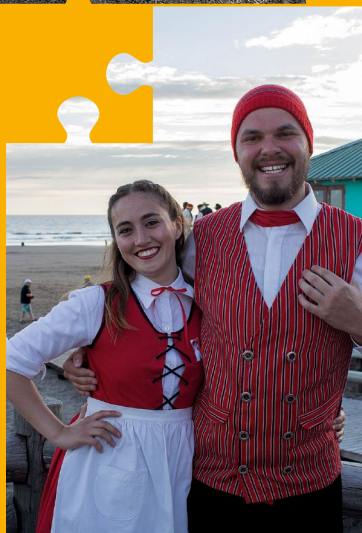
Language camps for young Estonians held in Estonia
integratsioon.ee/noorte-rahvusaaslaste-keelelaagrid-eestis

Grants for Estonian cultural organisations abroad to support the Estonian cultural organisations abroad and strengthen their sense of belonging with Estonia
integratsioon.ee/konkursid



Integration
Foundation

The activities of the foundation can be found
on our website integratsioon.ee



Back to your
roots