



## ADVICE & TIPS – ESTONIA



Estonia has a growing economy and is embracing new industries which, in turn, are bringing new opportunities for work.

The tourism sector in particular is flourishing and this may provide a useful route in for graduates/workers from different countries. As it expands, Estonia is experiencing a skills shortage. Many of its indigenous workforce do not have the skills needed to develop new technologies, for example. Again, this is opening up possibilities for foreign workers.

- *Typical problems encountered:* language may be the biggest barrier for many foreign workers. Although use of the English language is on the increase in business and academia, knowledge of Estonian is a distinct advantage and that increases your potential job options. Russian is also spoken in Estonia.
- *How to improve your chances:* take an Estonian language course either before you leave or once you arrive in Estonia.
- *Language requirements:* proficiency in Estonian greatly increases your job options. Many of Estonia's universities run Estonian language courses and modules for their foreign students.

In Estonia, a network of personal contacts is absolutely essential to find a job, for Estonians prefer doing business through personal contacts. Informal networks, friendships and even romantic relationships form part of the informal networks essential to every day business life. Please note that all communication in Estonian companies is top down.

There are many young Estonian highly qualified and highly educated top managers. Education and qualifications are therefore essential to gain authority in Estonia. And although Estonia is still experiencing a fair annual economic growth, unemployment is still relatively high for Estonian standards, which makes finding a job a true challenge.

### **The Application Letter**

In general a letter of application should create enough interest to make the potential employer want to look at your application in more detail and hopefully invite you for an interview. Your application letter, however, should not provide too much information about experience and qualifications; this will be provided in your CV.

If used, the covering letter in Estonia is usually one page long but never longer than two pages. Although an application or covering letter is getting more common, it is not always required. Motivate clearly why you consider yourself the right person for the job and try to address your application to a specific person.

## **The Curriculum Vitae**

The key focus of your CV should be to persuade the employer to invite you for an interview. Therefore, your CV is a marketing tool, which should be adapted to the market in which you intend to use it.

In Estonia, try to make sure that you do not exaggerate about your skills and experience; if you have little experience, the best thing to do is to specify what you have studied in even greater detail. Estonian CV's are functional; this means that the information is structured per item. Your Estonian CV should be organised in a reverse chronological order.

It's becoming more popular to apply for a job via the internet. Be aware of the fact that an electronic CV does not always look the same as the standard one.

## **The Application Procedure**

Application interviews are the most crucial part of the selection procedure in Estonia (Do you fit in the team?). When applying for a job in Estonia, be prepared for two to four application interviews. Always mention several reasons why you consider yourself the right candidate for the job. Be aware that although Estonians tend to mix business with pleasure, meetings should be kept formal. And: be on time because Estonians are very punctual! And although honesty and forthrightness are respected characteristics, Estonians do take care that they do not offend those they are in discussion with.

Do not rush Estonians because this can easily destroy the negotiating process and never sit until invited in an application interview in Estonia. Avoid exaggerating, instead, stay calm and stick to the facts. Furthermore, never criticise former employers.

Dress smart. The Estonian dress rather formally; men are expected to wear a suit, a necktie and most importantly quality shoes. Some Estonians may even see footwear as a barometer of success. Estonian women dress in a formal but less conservative way.

## **Where can I work?**

- Major industries: manufacturing (machinery, automotive supplies, electronics and plastics, wood products such as timber, paper and pulp). Real estate also accounts for 15% of economic activity (Statistics Estonia, 2008).
- Recent growth areas: biotechnology, ICT, tourism, shared services centres and telecomms. Estonia's largest biotech company employs only 78 people and many of Estonia's own companies are small businesses. See [Invest in Estonia](#) for details of key sectors and key players within these sectors.
- Industries in decline: construction.
- Major companies: there are a number of global firms based in Estonia including 3M, Alstom, KPMG, Fujitsu, Procter & Gamble.
- Major cities: approximately 44% of Estonians work in and around Tallinn (Smart Estonia, 2008). Other major towns and cities include Tartu, Parnu, Narva and Kohtla-Jarve.

## What's it like working in Estonia?

- Average working hours: eight hours per day, five days per week, comparable with the UK.
- Holidays: annual leave entitlement is 28 days, with extended vacations applicable to some professions including state and local government officials, teachers, academic and scientific staff. In addition, there are 12 public holidays and one national holiday on 24 February for the Anniversary of the Republic of Estonia.
- Average graduate starting salary: the national average salary in Estonia in 2008 is estimated at approximately 700 Euros per month, with those in finance roles earning up to 2000 Euros per month, engineers earning about 750 Euros and hotel workers earning the lowest wages. The minimum wage was set at 278 Euros per month in January 2008.
- Tax rates: there is a flat-rate system of individual tax which is 22% and is considered one of the most liberal regimes in the world. It will be reduced by 1% annually until 2010. VAT is currently 18% and social tax (state pension, health insurance) is 33
- Working practices and customs: Estonian business practices are generally formal. Greetings and exchanges are reserved, softly spoken and conducted without excessive hand gestures. Estonians are very punctual and lateness is considered disrespectful. Organisations are hierarchical and status should be acknowledged. Using correct titles of address is very important.