

Christmas (*Jõulud*)

Christmas is one of the most important holidays in Estonian folk calendar. It is marked by the pre-Christian word *jõulud* in Estonian. In the country's folk tradition, Christmas has a double meaning: on one hand, it is marking Christ's birth, on the other, it marks the whole period of the mid-winter holidays. The magic and mysticism are combined with the sacred and spiritual.

In the traditional folk calendar, Christmas time began with St Thomas's Day on 21 December and lasted until Epiphany on 6 January.

Lots of people bring in a spruce in and decorate it. It is possible to cut your own Christmas tree from the forest if you pay online a small amount of money and go to the right forest. People who live in the countryside often have their own forest.

Christmas is time for family. Children come home and spend time with their parents. The habit to go to the sauna on Christmas Eve is a very old and important tradition.

We get presents on Christmas Eve (24 December). If families have young children they often meet a real Santa Claus. Others may find presents under the Christmas tree. We usually read poems or sing songs to Santa to get a present.

Traditional food is potatoes (baked in oven), sauerkraut, roast pork, blood sausages, pumpkin salad, lingonberry salad and rye bread.

<http://estonianworld.com/life/christmas-customs-estonia/>



Christmas market in Town Hall Square in Tallinn food



Blood sausage is a traditional food

Independence Day (*Iseseisvuspäev*)

The anniversary of the Republic of Estonia is on February 24, celebrating the proclamation of the Republic of Estonia on February 24, 1918. On that day, "Manifesto for all the peoples of Estonia" was published in Tallinn, in which an independent and democratic Republic of Estonia was declared. February 24 is Estonian national holiday and Independence Day.

After the restoration of Estonia's independence, the tradition of parades of the Estonian Defense Forces has been restored.

Since 1993 the President of Estonia organizes a festive reception on Independence Day, where the state decorations are given. President Lennart Meri started this tradition like it is in Finland.

Both the parade and reception have taken place in different cities in different years. Usually they are held in Tallinn.



Independence Square in Tallinn (parade on 24 February)
estonianworld.com/life/estonia-celebrates-independence-day/

St Martin day (Mardipäev)

Mardipäev is celebrated on 10 November. In old times people finished outdoor field work by that time. Men put on dark clothes, walked from house to house to wish good luck for cattle and crop. Behind the door they sang a special entrance song. People gave gifts to them.

Nowadays mostly kids do the same. They put on black clothes and wear masks or paint the face. Children play different games with the family and ask puzzles. Children get apples or sweets.



St Catherine's day (Kadripäev)

Kadri Day is on November 25th. It was women's holiday and was celebrated in the same way. Women put on clean white clothes, went from house to house and wished good luck for the cattle. Nowadays mostly children carry on the tradition.

Both of these anniversaries are part of the Estonian national calendar. They are not official holidays. They are celebrated in schools and kindergartens.

Song Festival

The first song festival was held in 1869 in Tartu. 872 singers took part in it. The initiator was the culture society Vanemuine.

Since then the song festival has been held on every 5th year and it has grown bigger. In 2014 about 30,000 singers and 60,000 spectators were on the song festival ground in Tallinn. The tradition of the Estonian song celebrations has for long been among the most important ways to carry on the national identity and an independent spirit.

In 1934 a folk dance festival was started. Since 1962 a youth song festival is held as well.

The festival starts with a colourful procession from the city centre to the song festival grounds. Lots of singers wear national costumes. The programme contains both old and new choral music. Some most beloved pieces are sung every time. The next song and dance festival will take place on 5-7 July 2019.

The tradition of song festivals is in the UNESCO world heritage list.



Song festival in Tallinn

<http://estonianworld.com/culture/pictures-estonias-youth-song-dance-celebration-2017/>

Midsummer Day (St John's Day)

Midsummer day is celebrated on June 24th in Estonia. The 23th of June is called Midsummer Eve and night between them Midsummer Night. It is the shortest night of the year and people celebrate the light time with bonfires, food, music and dancing. Various games are played around the fire (for example pulling the rope) and the bolder ones even jump over the bonfire.

Young people go to the forest to look for the flowers of ferns. They never find them because ferns never bloom.



<http://estonianworld.com/life/it-is-this-time-of-the-year-again-jaanipaev/>

The best-known ritual is the lighting of the bonfire and jumping over it. This is seen as a way of guaranteeing prosperity and avoiding bad luck. Likewise, to not light the fire is to invite the destruction of your house by fire. The fire also frightened away mischievous spirits who avoided it at all costs, thus ensuring a good harvest. So, the bigger the fire, the further the mischievous spirits stayed away.

Victory Day

Victory Day is celebrated on June 23rd since 1934. This marks the victory of Estonians in the battle of Võnnu, which took place during the War of Independence in June 1919.



There are parades in different towns of Estonia.