



OUTCAN Guide | Life in Tartu, Estonia

LOCATION

Country: Estonia

Town: Tartu, 2nd largest city after Tallinn.

Base: Baltic Defence College (BALTDEFCOL)

- Every citizen and resident must have an ID card from the Estonian Government.
- Administrative staff will make the necessary arrangements for members and their dependents to obtain ID cards once the family arrives a posting. This cannot be completed on HHT.

Other info to Consider:

- Family (non-dependants) can visit and stay 90 days **without visa** (Schengen Area).

POPULATION

Size: just under 100,000.

Ethnicity: 52% Estonian, 37% Russia, 3% Ukrainian and rest other eastern European mostly.

LANGUAGE(S)

Official language: Estonian.

Prevalence of French or English speaking: Very limited. Some will speak as 2nd or 3rd language but limited. Half of citizens spoke Estonian as their native language, while 46.7% spoke Russian. Other languages spoken in Tartu are Finnish, Belarusian and Ukrainian.

COST OF LIVING

Exchange rate to consider: Euro. 1 EUR = 1.47652 CAD (March 2024)

QUALITY OF LIFE

Climate and potential for severe weather, natural disasters:

- Estonia experiences cold winters and heavy snowfall in cities and rural areas between November and March.
- There are only a few hours of daylight during the winter months. The use of blue light lamps (SAD) and vitamin D is prevalent.

Laws and Culture:

- Penalties for possession, use or trafficking of illegal drugs are severe. Convicted offenders can expect jail sentences or heavy fines.
- Penalties for drinking and driving are severe. The legal blood alcohol limit is zero. If a police officer suspects you of drinking and driving, they could confiscate your driver's license on the spot. If you're convicted, you can expect heavy fines and possible jail time.
- In the event of an accident, you must contact police to file an official report.
- You are required to have a Canadian Passport with a SOFA stamp, Canadian driver's licence and a residency card during your time in Estonia. It is recommended that you have an international driver's permit (IDP).
- Pedestrians must wear small reflectors from dusk until dawn, could be fined for failure to wear a reflector, particularly if an accident occurs.

Safety and Security:

- Petty crime such as pickpocketing and purse snatching occur, during the summer tourist season. They target tourists in airports, train stations and other public areas.
- Theft of vehicles or their contents is common.
- Harassment of individuals sometimes occurs for reasons of race or foreign-looking appearance.

Level of isolation:

- This post is considered remote and has limited access to French and English; risk of feeling isolated is high.

HOUSING

- No military quarters available, housing will be on the economy.
- Using a local real estate agency is recommended, especially to avoid misunderstandings with lease, language barrier. Contact the Geilenkirchen Housing office for questions.

EMPLOYMENT

Are there employment opportunities for spouses?

- Limited due to language barrier.
- There are very limited employment opportunities available through CFMWS, families should plan to be single income for the duration of the posting. [CFMWS](#) | [MFS](#) | [OUTCAN Europe](#) | [CFMWS](#)

Op Tempo: The op tempo will vary greatly depending on position. TD is possible.

HEALTH CARE

Access: Health care is excellent in Tartu, and comparable to Canadian standards.

- Quality of care varies greatly throughout the country.
- Doctors and hospitals expect travel insurance or payment for health services. Credit cards and money transfers are widely accepted. Cash payments are accepted, but rarely expected.
- English speaking personnel limited but available.
- Prescriptions written by local providers can be filled on the economy.
- In addition to the core Canadian vaccinations, it is recommended that personnel receive the Tick Borne Encephalitis vaccine. It is endemic throughout Estonia and has been found in parks within the city as well.
- The Canadian Medical Clinic in Geilenkirchen is responsible for the healthcare of all Canadian military members in Europe and can be accessed.
- All bills associated with the care of dependents are the member's personal responsibility and are to be claimed through PSHCP. [PSHCP Member Portal \(pshcp-msh.ca\)](#)

Special needs: extremely limited in English or French.

Consideration for pregnancy / birth: Health care for pregnancy and birth is available on the economy.

Dental: Dental care can be accessed in town. You are required to pay up front, and you can then claim your expenses.

SCHOOLING

- Schooling is typically the Tartu International School (IB) for grades K-9.
- No compatible education options at post beyond grade 9
- There are no French language schools indicated for this mission.
- Should consider distance to international school when selecting a residence, catchment area and pick-up points for public transport.

- It is highly recommended that parents visit the school during HHT in order to view the facilities and introduce themselves to the staff.
- In order for their children to be placed, parents must bring the most current report card or transcripts
- No French education currently available in Tartu.
- For an approved list of schools, please contact Children's Education Management at:
CEMGEE@forces.gc.ca
- Children's Education Management - Canada.ca
- Gestion de l'éducation des enfants - Canada.ca

Curriculum vs. Canadian curriculum:

- The Curriculum varies depending on choice of school.
- None of them offer Canadian history or geography at the elementary level.

Resources for special need children: Access is depending on language required (English/French), area of specialization and degree of support needed, it may be very limited.

CHILDCARE

Things to Consider:

- Local municipal daycares start at 18 months old (as Estonians have one of the most generous maternity/parental benefits in the world) and up to 3 years old.
- Very few will provide childcare in English nor French.

TRANSPORTATION

Things to Consider:

- The Tartu Airport (TAY) is small and is only serviced by Finnair Airlines via Helsinki making duty travel in and out restrictive.
- While air travel is restrictive, travel by road and rail is possible. Most travellers choose to travel to Tallinn by bus or train and then fly to other destinations.
- Buses constitute the only form of public transport within the City of Tartu. There are 15 bus routes in the city.

RESOURCES AND AMENITIES

Is there a Military Family Services centre available in that location?

- No physical centre. Families in Estonia are supported by the Remote Team:
MFSE.Remotes@cfmws.com

Psychosocial / Mental Health Resources:

- Not at post, MFS(E) SW for dependants only, CAF SW/Mental Health Team for member and family are located in Geilenkirchen, Germany. Padre is located in the UK.

Communications (e.g. Quality of Internet connection): Quality of internet connection depends on location and can vary. Reasonably priced.

ACTIVITIES

Access to sports or other leisure activities: There are gym facilities (e.g. weight room, gym floor, exercise equipment) located at the BALTDEFCOL facility at no cost to members or families.

- There are plenty of recreational activities and venues available. Limited in English or French

Availability of playgrounds: Yes.

RESTRICTIONS TO CONSIDER

Are common law relationships recognized? Yes. A registered partnership offers many of the same rights as marriage except in the areas of taxation and adoption.

Are same sex couples recognized? Yes. Estonian law prohibits discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation. However, LGBTQ2 travellers should consider exercising caution, especially in smaller towns, when visiting Estonia.

Medications that are illegal in the country: use without a prescription of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances is illegal.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- **European Commission Country Reports (2023)**
- https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/publications/2023-european-semester-country-reports_en
- **Canadian Travel Advisories**
<https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories>
- **CIA World Factbooks (One Pagers from US)**
- <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/estonia/>
- **Living Abroad (from Gov.UK)**
 - <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/estonia>

For more comprehensive information, please feel free to reach out to the resources below

- MFS(E) Social Worker: MFSSocialWork@cfmws.com
- CAF Social Worker: GKMedicalClinic@forces.gc.ca
- MFS(E) Team: MFSE.Remotes@cfmws.com
- MFS(E) Regional Office: +49 (0) 2451 717 173, MFS.Europe@cfmws.com