



# Kyiv Київ

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## Best Places to Eat

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## Best Places to Stay

- » Rented Apartment (p53)
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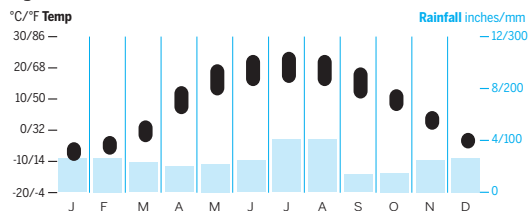
## Why Go?

Ancients were spoilt for choice when they needed a pretty spot to settle down. One can't help thinking this in Kyiv, the birthplace of Eastern Slavic civilization, which spread from here as far as the Pacific coast of Eurasia. Its lovely forested hills overlook the Dnipro – a river so wide that birds fall down before reaching its middle, as writer Nikolai Gogol jokingly remarked.

Those hills, numbered seven as in Rome, cradle a wonderfully eclectic city that has preserved the legacy of its former possessors, from Viking chieftains to Soviet dictators. History buffs can indulge in unrestrained epoch-hopping, but it's rewarding enough just to stroll along the streets lined by trademark chestnut trees, stopping by an open-air cafe or diving into a basement bar. That's where one meets Kyivites – a merry, tongue-in-cheek and perfectly bilingual lot, whose distinct urban identity outweighs their ethnic allegiance. They are the city's main asset.

## When to Go?

### Kyiv



**January Party** on New Year's night, then repent at an Orthodox Christmas service a week later.

**May Frolic** in Kyiv's two Botanical Gardens, where just about every tree is blossoming.

**July Witness** ancient pagan ceremonies and enjoy great world music at the Kraina Mriy festival.

## History

Legend has it that three Slavic brothers and their sister founded Kyiv. The eldest, Kyi, gave the city its name. The names of brothers Shchek, Khoriv and sister Lybid now appear in its topography. An iconic statue of the four siblings – the Foundation of Kyiv Monument (Пам'ятник засновникам; Map p32) – stands on the banks of the Dni-pro River.

Four hundred years later the city really started to prosper, after Vikings from Novgorod took control. Circa 864 two Novgorod warlords Askold and Dir settled down in Kyiv after a failed raid on Constantinople. Novgorod's new prince Oleh journeyed to Kyiv in 882, dispatched the two Vikings and declared himself ruler. This was the beginning of Kyivan Rus ('Rus' being the Slavic name for the red-haired Scandinavians). The city thrived on river trade, sending furs, honey and slaves to pay for luxury goods from Constantinople. Within 100 years its empire stretched from the Volga to the Danube and to Novgorod.

In 989 Kyivan prince Volodymyr decided to forge a closer alliance with Constantinople, marrying the emperor's daughter and adopting Orthodox Christianity. Kyiv's pagan idols were destroyed and its people driven into the Dni-pro for a mass baptism.

Under Volodymyr's son, Yaroslav the Wise (1017–54), Kyiv became a cultural and political centre in the Byzantine mould. St Sophia's Cathedral was built to proclaim the glory of both God and city. However, by the 12th century, Kyiv's economic prowess had begun to wane, with power shifting to northeast principalities (near today's Moscow).

In 1240 Mongol raiders sacked Kyiv. Citizens fled or took refuge wherever they could, including the roof of the Desyatynna Church, which collapsed under the weight.

The city shrank to the riverside district of Podil, which remained its centre for centuries. Only when Ukraine formally passed into Russian hands at the end of the 18th century did Kyiv again grow in importance. The city went through an enormous boom at the turn of the 20th century when it was essentially the third imperial capital after St Petersburg and Moscow. Many new mansions were erected at this time, including the remarkable House of Chimeras.

During the chaos following the Bolshevik Revolution, Kyiv was the site of frequent

battles between Red and White Russian forces, Ukrainian nationalists, and German and Polish armies. Author Mikhail Bulgakov captured the era's uncertainty in his first novel, *The White Guard*. The home in which he wrote this book is now a museum (see p35).

In August 1941, German troops captured Kyiv and more than half a million Soviet soldiers were caught or killed. The entire city suffered terribly. Germans massacred about 100,000 at Babyn Yar and 80% of the city's inhabitants were homeless by the time the Red Army retook Kyiv on 6 November 1943.

The postwar years saw rapid industrialisation and the construction of unsightly suburbs. During the late 1980s nationalistic and democratic movements from western Ukraine began to catch on in the capital. Throughout the presidency of Leonid Kuchma, Kyiv and its young population increasingly became a base of opposition politics. During the Orange Revolution of 2004, activists from around Ukraine poured into the capital to demonstrate on maydan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Sq) and outside the parliament building. In the 2010 presidential elections, two-thirds of voters in Kyiv supported Orange Revolution leader Yulia Tymoshenko, although she still lost to Viktor Yanukovych.

## Sights

Some of Kyiv's main attractions are half-day adventures and not always terribly central. So, rather than plunging right in, it's highly recommended you warm up with an initial stroll. The Walking Tour (p50) provides a quick introduction to the city.

### CENTRE

#### Maydan Nezalezhnosti

CENTRAL SQUARE

(майдан Незалежності; Independence Square; Map p36;  Maydan Nezalezhnosti) Fountain-filled maydan Nezalezhnosti is the city's most popular meeting place. This was made plain on worldwide TV at the end of 2004 when the square became ground zero for Ukraine's Orange Revolution and a makeshift tent city.

The square has held protests since the Orange Revolution and will probably see many more. Some **graffiti** left from those events is preserved under plexiglass on one of the post office columns near the corner of Khreshchatyk. Since 2001, the square has been dominated by kitschy post-Soviet