



Odesa & Southern Ukraine

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POP 4.7 MILLION / AREA: 86,300 SQ KM

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Best Places to Stay

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Why Go?

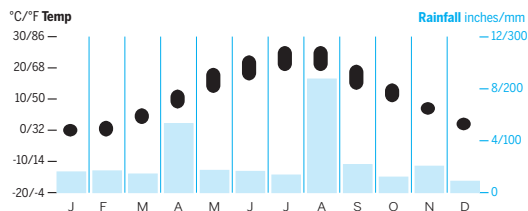
Ukrainian nationalists scowl at any mention of Russian empress Catherine the Great, but there's no denying Southern Ukraine wouldn't be what it is today without her. This chunk of no-man's-land between the Cossacks and Crimea formed part of her late-18th-century territorial acquisitions, opening up the balmy Black Sea to a bronchitic St Petersburg. Catherine dispatched lover Grygory Potemkin and a multicultural posse of foreigners to civilise and populate the coast; Potemkin founded Odesa, but died before it was started.

Odesa is still Ukraine's most multicultural city, as well as the self-declared Ukrainian capital of both hedonism and humour. Hedonists flock down from Kyiv for the sandy beaches and wicked nightlife; the humour in this oh-so-Russian city is tougher to find.

It's not all about Odesa's energy and attitude: the south is also home to three major river estuaries, the most spectacular being the Danube Delta, a birdwatcher's paradise.

When to Go?

Odesa



January Feel the warm mist drift onto the Black Sea's deserted beaches.

April Witness Ukraine's funny side at Odesa's Carnival Humorina festival of humour.

October-November Arrive in time for the bird migration in the impressive Danube Delta.



Odesa & Southern Ukraine Highlights

- 1 Join the tanning and party fest on **Odesa's beaches** (p145)
- 2 Spot zebra and bison on safari at the **Askania Nova Reserve** (p155)
- 3 Make an ascent of the **Potemkin Steps** (p141) – setting for one of cinema's most famous scenes
- 4 Launch an assault on the beefy ramparts of **Bilhorod-Dnistrovsky Fortress** (p156)
- 5 Try to keep your feet dry in **Vylkovo** (p156), epicentre of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve
- 6 Crawl the bars and restaurants in and around Odesa's **vul Derybasivska** (p141)

Odesa ОДЕСА

POP: 1 MILLION

Odesa is a city straight from literature – an energetic, decadent boomtown. Its famous Potemkin Steps sweep down to the Black Sea and Ukraine's biggest commercial port. Behind them, a cosmopolitan cast of characters makes merry among pastel neoclassical buildings lining a geometrical grid of leafy streets.

Immigrants from all over Europe were invited to make their fortune here when Odesa was founded in the late 18th century by Russia's Catherine the Great. These new inhabitants gave Russia's southern window on the world a singular, subversive nature.

As well as becoming a duty-free port, Odesa also attracted ordinary holiday-makers with its sunny climate and sandy beaches. True, the city's appearance grows tatter as you head south past half-empty sanatoriums towards its beachside nightclubs. However, this East-West crossroads

makes up for that with sheer panache, and Odesans are known across the old USSR for being stylish, funny, savvy and not easily impressed.

But let's not get carried away here. Barcelona or Brighton it ain't, and the city does have a distinctly seedy feel. Prostitutes, con artists, drug dealers and the mob have all found their niche here, and the city is a magnet for sex tourists, wife hunters and general ne'er-do-wells from around the world. Also, nowhere else in Ukraine do the police hassle foreigners to such an extent, something you might experience firsthand should you head to the beaches in the evening.

History

Catherine the Great imagined Odesa as the St Petersburg of the South. Her lover, General Grygory Potemkin, laid the groundwork for her dream in 1789 by capturing the Turkish fortress of Hadjibey, which previously stood here. However, Potemkin died before work began on the city in 1794 and his senior commanders oversaw its con-