



# Kyiv Київ

044 / POP 2.9 MILLION

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## Best Places to Eat

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- ➔ Harbuzyk (p58)
- ➔ Kanapa (p58)
- ➔ Kyivska Perepichka (p56)

## Best Places to Stay

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## Why Go?

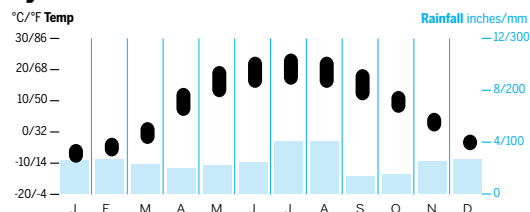
In the beginning there was Kyiv. Long before Ukraine and Russia came into being, its inhabitants had already been striding up and down the green hills, idling hot afternoons away on the Dnipro River and promenading along Kreshchatyk – then a stream, now the main avenue. From here, East Slavic civilisation spread all the way to Alaska.

But thanks to its many reincarnations, there are few signs of ageing on Kyiv's face. Wearing its latest national capital's hat, it reveals itself as a young and humorous gentleman, elegant on the eating/drinking front, but prone to kitsch when it comes to urban development.

It has a fair few must-sees, mostly related to the glorious Kyivan Rus past, as well as both charming and disturbingly eclectic architecture. But its main asset is the residents – a merry, tongue-in-cheek and perfectly bilingual lot, whose distinct urban identity outweighs their ethnic allegiance.

## When to Go

### Kyiv



**Jan** 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.

**Jul** Witness ancient rites and enjoy great music during the Ivan Kupala 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 Київу) – stands on the banks of the Dnipro 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 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 Dnipro for a mass baptism.

Under Volodymyr's son, Yaroslav the Wise (1017–54), Kyiv became a cultural and political centre in the Byzantine mold. 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.

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 Yanukovich.


## 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.

## City Centre

### ★ **Maydan Nezalezhnosti**

SQUARE

(майдан Незалежності; Independence Sq; Map p38;  Maydan Nezalezhnosti) Be it celebration or revolution, whenever Ukrainians want a get-together – and they very often do – Independence Sq is the nation's meeting point. This is a new phenomena and so is the name of this huge fountain-filled space flanked by Stalin-era buildings and presided over by a kitschy post-Soviet statue of a winged female atop the **Independence Column**.

Nothing of note happened here until pro-independence students set up a tent camp in the early 1990s, when it was still called October Revolution Sq. After the USSR collapsed, the urge for change was so strong that even the perfectly normal Ukrainian word *ploshcha* – square – sounded too Russian. That's when the word *maydan*, related