



Odesa & Southern Ukraine

Одеса і Південна Україна

POP 4.7 MILLION / AREA 86,300 SQ KM

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Best Places to Eat & Drink

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Best Places to Stay

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Why Go?

This region feels New World much more than Europe. The flat steppe between the estuaries of the Dnipro and the Danube was only properly colonised after Russian empress Catherine the Great wrestled it from the Turks.

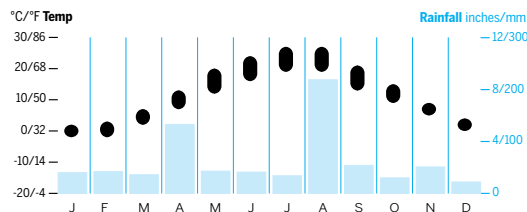
It was indeed touted as the Russian California when immigrants from all over Europe poured in to cultivate virgin lands and build the port of Odesa. Greek, Yiddish, Italian and German were all spoken here along with Russian and Ukrainian.

Although less multicultural today, Odesa is still permeated with porto franco spirit, displaying Jewish humour and French conviviality, along with crumbling mansion houses, which line the streets named after settlers' ethnicities.

To the west, colonists' heritage lingers next to the birding paradise of the Danube Delta. In the east, swathes of virgin steppe are preserved on Dzharylhach island and in Askaniya Nova Reserve, which an eccentric German aristocrat populated with wildebeest and zebras.

When to Go

Odesa



May Smell blooming lilacs and join the vanguard of Odesa's beach-bum army.

Jul Gorge on delicious fruit and watch silent movies on the Potemkin Steps.

Oct Arrive in time for the bird migration in the impressive Danube Delta.

ODESA

048 / POP 1 MILLION

Odesa (Одеса) 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 neo-classical 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 holidaymakers with its sunny climate and sandy beaches. True, the city's appearance grows tattier 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 Odessans are known across the old USSR for being stylish, funny, savvy and not easily impressed.

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 construction instead. The Spanish-Neapolitan general José de Ribas, after whom the main street, vul Derybasivska, is named, built the harbour. The Duc de Richelieu (Armand Emmanuel du Plessis), an aristocrat fleeing the French Revolution, became the first governor, overseeing the city's affairs from 1803 to 1814.



Odesa & Southern Ukraine Highlights

- 1 Join the tanning and party fest on Odesa's **beaches** (p150).
- 2 Spot zebra and bison on safari at the **Askaniya Nova Reserve** (p159).
- 3 Make an ascent of the **Potemkin Steps** (p147) – the setting for one of cinema's most famous scenes.
- 4 Launch an assault on the beefy ramparts of Bilhorod-Dnistrovsky's **Akkerman Fortress** (p160).
- 5 Try to keep your feet dry in Vylkovo, epicentre of the **Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve** (p161).
- 6 Crawl the bars and restaurants in and around Odesa's **vul Derybasivska** (p147).
- 7 Tuck into a plate of Odesa's endemic and unforgettable **food** (p154).
- 8 Feel the melancholy of the steppe on the island of **Dzharylhach** (p159).