

This chapter was written in May 2014, and is an addendum for the 4th edition of Lonely Planet's *Ukraine* guidebook. The pages that follow contain updated information about the dramatic changes in Ukraine due to the Euromaidan protests and the annexation of Crimea.

# Ukraine under Duress

**Poor Ukraine. When this edition was being researched in the summer of 2013, the meltdown that followed later was nowhere on the cards. Yet, by May 2014 Ukraine was threatened by Russian aggression, partially occupied and struggling to survive as a single nation. Eastern regions were most dangerous at the time of writing, while the western part of Ukraine was safe and felt unlikely to be threatened in future. But wherever you are planning to go, read the news carefully – the situation is volatile and it changes daily.**

## What Happened?

For the most dramatic and insightful coverage of the Ukrainian upheaval, watch Simon Ostrovsky's series of dispatches on [www.vice.com](http://www.vice.com) or YouTube.

### Kyiv Protests

President Viktor Yanukovich spent a few years persuading Ukrainians that EU integration was a goal worth pursuing, so the nation was dumbfounded in October 2013 when, in a spectacular U-turn, he refused to sign the association agreement with the EU and instead embarked on a fast rapprochement with Russia.

Average-sized protests followed in Kyiv, with a few hundred students pitching tents in Independence Sq (maydan Nezalezhnosti). The movement that became known as Euromaidan didn't seem to be achieving much until riot police brutally dispersed the protesters, injuring many. That prompted massive protests – the whole city appeared to be out in the streets. Activists reclaimed Independence Sq, setting up a huge tent camp and occupying several government buildings.

The government resorted to kidnappings and sent armed thugs to terrorise Kyiv residents. The stand-off continued into January, by the end of which riot police started using live ammunition against the protesters, killing a few. In a matter of days, the protest mutated into an urban-guerrilla army taking on the police with sticks, makeshift shields and Molotov cocktails.

Fighting reached its peak in the middle of February, when dozens of people were being killed daily. On 21 February Yanukovich fled Kyiv and riot troops retreated, allowing the protesters to occupy the government compound. An interim government was created and presidential elections scheduled for 25 May 2014.

### Annexation of Crimea

Before Ukraine could take a breath, Russian special troops aided by local riot policemen started taking over government buildings and military facilities in Crimea. Locals, the majority of whom are ethnic Russians, either hailed the developments or remained apathetic. Only Crimean Tatars and a handful of Ukrainian activists attempted to voice their disagreement.

In the blink of an eye, Crimea had a new, Russia-backed government, which conducted a hastily organised 'referendum' on 16 March. The new leaders claimed that 97% of the participants voted for the region to join Russia. A few days later Moscow formally incorporated Crimea into the Russian Federation. This largely peaceful takeover drew comparisons with the annexation of Sudetenland by Hitler in 1938.

### Insurrection in the East

Towards the end of March, groups of militants and pro-Russian activists started attacking government buildings in various places across Ukraine's predominantly Russian-speaking southeast. Events took a particularly nasty turn in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, where a band of heavily armed men led by a Russian commander, operating out of the town of Sloviansk, seized government buildings in pretty much every significant city or town across the two regions. They proclaimed the 'Donetsk People's Republic' and scheduled a referendum on its independence for May 2014. The government in Kyiv launched an anti-terror operation, but it stalled by the end of April after some embarrassing gaffes. Sporadic gun battles resulted in several deaths. Meanwhile, Sloviansk militants – many of them from Russia or Crimea – took to hostage-taking, seizing several journalists and a group of OSCE monitors. They were also blamed for a number of kidnappings and assassinations.

### Change of Scenery

For the latest security alerts check the websites of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO; [www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/ukraine](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/ukraine)) and US State Department (<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings/ukraine-travel-warning.html>).

### Kyiv

Ukraine's capital was peaceful and fully functional at the time of writing, but the urban-guerrilla camp in Independence Sq was still very much in place. Unarmed but combat-ready, the militants said they wouldn't go anywhere until the demands of Euromaidan protests were fully implemented.

To see the sites of the clashes, walk up vul Instytutska, past Hotel Ukraine – its lobby functioned as a makeshift hospital at the height of the fighting. Places where people got killed are marked by photos of the victims, adorned with flowers and candles. If you want to earn respect from the locals, it's a good idea to bring some flowers, too. Another front-line was located in the parallel vul Hrushevskoho, near the colonnaded entrance to Dynamo Stadium.

The revolution added a new exciting sight to the Kyiv itinerary – the countryside residence of ex-president Yanukovich. Known as **Mezhihirya**, it is located in the village of Novy Petrivtsy, 30km north of Kyiv. The enormous estate was opened to the public (grounds admission 20uah) soon after its owner fled it by helicopter on the ominous night of 21 February. You can walk around the premises checking out 'Roman ruins' by the kitschy main house, a spa complex, a golf course and a mock Spanish galleon moored at the beach on the Dnipro River. Tours of the main house can be arranged via Euromaidan activists – try calling Sviatoslav (063 654 2448), but beware of an extremely grumpy militant-turned-housekeeper who shows people around. A direct bus runs from Heroyiv Dnipra metro station in Kyiv.

The best and the kitchiest finds from the house, including the famous golden loaf of bread, were exhibited in Kyiv's **National Art Museum** (Національний художній музей; <http://namu.kiev.ua>; vul Hrushevskoho 6;

adult/student 20/10uah; ☀10am-5pm Wed, Thu & Sun, 12-7pm Fri, 11am-6pm Sat; 🇺🇦Maydan Nezalezhnosti) at the time of writing.

## Crimea

Controlled by Russia, Crimea is now accessible for Russian visa-holders either by plane from Moscow or by ferry across the Kerch Strait, although in April 2014 people had to queue for up to 18 hours to get on the latter. Entering Crimea via mainland Ukraine is trickier – the new law on ‘temporarily occupied territory’ stipulates that foreign nationals need special permission. It was unclear at the time of writing how one can get it, and you’ll need a Russian visa anyway. Foreign airlines no longer fly into Crimea.

After the takeover, the Russian authorities announced a transition period, during which Ukrainian hryvnya would be completely replaced by the Russian rouble, while local businesses would have to comply with much more restrictive Russian laws. The peninsula also formally joined Moscow’s time zone (two hours ahead of Ukraine). There were fears that small hotels and people renting out apartments to tourists would be hit the hardest. The attitude to foreigners, particularly English-speakers, was not great and some journalists were badly harassed around the referendum period. Be careful not to expose yourself too much if you go there.

## Eastern Ukraine

The situation was extremely volatile in Donetsk and Luhansk regions at the time of writing. The area around Slovyansk, north of Donetsk, was particularly dangerous, with daily shootouts and kidnappings. This danger zone includes Sviatohirsk, Artemivsk and Soledar (all mentioned in Lonely Planet’s *Ukraine* guide). Don’t go there unless you are a journalist or have another good reason to risk it.

In Donetsk, several government buildings were occupied by armed thugs, and although overall the city remained peaceful and functional, it was unclear who was in control. Be very cautious approaching occupied buildings.

Kharkiv seemed to be largely controlled by the authorities, but there were some nasty clashes and attacks on government buildings. Be careful hanging out in the main square. Dnipropetrovsk, ruled with an iron fist by Ukraine’s second-richest man Ihor Kolomoysky after the collapse of the Yanukovich government, remained an oasis of order.

## Odesa & Southern Ukraine

Serious clashes between supporters and opponents of the new Kyiv government in Odesa in early May led to several casualties. The city’s strategic location on the coast and its historical symbolism as a gem in the Russian crown makes it vulnerable to potential Russian attacks.

Dzharylhach and Askaniya Nova Reserve have suddenly found themselves in the border zone next to the Russian-controlled Crimea, with the Ukrainian army digging in to repel a potential invasion. Make inquiries and check the news attentively before heading there.

# Welcome to Ukraine

*Big, diverse and largely undiscovered, Ukraine is one of Europe's last genuine travel frontiers, a poor nation rich in colourful tradition, warm-hearted people and off-the-map experiences.*

## Big & Diverse

Ukraine is big. In fact it's Europe's biggest country (not counting Russia, which isn't entirely in Europe) and packs a lot of diversity into its borders. You can be clambering around the Carpathians in search of Hutsul festivities and sipping Eastern Europe's best coffee in sophisticated Lviv. Ukrainians are also a diverse crowd; from the wired sophisticates of Kyiv's business quarters to the Gogolesque farmers in Poltava, from the Zaporizhzhya steelmaker to the Hungarian-speaking bus drivers of Uzhhorod, few countries boast such a mixed population.

## Hospitable Hosts

Despite their often glum reticence and initial distrust of strangers, the Euro 2012 football championships proved what travellers to the country have known for years – that Ukrainians are, when given the chance, one of Europe's most open and hospitable nations. Break down that reserve and you'll soon be slurping *borschtsch* in someone's Soviet-era kitchen, listening to a fellow train passenger's life story or being taken on an impromptu tour of a town's sights by the guy you asked for directions.

## Outdoor Fun

A diverse landscape obviously throws up a whole bunch of outdoorsy activities – from mountain biking and hill walking in the Carpathians to bird spotting in the Danube Delta, from cycling along the Dnipro in Kyiv to water sports on the islands across the river. But if the idea of burning calories on hill and wave has you fleeing for the sofa, rest assured that most Ukrainians have never tried any of the above, but love nothing more than wandering their country's vast forests, foraging for berries and mushrooms or picnicking by a meandering river.

## Living History

Some claim history ended around 1989, but not in Ukraine. The country is passing through a choppy period in its post-independence story and one which is fascinating to watch (from a safe distance perhaps). History is all around you wherever you go in this vast land, whether it be among the Gothic churches of Lviv, the Stalinist facades of Kyiv, the remnants of the once-animating Jewish culture of West Ukraine or the more recent Soviet high-rises just about anywhere.



# Kyiv Київ

044 / POP 2.9 MILLION

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## Why Go

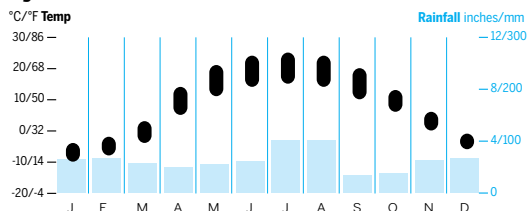
In the beginning there was Kyiv. Long before Ukraine and Russia came into being, its inhabitants had been already striding up and down the green hills, idling hot afternoons away on the Dnipro River and promenading along Kreshchatyk – then a stream, now the main avenue. From here, East Slavic civilisation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

But thanks to its many reincarnations, there are few signs of aging on Kyiv's face. Wearing its latest, national capital's hat, it reveals itself as a young and humorous gentleman, though scarred by winter 2014 clashes.

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, who act as one when their freedoms are threatened.

## 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) – 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.

History was repeated during Euro-maidan protests in the winter of 2013–14, only this time events took a much nastier turn. More than 100 people died in clashes between riot troops and pro-Western protesters that led to the ousting of president Yanukovich. The city's residents displayed outstanding stamina and solidarity – filling sacks with ice and snow to build barricades, bringing food to antigovernment militiamen, standing up to riot police and dragging the injured from the battlefield under a shower of bullets.

## Sights

### ★ **Maydan Nezalezhnosti**

SQUARE

(майдан Незалежності | Independence Sq;  Maydan Nezalezhnosti) Independent Ukraine has a short history and pretty much all of it was written here. Popularly known as Maydan (pronounced 'my-dun'), the square was the site of pro-independence protests in the 1990s, when nationalist students pitched tents here for the first time, copying China's Tiananmen Square protesters. During the Orange Revolution of 2004, this vast fountain-filled space flanked by Stalin-era buildings was transformed into a huge tent-camp and the scene of a never-ending rally.

But all of that was eclipsed by the Euro-maidan protests in the winter of 2013–14,


when the square turned into the camp of an urban-guerrilla army with massive camouflage tents, soup kitchens, stacks of firewood and tires to burn if the police goes on the offensive.

The protest started under the **Independence Column**, which is topped with a kitschy winged female statue. This is also the site of the first brutal dispersal of protesters. The Euromaidan headquarters was located in the **House of Trade Unions**, which burned down at the height of the clashes in February 2014. Artists have sprinkled its charred shell with pink dots to make it look less depressing.

The camp was still very much there at the time of writing. Some of the inhabitants are wary of visitors and especially of photographers. They are rough people who have been through hell, so if they are still around when you visit, don't act silly.

### Khreshchatyk

STREET

(Хрещати́к;  Khreshchatyk) Parts of the city's main drag were still occupied by barricades and tents of Maidan militants at the time of writing, but these were being gradually dismantled. Outside revolution periods, Kreshchatyk (named after a river now running in a pipe underneath) is a great place for an evening stroll and watching locals in their element.

During WWII the retreating Soviet army mined the buildings here, turning them into deadly booby traps for any German soldiers setting foot inside. Most places exploded or caught fire, which is why buildings had to be rebuilt in the current Stalinesque style.

Khreshchatyk is at its best during weekends, when it's closed to traffic and becomes a giant pedestrian zone. But while the guerrilla camp is still there, there is no traffic anyway.



# Crimea КРИМ

POP 2.3 MILLION / AREA 26,200 SQ KM

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## Why Go

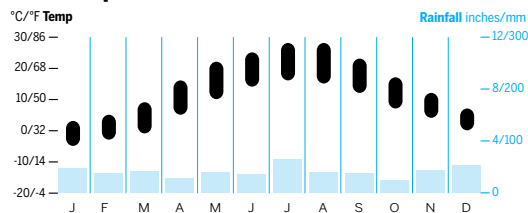
Shaped like a diamond, this tiny subtropical gem has always been an eye-catcher for imperial rulers – from Romans to Russians. The latest invasion, albeit a largely peaceful one, took place in March 2014, when the peninsula was annexed by and once again incorporated into Russia after 23 years as part of independent Ukraine. Although this takeover has not been recognised by the international community, Crimea is now only visitable via Russia and on a Russian visa. The future of its tourist industry was uncertain at the time of writing.

In Crimea's south, mountains rise like a sail. Protected from northern winds, the coast is covered in lush subtropical vegetation. This is where Russian royals built summer palaces, which were later transformed into sanatoriums for workers.

The mountains are the heartland of Crimean Tatars – a nation of survivors, who brought back from 50-year exile their traditions of hospitality and excellent food. They live surrounded by limestone plateaus – a magnet for trekkers and cyclists who come for the great vistas and ancient cave cities.

## When to Go

### Simferopol



**May–Jun** Feel the flower power as orchards bloom and mountains are covered in wild tulips.

**Jul–Aug** Beaches are packed but the sea is warm and the Kazantip rave is underway.

**Sep–Oct** Crows wash away. Time for jazz in Koktebel and mountain hikes.



## History

The stage is littered with cameo appearances, from ancient Greeks who built Chersoneses (now Khersones) to the 15th-century Genoese merchants behind the impressive Sudak fortress, as well as Cimmerians, Scythians, Sarmatians and Jews. However, the central theme of Crimean history revolves around the struggle between the Turkic and Slavic peoples for control of the peninsula.

This began in 1240, when Mongols conquered Crimea. Two centuries later control passed to their descendants, the Tatars, who held it for centuries. The Crimean Khanate became an independent political entity under Haci Giray in 1428, and after the 1475 invasion was a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire. Although advanced in culture and arts, its main economic activity was trading in slaves, captured during raids into Russian, Ukrainian or Polish territory.

While a Turkish vassal state, Crimea enjoyed much autonomy. The same was not true when the Russians arrived in 1783 and began a campaign of assimilation. Three-quarters of Crimean Tatars fled to Turkey, while Russians, Ukrainians, Greeks, Bulgarians, Germans and even some French were invited to resettle Crimea.

Such Russian expansionism soon began to worry the great powers, Britain and France. As Russia tried to encroach into the lands of the decaying Ottoman Empire, the Crimean War erupted in 1854.

With close ties to the monarchy, Crimea was one of the last White bastions during the Russian revolution, holding out till

November 1920. It was occupied by German troops for three years during WWII and lost nearly half its population. In the war's aftermath, Stalin deported all remaining Crimean Tatars and most other ethnic minorities.

In 1954 Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, a self-styled Ukrainian, created the Autonomous Crimean Soviet Socialist Republic and transferred legislative control to the Ukrainian SSR from the Russian Federation.

This is how Crimea ended up inside independent Ukraine after the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Although never enthused by Ukrainian independence, the ethnic Russian majority didn't make any significant attempts to change the status quo. However, Russia secured the right to maintain a navy base in Sevastopol, which later proved to be a Trojan horse.

The early 1990s also saw the return of Crimean Tatars from exile in Central Asia, where Stalin sent the entire people in 1944, having accused them of collaboration with the Nazis. They tended to be overwhelmingly pro-Ukrainian.

A sudden change came in March 2014 when, following the collapse of Yanukovich government in Kyiv, Sevastopol-based Russian marines and special forces took over Crimea in a matter of days. The Ukrainian army chose not to resist and was peacefully squeezed out of the peninsula.

After a hastily conducted 'referendum', Russia proclaimed Crimea its territory in a move that was rejected by the international community. At the time of writing, Crimea was firmly under Russian control and all links with Ukraine were being methodically severed.

For an easy-to-absorb, chronological listing of Ukrainian events from the 9th to the 20th centuries, set alongside those in the rest of the world, head to [www.brama.com/ukraine/history](http://www.brama.com/ukraine/history).

## The Yanukovych Years

Many feared that upon coming to power Yanukovych and his oligarch-backed, east-based Party of the Regions – allegedly behind the electoral fraud that sparked the Orange Revolution – would begin to gnaw away at democracy, press freedom and human rights. The new president confirmed everyone's misgivings in 2011 when Yulia Tymoshenko was put on trial for abuse of office (basically for signing a 2009 gas deal with Russia that annoyed a few wealthy regime string pullers). This was seen in the West and by most commentators as nothing short of a political show trial and a successful attempt by the new regime to rid itself of any meaningful opposition. Intimidation of critical journalists, provocative language laws sceptically brought to parliament just two days after the Euro 2012 final (ensuring the country didn't stay united for too long), jailing of other members of the previous government, inaction on corruption and a whole list of controversial laws and provocative campaigns have followed.

In late 2013, president Yanukovych's refusal to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union (EU) led to huge protests in Kyiv and Lviv (as well as other West Ukrainian cities). The protests became known as the Euromaidan.

In the course of winter, the protests grew into an urban warfare between riot police and hired thugs on the government side and a ragtag urban-guerrilla army on the other. More than 100 people died in clashes which eventually forced president Yanukovych to flee. Tymoshenko's allies Oleksandr Turchynov and Arseniy Yatsenyuk were appointed acting president and prime minister respectively. But before anyone could take a breath, Russia annexed Crimea and engineered an uprising in the eastern Donbas region.

See *Ukraine Today* (p226) for more on current issues.

### 2010

Despite allegations of a fraudulent election in 2004, Viktor Yanukovych becomes president in a closely fought February poll. Many Ukrainians fear press freedom and democracy will suffer under his rule.

### 2011

Opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko is jailed for abuse of office while prime minister. Many see this as a political trial and a sign that president Yanukovych is pushing the country towards dictatorship.

### 2012

In partnership with Poland, Ukraine hosts the Euro 2012 Cup, the largest sporting event the country has ever witnessed. However, matches are boycotted by EU governments over the Tymoshenko affair.

### 2013

Protests erupt when president Yanukovych refuses to sign an Association Agreement with the EU. More than 100 people die in clashes and Yanukovych flees the country.

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