



Ukraine

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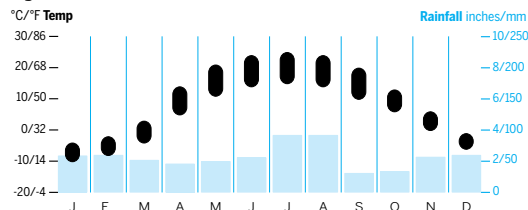
Why Go?

Shaped like a broken heart, with the Dnipro River dividing it into two, this Slavic hinterland is a vast swath of sage-flavoured steppe filled with sunflowers and wild poppies. Blessed with a near-ideal climate and the richest soil in Europe, it's one huge garden of a country where flowers are blossoming, fruit are ripening and farmers markets sing hymns of abundance.

If only its history were as idyllic. Just over two decades into a very troubled independence, Ukraine (Україна) is dogged by a conflict with neighbouring Russia that has left Crimea and a small chunk of its eastern territory off limits to most travellers. But the country's main attractions, including eclectic and rebellious Kyiv, architecturally rich Lviv and flamboyant Odesa, are well away from the conflict zone. A long stretch of the Black Sea coast invites beach fun, while the Carpathians draw skiers in winter and cyclists in summer.

When to Go

Kyiv



Jan Party on New Year's Eve then repent at an Orthodox Christmas service a week later.

May A great time to visit Kyiv when its countless horse chestnut trees are in blossom.

Aug Sip Ukraine's best coffee in one of Lviv's many outdoor cafes.

Kyiv

044 / POP 2.9 MILLION

Sometimes chaotic central Asia, other times quaint central Europe, Kyiv (many agree) is the former USSR's most pleasant metropolis. A pretty spot amid the wooded hills hemming the wide River Dnipro, this eclectic capital has preserved the legacy of its former possessors, from Viking chieftains to post-Soviet dictators. Despite its starring role in the 2014 Maidan Revolution which toppled the last of those rulers, only the very centre around Maidan Nezalezhnosti bears any scars, the rest of the city being untouched by the tumultuous events that have put the geopolitical spotlight firmly on Ukraine.

Sights

★Kyevo-Pecherska Lavra

MONASTERY

(Києво-печерська лавра | Caves Monastery; 044-406 6375; kplavra.kiev.ua; vul Lavrska 9; grounds 20uah, caves & exhibitions adult/child 60/30uah; 8am-7pm Apr-Oct, 9am-6pm Nov-Mar; Arsenalna) Tourists and Orthodox pilgrims alike flock to the Lavra. Set on 28 hectares of grassy hills above the Dnipro River, the monastery's cluster of gold-domed churches is a feast for the eyes, the hoard of Scythian gold rivals that of the Hermitage in St Petersburg, and the underground labyrinths lined with mummified monks are exotic and intriguing. That's from a tourist's perspective, but for pilgrims this is simply the holiest ground in three East Slavic countries – Ukraine, Russia and Belarus.

Andriyivsky Uzviz

HISTORIC SITE

(Kontraktova pl) According to legend, a man walked up the hill here, erected a cross and prophesied: 'A great city will stand on this spot.' That man was the Apostle Andrew, hence the name of Kyiv's quaintest thor-

oughfare, a steep cobbled street that winds its way up from Kontraktova pl to vul Volodymyrska, with a vaguely Monparnasse feel. Its highlight is the stunning gold and blue **St Andrew's Church** (Andriyivsky uzviz; 10am-6pm; Kontraktova pl) **FREE**, a five-domed, cross-shaped baroque masterpiece that celebrates the apostle legend.

★St Sophia's Cathedral

CHURCH

(n.sophiakievsk.org; pl Sofiyska; grounds/cathedral/bell tower 20/60/30uah; grounds 9am-7pm, cathedral 10am-6pm Thu-Tue, to 5pm Wed; Maydan Nezalezhnosti) The interior is the most astounding aspect of Kyiv's oldest standing church. Many of the mosaics and frescoes are original, dating back to 1017-31, when the cathedral was built to celebrate Prince Yaroslav's victory in protecting Kyiv from the Pechenegs (tribal raiders). While equally attractive, the building's gold domes and 76m-tall wedding-cake bell tower are 18th-century baroque additions.

★Maidan 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 Maidan, the square was the site of pro-independence protests in the 1990s and the Orange Revolution in 2004. But all of that was eclipsed by the Revolution of Dignity in the winter of 2013-14, when the square was transformed into an urban guerrilla camp besieged by government forces. Makeshift memorials to fallen revolutionaries on vul Instytutska serve as a sombre reminder.

Sleeping

Dream House Hostel

HOSTEL €

(095 703 2979; www.dream-family.com; Andriyivsky uzviz 2D; dm/d from 170/650uah, d with bathroom from 820uah; Kontraktova pl) Ky-

ITINERARIES

Two Days

A couple of days are just enough to 'do' **Kyiv**, starting at its stellar attraction, the Kyevo-Pecherska Lavra (aka the Caves Monastery). Follow this with a hike up artsy Andriyivsky uzviz for a taste of prewar Ukraine, before plunging into the beeswax-perfumed Byzantine interior of Unesco-listed St Sophia's Cathedral.

Five Days

Having seen the sights in Kyiv, hop aboard a slow night train to **Lviv**, Ukraine's most central European city complete with bean-scented coffee houses, Gothic and baroque churches, and quaintly rattling trams.