



UKRAINE DEVELOPMENT TRUST

GUIDELINES FOR PEOPLE CONSIDERING TO TRAVEL AS TOURISTS DURING WARTIME CONDITIONS

DATED: 4 JANUARY 2024

1. The government of Ukraine is encouraging foreign tourists to visit Ukraine notwithstanding the war, but this is obviously a controversial proposition given that there is a war underway and virtually every government in the world that provides travel advice to their citizens is unambiguously advising their citizens not to visit Ukraine at the time of writing by reason of the war and the consequent infrastructure and transport disruptions, as well as the potential danger of such a visit.
2. Several websites appear to be Ukrainian government websites promoting tourism in Ukraine. In particular the website <https://visitukraine.today/>, which appears at the top of some search engine searches, although appearing to be a Ukrainian government website and containing a variety of mostly reliable pieces of information, is not a government website. Instead it is a commercial website and its principal purpose is to sell various types of service or product in connection with tourists who are visiting Ukraine. There are a number of other similar such websites but none of them are official government websites and they virtually all of them have commercial purposes. You are of course at liberty to review those websites but be aware that they may have underlying commercial purposes and therefore the information they provide may not be strictly accurate.
3. We must emphasise that **we are aware of no official Ukrainian government website promoting tourism in Ukraine.**
4. This information note is intended to be independent and impartial and is provided free of charge. We have no intention of selling or profiting from the information summary contained in

this information note which is provided in the public interest only. We are not associated with any tourist agency, hotel or any other person or business working in the tourism industry, and this information is provided free of charge.

5. No travel to Ukraine is 100% safe at the current time. At the time of writing the Russian Armed Forces are conducting missiles and drone attacks with high explosive and fragmentation warheads against cities across Ukraine, including as far west as the traditional tourist epicentre of Ukraine, Lviv, and it cannot be excluded that a causal tourist to Ukraine is the victim either of such an attack or finds themselves inconvenienced by the consequences of such an attack (for example the roads are closed by the Police or public transport stops running). We must emphasise that these risks are in our estimation very low in the following tourist destinations:

Chernivtsi

Transcarpathia (Zakarpattia) / Bukovel / Rakhiv

Ivano-Frankivsk

Uman

Chernihiv

Kamianets-Podilskyi

Uzhhorod

Odessa (excluding the port area which is sealed off by the Ukrainian Armed Forces)

6. The risks are low but not negligible in Lviv and Kyiv. The risks are high in Kharkiv and extremely high in Kherson. Indeed upon entering Kherson you will be asked the purpose of your visit by the Ukrainian military police and if you declare it to be tourism then you are extremely unlikely to be permitted to continue your journey.
7. Ukrainian airspace is closed and you must travel overland to enter Ukraine as a tourist. Crossings from Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Moldova are all possible as a tourist. There are trains and buses from most of the larger cities in these countries, as well as from Vienna, Prague and a number of other central European cities, to various cities in Ukraine. Flixbus offers a comprehensive set of bus services in and out of Ukraine. Ukrainian Railways tickets can be bought using a mobile phone App but only in Ukraine, which makes it difficult to enter Ukraine by rail unless you have a friend in Ukraine who can make the purchase for you. Many tourists find the easiest route into Ukraine to be to travel from the southern Polish city of Kraków to Lviv by bus. Several bus companies ply the route daily, including both daytime and nighttime buses with Flixbus, and you can buy tickets online. The journey time is typically around seven hours, including two hours at the border. Be ready for comprehensive searches of your luggage. If you are asked the purpose of your visit, you are free to say tourism and you may then be asked where you will be visiting in Ukraine.

8. Most western nationalities are allowed to stay in Ukraine for 90 days in any 180 day period (the standard Schengen rule), and you should not overstay or breach this rule as it is now increasingly strictly enforced by the Ukrainian border police. The 90-day period cannot be extended in-country. You must leave within 90 days of entry or a criminal case will be opened against you on departure from Ukraine and you will be fined; you may also be banned from re-entering Ukraine.
9. Do not attempt to cross the borders with Belarus or Russia as a tourist or you are highly likely to be detained. The ferry service from Istanbul to Odessa has been suspended and no passenger or cruise ships berth in Ukraine.
10. If you decide to walk over the border at Medyka (a 15-minute taxi ride east of the southeastern Polish town of Przemyśl), you should be reasonably physically fit and be able to carry your own luggage as it involves a 25-minute walk along a rough path between chain fences. Some people find this route intimidating. If you do this, have your hotel accommodation in Lviv send a car to collect you on the Ukrainian side of the border as public transport from the Ukrainian side of the border to Lviv is patchy and virtually unnavigable unless you speak either Ukrainian or Russian. Also you may have no idea where you are going once you arrive in central Lviv at some bus station or other unfamiliar to you. All hotels above the level of youth hostels in Lviv tend to be very helpful in organising things like cars and taxis for you.
11. Bring your own medications with you, as public medical facilities may not always be available or up to the standards you might expect in wartime Ukraine. In the event of a medical emergency you should seek to exit Ukraine immediately and obtain treatment abroad.
12. English is widely spoken amongst young people in Lviv and Kyiv but it is not commonly spoken elsewhere. Download both Ukrainian and Russian dictionaries on a Google Translate App on your mobile telephone before arrival in Ukraine, so that you can use it even when you have no data connectivity.
13. Lviv and Kyiv both have hotels of every standard, up to and including five stars. Prices for luxury accommodation are very reasonable by European standards. There are also a variety of restaurants of every quality in all tourist towns, although be aware that restaurants in regions (*Oblasts*) with surfers typically accept last orders for food at 9pm. There are curfews in a number of different *Oblasts* of Ukraine and a list of them is available here:

<https://visitukraine.today/blog/97/curfew-in-the-regions-of-ukraine-updated>

14. The time that bars, coffee shops and cafes close varies widely depending on the individual institution and the town or city you are visiting. In Lviv, most bars expect you to leave at 11pm and drinks may not be served after 10.30pm. In Kyiv, a number of bars are open a little later: perhaps as late as 11.30pm. Public transport tends to dry up after about 8pm in most cities and stop completely by about 9.30pm.
15. Public transport tends to be quite good in Ukrainian cities, but you need to know how it works and to be able to read Cyrillic. There is an App called “EasyWay” that provides live locations for public buses, trolleybuses and trams in Ukrainian cities, in English. Familiarise yourself with this App to make the use of public transport far easier. It is possible to pay with cards or electronic payment systems on public transport but only if you have the right sort of software installed and/or a Ukrainian bank account and the rules are different in each city. In Kyiv you can enter the metro by pressing a credit or debit card against the card reader on the barrier. In Lviv it is easier to pay bus and tram tickets in cash to the driver. In Kharkiv all intra-city public transport is free. Ask helpful local people for advice as there are no fixed rules.
16. A lot of people use *marshrutkas* (private minibuses) both for intra-city travel and inter-city travel, and these can be more convenient but you need to know the routes and they are not always advertised. They typically cost slightly more than public buses but they are very cheap. They are common for inter-city travel in the south, and they represent the easiest way of travelling the route Odessa-Mykolaïv-Kherson, being far faster than the trains that follow a circuitous route and are infrequent. Kherson railway station has recently been attacked and may be unusable.
17. Lots of people do breach the curfew and there are nightclubs in both Lviv and Kyiv that are open well past the curfew hour, seven days a week. If you ask around you will find them sooner or later. However the Police do roam the streets after curfew, particularly in central Lviv. If they stop you and you show a foreign passport they will likely just direct you to your hotel but remain respectful and polite with the Police at all times; do not attempt to bribe them; do not act aggressively or drunkenly with them; remember at all times that Ukraine is under martial law.
18. Although alcoholism is widespread in Ukraine, try to avoid becoming so drunk that you pose a danger to yourself or others, in particular in cold or icy weather. Avoid drunken, aggressive encounters. The Police (or private security companies) will invariably be called and you will find yourself in big trouble.
19. Standards of service are not always perfect but try to be sympathetic as people in public hospitality venues and service roles may have a number of stresses and pressures in their lives by reason of the impacts of the war.

20. Avoid speaking Russian in western Ukraine, in particular in Lviv, or you may upset local people.
21. Ukraine used to have a reputation for rip-offs with foreign tourists but these have largely subsided. Nevertheless it is worth being careful, in particular in Lviv (where some bars may overcharge you) and in Kyiv (where a number of AirBnB style accommodations post fake photos and turn out to be substandard). Unless you are familiar with Kyiv, take particular care booking private apartments as you may be very dissatisfied with the location or hygiene of the accommodation. Accommodation quality is higher in Lviv. If you can afford them, where they exist, try to stay in international hotel chains as these maintain western standards and the staff are likely to speak English to a high level.
22. Most museums and tourist attractions are open across Ukraine, save in vulnerable front line locations. Many of the tourist attractions in Kharkiv have been damaged or destroyed by aerial bombardment; others are shuttered. Some historical buildings in Odessa have been damaged by aerial bombardment but the city remains very beautiful in the centre. In Lviv and Kyiv, most tourist attractions are open. The beach is open in Odessa and local people even swim in the sea - within strictly defined parameters. A number of bars and nightclubs remain open in Odessa in the summer months. Some nightclubs in Lviv, Kyiv and Odessa remain open but have shifted their hours so that they open late afternoon or early evening and close in time for curfew.
23. Travel between cities is best undertaken by train, and train tickets should be booked on the Ukrainian Railways App which is in English. Full refunds on tickets are available right up until the moment before travel. There are various classes available on trains but international travellers will find "First Class" and "De Luxe class" (the latter being comfortable two-person sleeper compartments) the most agreeable. Bring your own food and drink, and a book. There is often no mobile telephone coverage for large sections of long journeys. Car hire is possible in Ukraine using domestic and international agencies at reasonable rates but road quality and driving standards are both poor. As a foreigner you are likely to be held liable for any traffic accident where you are driving a car. Police tolerance for drink driving is zero, checks are frequent, particularly at night and early in the morning, and you cannot bribe your way out of such a problem; you will have your licence confiscated immediately, you are likely to be arrested, and you will have to stay in Ukraine pending a court hearing at which you will be fined. Avoid the long-distance domestic buses as they often travel at night when driving is particularly dangerous as most roads are unlit, both in and between cities.
24. It is permissible to break the curfew if you are in or catching a train (including walking or taking a taxi to or from a railway station - but you will find it difficult to order one; taxis are often

waiting near the railway stations after curfew but will charge elevated prices) and if you are in or catching a long-distance bus; but not if you are driving your own car. Inter-city highways have police checks on them 24 hours a day, *inter alia* to enforce curfews.

25. Ukraine's reputation for sex tourism has thankfully dramatically diminished as a result of the war and you should not bother travelling to Ukraine for these purposes as you are unlikely to find whatever you might be looking for.
26. Streets are often poorly lit at night, even in major cities, and the street lights are often turned off during or around curfew times. Bring a torch, particularly as streets may have potholes in them. Google Maps cannot always be relied upon because GPS or mobile 'phone signals can be jammed, in particular during aerial attacks.
27. The most popular taxi Apps are Bolt and Uklon and they are effective even for longer inter-city journeys of not more than 2-3 hours; but elementary Ukrainian or Russian language skills will make such journeys easier as drivers may not speak much English. If you ask a hotel to call you a taxi they will typically just call a Bolt or Uklon taxi for you. You will need a Ukrainian SIM card to use these Apps effectively; they can be purchased cheaply throughout Ukraine in gas stations, dedicated mobile phone stores, supermarkets and elsewhere. The best mobile phone networks are Kyivstar and Vodafone.
28. Unless you have substantial experience working in conflict zones, avoid war tourism along the front line as circumstances are difficult and the atmosphere can be tense. Do not attempt to navigate the M14 road from Kherson up the north / east / right bank of the Dnipro / Dnieper River to Zaporizhzhia, as this road comes under frequent artillery attack and there are roadblocks every 5-10 kilometres throughout the route. Although it is a beautiful and scenic road it is out of bounds for casual visitors while the Russian Armed Forces are stationed on the opposite bank of the river.
29. The usual international hotel booking websites, such as www.booking.com, do not work in certain frontline communities such as Sloviansk, Kramatorsk, Zaporizhzhia, Nikopol and Kherson. However there are hotels to stay in there and you will find their details on the internet. You can then email them, message them or telephone them (preferably in Ukrainian or Russian) to make a reservation. However before you decide to make reservations in hotels in these places, ask yourself whether it is safe and desirable and enjoyable to travel to these places as a tourist and whether you really have a pressing reason to go to such places. Life is difficult in all of these communities due to proximity to the war and you are unlikely to have a pleasant touristic experience. You may also be exposing yourself to significant danger.

30. Bring a guidebook, even if it is a few years out of date (we are not aware of any contemporary ones), because tourist information can be limited. A lot of government tourism information offices in tourist cities are closed and official tourism information is minimal. Limited physical maps of major cities and provinces are available sporadically in big cities (Ye Bookshops in Lviv have such maps) but they are in Cyrillic only. Consider bringing such maps from abroad, if you can find them.
31. If you are coming to Ukraine to learn Ukrainian, again bring your textbooks with you as you will find them of higher quality and a wider selection if purchased outside Ukraine.
32. Avoid drinking the tap water too frequently as although it is generally free of diseases, ageing piping may mean that it has higher heavy metal content than is typical elsewhere. Local people tend to drink bottled water.
33. Many bars serve “craft beer” or “domestic spirits” that in truth are home made beer or moonshine (“*samohon*”). Although we have never had any problems drinking these things, be aware that the cheaper end of alcoholic beverages in bars in Ukraine can be home made, even if they appear to be served from official bottles.
34. There is an official nationwide domestic “tourist tax” on accommodation in Ukraine where foreigners are staying but its collection is variable. Many places do not charge it. Where it is charged, it is seldom more than about 2%. If you find a substantial tourist tax added to your accommodation bill, be suspicious.
35. Central Lviv and touristed parts of Kyiv are awash with stalls and shops selling souvenir items. Lviv is by far the best for this but choose the shops carefully and be prepared to bargain where no prices are indicated. Do not buy souvenirs made of used ammunition such as bullet casings or you may find that they are confiscated by the customs authorities on departure from Ukraine (your bags are very likely to be x-rayed or searched, possibly more than once) and on no account try to take such items on aeroplanes outside Ukraine.
36. Although guns and other weapons are widely available in Ukraine you should obviously not attempt to buy these, still less think of exporting them from the country, or you are looking for trouble. Only people with legitimate front line business should have any interest in buying these sorts of things, and they pay maximum attention to securing such items when not in front line use. Do not imagine that you are in the Wild West with “open carry” rules. You cannot carry a gun in public in Ukraine, whether hidden under your clothing or otherwise, unless you are on the front line or in one of the settlements in close proximity to it where such things are tolerated. The Police are extremely heavily armed so you are looking at a potentially lethal encounter if you attempt such a thing.

37. The Police are generally trustworthy and helpful and they try to speak English, so do not hesitate to approach the Police if you find yourself in any difficulties.
38. Be culturally sensitive and understand that there is a high level of animosity towards all things Russian in the course of an extended and bloody war with the Russian Federation. Avoid making remarks sympathetic to Russian people or culture or they may be misinterpreted. Avoid political discussions in which you advocate compromise with Russia or any similar subject as these may result in a very hostile reaction. The Ukrainian national mood is highly against any talk of compromise with Russia, who are seen (rightly) as belligerent invaders with whom no compromise is possible.
39. International health insurance policies are mostly void in Ukraine by reason of foreign governments' travel advice against travel in Ukraine. There are various websites offering sale of Ukrainian "military" insurance policies and such things but these are mostly worthless or rip-offs. You do not need any particular type of insurance policy to enter Ukraine as a tourist and do not believe websites or other materials that suggest to the contrary. You will essentially be travelling without travel insurance. In the event of an emergency, you will have to self-repatriate or move to a hospital outside Ukraine and pay for this with your own funds. Ensure you carry a quantity of cash with you to cover this eventuality, as cash machines in Ukraine, although plentiful, may not always work and looking for one in an emergency or at an unusual time of the day may be frustrating.
40. Avoid trekking (outside the Carpathian Mountains, which are safe) at this time. Parts of Ukraine suffer from problems related to landmines, particularly in proximity to the front line or where Russian occupying forces used to be located, and minefields are not always marked. If you do go trekking, follow local advice and take a local guide if one is available.
41. Outside the Arcadia beach resort suburb of Odessa, avoid the Black Sea beaches which may be mined.
42. Be sensitive about photography of military installations or in front line locations. Ukrainians have become used to international journalists taking photographs of all sorts of unusual things, and generally will not object; but where you see a sign prohibiting photography, or where a law enforcement or military official instructs you not to take photos or video, comply with those instructions.
43. Do not be paranoid. You are not going to be targeted by the Russian Armed Forces for being a tourist in Ukraine. (On the other hand, do not attempt to enter the Russian Federation with a Ukrainian entrance stamp in your passport, or you are looking for trouble.) The odds of being

struck randomly by artillery or a missile, although they increase exponentially as you approach the front line, are extremely low in most tourist locations. The greater challenge you may face is inconvenience in disruption of transport and other infrastructure as a result of Russian aerial attacks or air raid warnings.

44. As to air raid sirens, be aware that the vast majority of Ukrainians simply ignore them, having become inured to them, and most people simply sleep through them if they take place at night. You might want to bring some ear plugs. However be aware that all public buildings, including railway stations, close during air raid alerts, although trains keep running during alerts. (You just have to work out how to board the train without entering the railway station; there is usually a way.)
45. Tour guides are available in Kyiv and Lviv but adequate tour guides are not available elsewhere in the country in our experience. The rate for a tour guide seems to hover at around EUR20-25 an hour. Agree in advance carefully what you want to see as the tour guides may or may not have had professional training. They may simply be people who speak English reasonably well. Ukrainian tour guides are a very mixed experience.
46. Leave Ukraine by bus or by train, or cross the border on foot at Medyka. Do not attempt to drive your own vehicle across Ukrainian borders. We have heard countless horror stories of people attempting to do this and discovering that they have problems with the Byzantine paperwork requirements, resulting in (often extremely) long delays.
47. Food standards are generally high. Restaurants are clean and Ukrainian food is in plentiful supply. You will eat and drink well in Ukraine. The country is awash with cultural sights. People are only since the beginning of the war in February 2022 starting to learn English in significant quantities but they will try to help you if you approach them and speak slowly in English. Younger people tend to speak English better than older people. Ukrainians are friendly and will go out of their way to help foreigners. There are far fewer rip-offs and scams than there used to be. Ukraine is an intriguing destination for an adventurous tourist, provided you are patient and used to reasonably rugged travel. It is not an appropriate destination for “stag parties” but it may be of interest to “culture vultures” with a taste for the unusual or for “off the beaten track” vacations.

Ukraine Development Trust
www.development-foundation.org
contact@development-foundation.org