



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR FOREIGN VISITORS TO UKRAINE

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Do I need a visa?

Most citizens of western countries do not need a visa for a visit which does not exceed 90 days in any 180 day period. An accurate map of Ukraine's visa policy appears here:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visa_policy_of_Ukraine

Is it a problem if I have a Russian visa or evidence of entry into Russia in my passport?

Yes. Replace your passport in such circumstances, or you are liable to receive extended interrogation on entrance to and/or exit from Ukraine by Ukrainian State Security Service officials.

Are any other visas or entrance stamps problematic?

We are not aware of any other entrance stamps or visas causing a problem. A Belarusian visa or entrance stamp is known not to be problematic.

Why are there no flights into Ukraine?

The entirety of Ukrainian air space was closed to civilian traffic on 24 February 2022 when the Russian Armed Forces attempted an assault upon Ukraine's principal cities and destroyed a number of airports across the country. The continuing threat to aircraft from ballistic missiles means that it has never re-opened. Russian civilian airspace in proximity to Ukraine has also been closed, and a number of countries have imposed sanctions against civilian aircraft flying into Russia.

Is crossing the border time-consuming?

There is no straightforward answer to this. Crossing from Poland to Ukraine seems to be easier and quicker than crossing from other countries to Ukraine and quicker and easier than exiting Ukraine which often involves a more thorough search of luggage. Buses may pass immigration in as little as 30 minutes but an hour or two is more common. There are a few horror stories out there; we have suffered for five hours at the Ukrainian-Polish border once; we have heard of even longer delays but they seem rare.

Trains are not obviously any more reliable than buses. Their timing may be less convenient.

Overnight trains and buses crossing the border are notoriously uncomfortable and you may arrive without having had significant sleep and absolutely exhausted because you crossed the border in the middle of the night, with people having inspections of bags and shuffling on and off the buses / trains, disrupting their sleep.

The quickest way to cross the border is undoubtedly to walk across at Medyka, between Przemyśl and Lviv, which involves virtually no delays or questions at all; but you need your transport arranged at each side or you may spend a lot of time haggling with unscrupulous taxi drivers and the like, often in a language other than English.

Is travelling to Ukraine dangerous?

Although the risks cannot be described as zero, Ukraine is safe enough for casual tourists, volunteers or those visiting relatives, provided that you stay away from cities and towns in proximity to the front line and you do not join the International Legion for the Defence of Ukraine. If you do either of those things, then visiting Ukraine can be dangerous.

Is there freedom of speech in Ukraine?

Yes, you can say anything you want without fear of arrest or government persecution, and a wide variety of political opinions about the war in Ukraine are commonly heard. However you may offend people deeply if you express pro-Russian views, and doing so is likely to cause you to be shunned and avoided. Remember that Ukraine is a country at war with her neighbour and this is an existential threat to her independence. So be careful.

We are not aware of any overt incidents of electronic communications interference in Ukraine, although of course some covert targeted incidents may well be taking place as part of the ordinary course of security and intelligence operations in the middle of a war.

Is there censorship in Ukraine?

Yes, but it is only very limited. To the best of our knowledge, all .ru websites are blocked, as are all websites associated with the Russian government (for example Russia Today, the Russian state broadcaster). .ru email addresses are also blocked, as are +7 telephone numbers (this is the international country code for Russia). There is no line-by-line censorship bureau or anything similar, which is remarkable for a country in a full state of war. Plenty of people are expressing opinions openly contrary to the official government narrative about what is happening in the war.

Will I be able to use the internet and mobile telephony in Ukraine?

Yes, and you should buy a Ukrainian SIM card as soon as possible upon entry. The best ones, in our opinion, are Kyivstar and Vodafone; they have the widest coverage across the country. Lifecell is another option that works well in Lviv but not always as well in the East, for example.

However be aware that telephony and the internet may be disrupted sporadically. We have found problems downloading large attachments; periodic email outages; disruptions to GPS signals; disruptions to mobile 'phone data, and a variety of other problems that arise from time to time.

Is there a shortage of food?

No! There is a surplus of food, as Ukraine is a predominantly agricultural economy currently unable to export a lot of its produce due to the Russian Black Sea blockade of the principal Ukrainian port of Odessa. Therefore food is cheap and plentiful. You will eat well in Ukraine. It is not a country to come to if you want to lose weight.

Is it viable to visit Ukraine as a tourist?

Yes; it is perfectly viable provided you bring a guidebook and you are ready for the fact that some museums may be closed or have restricted opening hours; and you stay away from the front line. We have prepared a separate [briefing note on tourism in Ukraine](#).

Will I be able to print documents?

Assume not. Printers of any quality seem to be rare in Ukraine and few people rely on printed documents for anything except receipts in shops. Everything from train tickets to tickets to the opera are done by showing mobile telephones with screens and scanned barcodes.

There are some “copy shops” dotted around major cities but in our experience their quality can be extremely variable.

Incidentally, printed menus in restaurants are increasingly scarce in Ukraine so have a QR code scanner App installed on your mobile telephone.

How do I book hotels and what are they like?

The usual travel agency websites such as [booking.com](#) are the best way of booking hotels in Ukraine, except for places on or near the front line (including Sloviansk, Kramatorsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson) that are excluded from the main travel agencies’ portfolios. If you want to stay in such a place in a hotel, you need to contact the hotel directly, often by telephone. They may not speak English, so you may need to call them in Ukrainian or Russian or have a friend who speaks one of those languages help you.

Beware of hotel websites and other online information about hotels’ facilities. Much of it may be false or out of date. Few restaurants in Ukraine during wartime have functioning restaurants or they may be very basic. Few have functioning bars. Advertisements for 24-hour service can be taken with a pinch of salt. However there will often be someone to admit you during curfew hours if that is when you arrive; but you should warn the hotel in advance that you will be arriving during curfew hours.

Room standards are hugely variable and do not necessarily believe the photographs you see online.

Generally hotel experiences in Ukraine are satisfactory but you may not see many other guests. Hotel staff tend to try to be as helpful as they can.

How do I rent an apartment in Ukraine?

AirBnB has waived all its commissions for Ukrainian landlords and therefore it has come to dominate the market in apartment rentals. Use AirBnB. There are other services available of a more or less informal nature but they tend to be in the Ukrainian language only and they may be unreliable.

You can negotiate long-term rental discounts with AirBnB hosts (as you can with hotels). Just contact the host.

You will virtually never live with someone when you rent an AirBnB apartment; you will just be directed to a a box near the door which takes a code to release a key. Most AirBnB hosts are helpful upon request but are not pro-active so if there is a problem you must tell them directly (Ukrainians like to be direct) and ask them to fix it.

Beware of AirBnB rentals not looking the same as the photos. This is apparently a particular problem in Kyiv.

There are a lot of empty apartments in Ukraine because so many people have fled the country or are internally displaced. Your host may not even be in Ukraine.

In the winter, in some older buildings, the pipes may freeze up, particularly if the property has not been occupied for a while. This means that you will have no access to running water for a period. Usually these problems resolve themselves in hours or a couple of days at most.

The AirBnB website can produce a PDF reservation form for immigration use. This is generally preferable to asking your host to produce a piece of paper as they may not know what it ought to look like and people in Ukraine have an aversion to official pieces of paper!

Beware of some AirBnB advertisements on or near the front line that are actually for the rental of destroyed properties. These advertisements are in reality requests for donations to rebuilt destroyed homes and you cannot stay there.

Can I drink the water?

Although many people do not, yes you can, even near the front line.

Are medical supplies available in Ukraine?

Although Ukraine is awash with pharmacies, you may have to visit several to find any specific medication you need. Supply of pharmaceuticals is patchy. It is best to bring your own essential medications with you if you can, to avoid having to trawl around lots of different pharmacies. Most medications are available without prescription, with the exception of psychiatric medications that do require prescriptions and obtaining a quick appointment with a psychiatrist in Ukraine is virtually impossible.

High quality medical kits in the form to be used by the armed forces are in extremely short supply in Ukraine and if you anticipate travelling in close proximity to the front line you should bring one or more military-grade medical kits with you.

Can I open a bank account in Ukraine?

It depends on the bank and the branch. We have heard stories of people opening bank accounts with Privatbank (Ukraine's largest bank, now under government control) with foreign passports and evidence of a Ukrainian address (e.g. an AirBnB confirmation invoice available from their website).

It seems commonplace that accounts can be opened in US dollars and Euros as well as in Ukrainian Gryvnas.

Accounts with Monobank (a popular FinTech product used by many Ukrainians to pay in shops and on public transport via a mobile 'phone App, and to execute financial transfers between one-another) are unavailable unless you have a permanent residence permit, which may require five years of temporary residence (renewable year-to-year) before you achieve it, depending on your immigration status.

Be aware that international wires both into and out of Ukraine are often extremely problematic. Where successful, they may take a month or more.

As a practical matter, funds deposited in Ukrainian banks will be for expenditures in Ukraine or you can withdraw the funds in cash, convert them into a western currency (this is not easy outside Ukraine), and leave the country with the cash.

There are theoretical limits on how much cash you can take into and bring out of Ukraine but we are not aware of any recent attempts to enforce those limits. Ukrainian border officials tend to understand that in times of warfare it is inevitable that people may travel over international borders with large amounts of cash.

I have a civil dispute. Should I resort to the courts?

Probably not. Ukrainian courts do not have a good reputation. Resolve any disputes either by “taking it on the chin” (i.e. absorbing the loss) or through negotiations with the parties involved; or by introducing an intermediary. The greater majority of Ukrainians are quite honest financially and are open to reasonable solutions when intervening events make an agreement go awry. In wartime conditions, intervening events are something Ukrainians have become used to.

Can I drive in Ukraine?

Yes you can. However you should not attempt to drive your own vehicle into Ukraine unless you have taken legal advice on the paperwork required. The paperwork needed can be complex and the regulations can be sporadically or arbitrarily enforced. You may find that you have difficulties exiting Ukraine with your vehicle.

Driving conditions are often hazardous due to poor road quality, drink drivers and unlit roads. Hazards are substantially elevated at night. Do not attempt to drive at night, not least by reason of the curfew. You will be stopped frequently by the Police if you attempt to drive in curfew hours.

Do not drink drive. The tolerance for drink driving is zero. Even one alcoholic drink in your bloodstream is too much. You can be breathalysed by the Police at any time of day. If you are found even slightly positive, your international driving licence will be confiscated on the spot, you are likely to be arrested and taken to the Police station with your vehicle left at the side of the road; you will then be bailed pending a court case which may be a significant period in the future; you may not be permitted to leave Ukraine pending the court case; you will receive a substantial fine; you cannot make “facilitation payments” or anything similar to circumvent this process.

You can hire a car. Rates are reasonable and you can use your foreign drivers’ licence; the authorities do not seem too strict about such things. Some car hire agencies allow you to drop off a car in a different city from that you hired the vehicle in. Internet search is the best way of finding car rental agencies and the procedure conforms to international standards.

Do not drive a hire car into the Red Zone (the area within accurate shelling range of Russian artillery) or you are looking for trouble.

Can I work in Ukraine?

There is very little paying economic activity in Ukraine during wartime for foreigners. In principle you need the right sort of residence permit to work in Ukraine but in practice these laws are not enforced because there is no paying work. Volunteering work that assists Ukrainian civilians or the military does not in practice require a separate permit although one is available and you should consult a lawyer if you want to do this. We can help to recommend one upon query.

In practice nobody will stop you from working remotely in Ukraine, but bear in mind that internet quality can be spotty, particularly outside the main population centres.

Opening a business in Ukraine is a complex proposition and unlikely to be economically viable unless your revenues are from outside Ukraine, given the wartime economic conditions. You should consult a lawyer if you wish to do this lawfully. Lots of Ukrainians run more or less informal businesses that are unregistered but this is not wise for foreigners. Although not hugely likely, the possibility of your being investigated or prosecuted for running an illegal business cannot be excluded.

It is possible to open a charitable organisation in Ukraine; this is a less arduous process than opening a business and if you want to employ people in Ukraine in the course of your charitable activities then you should do this or you risk breaching employment laws.

Do not overstay your immigration permission if you are working in Ukraine in any capacity, whether voluntary or otherwise. It is increasingly the case that you will not be excused immigration violations on exiting Ukraine simply because you were present in Ukraine as a volunteer; even a short overstay may result in a criminal case being opened against you; a significant delay at the border; a fine; and (depending on the length of the overstay) a lengthy ban.

What sort of insurance policy should I buy to travel to Ukraine?

The short answer is: none; unless you need it for immigration purposes. Contrary to some materials you will find, particularly on foreign government websites, the Ukrainian authorities will not ask you for a copy of a travel or medical insurance policy upon entry to Ukraine. If you need one for immigration purposes (for example for presentation at a Consulate in connection with a visa application), your legal advisor will typically provide you with one.

Insurance policies themselves are generally useless in practice in Ukraine. International policies will not pay out on claims in respect of incidents in Ukraine because the vast majority of foreign governments advise against travel to Ukraine and this tends automatically to void the policy. Ukrainian insurance policies tend not to pay out at all. So-called “military insurance policies” are a scam, selling you an insurance policy that nobody will accept in lieu of actual payment.

If you need medical attention, expect to pay for it, typically in cash.

We are not aware of any company genuinely offering an insurance policy to extract you or evacuate you from Ukraine in case of emergency; you will typically have to get yourself out. There are private organisations offering such services (www.the-paladins.com is one of them) but they tend to be very expensive because a lot of specialist expertise is involved. Thankfully such extractions are extremely rare. Most of the time they just aren't necessary, because the front line is not moving at the time of writing and has not much done so for the past 12 months or so.

Do I need to bring a lot of cash?

No; Ukraine is an increasingly cashless society and most payments are now made by credit or debit cards. There are ATM's across the country but they may not always have a lot of cash in them or they may have relatively low daily withdrawal limits. Cash is useful in a number of circumstances, for example when on or in proximity to the front line; to buy tickets for public transport; buying things in so-called “green markets” (outdoor markets); and certain sorts of (often less scrupulous) taxi drivers.

There are money changing offices everywhere in Ukraine; they are far more ubiquitous even than banks or ATM's. You can change major European and American currencies into Gryvnas and back again easily. More obscure currencies, even if fully internationally convertible, may prove much more difficult to change and you may be charged a hefty commission if you can find anyone willing to change such banknotes.

There is a black market in exchanging Russian rubles for Ukrainian Gryvnas in Kharkiv but we have not attempted this and we do not recommend it. Were the Ukrainian authorities to find Russian rubles in your wallet, it would probably elicit a very negative reaction.

How do I book train tickets?

This is very easy. There is a Ukrainian Railways App you download onto your mobile phone and it is in English. It is much easier to use than the Ukrainian Railways website which is full of bugs. You cannot buy Ukrainian Railways tickets unless you are in Ukraine; neither the App nor the website will function properly unless they detect a Ukrainian Railways IP address. (Incidentally, this is also true of ticket purchases for other public institutions like the Lviv Opera House.)

If you use the App (but not if you use the website), you can obtain a full refund of your ticket if you do not travel, even if you cancel the ticket after the due time / date of departure.

Is train travel comfortable?

This depends entirely on the class of travel. Classes of travel describing themselves as “First Class” or “de luxe” are generally fine; anything describing itself as “second class” or “third class” may be substantially less comfortable and sleeping compartments may be very cramped or extremely cramped. Do not attempt this if you suffer from claustrophobia.

Train journeys can be very long and they can start or end at extraordinarily inconvenient times such as in the middle of the night in the middle of a curfew. Choose your trains carefully for a convenient schedule. It is usually fine to book just a day or two in advance.

Trains with seats (not berths) describing themselves as first class will have a buffet car, and trains describing themselves as “de luxe” (but not first class sleepers) may offer food. Hot water, tea and coffee are all available in every class for a modest fee. Most people bring their own food on extended journeys, although long-distance trains may make one or more twenty-minute stops at stations to allow people to alight to buy provisions at stalls in the station (these stalls typically only take cash and may not have change). Do not miss the train if you alight to buy provisions, as the trains are liable to start moving off with or without passengers who may have alighted temporarily.

Alcohol is not for sale on any Ukrainian Railways trains but there is no objection to taking your own alcohol on board and drinking it. If you do this you may well find that other people on the train ask to share your alcohol and it is normal to share food and drink with other people on the train. They will do likewise with you if they can afford it.

In winter, trains generally are heated adequately - some with wooden stoves on each carriage that look alarmingly dangerous but in fact keep everybody very warm. In summer, you may be uncomfortable if you take a class of train that advertises itself as “not air conditioned”.

Trains tend to stop a lot in the middle of the night so don't expect a hugely good night's sleep. You may feel like the living death by the end of an extended overnight journey, particularly if you are not in first class.

Is bus a viable alternative to trains?

Ukraine is full of long-distance bus companies of varying quality. Flixbus is the best in our opinion but there are many others. Flixbus allows you to buy tickets online from outside Ukraine in an English language App or website with a foreign credit card. It offers partial refunds if you decide to cancel. It is somewhat cheaper than the train and its schedules may be more convenient but it is more cramped than the train. Flixbus buses are large and sturdy which is reassuring if you are taking an overnight bus due to the dangerous driving conditions at night. Bus travel during curfew hours appears to be informally permitted whereas travel in a private vehicle is not absent good reason that can be explained to the Police to their satisfaction.

Our strong preference is to take the train over the bus if first class or “de luxe” class is available as it is much more reliable and easier to use in terms of finding out where the train goes from, etcetera. Sometimes bus stations can be confusing in Ukraine, particularly the one opposite Lviv railway station (which is not the main Lviv bus station, a larger venue to the south of the city that few people actually use).

I don't speak Ukrainian or Russian. Will I find it difficult to get around?

Outside western Ukraine, virtually everyone speaks some Russian. English is widely spoken by people under the age of 30 in Kyiv and Lviv but not elsewhere. Younger people in other cities are likely to have smatterings of English. It helps enormously to learn 100 or 200 words of Ukrainian. Also it helps enormously to be able to read the Cyrillic alphabet, as few signs are in the Latin script outside Kyiv. It is not difficult to pick up Ukrainian Cyrillic; it just requires a few hours of study.

Ukrainian is a Slavic language. It is relatively easy to learn if you speak another Slavic language. It is more difficult to learn if you have no experience of Slavic languages.

There is a severe shortage of good books teaching Ukrainian for foreigners in Ukraine. Buy a language textbook, dictionary and Cyrillic alphabet book, if you need one, before arriving in Ukraine. Russian language learning materials seem to have disappeared altogether from Ukrainian bookstores. Presumably if this continues then the Russian language will just stop being spoken, at least in public, within a generation or so.

Is alcohol freely available?

Yes. Shops and restaurants can sell alcohol from 12 Midday until 9pm only. Bars can sell it until later; just how much later depends on the city and the curfew and how strictly the curfew is enforced. In most towns and cities bars customers must leave bars by 11pm.

There is no alcohol for sale in free Donetsk *Oblast* and certain other territories in the “Red Zone” (i.e. the zone of danger of proximity to the front line) but alcohol is available, and bars remain open, in Zaporizhzhia, if somewhat muted. We have been told that there is a black market for the purchase of alcohol in Kramatorsk but we have not ourselves investigated this.

What happens if I get in a violent interaction?

The Police will arrive and you will be arrested and possibly imprisoned for a significant period before being deported. Prison conditions in Ukraine fall below European standards and access to consular assistance is virtually zero. You may be incarcerated for a significant period awaiting trial. Avoid violent confrontations in Ukraine.

Occasionally Ukrainians may enter into violent confrontations with one another when intoxicated. Avoid bars or private residences where people are getting extremely drunk in a potentially unpleasant way. If you are invited to a private apartment, bear in mind that you may be effectively trapped in there with people drinking heavily until curfew is lifted.

If I get into trouble, can my Embassy help?

The answer to this question is almost always: no. There is virtually nothing any foreign country’s Embassy in Kyiv can do to assist their citizens in the country. This includes consular assistance upon arrest and detention; assistance with medical problems; and assistance with removing the dead from Ukraine. All Embassies in Kyiv are run to a degree by skeleton staff under conditions of maximum security and their duties are typically confined to official communications with government officials.

If a relative dies in Ukraine, you are likely to have to accept that they must be buried in Ukraine as transport of the dead out of Ukraine in wartime conditions is extremely difficult.

Are drugs available in Ukraine?

No. We have never heard of any of the conventional “recreational narcotics” being used in wartime Ukraine. Do not attempt to smuggle drugs into Ukraine as there are sniffer dogs at the borders. Penalties can be harsh. Ukraine used to have a problem with hard drugs but it has mostly disappeared amidst wartime conditions. It was associated with violent gangs that have also mostly disappeared.

Is it acceptable to form amorous relations with Ukrainians?

Yes; many Ukrainians are open to international relationships and they can be very friendly and welcoming to foreigners. However be aware that Ukraine has a sad history of sex tourism and sex trafficking, as well as domestic violence; therefore always approach any putative relationship with respect, consideration and courtesy, just as you would in any other country.

Is homosexuality legal in Ukraine?

Yes; but open displays of homosexuality are extremely unusual and tend to be confined to specific private social environments. Exercise caution and, as a rule, avoid open displays of homosexual affection in public places.

Can I visit Ukraine in the winter?

Yes; but the months of December and January are both invariably extremely cold with temperatures falling as low as -20 or even lower in the south and the east. Heavy snowfall is common and this may disrupt transport arrangements, in particular road travel. (Train travel in winter remains more reliable.) There may be a permanent layer of ice on pedestrian walkways as the temperature seldom rises above zero. Therefore be careful walking. Life in Ukraine during these two months is mostly spent indoors.

Contrary to some international media portrayals, most private apartments and hotels are perfectly adequately heated for the winter season and Russian attempts to knock out Ukraine's energy distribution network for the most part have failed or, where they take place, service is typically restored quite quickly.

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