

## UKRAINE DEVELOPMENT TRUST

### GUIDANCE FOR CIVILIAN TRAVEL UP AND DOWN THE FRONT LINE IN THE WAR IN UKRAINE

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The purpose of this guidance is to provide impartial information and advice on how to travel to and between the various frontline communities in eastern Ukraine in close proximity to the territory occupied by the Russian Armed Forces. The purpose of the guidance is to assist those wishing to travel in these areas in a civilian capacity to do so as safely as possible. We do not recommend travelling to any of these areas and indeed we strongly recommend not doing so. If, notwithstanding our recommendation, you do travel to these areas, then these guidance notes may help you in staying tolerably safe and in understanding the strictures on your movements activities given the applicability of Ukrainian martial law in the region.

1. The settlements and *Oblasts* (regions) that this guidance note is intended to cover include Kharkiv; Izyum; Sloviansk; Kramatorsk; Bakhmut; Kostyantynivka; Zaporizhzhia; Nikopol; and Kherson. These are the principal front line cities in free Ukraine, and from time to time they all experience varying levels of Russian missile, artillery or other airborne attacks.
2. The easiest way of travelling to the front line is by train. If you attempt to drive your own private vehicle, you will find large numbers of security checkpoints that may take a personal interest in your vehicle and its occupants, and in particular any documents you may present to the military personnel or be asked for; and the density of those checkpoints increases the closer to the front line that you go. Bus travel can be arduous for the same reason, although the Odessa-Mykolaïv-Kherson marshrutka service is reasonably reliable and tends to run hourly during daylight hours. To use this service you just show up at the bus station in the relevant city and you wait. If you can't read Cyrillic you will find it difficult to find the right marshrutka.
3. All of Kharkiv, Izyum, Kramatorsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson have railway stations with long-distance trains that can be purchased using the Ukrainian Railways website (or, better, the App) but from within Ukraine only. However it may not be that all train tickets on all trains can be purchased online. For example it appears impossible to purchase tickets exiting Kherson online. Also it appears not possible to purchase tickets to Kherson other than in third class which is very uncomfortable. Therefore you may wish to buy two train tickets to reach Kherson: one to Mykolaïv in a more comfortable class; and the second in third class on the same train, transferring carriages during the half-hour stop in Mykolaïv. We do not understand the reasons for these various unwritten rules but there are daily trains from as far west as Lviv

to all of these cities and you should not be fooled if the Ukrainian Railways website / App seems to suggest otherwise.

4. You may receive a document check arriving at some of these railway stations but with a foreign passport, telling the military police that you are a civilian volunteer, it should be cursory.
5. We have discovered that it is not possible to purchase tickets from Kherson railway station until 48 hours prior to departure; and then only a very limited number of tickets appear to be available. We do not know the reason for this but we anticipate that the reason may be because the trains are booked out for the Ukrainian Armed Forces and then the balance released only shortly before the date of departure.
6. Various bus services are offered to and from frontline communities but they seem to be unreliable. You may find yourself buying a ticket on the internet in advance and then there being no bus or the service having been cancelled.
7. In Kherson, the intra-city and inter-city taxi service Bolt does not operate but Uklon does. In Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv, Sloviansk, and Kramatorsk both services work.
8. A great deal of inter-city transport is arranged using the car-sharing service BlaBlaCar; but beware because it requires some patience and negotiation to use it. Firstly the App works in Ukrainian / Russian only, so you must at the very least be able to read those languages or you will need a person who can speak those languages to assist you. Many of the rides being offered purport to be from young ladies although they are not in fact driving anywhere. Instead they are agents for people running different types of minibus (*marshrutka*) services up and down front line cities, in particular the run between Kharkiv to Izyum to Sloviansk to Kramatorsk to Dnipro. Some of these minibuses are civilian; some of them are military operations but they do not object to taking paying civilians. The greater majority of these services leave early in the morning (sometimes as early as 5am). What will typically happen is that you will book what appears to be a private car service with BlaBlaCar and then someone will telephone you, typically in Ukrainian or Russian, and tell you what the real arrangement is, possibly enquiring as to the purpose of your trip to ensure that you are legitimate. You will be given a time and a location where to meet and you should arrive a few minutes early. In this author's experience these services are fairly reliable but you need to be able to cope with the language barrier if you are to use them effectively. The actual price of the ride will be more than that initially advertised on BlaBlaCar. The location where you are dropped in each city will vary in each case and may or may not be very convenient. In Kharkiv this author was dropped in the car park of a shopping centre a significant distance from the centre of the city, but it was in close proximity to a metro station.

9. The road from Sloviansk to Bakhmut is notoriously dangerous and you should not attempt to use it either in a private vehicle or in any form of public transport (although nobody will stop you). Foreign civilian volunteers have been killed and seriously injured driving on this road; they were targeted by Russian artillery based in Bakhmut.
10. If you must travel to Bakhmut and its suburbs (and this is very dangerous indeed given that Bakhmut is predominantly under Russian occupation), you should approach the city from Kostyantynivka via the backroad that exists.
11. Do not attempt to travel to Avdiivka. Your vehicle is highly likely to be attacked by Russian artillery on the network of backroads you need to take in order to get there. The average life expectancy of soldiers serving in Avdiivka is two days. There are no adequate accommodation options in Avdiivka.
12. All of Sloviansk, Kramatorsk, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson have adequate and safe central accommodation options and if you wish to be appraised of our recommendations, please contact us explaining who you are and why you want to go to these places.
13. No alcohol is available in any of Kherson, Kramatorsk or Sloviansk. You can bring your own but you must drink it in your hotel room.
14. The road from Kherson to Nikopol is extremely dangerous and at the time of writing one of the most dangerous roads in all of free Ukraine. If you wish to travel to Nikopol, you should do so either from Zaporizhzhia or from Kryvyi Rih. It is known that there are reliable buses to and from Kryvyi Rih.
15. You should take local advice as to curfew times which may vary in practice as opposed to theoretical curfew hours. Hence for example in Kherson the theoretical curfew hour is 7.30pm but in practice very little indeed is open later than 5pm. We know of one restaurant that will take orders until about 6pm but it is not wise to be out later than 6.30pm. You are unlikely to be arrested or detained if you are out after curfew but you will be wondering around in the pitch black and this will make it very difficult to navigate. You might have an accident and hospital facilities may be near to non-existent. Get used to waking up early and going to bed early in all front line destinations. Have food in your accommodation in all front line destinations as you will not be able to go out easily or at all after dark to find food or a place to eat.
16. Be careful what you photograph in front line destinations. Photographing military installations is generally out. Ask people's permission before photographing them. Photographing war

damage is acceptable because Ukrainian people want the rest of the world to know what is going on; but be sensitive nonetheless and if asked why you are taking such photographs, then explain politely that you are trying to publicise the justice of the Ukrainian cause.

17. Many people along the front line may not speak Ukrainian and may speak in Russian only or predominantly. Be sensitive to linguistic and cultural issues, just as you always should be anywhere in Ukraine in the context of war.
18. Plan all routes meticulously. Make accommodation and travel arrangements in advance but also be prepared to be flexible because events on the front line do change. Provided you are careful it is unlikely that you will be injured or worse; but do not arrive in towns at unusual times (i.e. after dark or before dawn) unless someone trusted is meeting you. Take paper maps in case GPS or mobile telephony connections fail you. Do not rely upon Google Maps or similar products because sometimes they contain incorrect information or they simply don't work. This is a particular issue in Zaporizhzhia where there is a significant telecommunications and GPS interceptions facility to divert Russian drones and other aerial ordnance from their intended targets. However it can happen anywhere in the vicinity of the front line which is why meticulous planning is all the more important.
19. Consider taking body armour if travelling to free Donetsk *Oblast*, the Nikopol area or Kherson. Conventional kevlar-lined flak jackets are unlikely to prevent serious injury from shrapnel or aerial warheads; use lead plate body armour and steel helmets, if at all. Be aware that this type of equipment is both expensive and heavy. Travel with the minimum consistent with your purposes. Do not expect to find regular consumer items for sale in any significant quantities although you may be lucky and find a shop selling mobile phone accessories, some military clothing and/or items of civilian clothing.

For more information feel free to contact the Ukraine Development Trust, [www.development-foundation.org](http://www.development-foundation.org), [contact@development-foundation.org](mailto:contact@development-foundation.org), WhatsApp to +380 98 467 4579.