



Some Useful Tips

SOME DOs AND DON'Ts FOR VISITING BUSINESSMEN

- * Don't think you can do anything in Ukraine only from Canada. You must become familiar with a market and potential clientele who are nothing like what you know at home.
- * A good local partner is worth his weight in gold, and may be as hard to get your hands on. Choose carefully; he will also bridge the language gap and cultural barriers.
- * Talk to Foreign Affairs and Embassy officials -- both Canadian and Ukrainian. They will be able to give you leads and information you will need to know.
- * When you finally do go to Ukraine, be an intelligent traveller. Don't make yourself conspicuous either through your behaviour or your attire; you will be picked out anyway.
- * Don't flaunt your money or your expensive lap-top; you wouldn't do it in New York City, or anywhere else, for that matter.
- * Bring American money in denominations not larger than \$20's; Canadian money is next to impossible to exchange. The present exchange rate in Ukraine has reached 50,000 coupons to \$1 US, so make yourself familiar with local currency or you will be at a total loss.
- * Be prepared to bargain. The taxis around hotels will invariably demand \$10 the minute they see your Canadian smile; just tell them you only want a ride, not the car, and offer half. Agree to the price and destination before getting into the car, for a return trip if you are uncertain whether cabs are available at the other end.
- * Know ahead of time where you are staying; hotel rates in Kyiv can go up to \$189 US per night, whereas in an equivalent hotel or outlying city or region can cost only \$20 US.
- * Keep all receipts, including the slip of paper you get when exchanging your dollars for local coupons. Upon departure, Ukrainian customs may require you to provide proof that you converted your money legally at a bank or in the hotel, especially if you purchase anything of value. Without such proof, they can demand 100% duty!
- * Bring a small medical kit for minor emergencies - everything from bandaids to tylenol (no codeine), something for diarrhea, and a needle for any medical emergencies, with a doctor's note explaining the needle). (There is a chronic shortage of needles in Ukraine.)
- * The streets are dark at night due to the government policy of energy conservation because of Ukraine's energy shortage. Don't go out alone after dark, and know exactly where you're going.
- * Keep your passport and excess cash in a money belt or in a hotel safe. Travellers cheques are much easier to use than credit cards. Your driver's license is of limited use: even if you find a rentable car, gasoline is scarce everywhere.

"More unbelievable yet," adds Gwyn, "inflation has hit 90 per cent." Daily? Monthly? Per annum? How does this compare with the countries of Latin America? Asia? An economic crisis, he notes, "has happened to the most naturally wealthy of all the ex-Soviet republics." This is simply untrue. Russia was always the most wealthy Soviet republic. Ukraine's "black earth" supplied about 22 per cent of Soviet grain in 1990, roughly equivalent to its proportion of population within the USSR. The "bread basket" days, recalled by Gwyn, ended years ago.

Gwyn states that Ukraine's "ablest citizens" were slaughtered by Stalin in the 1930's, the Nazis in the 1940's or emigrated to places like Canada." By that token, the only people of ability in post-Soviet Ukraine would be in their 80s and 90s. Ukraine in fact has a well educated population.

Crimean president Yuri Meshkov is calling, Gwyn writes, "for outright independence and for economic union with Russia." Aside from the fact that the the two phrases are mutually contradictory, the statement is inaccurate.

The Crimean parliament has supported a return to the constitution originally issued in 1992 that would permit Crimeans dual citizenship, i.e. Ukrainian and Crimean. This is admittedly a concern for Kyiv, but the proposal has been shelved.

"Official Russian reaction" to the above "has been moderate and cautious." Unfortunately, official Russian reaction since 1992 has been anything but moderate; witness the Russian parliament's declaration that the "gift" of Crimea to Ukraine was illegal, and Boris Yeltsin's recent statement that Russia and Ukraine together should deal with Crimea. Imagine the situation if President Clinton announced that, together with Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, he would step in and "resolve" the Quebec question!

The "real Ukraine" (How condescending! Is there a real Canada, a real France?), appends Gwyn, has a considerable Russian-speaking minority. Another error. The Russians are in a minority in East Ukraine, the Russian-speakers are a majority.

Ukraine's only possible exit from its dilemma, declares Gwyn, is to connect itself to the country "Russia - from which it liberated itself just three years ago."

Ukraine did not need to liberate itself from Russia since it was not part of Russia.

"The West and the United Nations lacked the will to send peacekeepers to the Crimea or to the Caucasus," maintains Gwyn. Astonishing. Has there been fighting in the Crimea? Casualties? Why would peacekeepers go there rather than say Bendery in Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan or Tajikistan, all of which have seen thousands of casualties in civil war situations? The Caucasus, incidentally, is not in Ukraine. For all its economic problems, Ukraine has been for three years one of the isolated havens free from conflict, in contrast to virtually every other CIS republic.

Like so many others of late, the article seems calculated to inflame, and is lacking in informed analysis. Indeed, unless the collapse of Ukraine is to be a self-fulfilling prophesy, obtaining accurate information on Ukraine should ideally be the prerequisite for writing at all.