



## VISITING KYIV: THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW

### VISITORS VISAS

Ideally, we recommend that you apply to a Ukrainian consular office or embassy for a visa before coming to Ukraine. However, Ukrainian consular offices abroad are not yet established in all nations, so visas can be obtained at Borispol airport in Kyiv or at any border. The applicant must provide a valid passport, two photos, an invitation (if necessary) and pay a fee of approximately \$50 Cdn.

### MONEY

For the present moment the national currency is the Karbovanets, or Coupon. But Ukraine is awaiting the introduction of its own fully convertible currency, the Hryvnia. You may not leave the country with Coupons, so be sure to spend them, or change them back into hard currency before you leave. United States dollars and the German Deutsche Mark are the most commonly accepted foreign currencies. Local businesses often prefer payment in hard currency, but the Karbovanets is the only legal tender.

### CURRENCY EXCHANGE

You can exchange hard currency for Coupons at an increasing number of locations throughout the city. If you are arriving by air at Borispol International Airport, you will find two currency exchange points located in the airport. Once you are in the city, we suggest that you change your money into local currency at any major hotel or exchange office. New exchange offices are popping up all over the city. Unfortunately, due to hyperinflation and rapid devaluation of the Coupon, exchange rates here can vary from week to week. They are sure to have changed substantially by the time you read this. Beware of changing money on the streets or with private individuals: it is illegal and can be dangerous.

### TRAVELLER'S CHECKS

Traveller's checks can be cashed at Intourist hotels and at a small number of banks and exchange offices. Until very recently, they haven't been accepted anywhere outside of certain hotels.

### CREDIT CARDS

At this point, credit cards are not in wide use throughout Ukraine. Some major hotels accept credit cards, but be sure to ask first. There are also a few hard currency stores bars and casinos where you can use your credit cards.

### WATER

The Ukrainian government recommends that you boil the water before drinking it to avoid bacterial infections. You may want to pack a water purification unit, or iodine tablets to be safe. Imported bottled mineral water is available in hard currency stores. Locally bottled mineral water is available in Ukrainian grocery stores and all restaurants, but the taste can be unpleasant. You should also be aware of a second curiosity about the water supply. One of the "finest" inventions of the centrally planned economy was centralized hot water and heating. Hot water, for example, is typically turned off for a month during the summer so that the pipes can be cleaned. This can happen without warning. In some cities, like Lviv, the water supply (even cold) may be irregular year-round, or available only at certain times each day.

### ALCOHOL

You will find that alcohol is easily accessible and inexpensive in Ukraine. Beware, however of drinking and driving - this is a zero tolerance country. The fines are substantial and you will never forget the hassle of trying to get your drivers license back. Please take a cab if you have been drinking.

### RADIATION

As you probably remember, the tragic accident at the Chernobyl nuclear reactor that happened eight years ago. Small parts of Ukraine are still uninhabitable, and people develop radiation poisoning as they have resettled illegally. In Kyiv, the level of background radiation is considered safe, or normal, according to the

U.S. Embassy. If you will be travelling outside of Kyiv, the main area of concern is the northern section of the Zhytomyr Oblast.

### ELECTRICITY

The standard electrical voltage throughout Ukraine is 220 volts. Some outlets may operate on 127 volts, but these are very rare. You may need a converter as well as an Eastern-European plug adapter if you are bringing electrical appliances. Be aware that there are frequent power surges and other irregularities in the electrical supply. You may wish to bring a surge protector.

### LANGUAGE

Ukrainian is the official state language of Ukraine. However, due to decades of enforced russification, you are more likely to hear Russian being spoke on the streets of Kyiv than Ukrainian. Until independence, Ukrainian was spoken almost exclusively in the villages. Russian was the language of business, and education; the language of the city dwellers. The two languages share the same Cyrillic alphabet, and if you arrive unfamiliar with either language, a phrase book or interpreter is almost essential. Not much English is spoken here. You will quickly learn that "PECTOPAH" is the word for restaurant, and it even sounds like the English pronunciation of "restaurant" without the last "t". You will also find that there are very few around.

### BUSINESS HOURS

Businesses and public offices normally work an eight hour day, Monday through Friday, closing for lunch between 1:00 and 2:00 pm. Most banks are open to the public from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm Monday through Friday.

### PUBLIC RESTROOMS

You should always carry your own supply of toilet paper with you, as it is seldom supplied. Public rest rooms tend to be unsanitary, due to the lack of proper cleaning products. Many toilets will clog if you throw paper into them - there is always a basket nearby for the paper. There are pay-toilets in large department stores, some underground pedestrian crosswalks and restaurants.

### OPERATING HOURS

In Ukraine, it's not uncommon for something to be closed when it should be opened. Restaurants often close for an hour around lunchtime, or before supper. Ticket offices have "technical breaks" where all activities stop for 15 minutes and ticket agents stare from their booths at the line of waiting people. These holdovers from the planned economy can be particularly frustrating to Westerners coming from a service-oriented environment. Nonetheless, these inconveniences are being eliminated as the economy evolves.

### LINES

Before coming here, you've probably seen pictures of people waiting in long lines for bread or other things. You will still see long lines throughout the city, but more often than not they are for ice cream! Increasing prices have reduced the lines.

### STREET NAMES

Many of Kyiv's streets have been renamed in the last few years, removing the names of Communist heroes and leaders. This can lead to confusion for locals and traveller alike. In addition, streets are often unmarked. Street signs, when they exist, tend to be located on the corner of a building.

### DELIVERY SERVICES

DHL Worldwide Express, TNT Express Worldwide, Federal Express Pony Express, United Parcel Service(UPS).

### ASSISTANCE

Contact the Canadian Embassy if you should encounter any major problems: 31 Yaroslaviv Val Street; tel: (044) 212-3550/2235.

*Source: Kyiv in your pocket, Linea 12 Ad Agency/Air Ukraine.*