

Kiev

Overview

The city of Kiev is located in the north central part of the Ukraine, on the Dnieper River. It is the capital and largest city of the country, home to over 2.6 million people. Kiev attracts many visitors all year round for its scientific, industrial, educational and cultural importance in Eastern Europe. As well as this, visitors are fascinated by Kiev's rich history and its mix of old and new throughout the city.

Modern Kiev is filled with historical monuments, such as the Kiev Pechersk Lavra (the Monastery of the Caves) and the Saint Sophia Cathedral which are part of the Seven Wonders of Ukraine Collection. There are many classy restaurants, nightclubs and theatres in the centre, such as the Kiev Opera House, which are central to the city's culture. Shoppers looking for traditional items will be attracted to the historic area of Andriyivskyy Descent, selling books, religious artifacts, games and jewelry.

Kiev is now home to several prestigious hotels in the centre. The choice varies from cheap to luxurious; in the heart of the city's bustling city centre or surrounded by picturesque monuments and sites. Those looking for a 5* luxury experience will enjoy a stay at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, located in the centre of many government offices, cultural centers, theatres, restaurants and shops. Visitors looking for a more laid-back stay can settle in one of Kiev's largest hotels – the Tourist Hotel, located on the Dnieper River in one of the town's most picturesque locations. Whilst close to both the city's parks and beaches, the Tourist Hotel is also near to the metro station to take visitors into the town center.

Kiev boasts hundreds of restaurants bars and cafes, serving their diners in both comfort and style, and offering an impressive variety of cuisines. While Kiev embraces many cuisines from all over the world, visitors should not miss the opportunity to try traditional Ukrainian dishes such as varenik (small dough pies with different stuffings), and famous Ukrainian borsch (beet soup) with pampushki (soft rolls soaked in fresh crushed garlic and oil). Ukrainian cuisine is rich in both taste and nutritional value, with influences including Russian, Polish, German and Turkish. Don't be shy to ask for second helpings, Ukrainians consider this a show for appreciation of their food! Popular alcoholic beverages include strong spirits such as Russian Vodka and Samohon (moonshine) with infusions of fruit, spices or hot peppers. Popular non-alcoholic beverages include fruit compotes, made up of sweet, dried-fruits boiled in water. On entrance to upscale restaurants, expect coats and bags to be checked

Kiev has a continental climate; with snowy winters reaching as low as -20C and hot summers reaching up to +35C. Rain is common throughout autumn to spring, with the summer warmth beginning around May through to the end of September. Kiev is known for its Indian summers where the climate is pleasant, with slight rain and warm temperature levels between +20-25C.

The official currency in Kiev is the Hrivna (pronounced Grivna). Conveniently, there are ATM and bank machines every 100 yards in the town. As well as this, traveller's cheques can also be cashed in at local banks for a 3% charge. It is best to use cash rather than cards in the Ukraine, as credit card fraud is often and so it is highly recommended not to use credit cards during your stay.

Places to Visit

Pechersk Lavra - Caves Monastery

This fascinating historical site was built by Kiev monks back in 1051 and is the most holy place in the Ukraine. The caves on the site are burial grounds for monks. The Lavra is the centre of Eastern Orthodox Christianity and

is also one of the Seven Wonders of Ukraine. It is worth booking onto an English-speaking guided tour to receive the full experience as there are very little signs in English.

Saint Sophia Cathedral

This cathedral is one of the city's most famous landmarks for its stunning architecture and fascinating history. Taking over 9 centuries to build, it is also one of the Seven Wonders of Ukraine. The uniquely painted interior contains mosaics and frescoes dating back to the 11th century.

Park Peremohy – Victory Park

A popular site for outdoor lovers. During the winter seasons, the lakes freeze over and ice fishermen and children with roller-skates are a frequent site. The summer months attract a greater amount of visitors for swimming and sunbathing, with the daytime temperatures reaching between +30-35C. Victory Park is easily accessible, located near Darnytsia subway station.

Khreshchatyk Street

Khreshchatyk is the main street in Kiev, and although it was completely destroyed during the world war, it has been renovated thanks to the period of Ukraine's independence. The street has been restyled in the neo-classical Stalinist architecture and is now a popular destination for both citizens and tourists. Khreshchatyk Street is closed off to transport and reserved for pedestrians during weekends and public holidays so that everyone can enjoy the many stores, cafes, restaurants and markets located within it.

Museum of the Great Patriotic War

Situated in the hills of the Dnieper River, it is one of the Ukraine's largest museums, featuring over 300,000 exhibits. As well as educational, the museum is located amongst fascinating surroundings, centred around the city's most famous 'Motherland' statue. The memorial complex contains World War 2 military equipment, the armaments used by the Soviet Union, as well as its portrayal of the terrors of the Nazi occupation and courage of the home front.

Regular Events

January - New Year's Day

New Year's Day is Ukraine's biggest holiday, filling the streets of Kiev with excitement. The streets of Kiev are filled with decorations and all night parties to celebrate the New Year. On New Year's Eve the Ukrainian equivalent of Santa Claus – 'Ded Morez' (Grandfather Frost) delivers presents to sleeping children at night.

February - InterCharm Ukraine

The KyivExpoPlaza holds an annual perfume and cosmetics trade fair where over 600 Ukrainian and international countries promote their range of products. Also on offer are seminars, lectures and master classes for industry

professionals.

March - International Women's Day

On the 8th March, traditions celebrating women's independence include giving flowers and sweets to the special females in your lives as a sign of remembering women's achievements.

April - Easter Day

Eggs are boiled, decorated and painted in bright colours as a Ukrainian tradition and a special sweet Easter bread full of raisins is baked. It is common for locals to take food such as eggs and bread to church to be blessed by a priest on Easter night.

May - Kiev Day

The national day of the capital is celebrated on the last weekend in May. The city hosts a carnival of parades, performances and fireworks to celebrate the city's pride.

July - International Festival of Sand-Sculptures and Land-Art

Held at Ghydropark, Venetian Bay, this festival has become one of the most eagerly anticipated events in Kiev. Each year the sculptures are based around a different theme with many exciting opportunities for visitors.

August - Independence Day

Ukraine celebrates its freedom from the USSR on the 24th August every year. The town of Kiev gathers to watch the military display of the Ukrainian flag parading the streets and to listen to the military orchestra play.

September - Kyiv Fashion

As one of the city's biggest style events, various exhibitions come together at the KyivExpoPlaza for four days in September. Fashionistas will love the variety of shoes, clothes, make-up and accessories that are celebrated at this event.

October - Tango Kyiv Style Festival

October gives you the chance to unleash your passion for the Tango. Restaurants and theatres in the city host a 4-day festival full of shows, performances and workshops, ending with a Tango Ball on the final night.

December - President's Gala Dinner

Hosted by the Kyiv Lions Club as a fundraising event to raise money for the club as well as the needy and underprivileged. It is a night worth attending, with food, wine and spirits included in the ticket price. Entertainment for the night includes performances from top Ukrainian artists, plus local bands and DJ's playing both Ukrainian and international music.

Getting Around

Airport Transfers

Passengers arriving in Kiev by air will fly to one of two airports: Boryspil Airport used by many international airlines, or Zhulyany Airport used by domestic flights and limited flights to surrounding countries. There is a large yet unregulated taxi service around Kiev to transport visitors from the airport that allow pick-up by phone. The numbers will be available at an information office.

Metro

The Kiev Metro system is the fastest, most convenient and most affordable means of transport around the city. It now has 3 lines through most of the city, reaching a total of 46 stations. A single ticket on the metro costs 1.70 hryvnia, to all destinations. Cash is exchanged into tokens in order to use the metro. Those planning on using the metro frequently should purchase the contact card which can be prepaid for up to 50 trips. As is custom, when using public transportation, seats should be given up to the elderly, mothers with children and the handicapped.

Train

Railways are Kiev's main form of transport between cities. However, the service has failed to meet passenger's demands as it has met with problems such as the Dnieper River bridges which prevent any development of the railway system. Tickets for trains can be purchased from ticket offices within the stations.

There is another form of train known as the Elektrichkas, owned by the Ukrzaliznytsia company. These are short-range trains that offer a fast and safe service. However, they can be unreliable due to falling behind schedule. It is not advisable to take these trains during rush hour as they can get overly-crowded.

Bus

Kiev's public bus services are known to be unreliable and so other methods of transport around the city are encouraged to be taken. Private minibuses are a well maintained form of transport and have been proved to be more reliable and faster than larger buses. All public road transport is owned by the Kyivpastrans municipal company and is greatly subsidized by the city and has a simple tariff per person, independent of distance travelled.

Taxi

There is no problem getting a taxi around Kiev as they cover the city streets. However, it is common for local car drivers to pick up passengers awaiting a taxi so be sure to phone for a private taxi service. Taxis are ordered by dialling 0-58. The most common way of getting around is by private cars that act as taxis as they are a cheaper method of transport. To be safe, ensure there is no more than one person inside the car before you get in. A price should be negotiated on before moving off, although drivers rarely speak much English.

The Kiev Funicular

Kiev's unique mode of transport that takes passengers up the steep hill, overlooking the Dnieper River, between the Upper town and lower commercial area. Opened to the public in 1905, the transportation system is reasonably priced, fast and convenient, taking approximately 3 minutes between stations.