

# Central Ukraine



This region is known as the home of Ukraine's famed black loam, the rich soil that puts the bread on the table in Ukraine – the 'breadbasket of Europe'. But you'll find more than just *chornozem* (black earth) in this region where Cossacks once roamed. Unbeknownst to many, the land known as Polissya, which lies largely between Kyiv and the Belarusian border to the north, is naturally forested, giving outdoorsy types ample chance to scale cliffs, pick berries, swing birches or sashay in the flowing waters of the region's many rivers. One can imagine poets being equally content here.

South of Kyiv the forests of Polissya yield to the vast flatlands of Podillya. Before WWII this region lay at the heart of the Jewish Pale of Settlement, birthplace of the Jewish *shtetl* (village). Catherine the Great established the Pale (demarcation line), which stretched north to Lithuania and west into Poland, in the late 18th century to remove Jews from Russia and mark the area in which they were allowed to live. Hasidism was founded in Podillya in the 17th century, and the region is peppered with tombs of Hasidic masters that draw scores of Jewish pilgrims. The Nazis obliterated practically every trace of central Ukraine's Jewish culture, but the odd poignant reminder remains in the form of a decrepit Jewish cemetery, a forgotten mass burial site or the testimony of an aging eyewitness to the Nazi horror.

The jewel of central Ukraine lies at the southern border of Podillya: Kamyanets-Podilsky, a granite 'island' in the sky surrounded by the natural moat of the Smotrych River. Watched over by its famous fortress, Kamyanets-Podilsky is an incredible sight that, remarkably, continues to see relatively few tourists. It's hard to see this situation continuing for much longer, though.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Walk over the Turkish Bridge to the stunning castle of **Kamyanets-Podilsky** (p106)
- Stroll through the phenomenally landscaped grounds of Uman's **Sofiyivka Park** (p102)
- Watch devout Jews revere deceased Hasidic masters in **Berdychiv, Uman, Bratslav** and **Medzhybizh** (p103)
- Head way off the beaten track at the **Nuclear Missile Museum** (p104)
- Rock-climb or visit the famous **Korolyov Cosmonaut Museum** (p101) when you're in Zhytomyr
- Get up close and personal with embalmed Dr Pirogov in **Vinnitsya** (p104)



■ POPULATION: 5.5 MILLION

■ HIGHEST POINT: 370M



## POLISSYA

The woody, river-sliced region radiating out of Kyiv in all directions is known as Polissya. The bulk of the region lies north of Kyiv, extending into Belarus, and sees none of the heavy tourist traffic of southern and western Ukraine. Those who do make it here are usually campers, mountain bikers, rock-climbers, mushroom pickers, canoeists and the odd hunter. If you don't fit one of those categories, you might enjoy taking in Zhytomyr's easy-going charm or exploring the rich Jewish history of Berdychiv, both west of Kyiv. The eastern portion of Polissya is covered in the Around Kyiv section (p95).

### ZHYTOMYR ЖИТОМИР

☎ (8)-0412 / поp 284,200

US Peace Corps volunteers who end up stationed in this city 100km west of Kyiv can't stop raving about the place and it's easy to see why. The Teteriv River cuts a deep slice through the city's leafy southern edge, making zhytomyr something of an adventure-sports Mecca. On summery weekends, bungee jump-

ers fly off the Berdychivsky bridge, while a huge forest just across it provides quality terrain for mountain biking and hiking. That said, outside of Zhytomyr's famous space museum there's not too much to divert more sedentary types. A half-day is sufficient to cover the main sights.

### Sights & Activities

A good place to take Zhytomyr's pulse is along pedestrian **vul Mykhaylivska**, which runs north from maydan Rad, one of Zhytomyr's countless squares. The city's main square, maydan Soborny, is a short walk west of here and is easily identifiable by its giant **Lenin statue**.

The city's core sights are clustered behind (west of) maydan Soborny, along tree-lined bul Kafedralna. Towering **St Sophia's Church** (1748), with its distinctive peach exterior and lavish interior, is a must-see for lovers of baroque churches. The **Regional Museum** (maydan Zamkovy 1; admission 2uah; ☎ 10am-6pm, closed Mon & Sat) right next door is more notable for its attractive baroque exterior than for the musty archaeological and cultural exhibits inside. Slightly more worthwhile is the **Nature**

**Museum** (bul Kafedralna 14; admission 2uah; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat), housed in a former Orthodox church. Here you'll find stuffed specimens of indigent foxes, elk, wolf and wildcats lurking in dioramas that accurately portray Polissya's forested topography.

The **Korolyov Cosmonaut Museum** (☎ 372 653; vul Dmytrivska 5; admission 7uah; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Tue-Sun, closed last Thu of the month), named after acclaimed Soviet rocket engineer and local hero Sergey Korolyov, is well known throughout the former Soviet Union. Suitably space-aged music plays and fake stars glimmer as you walk around a dark room packed with various trappings of the Soviet space program, including several satellites, lunar rocks and an actual Soyuz rocket. The museum is modern and quite well done, but unless you're a true space nut it's probably not worth a special trip to Zhytomyr. Some of the museum's placards are in English. The house where Korolyov was born, now a museum dedicated to his life, is directly across the street from the museum.

Flanking the Teteriv River about 1.5km south of the centre, **Gagarin Park** is a hive of activity in the summer months and serves up great views of the river gorge and the forest beyond, accessible via the pedestrianised Berdychivsky bridge over the gorge. To reach the park follow bul Stary to its southern terminus.

Rock climbers rave about the bolted routes up the cliffs of Denyshi, 10km west of Zhytomyr.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Zhytomyr Hotel** (☎ 228 693; maydan Peremohy; unrenovated r 26, renovated s/d \$40/70; [P]) The unrefurbished rooms here are a great deal – Soviet-style but functional and clean. We love the half-bathtubs, and the waterfall-style showerheads were clearly way ahead of their time. However, if you're looking for something a little more upscale, the classier renovated rooms at the Ukraina Hotel are much better value.

**Ukraina Hotel** (☎ 472 999; vul Kyivska 3; unrenovated s/d \$30/50, renovated \$36/60; [P]) The stylish renovated rooms here are well worth the upgrade. The doubles are actually suites and, for those looking for some USSR nostalgia, some balconies have views overlooking the Lenin statue on maydan Soborny. The hotel is also known for its Georgian restaurant, Pirosmeni (open 8am to 11pm), with a large, filling set breakfast (16.50uah) and excellent Georgian cuisine

priced right (mains 12uah to 20uah). Credit cards accepted.

**Kanyon** (bul Peremohy; mains 10-25uah; ☎ 1pm-4am) This restaurant has a cowboy theme but the food is strictly Euro-Ukrainian. It turns into a disco by evening.

In the warmer months, your best bet is to forsake the restaurants and head for the outdoor *shashlyk* stands above the pedestrian bridge in Gagarin Park, where you can easily fill up for less than 20uah. A half-litre of beer costs 3.50uah. The authentic Ukrainian ambience is *bezplatno* (free).

### Getting There & Away

To make Zhytomyr a day trip from Kyiv, take a *marshrutka* from the Zhytomyrska metro stop (see p93). These arrive at and depart from maydan Peremohy in the centre of Zhytomyr. Trains to and from Kyiv are sporadic and take more than twice as long (3¼ hours).

### BERDYCHIV БЕРДИЧІВ

☎ (8)-0414 / поp 87,600

You'd never guess today that this sleepy town on the southern edge of Polissya was once an important intellectual centre and hotbed of Jewish culture. At the turn of the 19th century, Berdychiv's population was more than 80% Jewish. The Nazis took care of that, executing just about every one of the city's 39,000 Jews and burying them in mass graves on the town's outskirts. These days Berdychiv's Jewish community numbers only several hundred, but the city remains an important pilgrimage site for followers of revered Hasidic master Levi Yitzhak (1740-1810) who is buried in the town's remarkable Jewish cemetery.

The website [www.berdichev.org](http://www.berdichev.org) is a good resource for information on the city.

### Sights

#### JEWISH CEMETERY

Levi Yitzhak's mausoleum is in Berdychiv's eerie, overgrown **Jewish Cemetery** (Evreysky Kladovyshe; vul Lenina). While the mausoleum itself has been looked after, several-hundred-odd boot-shaped tombstones lie hideously askew and virtually hidden by weeds, neglected almost to the point of disbelief. Many tombstones, etched with barely legible Hebrew inscriptions, lie flat on the ground. The graves predate the Nazis by at least several decades, but it was the Nazis who sealed

the cemetery's fate by leaving no Jews behind to care for it.

A walk through the cemetery is moving and awe-inspiring. The effect is magnified by the solitude of the place. Despite its sorry state, it has fared better than the many Jewish cemeteries in Ukraine that have been buried and lost forever. It is thus a symbol of defiance and a powerful, important and rare reminder of the country's rich pre-Holocaust Jewish past.

The cemetery is about a 5km taxi ride (10uah) northwest of Berdychiv's bus and train station on the road to Zhytomyr; the cemetery's entrance is across from a petrol station.

### OTHER SIGHTS

The impressive brick-walled complex hogging the horizon as you approach Berdychiv from Khmelnytsky is widely known as the **Berdychiv Castle** (*krepost*), but it's actually a 17th-century Carmelite monastery. The fortress-like defensive walls and towers were built in the late 18th century.

Those who are interested can try to hunt down the two **mass burial sites** that lie outside the city. The first one is about 3km west of the monastery on the Khmelnytsky highway. A memorial on the right side of the highway commemorates the 18,640 'Soviet citizens' killed here in September 1941 – like all Soviet Holocaust monuments it makes no mention of Jews. The actual burial site, marked by a plaque with Hebrew writing, is hidden under a clump of low-lying trees about 150m into the cow pasture behind the Soviet plaque. A second burial site, where another 18,000 Jews died, is another 1km towards Khmelnytsky on the left side of the highway. At both sites the Nazis shot their victims in the back of the head and let their slumped bodies fall into pre-dug pits.

Berdychiv also has links to two great 19th-century literary figures: Joseph Conrad was born here (1857) and Honoré de Balzac was married here (1850) in the rose-tinted **St Barbara Church** (vul Karalipnika).

### Sleeping

Berdychiv is best visited as a day trip from, or en route to, Vinnytsya or Zhytomyr, but if you want to stay the night there are some options, including the Soviet-style **Druzhba** (☎ 324018; vul Karalipnika 82; s/d from \$16/25; 📍) and the slightly

more upscale **Hotel Mirabella** (☎ 320 190; vul Lenina 20; standard/deluxe r \$36/50; 📍)

### Getting There & Away

Regular *marshrutky* to Zhytomyr leave when full (roughly every 20 minutes) from Berdychiv's central bus station (8uah, one hour). There are buses or *marshrutky* at least every hour to Vinnytsya (15uah, two hours) and Kyiv (25uah), which is 3½ hours away by bus or 2¼ hours by *marshrutka*. Berdychiv is not on a main train line.

## PODILLYA

Podillya is the borderland within the country whose name means 'borderland'. Podillya is the bridge between the stolid, Russia-leaning east and the pro-European south. A swing district politically, topographically it's more predictable: flat and agricultural. The iconic image of bright blue sky over vast wheat field – the inspiration for the colours of the Ukrainian flag – is practically inescapable here. But Podillya is not all farms and flatlands. Castle hunters will find business to attend to in the region's southern half, particularly in the 'rock island' city of Kamyanets-Podilsky. And there are a handful of more unusual sites, including a Hitler bunker and a missile museum, scattered about the region for those with time to explore.

### UMAN УМАНЬ

☎ (8-)0474 / pop 89,000

All roads in Ukraine seem to pass through this central hub, home of relentlessly romantic Sofiyivka Park and the final resting place of the revered Hasidic Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav. Visiting Uman is a perfect way to break up the journey between Kyiv and Odesa. Or, in a pinch, Uman can be done as a long day trip from either city. Beyond the park and the tomb there's not much happening here.

Nash Svit publishes a great city map, filled with information on the park. It's available at **Knyhy** (vul Sadova 1; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) in the town centre.

### Sights

Sofia Pototsky was a legendary beauty, and Uman's stunning **Sofiyivka Park** (☎ 363 19; vul Sadova; admission 8uah, free before 9am, after 6pm & all

### PILGRIMS FLOCK TO PODILLYA

Ever since the death of Rabbi Nachman (1772–1810), Jewish pilgrims have flocked to his grave-site in Uman every Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah) to pay homage to this 18th-century sage who founded the Breslov branch of Hassidism.

The rabbi was born in Medzhybizh (see p106), made his name in Bratslav (Breslov), near Vinnytsya, and died of tuberculosis in Uman at the young age of 38. On his deathbed, Nachman promised his followers that he would save and protect anyone who came to pray beside his tomb. Today some 20,000 Jews answer his call at Rosh Hashanah, and at any time of year you'll find a handful of devout worshippers – both male and female – praying at his grave site.

Pilgrimages also take place to the grave of the Baal Shem Tov (Besht), Rabbi Nachman's grandfather and the founder of Hasidism, in Medzhybizh (p106); to Levi Yitzhak's grave in Berdychiv (p101); and to Bratslav (p106).

winter; ☎ 6am-10pm summer, 6am-9pm rest of year) is her husband Count Felix' monument to her physical perfection. Having bought Sofia for two million zloty from her former husband (she had been sold into slavery at an early age by her parents), the Polish count set to landscaping this 150-hectare site with grottoes, lakes, waterfalls, fountains, pavilions and 500 species of tree. The result, completed in 1802, was Ukraine's answer to Versailles.

A map at the park entrance describes the history of the park in English and points the way to the various highlights, most bearing sentimental names like **Island of Love** and **Grotto of Venus**. The park is such a superlative piece of landscape architecture that you do not need to be a park lover to appreciate it. In summer, you can hire boats to traverse the park's many ponds. As it turns out, Sofia broke Felix' heart before he died, having an affair with his son.

Tours of the park are available in English and cost 180uah. The park is about a 10-minute walk from the centre of Uman, down vul Sadova.

To visit the **tomb** (vul Pushkina) of Rabbi Nachman (see above), head towards Sofiyivka Park and, about halfway down vul Sadova, turn right onto vul Pushkina.

### Sleeping & Eating

During Rosh Hashanah most Uman residents rent out their flats to pilgrims or tourists. The rest of the year you're limited to the following.

**Uman Hotel** (☎ 452 632; vul Radyanska 7; r with shared/private bathroom per person from \$6/14; 📍) You would expect much, much worse from this centrally located Soviet-style hotel. The rooms, while tatty, are well attended to by Stakhanovite

maids and the beds aren't deal-breakers. One of Ukraine's true bargains.

**Hotel Muzey** (☎ 433 527; vul Sadova 53; r with shared bathroom per person \$10, d with private bathroom \$40) While a big step up from the Uman Hotel, this faded number next to the park entrance has seen only token renovations since the 1980s. Still, it has a nice lobby, a restaurant and is reasonably good value.

**Celentano** (vul Radyanska 15; pizzas 7-15uah) Ukraine's ubiquitous pizza chain is a blessing in restaurant-starved Uman.

**Kadubok Shynok** (vul Radyanska 7; mains 20uah) On the east side of Uman Hotel, it serves Ukrainian and Russian classics including tasty *borshch*.

### Getting There & Away

Uman is 210km south of Kyiv and 280km north of Odesa. Most Autolux and other buses between the two cities stop at Uman's bus station, or along the Kyiv–Odesa highway 2km west of the bus station, from where you can take a taxi into town. The best way to and from Kyiv is via private *marshrutky*, which run every hour until 8pm between Kyiv train station and the central square in front of the Uman Hotel (25uah, 2½ hours). Buses take 3¼ hours to get to Kyiv and four hours to Odesa. Services for buses to Vinnytsya (three hours) and Khmelnytsky (five hours) are sporadic, but there are a few per day, or you can reach Vinnytsya by taxi (275uah, 1½ hours).

### VINNYTSYA ВІННИЦЯ

☎ (8-)0412 / pop 356,700

Vinnytsya is another perfectly pleasant city that one would never expect to find hidden amid central Ukraine's endless wheat, sunflower and sugar-beet fields. It famously plays



### OFF THE BEATEN TRACK – NUKES IN A FIELD

It's not easy to find, but deep in Ukraine's agricultural heartland, 30km north of Pervomaysk, lies arguably Ukraine's coolest museum. The **Museum of Strategic Missile Troops** (☎ 8-051 615 4478, 142 471; museum 15uah, control room 20uah), better known as the Nuclear Missile Museum, was formerly a nuclear missile launch facility.

The highlight is the journey taking you 12 storeys underground in a Brezhnev-era elevator to the control room, where you can't help thinking that once upon a time a simple push of a button could have ended civilization as we know it. I sat at the desk of doom, my hand hovering over the button, and pretended to take that fateful call on an old Soviet phone.

The facility controlled 10 missiles, each of which lay hidden in subterranean silos near the control room. In the grounds of the museum are four huge decommissioned intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), including a 75-foot SS-18 Satan rocket, the Soviets' largest ICBM. There were actually no Satan rockets at this complex. This particular specimen was hauled in from Baikanor, Kazakhstan. Ukraine's facility was for shorter-range missiles targeting Europe.

My guide worked here when it was still a working missile launch pad. I asked him whether the US knew about this place back in the day. 'Of course', he said. Stupid question, I guess. The Soviets knew plenty about US sites too, judging from the old satellite photos on display. After the Soviet Union collapsed, this facility continued to work briefly until it was decommissioned as part of START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) in the mid-90s.

It's a fascinating museum but there are no English guides and getting here is a considerable hassle unless you're driving from Kyiv to Odesa. From Kyiv, turn left (toward Holovanivsk) about 50km after Uman and follow the signs to the museum (about 40km). From Uman it's a 180uah, one-hour taxi ride. Another option is to take a *marshrutka* from Mykolayiv in southern Ukraine (see p181) to Pervomaysk (30uah, 2½ hours) and continue by taxi to the museum (60uah one way).

host to the embalmed body of a renowned Russian doctor and to one of Hitler's bunkers, but its true appeal lies in its centre, where several churches, a park and a pleasant pedestrian street compete for attention. Vinnytsya also makes a good jumping-off point for some interesting excursions in southern Podillya (see p106).

There are internet cafés and a supermarket on the pedestrian street, vul Kozytskoho. The city has a snazzy English-language website, [www.vinnytsatourism.com.ua](http://www.vinnytsatourism.com.ua), with loads of practical information.

## Sights & Activities

### CITY CENTRE

Vinnytsya's compact centre is bisected by vul Soborna and anchored by **maydan Nezalezhnosti** (Independence Square), where you'll find a monument to the Orange Revolution, when major protests were held here. Turning north off vul Soborna onto vul Kozytskoho you might be forgiven for thinking that you're in Poland or Germany. This narrow, cobbled stretch of road is lined with shops and leads to a brick clock-tower housing the interesting **Afghan War Museum** (admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun), with

tributes to the 167 local young men who made the ultimate sacrifice in the Soviet-Afghanistan War. West of here is **Kozytskoho Park**, where you'll find a very Soviet-style WWII monument of three brutes in front of an eternal flame.

If you have time to kill, the diverse **Regional Museum** (☎ 352 025; vul Soborna 19; admission 2uah; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) has some interesting archaeological artefacts, stuffed wild animals, a model of the old Vinnytsya Castle, and a WWII exhibit with intact Soviet propaganda. The light yellow, gold-domed 1753 **Transfiguration Church** (Vul Soborna 23), right next door, is worth checking out for its fine frescoes.

### PIROGOV CHAPEL & MUSEUM

The second most-famous embalmed corpse in the former Soviet Union (after Lenin in Moscow) rests in the basement of a **chapel** (vul Pyrohova 195; suggested donation 5uah; ☎ 9am-5pm) about 6km southwest of Vinnytsya centre. Nikolai Pirogov was a Russian medical pioneer who invented a type of cast as well as a revolutionary anaesthesia technique. His wife had him embalmed when he died in Vinnytsya in 1881. The body is said to be much better preserved

than Lenin's younger corpse. This is without question one of Ukraine's oddest sites.

About 2km before you get to Dr Pirogov's resting place you can see his house, now a **museum** (vul Pyrohova 155; admission 5uah; ☎ 10am-6pm). It's actually more interesting than you'd expect, and not just because of the Soviet character of the place (the Soviets claimed Pirogov as a hero many years after his death because his inventions saved countless lives in the world wars). The doctor's anatomical sketches are also quite interesting, and one room remains unchanged from the surgeon's era.

Take *marshrutka* 57 to both the museum and the corpse.

### WEHRWOLF

WWII buffs might fancy a trip out to the remains of Hitler's forward bunker, 8km north of Vinnytsya near the town of Stryzhavka. Hitler visited this bunker a couple of times (accounts vary) between May 1942 and July 1943. Presumably it was on one of these visits that he ordered the execution of the 15,000 Ukrainian slave labourers who built the complex – he was ostensibly worried that they would spill the beans about the bunker's location. At its peak the Wehrwolf complex consisted of three bunkers and 20 standing structures, complete with swimming pool, movie theatre and casino. The Nazis blew it all up on their retreat in 1944. Today there's not a whole lot to see here besides some large fragments of the bunker in an otherwise empty field – which is arguably more affecting than the typical Soviet monument. To get here take a taxi (for about 35uah return) from Vinnytsya.

### Sleeping

**Pivdenniy Buh** (☎ 323 876; pl Zhovtnya 1; s/d from \$21/24; ☎) The beds sag like hammocks, the bathrooms are uninviting, and the walls have been almost completely dispossessed of paint at this 1970s leviathan. Stay here only if you prefer an authentic Soviet experience to a good night's sleep.

**Podillya** (☎ 592 233; vul Pushkina 4; [www.vintur.com.ua](http://www.vintur.com.ua); s/d from \$28/50; ☎ ☎) It's a step up from Pivdenniy Buh, with a better location to boot. They also have an in-house tourist agency and a funky café on premises.

The once-prestigious Savoy group has a pair of long-running hotels occupying grand, if faded, buildings off maydan Nezalezhnosti. **Ukraina Hotel** (☎ 358 067; vul Kozytskoho 36; s/d from

\$30/46; ☎) is the more historic and appealing of the two. It has a prime location on pedestrian vul Kozytskoho, and passable if unspectacular rooms. **Vinnytsya Hotel** (☎ 358 067; vul Soborna 69; s/d from \$30/46; ☎), like its sister across the street, has a mix of refurbished and unrefurbished rooms.

### Eating

**Limon Café** (☎ 578 838; vul Hrushevskoho 28; mains 15-30uah; ☎ 9am-midnight) Vinnytsya's grooviest little bistro is full of hidden nooks and the sounds of ethnic lounge music. It serves a mean spaghetti with seafood, great salads and capably concocted alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks – try the cherry-lemon juice, a house speciality.

**Café Madeleine** (☎ 356 789; vul Hrushevskoho 70; mains 15-30uah) Another funky little find with a southwest-US vibe – think Aztec-style etchings in earthy-toned walls. The *bliny* (pancakes) here are famous and a mere 40uah earns you the right to inhale from flavoured *kalyan* (hookah) pipes.

Good shawarmas can be found at the Sputnik *rynok* (market) just east of Café Madeleine on vul Hrushevskoho.

### Getting There & Around

More than a dozen passenger trains daily connect Vinnytsya with both Kyiv and Lviv. The quickest way to and from Kyiv is on either the Kyiv-Kamyanytsya-Podilsky or Kyiv-Khmelnytsky express trains (35uah, 2½ hours). Note that the Kyiv-Lviv express train does not pass through Vinnytsya. The twice daily Odesa-St Petersburg train connects Vinnytsya with Odesa (80uah, seven hours) and Zhytomyr (25uah, three hours).

The **train station** is about 3km east of Vinnytsya's centre. Most trolleybuses and buses from the station head straight down vul Kotsyubynskoho, passing near the Central Bus Station before crossing a bridge over the Pivdenniy Buh river to vul Sadova right in the heart of the city.

Buses from the **Central Bus Station** (vul Kyivska 8) fan out to points north, east and south, including frequent buses to Berdychiv (13uah, 1½ hours), Zhytomyr (20uah, 2½ hours) and Bratslav (10uah, 1½ hours). The **West Bus Station**, about 4km west of the centre on Khmelnytsky shose, services western Ukrainian cities, including Lviv, Khmelnytsky and Sharhorod (12uah, two hours, hourly).

## AROUND VINNYTSYA

There are a couple of interesting side trips from Vinnytsya, especially if you are interested in Jewish heritage sites. The village of **Bratslav**, 50km southeast of Vinnytsya, is where Rabbi Nachman lived and wrote most of his teachings before moving to Uman (see the boxed text on p103). Several of Nachman's disciples are buried in a shrine-like **cemetery** on a lovely hillside overlooking a river. Jewish pilgrims allege that the graves have healing powers.

Southwest of Vinnytsya is the *shtetl* of **Sharhorod**. The *shtetl* originated in Ukraine and the one in Sharhorod is said to be the best-preserved example in the country. But it may not be that way for long. Sharhorod's *shtetl* is dying; its 16th-century **fortress synagogue** (used as a liquor factory in Soviet times) and many of the houses clustered around it have been abandoned to the elements.

Sharhorod also has a sprawling **Jewish cemetery** with thousands of exquisitely carved tombstones, some dating as far back as the 17th century. To get to it, follow the lane to the right of the post office down the hill, bearing left and crossing the creek. Then follow the trail up the hill bearing left and you will see the black cemetery gate marked with three large Stars of David.

For details on getting to Bratslav and Sharhorod see p105.

## KHMELYNYSKY & MEDZHYZHIV ХМЕЛЬНИЦЬКИЙ & МЕДЖИБІЖ

☎ (8-0)382 / pop 254,000

Khmelnysky, the gateway to western Ukraine, has little to divert tourists, but it is a convenient transport junction for those looking to get to Lviv from Kamyanets-Podilsky or from other off-the-beaten-track destinations in central Ukraine. It's also a convenient jumping-off point for the village of Medzhybizh, 30km to the east.

Besides being the birthplace of Hasidism (see p103), Medzhybizh possesses delightful rural charm, and a mighty 16th-century **fortress** (admission 4uah, ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) which stands at the confluence of two rivers.

If you get stuck in Khmelnysky for a night, try the **train station** (s/d \$20/31) or **Eneida Hotel** (☎ 718 018; www.eneida.km.ua; vul Teatralna 8; basic/renovated d \$30/42; ♿ ♿), which boasts tastefully renovated rooms with big, comfortable beds and classy furniture.

## Getting There & Away

Dozens of trains go through Khmelnysky on their way to Lviv (60uah, four hours) and Kyiv (58uah, six to eight hours), which is also serviced by two daily express trains (45uah, 4½ hours). One express train from Kyiv continues to Kamyanets-Podilsky, departing Khmelnysky at 9.20pm and arriving two hours later. There are also five trains per evening to Odesa (60uah, six to eight hours), all departing between 10.30pm and 5am.

Private *marshrutky* zip down to Kamyanets-Podilsky every 30 minutes or so from the Maslozavod (Маслозавод; Cooking Oil Factory) stop on Khmelnysky's southern edge (20uah, 1½ hours). Avoid the slow, packed, public buses and *marshrutky* to Kamyanets-Podilsky that leave from the bus station (300m from the train station). Myriad *marshrutky* connect the train station with the Maslozavod stop. A taxi to Kamyanets-Podilsky should cost about 200uah.

Any eastbound bus from the bus station gets you to Medzhybizh (5uah, 45 minutes).

## KAMYANETS-PODILSKY

КАМ'ЯНЕЦЬ-ПОДІЛЬСЬКИЙ  
☎ (8-0)3849 / pop 100,000

Kamyanets-Podilsky is the sort of place that has writers lunging for their thesauruses in search of superlatives. Even words like 'dramatic', 'stunning', and 'breath-taking' just will not do. Like the Swiss capital of Bern, or Český Krumlov in the Czech Republic, the town is located where a sharp loop in a river has formed a natural moat. However, Kamyanets-Podilsky is much wilder and more arresting than these other places.

The wide tree-lined Smotrych River canyon is 40m to 50m deep, leaving the 11th-century old town standing clearly apart on a tall, sheer-walled rock 'island'. According to an oft-told legend, when the Turkish Sultan Osman arrived to attack the town in 1621, he asked one of his generals, 'Who has built such a mighty town?' 'Allah', came the reply, to which the Sultan responded, 'Then let Allah himself conquer it', and bid a hasty retreat.

## History

Named after the stone on which it sits, Kamyanets-Podilsky existed as early as the 11th century as a settlement of Kyivan Rus. Like much of western Ukraine, the town

spent periods under Lithuanian and Polish rule, with the latter dominating from the 15th to 17th centuries. Unlike much of western Ukraine, however, it fell briefly to the Ottoman Turks, who conquered it with a tremendous army in 1672 and ruled for 27 years. After being returned to Polish rule, Kamyanets-Podilsky was conquered in 1793 by the Russians. They used its fortress as a prison for Ukrainian nationalists. In 1919 the town became the temporary capital of the short-lived Ukrainian National Republic. During WWII the Germans used the old town as a Jewish ghetto, where an estimated 85,000 people died. Intensive fighting and air raids destroyed some 70% of the old town.

## Orientation

Central vul Knyaziv Koriatovychiv runs for some 1km east-west through the Soviet-style new town, from the bus station to the New Bridge crossing over to the old town. Once across the bridge you can walk across the 'island' of the old town from north to south, passing most of the key sights before reaching the main attraction – the **fortress**, which lies across the Turkish Bridge near the island's southwest corner.

All hotels, services and most restaurants are in the new town, far removed from the tourist attractions of the old town. Tourism officials assured us that two hotels, a slew of restaurants and even – gasp – a tourist office would be opening up in the old town by 2009 in an effort to boost tourism. You might consider visiting *before* that happens.

## Information

**Post, internet & telephone office** (vul Soborna 9; internet per hr 3uah; ☎ post 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat, internet 8.30am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat & Sun)  
**Post office** (vul Troitska 2)

## TRAVEL AGENCIES

The following offer city tours (half-day tours \$30 to \$40) as well as tours to the nearby fortress in Khotyn (p155), and hiking, biking and caving excursions in the **Podilsky Tovtry National Nature Park** (www.tovtry.com), west of Kamyanets-Podilsky.

**Filvarky Centre** (☎ 360 24; www.filvarki.km.ua; vul Lesi Ukrainky 99)

**Gala Tour** (☎ 308 05; vul Soborna 23)

## Sights

### EN ROUTE TO THE FORTRESS

Cross the New Bridge into the old town, stopping to admire the amazing views of the canyon floor below. Some natters used to bungee jump here until tragedy struck in 2006 – a plaque on the east side of the bridge has the details. Looking south from the bridge you can spot the **pottery tower** (1583), so named because it was looked after by the town's potters. Twelve of these towers once lined the bank of the gorge along the perimeter of the island; seven or eight remain today.

After crossing the bridge, follow the main road as it curves to the left, passing the newly rebuilt **Holy Trinity Church**. Up ahead is the **Polish Market Square**, distinguishable by its tall, 14th-century **ratusha** (town hall). Under the medieval Magdeburg Laws, each of the old town's four major ethnic groups – Poles, Ukrainians, Armenians and Jews – occupied a different quarter; this square was the heart of the Polish quarter. The *ratusha* now houses three museums that are of limited interest unless you are into coins, medieval justice or the Magdeburg legal system. In front of the *ratusha* is an enclosed **Armenian well** (1638).

On your right, through a small triumphal gate lies the **Cathedral of SS Peter and Paul** (see the boxed text, p109).

Continue down vul Starobulvarna, past the baroque 18th-century **St Jehoshaphat's** Greek Catholic Church (formerly St Trinity's), which is fronted by sculptures of two saints who appear to be boogieing down. Beyond, the road dips past further fortifications on the northern side of vul Zamkova. You'll see the 16th-century **Armenian Bastion** and main **City Gate** before arriving at the 11th-century **Turkish Bridge** leading to the fortress. The name is slightly misleading, as this is essentially a medieval construction whose arches were filled in and fortified by Turks in the 17th century. Today, it's closed to vehicles during the day and open to light traffic at other times.

## THE FORTRESS

Built of wood in the 10th to 13th centuries, then redesigned and rebuilt in stone by Italian military engineers in the 16th century, the **fortress** (admission 5uah; ☎ 9am-6.30pm, to 5.30pm Mon) is a complete mishmash of styles. It's certainly not one of those attractions where you have to keep off the grass, or watch what you touch. You're given free rein to clamber all over it.





## QUEEN OF THE CASTLE

Iryna Pustynnikova is Ukraine's original castle-hunter. She runs the website <http://castles.com.ua> and does out castle-hopping itineraries to anybody who asks. We caught up with Iryna in her hometown, Kamyanyets-Podilsky, and asked her to pick the top five lesser-known castles in Ukraine.

- **Czerwonograd** (Map p113) 'It's simply...wow! 100 years ago the guidebooks called it the most beautiful manor in Poland. For me it's the most beautiful place in the whole country.' From the 14th to 17th century; near Nyrkiv, 50km north of Chernivtsi.
- **Sydoriv castle** (Map p100) 'It looks like an ocean liner sailing through a sea of maize and other vegetables.' Built in the 17th century; near Husyatyn, 60km northwest of Kamyanyets-Podilsky.
- **Kudryntsi castle** (Map p100) 'The landscapes are unbelievable, the ruins are very scenic and vivid, and tourists are rare birds here.' Early 17th century; 22km west of Kamyanyets-Podilsky.
- **Nevytske castle** (Map p137) 'Legend has it this very picturesque castle served as a shelter for Uzhhorod's girls – *nevesta* is the local word for 'girl'. Built in the 16th century; 12km north of Uzhhorod.
- **Hubkiv castle** (Map p113; Rivne oblast). 'It rises 32m over an area known as 'Switzerland on the Sluch River'. The views these castle ruins command are simply breathtaking. The fresh air that wafts forth from the surrounding forests inebriates the visitor like a good wine, and heals as well as any medicine.' From the 15th to 16th century.

For separate video tours of more Ukrainian castles, log on to [www.youtube/user/doktoruri](http://www.youtube/user/doktoruri).

install camp sites along the river, but it may take a while. There are a few places along the river where you can rent **canoes**.

## Festivals & Events

Kamyanyets-Podilsky has two marvellous festivals. **Kamyanyets-Podilsky Days**, in mid-May, features street parties, concerts, parades and a picturesque hot-air balloon festival. In early October the **Terra Heroika Festival** sees jousting, horsemanship and swordsmanship displays in the fortress.

## Sleeping

All hotels are in the new town. At the time we visited there was only one bare-bones 'hostel' – the Podillya – but more comfortable options might open up soon.

**Podillya** (☎ 788 47; vul Lesi Ukrainka 122; d or tr with shared bathroom per person \$8) This crumbling edifice 400m beyond the Gala Hotel south of the new town centre is for now the only backpacker-friendly accommodation in Kamyanyets-Podilsky. Rooms are clean but have saggy beds and share a tatty common bathroom. There's a basic café here.

**Kseniya** (☎ 203 79; kseniya@kp.km.ua; Zhvanetske shose 3; s/d/tr/q \$20/32/40/50; Ⓟ) This is an interesting option just 300m west of the fortress. With an irreverent castle-like design and tacky heart-

shaped pillows in some rooms, they make a somewhat weak stab at romance. Still, it's a good deal. The basic singles and doubles are more understated.

**Hotel 7 Days** (☎ 303 92; sevendays@kp.rel.com.ua; vul Soborna 4; s/d from \$43/66; Ⓟ) Inside this ugly tower block roost smiling receptionists touting comfortable, clean, modern rooms. There are three categories of both singles and doubles, but even the lowest-category rooms get plenty of TLC. Our main complaint is the small rooms – the one immutable relic of the hotel's Soviet past. Prices drop by 10% on weekdays.

**Kleopatra** (☎ 656 83; kleopatra@kp.km.ua; vul Ohiyenka 39/2; r from \$80; Ⓟ ☎ ☎) The preferred lair of nouveau-riche businesspeople and politicians, it's actually a great deal for what you get: plush towels and linens and four-star extras like fluffy white bath robes and fancy soaps. Breakfast is free but the restaurant closes if somebody rich and important wants to eat in peace.

There are two similar hotels right across from each other about a 20-minute walk south of the new town. **Filvarky Centre** (☎ 332 31; www.filvarki.km.ua; vul Lesi Ukrainky 99; s/d/tr from \$26/34/40; Ⓟ) is Kamyanyets-Podilsky's version of a resort, with deck chairs arranged around a swimming pool outside. Couples will like the large if somewhat worn rooms, which have

queen-sized beds. There is also a travel agency here. **Gala Hotel** (☎ 281 06; www.gala-hotel.com; vul Lesi Ukrainky 84; new r from \$24 weekdays, weekends \$29, old s/d from \$46/50; Ⓟ) is a solid midrange choice. Rooms in the 'new' building (2007) are larger, while rooms in the 'old' building (2005) have more style.

## Eating & Drinking

**Kafe Pid Bramoyu** (☎ 215 88; vul Zamkova 1A; mains 10-20uah) Although the service at this *shashlyk* restaurant-café can be spotty, the view overlooking the fortress never takes a day off. The menu covers all the Ukrainian basics, including *deruny* (potato pancakes) and *varenyky* (dumplings), plus fresh fish that you can pick out of their small pond.

**Stara Fortetsya** (Vul Valy 1; mains 10-30uah) Unfortunately you can take drinks only on the balcony, perched dramatically on a 40m cliff over the gorge. Inside is where the Ukrainian food is served. Watch out: prices are listed per 100g.

**Hostynny Dvir** (vul Troitska 1; mains 15-25uah) If you can forgive the spread-eagled bearskin pinned to the far wall, this refined restaurant has the best food in the old town, although service can be snail slow. Despite the carnivorous, mainly Russian menu, they'll rustle up meat-free options if you tell them you're vegetarian.

**Kava Pid Politsmeystera** (vul Zamkova) With 3.50uah Lvivske *pyvo* (beer), it's the best place in the old town for a drink.

Also recommended:

**Celentano** (vul Knyaziv Koriatorychiv; pizzas from 5uah) Ukraine's most popular pizza chain is typically mobbed with young locals.

**Hunska Krynytsya** (vul Soborna; mains 5-10uah; ☎ 8.30am-10pm) Quick Ukrainian eats on a street-side terrace in the new town.

## Getting There & Away

A new express train service from Kyiv has made Kamyanyets-Podilsky as accessible as ever.

It departs Kyiv at 4.45pm (50uah, six hours) and goes via Vinnytsya and Khmelnytsky. The return leg departs Kamyanyets-Podilsky at 4.30am. There's also an overnight to and from Kyiv (60uah, 12 hours).

If coming from Lviv, Odesa or eastern Ukraine, your best bet is to take a train to Khmelnytsky and continue by train or *marshrutka* from there (see p106). From Lviv and elsewhere in western Ukraine you might also consider taking a train to Chernivtsi, and then a *marshrutka* to Kamyanyets-Podilsky (see p155). There's a direct train from Odesa that departs every other day at 3.36pm and takes 18 hours with a six-hour stop in Khmelnytsky (75uah). There is no direct train to Odesa.

*Marshrutky* to Chernivtsi depart from Kamyanyets-Podilsky bus station (15uah, 2½ hours, at least every 30 minutes) and go via Khotyn (5uah, 45 minutes). The departure point for private *marshrutky* to Khmelnytsky (20uah, 1½ hours, every 20 minutes until 6pm) is north of the new town centre, on the corner of Khmelnytsky shose and pr Hrushevs'koho. The public Khmelnytsky-bound *marshrutky* that depart from the bus station tend to be slow, extremely crowded and take indirect routes. A taxi to Khmelnytsky costs about 200uah.

There are two buses per day to Lviv (55uah, 6½ hours), one or two daily to Ivano-Frankivsk (35uah, five hours), three night buses to Odesa (75uah, 12 hours, three daily) and a (slow) handful to Kyiv.

## Getting Around

The **bus station** is within walking distance (two blocks east) of the new town centre. The **train station** (vul Pryvokzalna) is 1km north of the bus station. You can take bus 1 into the new or old town, or catch a taxi, which should cost 10uah to 15uah.

*Marshrutka* 19 goes between the new town and the Armenian market square in the old town.

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