

Crimea Крим



The landscape is the star in Crimea; even those initially lured by the peninsula's fascinating past usually come to agree. Not that 'landscape' means the pebbly Black Sea beaches, crumbling concrete high-rises and post-Soviet kitsch of the main resort, Yalta, which isn't going to steal the market from Benidorm any time soon. Rather, it's the sheer mountain cliffs rising behind a coastline covered with cypress, juniper and grape vines that make this Tatar homeland so breathtakingly exotic and unique. High limestone plateaus, expansive vistas, bizarre volcanic formations and Byzantine 'cave cities' all lie inland from such historical landmarks as Balaklava, Sevastopol and Livadia (where Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin carved up postwar Europe). So, all in all, walking shoes are just as important as your swimming costume.

A stop on the Silk Road from China, and occupied throughout history by Greeks, Genoese, Mongols and Tatars, Crimea came under Russian rule in the late 18th century. Inevitably, these northerners seized upon the Mediterranean-style climate as perfect for a holiday retreat. The Russian monarchy began spending summers just outside Yalta during the 1860s. Millions of ordinary workers united in their desire to vacation here yearly during the Soviet era.

That heyday as a workers' paradise is long past. Yet, only now, nearly two decades after Ukrainian independence, is Moscow's influence on the 'Russian Riviera' even beginning to dim. More than 60% of locals are of ethnic Russian descent, many tourists are Russian too, and that language is spoken on Crimea's streets. But ever so slightly the Crimean Tatar influence is reappearing – among other things, and especially gratifyingly for visitors, in its food.

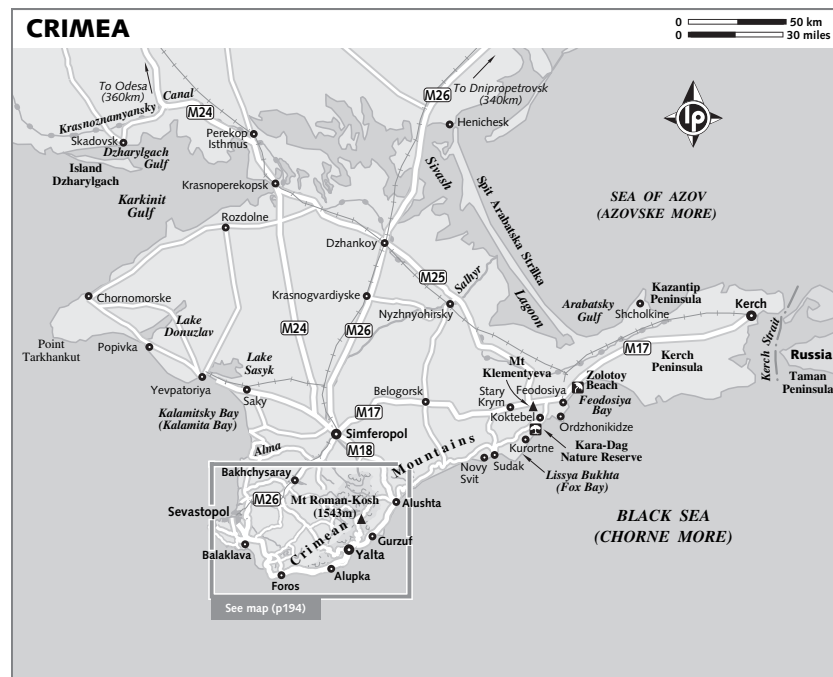
HIGHLIGHTS

- Visit the **Livadia** (p209) or **Alupka** (p210) palaces outside Yalta
- See how the medieval Tatars lived at the **Khans' Palace** (p193) before clambering over the nearby 'cave city' of **Chufut-Kale** (p196)
- Marvel at the Mediterranean-like beauty of **Balaklava** (p202) and breach the nuclear-bomb-proof doors of its hidden submarine factory
- Catch a minibus along the **Sevastopol–Yalta coastal road** (p203)
- Dare to take a cable car to the desert-like peak of **Mt Ay-Petri** (p210)
- Hike among the dramatic volcanic rock formations of the **Kara-Dag Nature Reserve** (p217), the original Jurassic Park
- Rappel down the side of the impressive fortress at **Sudak** (p212) and party in the seaside grotto at **Novy Svit** (p213)



■ POPULATION: 2 MILLION

■ HIGHEST POINT: MT ROMAN KOSH (1543M)



History

The stage is littered with cameo appearances, from 6th-century Greeks who built Chersoneses (now Khersones, p200) to the 15th-century Genoese merchants behind the impressive Sudak fortress (p212), as well as Cimmerians, Scythians, Sarmatians and Jews. However, the central theme of Crimean history revolves around the struggle between the Turkish and Slavic peoples for control of the peninsula.

This began in 1240, when Mongols conquered Kyivan Rus, including Crimea. Two centuries later, control of the peninsula passed to their descendants, the Tatars, who held it for centuries. The Crimean Khanate became an independent political entity under Haci Giray in 1428, and after a 1475 invasion, was a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire.

Although advanced in culture and the arts, its main economic activity was trading in slaves, captured during raids into Russian, Ukrainian or Polish territory. Some commentators even believe this now thoroughly outdated image of the Crimean Tatar as a slave trader contributes towards prejudiced attitudes to today's population.

While a Turkish vassal state, Crimea enjoyed much autonomy. The same was not true when the Russians arrived in 1783 and began a campaign of 'revenge'. Most of the peninsula's four to five million Tatars fled to Turkey, while Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians and even some Germans were invited to resettle Crimea.

Such Russian expansionism soon began to worry great powers Britain and France. As Russia tried to encroach into the lands of the decaying Ottoman Empire, the Crimean War erupted in 1854 (see p210).

With close ties to the monarchy, Crimea was one of the last White bastions during the Russian revolution, holding out till November 1920. It was occupied by German troops for three years during WWII and lost nearly half its population. In the war's aftermath, Stalin deported all remaining Crimean Tatars (see p192).

In 1954 Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, a self-styled Ukrainian, created the Autonomous Crimean Soviet Socialist Republic and transferred legislative control to the Ukrainian SSR. Hence, despite the name, the peninsula is really only semi-independent.

When the USSR disintegrated, Russia and Ukraine wrestled over the region. They came to a temporary compromise over Russia's Black Sea Fleet, allowing it to stay in Crimea until 2017. In 2007 Ukraine told Russia there was no chance of an extension on that lease.

The Crimean parliament is pro-Russian. It has often tried to make Russian the official language and to gain economic independence. It wasn't particularly chuffed by the Orange Revolution, and joint naval exercises with NATO off the Feodosiyan coast in 2006 brought huge anti-Western protests.

Russian-backed, so-called 'Cossacks' (vigilantes) have launched attacks on returned Crimean Tatars in the past few years, too, and tensions remain over land rights (see p192).

CENTRAL & WESTERN CRIMEA

SIMFEROPOL СИМФЕРОПОЛЬ

☎ (8)-0652 / ☎ 345,000

For many people, the Crimean capital is nothing but a night-time blur outside the taxi window as they race from the airport to the coast. Others only glimpse the city as they transfer from the train station to the trolleybus.

Neither group is missing much, aesthetically speaking. In contrast to the superficial, seasonal, merry-go-round of Yalta, Simferopol is a working city that marches on throughout the year. With more reasonable prices than at the seaside, you can save yourself a little money, give yourself a breather and sample some interesting restaurants by spending at least one or two nights here.

Orientation

The town centre is south of the airport, lying between the train station (to the northwest) and the central bus station (to the east). From the airport, trolleybus 9 goes to the train station. *Marshrutky* travelling west from the central bus station (from across the road) also go to the train station. To get downtown, you should look out for 'г Украина' on the destination sign. See p191 for more details.

Information

Central post office (vul Rozy Lyuxemburg 1; internet per hr 1-4uah) Contains a telephone centre and a 24-hour internet café.

Pro-Internet Center (☎ 549 805; Basement, vul Karla Marksa 1; per hr 4uah; ☎ 9am-8pm) Although full of noisy teenage boys, this has 112 high-speed computers, where you can plug in USBs and other media.

Sights

A young city, founded in the 18th century under Russia's Catherine the Great, Simferopol contains no must-sees. Remnants do survive, however, of earlier civilisations on the same site. The most interesting is the restored 16th-century **Kebi-Djami mosque** (vul Kurchatova 4), which dates back to the Crimean Tatar town of Ak-Mechet (White Mosque).

There's little sense of history about the much-touted **Neopolis** (btwn vuls Vorovskogo & Krasnoarmeyskaya), 2km east of the centre. However, it offers a good view of Simferopol in all its Soviet-constructivist glory, should you be tempted by such things. Archaeological excavations of a late Scythian city (300 BC-AD 300) seem to have been abandoned. Nowadays, the 20-hectare hilltop site is where locals take their goats or cattle to graze, or teenagers meet there for illicit drinking.

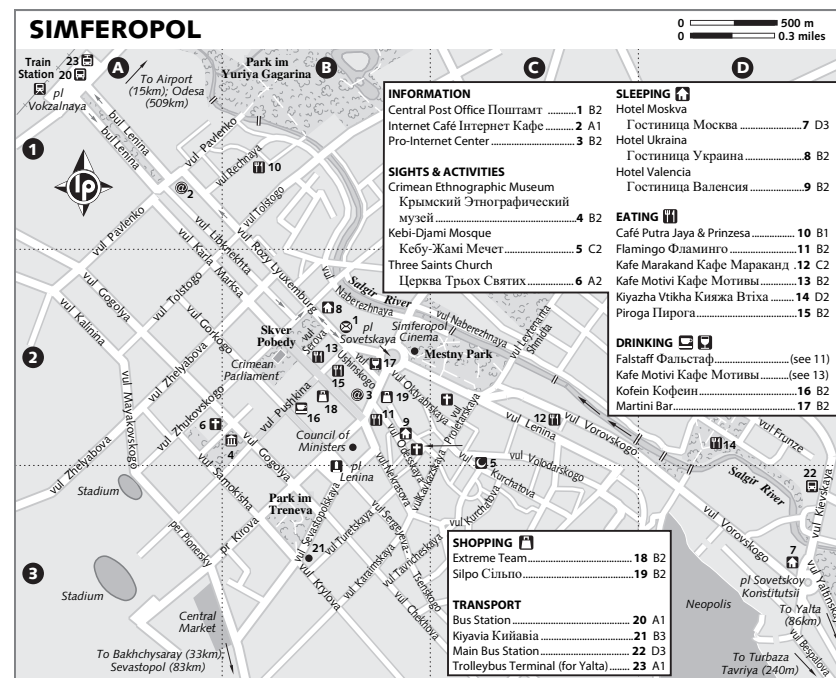
The memorable thing about the modest **Crimean Ethnographic Museum** (☎ 255 223; vul Pushkina 18; admission 2uah; ☎ 9am-5pm Wed-Mon) is its first room. It boasts a 3-D relief map of Crimea, populated with nearly 50 colourful small statues representing the peninsula's different peoples throughout history. The five-domed **Three Saints Church** (vul Gogolya 16) is nearby.

Sleeping

Turbaza Tavriya (☎ 232 024; vul Bepalova 21; s \$22-35, d \$32-48) This tranquil, hillside place is popular despite being a bit far from the centre, so call ahead. Of two buildings, one has been fully renovated, the other partially so (no lift or in-room phone, but otherwise similar). *Marshrutky* 15 and 17 go here from pl Sovetskaya.

Hotel Valencia (☎ 510 606; www.valencia.crimea.ua; vul Odesskaya 8; s \$20, d \$50-70, ste \$60-115; ☎) You'll think you've won the lottery if you bag the only properly single room at this friendly, well-run hotel, which fuses Crimea and Spain. Even the very cheapest double rooms are reasonable value for solo travellers, too.

Hotel Moskva (☎ 237 520, 237 389; www.moskva-hotel.com; vul Kievskaya 2; s/d from \$44/65, remodelled s/d \$57/83; ☎) Amusingly dissed even by passing *marshrutka* passengers as 'sovietsky', this former Intourist hotel has overpriced remod-



elled rooms, dumply old accommodation, dark halls and surly staff. Only if you're stuck.

Hotel Ukraina (☎ 510 165; www.ukraina-hotel.biz; vul Rozy Lyuxemburg 7; s/d from \$60/98; ☎) Renovated again in 2006, this central, forward-thinking hotel now costs twice as much but is still pretty good value. Admittedly, the baroque public areas are a bit OTT (although popular for weddings). However, rooms are restrained and well-finished – the standard class in sandy ochre and red-earth tones. Staff speak English, plus there's a sauna and hammam (Turkish bath).

Eating

Kafe Marakand (☎ 524 698; vul Vorovskogo 17; mains 5-9uah; ☎ Mon-Sat) Local Tatars are frequent patrons here, where the assortment of Central Asian dishes includes *plov* (meat and rice), *manty* (lamb ravioli), *lagman* (beef noodle soup), *shashlyk* (meat skewers) and *lepezhshky* (flat, round bread) – nothing substantial for vegetarians. There's also an Italianate covered stone terrace.

Piroga (vul Pushkina 4/6; mains from 6.50uah) Brightly coloured murals give this casual

eatery the atmosphere of a world food café. The eponymous pirogi are in fact like large flat calzones, and you choose individual toppings for them as for pizza. Salads and desserts also served.

Kafe Motivi (☎ 575 299; basement, vul Karla Marksa 9; menu prices 8-18uah; ☎ 10am-midnight Mon-Sun & 10am-2am Thu-Sat) This opulently decorated and moodily lit Persian restaurant is one of Simferopol's hip hangouts. The food, which consists mainly of stews and stir-fries, is delicious but usually takes ages to arrive. Menu prices are for 100g while most servings are 200g to 250g, so you need to do some mental arithmetic when ordering.

Kiyazha Vtikhа (☎ 291 489; vul Turgeneyeva 35; mains 18-42uah) This obligatory Ukrainian theme restaurant loves its cheesy band and cheek-to-cheek dancing, but the food is tasty.

Flamingo (☎ 278 898; vul Odesskaya 22/2; mains 40-185uah; ☎ 10am-midnight) Older well-heeled travellers might be most satisfied with this relatively sophisticated Euro-Ukrainian restaurant, with a smattering of English on its menu (and very unimpressive photos to help in the choosing!).

Enjoy a change at **Café Putra Jaya** (Dormitory 5, vul Rechnaya 2A; mains 8-15uah; ☎ 10am-9pm Sep-May only) and **Prinzesa** (vul Rechnaya 2; mains 5-9uah; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Fri, 10am-11pm Sat & Sun) – medical-school canteens catering to the numerous Indian, Malaysian and Arab students. The chicken tikka masala, Pattaya noodles, egg sambal, lassis and hummus (usually) in Arabic Prinzesa is cafeteria food, but still better than you'd get in Kyiv. On vul Pavlenko, pass the eye hospital, Aeroflot and the Appeal Court (апеляційний суд автономної республіки крим), turning right around that building and continuing diagonally to the next clearing. Prinzesa's red chairs are on your right. Continue through the guardhouse for Café Putra Jaya, on the left.

Drinking

Kofein (☎ 505 990; vul Pushkina 8; ☎ 9am-11pm) The 'exoticism' at this trendy African-themed café overdoes its appreciation of the female form. But if you can position yourself where your eye's not being poked out by a photographed nipple, you'll find it takes its coffee seriously and turns out a good brew.

Martini Bar (☎ 278 863; vul Ushinskogo 4; ☎ 10am-2am) American diner meets Scandinavian chic inside this classic cocktail bar (on pl Sovetskaya), but the local talking point is the bar's summer patio. Newly designed each year,

it was completely painted/decorated (even the floor) in Burberry's signature yellow tartan when we visited. Pizza and beer are also offered in warm weather on the lawn terrace.

Kafe Motivi (☎ 577 299; Basement, vul Karla Marksa 9; ☎ 10am-midnight Mon-Sun & 10am-2am Thu-Sat) From Thursdays to Saturdays, locals come for the DJs and the bar rather than the food.

Falstaff (☎ 524 698; vul Odesskaya 17; ☎ Mon-Sat) The entrance to this maritime-themed pub is shaped like the bow of a sinking ship. Downstairs in the basement, it's all wooden decks and rope decking, with beers, spirits, steak and a much-touted business lunch on offer.

Shopping

Extreme Team (☎ 546 734; Office 5, vul Karla Marksa 6; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat) A small but high-quality selection of last-minute camping and hiking supplies.

Silpo (Inside Univermag, pr Kirovaya 19; ☎ grocery 24hr, minimall 10am-6.30pm) Self-caterers should make a beeline to this conveniently located, Western-style supermarket. The grocery section is on the ground floor; the minimall is on the 1st.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Simferopol airport (☎ 295 516, 295 545; www.airport.crimea.ua) is 15km northwest of the town centre

HEADING DOWN TO YALTA

With no direct trains from Simferopol to Yalta, you need to make the trip by road. It's an infamous journey for two reasons – the traffic and the taxi prices.

The traffic is difficult to avoid, and it's renowned as the craziest in Ukraine thanks to poorly marked overtaking lanes. In fact, there's only one overtaking lane, in the middle of the road, which is 'shared' by vehicles in both directions. For several hundred metres, priority is given to southbound traffic to overtake, before northbound traffic is given right of way. To the uninitiated it's a little unnerving at first, but local drivers know the rules.

The slowest moving vehicles along this route are the Simferopol–Yalta trolleybuses. Trolleybus 52 serves Yalta (10uah, 2½ hours, every 20 minutes between 5.30am and 8pm). Covering 85km, it's the world's longest – and slowest! – trolleybus route. Trolleybus 51 only goes to/from Alushta (6uah, 1½ hours, every 20 minutes). Trolleybuses depart from the terminal next to Simferopol's train station clock tower. Large bags theoretically need a separate ticket.

Much speedier are the regular *marshrutky* and buses that plough to/from Alushta (12uah, one hour and a bit) and Yalta (18uah, 1½ to two hours). They depart from the bus stop between the train and trolleybus stations, and stop on the road beside the main bus station. Services leave at least every 20 minutes in summer and at least hourly in winter.

The above transport is cramped; some travellers might prefer a taxi if carrying luggage. Historically, taxi drivers had carte blanche to rip people off. They still try, of course, but scheduled fares to different destinations have at least been posted on an official billboard outside the airport terminal. Simferopol to Yalta should cost between \$35 for a normal taxi to up to \$75 for a VIP, air-conditioned transfer. Use this knowledge to negotiate at the train station, too.

BLACK SEA RAVE

Most people west of Berlin have yet to hear of it, but long-term attendees complain that the annual rave **Kazantip** (www.kazantip.com; Jul-Aug) has become too commercial. Launched in the early 1990s as an après-surf party near a half-finished nuclear reactor on the northeastern Kazantip peninsula, the five-week-long festival moved, because of local pressure, to Popivka, north of Yevpatoriya. Today 'the republic of Kazantip' is a huge Ibiza-style operation with enormous stage sets, international DJs such as Timo Maas, more than 100,000 punters, many of them half-naked (or naked), dodgy food, deliberately humorous rules and lots of serious security.

Too commercial? Probably, but the only way you'll make up your own mind is to visit. Once you book, the organisers can arrange to pick you up, but for the duration of the festival *marshrutky* meet major services arriving in Simferopol and also leave from outside Yevpatoriya's bus station, on vul Internatsionalaya.

and is accessible by trolleybus 9 (50 kopecks, 30 minutes) as well as myriad *marshrutky*, including numbers 49, 50, 98, 113 and 115.

Aerosvit (VV), Lithuanian Airlines (OV), Turkish Airlines (TK) and Ukrainian Airlines (PS) all fly in from abroad, as do several Russian carriers. Perhaps most notably, Baltic (BT) flies from London Gatwick via Riga. The airport's website has an up-to-date schedule.

Kiyavia (☎ 272 116; golubets@ticket.crimea.ua; vul Sevastopolskaya 22; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) sells both international and domestic air tickets.

BUS

It's hard not to fall into the local habit of bussing it everywhere. It's what the peninsula seems geared to. From the **bus station** near the train station there are daily services to Sudak (26uah to 29uah, 2½ hours, up to 22 daily) and Yevpatoriya (15uah, 1¾ hours, 11 daily).

From the **main bus station** (☎ 275 211; vul Kievskaya 4) on the other side of town there are regular services to/from Feodosiya (24uah, 2¾ hours, 16 to 20 daily), Kerch (43uah, four hours, at least eight daily) and Sevastopol (17uah to 21uah, two hours, up to 27 daily). Longer-distance services go to Odesa (75uah to 85uah, 12 hours, five daily) and Rostov-on-Don (126uah, 14 hours, twice daily) in Russia.

Locals usually catch *marshrutky* to Bakhchysaray (6uah, one hour) from the west bus station; they leave every 20 minutes. For newcomers, it's easier to use the main bus station, where direct or through services leave at least hourly.

TRAIN

Simferopol is Crimea's main railway junction, with four trains daily to/from Kyiv (110uah to 145uah, 15 hours) including two through services to/from Sevastopol, plus services to/from Dnipropetrovsk (75uah, seven hours, five daily), Lviv (130uah, 21 hours, daily), Kharkiv (95uah, 16 to 17 hours, at least daily) and Odesa (75uah, 12 hours, twice daily). There are also services to Moscow, St Petersburg, Rostov-on-Don and Minsk.

Local *elektrychka* run regularly along the Crimean peninsula to/from Yevpatoriya (two hours, 11 a day in each direction) and Sevastopol (two hours, seven daily in each direction). The latter service stops en route in Bakhchysaray (40 minutes). Prices are all 5uah or less. Be warned that if you're trying to leave Crimea in August, you might have to upgrade to 1st-class to get a ticket and that can cost three times as much.

Getting Around

Trolleybus 9 goes from the airport to the train station. To get to the centre from here you need to take trolleybus 5 or 2 eastwards, or a *marshrutka* or bus from near McDonald's with 'r україна' on its side. Alternatively, some *marshrutky* and buses, including 49, 98 and 113, go straight from the airport to the town centre. Alight at the central Hotel Ukraina stop on vul Rozy Lyuxemburg.

Although *marshrutky* travelling west from opposite the central bus station go to the train station, they usually skirt the city centre. To be sure you'll get downtown, look out for the 'r україна' sign. If you take a trolleybus, catch the 2, 4 or 6.

YEVPARATORIYA ЄВПАТОРІЯ

☎ (8-0)6569 / pop 103,000

A faded example of Crimea's exotic past, Yevpatoriya's attractions are Christian, Jewish and Muslim. Although in the Soviet era the town became a major health resort for ill children, and its western waterfront is still a dense grid of such sanatoria, since celebrating its 2500th birthday in 2003 it's been reclaiming its historic multiculturalism.

Most intriguing is the former **Dervish Monastery** (vul Kareavaya 18; Suah; tours 10am, 12pm, 2pm, 4pm & 5pm May-Sep), dating from the Crimean Khanate's 15th- to 18th-century ties to the Ottoman Empire. Although today's complex is dilapidated, you'll get an insight into Sufi mysticism as you retreat into the arched niches the monks used for days and weeks of isolated meditation. Most people also have fun standing on the spot used to 'channel' energy from the heavens. (The monastery insists women cover their hair and shoulders to enter, so bring a scarf.)

Diagonally across the road from the monastery is the refurbished **Main Gate of Medieval Kezlev**, the Crimean Khanate name for Yevpatoriya. Inside the gate is a fantastic **café** (☎ 9am-midnight May-Sep, 9am-10pm Oct-Apr), whose gorgeous-looking and -tasting Crimean Tatar

sweets, plus coffee, hookahs and souvenirs, are alone almost worth visiting the city for. The interior also houses a small **museum** (admission 10uah; guided tours only, tours leave hourly 9am-5pm) with a new, skilfully created 3-D model of the walled medieval city. Two-hour city tours are also offered by the museum's owner **Elken** (☎ 433 33; www.elken.crimea.biz; vul Kareavaya 29; 20uah; tours 10am, 5pm & 7pm May-Sep), whose office is the adjoining prefab container.

Elken's tours take in the Dervish Monastery (scarf still needed) and the winding streets of the former **Old Town Medina**. Overall, because its staff are friendlier than those in the Dervish Monastery and speak some English, this comprehensive, Russian-language tour really is the best sightseeing option – although you might want to skip out before the end.

Stay with the proceedings through the ruin of the **Armenian Cathedral** (1885), so the tour at least brings you to the door of Yevpatoriya's most beautiful building, the renovated **Karaim Kenassa** (☎ 330 35; vul Karaemskaya 68; admission 5uah, tours 10uah; ☎ 10am-8pm May-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Nov; tours hourly 4-7pm May-Sep). The Crimean Karaites, of whom only 1200 survive today, are Turkish Jews – descendants of 7th-century Khazars who in the 10th century converted to a dissident form of Judaism from Iraq. They lived

among the cave cities of Chufut-Kale (p196) and Mangup-Kale (p198) and later built this ornate complex of churches and arcades, which is again functioning as a place of worship.

Yevpatoriya's landmark **Dzhuma-Dzhami Mosque** (1552) is near the seafront, on the way back to the city gate.

Most of Yevpatoriya's accommodation is either unappealingly Soviet or wildly overpriced, but it's easy to visit in a day from Simferopol. In summer there are buses approximately every 20 mins from the bus station adjoining the Simferopol train station (15uah, 1½ hours). Even in winter, buses leave regularly (usually hourly).

In Yevpatoriya, the bus and train stations are next to one another on vul Internatsionalaya, northwest of the old town, and you can buy a map (план города or план міста) at the stalls in front of the train station. Then take tram 3 south down vul Frunze to the Hotel Ukraina and pr Lenina. Most trams and *marshrutky* heading east (left away from the hotel) will take you to the old town and waterfront.

БАКХЧЫСАРАЙ БАХЧИСАРАЙ

☎ (8-0)6554 / pop 27,500

Bakhchysaray has always been a good barometer of Crimean Tatar history. Its mellifluous

name – back-*chee*-sa-rye, meaning 'garden palace' – was conferred when the town was the capital of the powerful Crimean Khanate between the 15th and 18th centuries. Later it suffered significant destruction under Russian and then Soviet rule.

Today the tables are turning again, with Bakhchysaray and its returned Crimean Tatar inhabitants in the midst of a minor comeback. Sure, the place is still a little dusty and down-at-heel, but it does boast the khans' original palace, the country's cutest Orthodox church and a thoroughly entrancing 6th-century 'cave city'. And around them the green shoots of a tourist industry – hotels, restaurants and souvenir shops – and a friendly community are starting to bud.

Sights

KHANS' PALACE

When she was busy ordering the mass destruction of Bakhchysaray's mosques in the 18th and early 19th centuries, Catherine the Great spared the **Khans' Palace** (Khansky Palats; www.hansaray.iatp.org.ua; vul Leninaya 129; adult/child & student 20/10uah; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Jul & Aug; 9am-4.30pm Wed-Mon May, Jun, Sep & Oct; 9am-4pm Thu-Mon Nov-Apr). Her decision was reportedly based on the building being 'romantic', and it is sweet. While it lacks

TATAR TENACITY

'Our story is unique,' says Mustafa Jemilev, Chairman of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis (parliament) and Ukrainian national MP. 'There are not that many peoples in world history who have been deported in their entirety from their motherland and within 50 years have managed to return and re-establish themselves.'

Mustafa Jemilev explains this in Simferopol, where Tatars were bundled onto freight trains in 1944 and sent into exile on Stalin's orders for alleged collaboration with Nazis occupying Crimea. In just a few days starting on 18 May the entire Crimean Tatar population – a quarter of a million people – were removed from the peninsula. Sent to remote environments in Uzbekistan (principally), Kazakhstan and Siberia, nearly half of them would die during the journey or the following year.

Today, more than half a century after the deportation, or Sürgün, some 260,000 survivors and descendants have returned to Crimea, accounting for 12% of the local population. Denied access to their property and discriminated against, they have not had an easy path. Yet despite continuing attacks by pro-Russian 'Cossacks' and stand-offs with police demolishing Tatar businesses, Crimean Tatar leaders are essentially positive.

'Crimean Tatar' is a broad definition, but the group is essentially descendent of the Mongols who expanded the Golden Horde into Ukraine in the 13th century, intermingling with local tribes. Their 'nation', as the Crimean Tatars like to call themselves, has Kipchak and Nogai influences.

When the Horde disintegrated in 1428, the Crimean Tatars' Khanate reigned over the peninsula for centuries, firstly as an independent state, and then with close links to the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, four to five million Tatars emigrated to Turkey when the Russians conquered Crimea in 1783 and began a campaign of persecution (see p187). Some returned during the Russian revolution, with high hopes of independence, but it wasn't long before Stalin tried to inflict genocide on them.

The avowedly nonviolent movement for the repatriation of Crimean Tatars began in Uzbekistan as early as the 1950s, putting pressure on the Soviet authorities. In 1967 Khrushchev issued an official apology for Stalin's actions but it wasn't until perestroika and glasnost that Tatars were finally granted permission to return home (in 1989). Ukrainian independence officially sealed that deal.

Even then, the mass return in the early 1990s was difficult. At first it was still illegal to sell property to Crimean Tatars, and the Ukrainian government didn't get around to land allocation for years, so many returnees were forced to live (some up to a decade) in makeshift camps without electricity or running water.

No doubt there are continuing social and racial tensions. Visitors to the peninsula might find some local opinions about Crimean Tatars prejudiced and uninformed, even when the racism is sometimes more casual than malicious.

After we speak with the Crimean Tatar leader, there are further public standoffs between Russians, Crimean Tatars and police over land, including stalls atop the plateau of Mt Ay-Petri. However, when we say farewell, Mustafa Jemilev is relatively upbeat.

He admits that serious problems continue to haunt his compatriots. There's still no law enshrining the right of Crimean Tatars to live in Crimea. Many local Tatars don't have a home or work ('although things aren't as bad as two to three years ago'). The Crimean Tatar language is still teetering on the verge of extinction.

Yet, he concludes, it's something to have come this far. 'During the communist regime, a lot of us talked about returning to Crimea,' he recalls, 'but not many believed it would actually ever happen. But we fought for our rights, and this is the point: we're proud just to be here.' For more on the Crimean Tatars, visit www.iccrimea.org.

the imposing grandeur of Islamic structures in, say, Istanbul, this is a major landmark of Crimean culture and history.

The palace's intricate designs and minarets were erected in the 16th century under the direction of Persian, Ottoman and Italian architects. Fire and other damage has necessitated rebuilding over the years, but the structure still resembles the original.

Today's circuit begins through the entrance on the courtyard's right-hand side (although the ticket booth is to the left). Passing through the back of the finely carved, Venetian Renaissance **Demir Qapi Portal** (also called Portal Aleviza after its Italian designer), you enter the west wing and the dimly lit **Divan Hall**. This was the seat of government where the khan and his nobles discussed laws and wars.

Through the hall lies the inner courtyard, containing two fountains. With its white marble ornately inscribed with gold leaf, the **Golden Fountain** (1733) is probably the more beautiful. However, the neighbouring **Fountain of Tears** (1764) is more famous, thanks to Alexander Pushkin (see the boxed text, p196). It's tradition that two roses – one red for love and

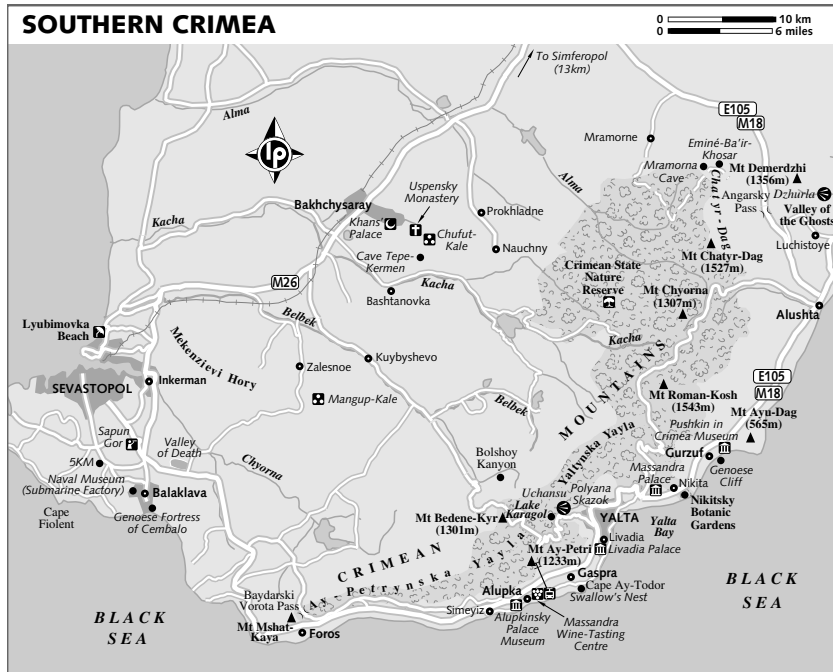
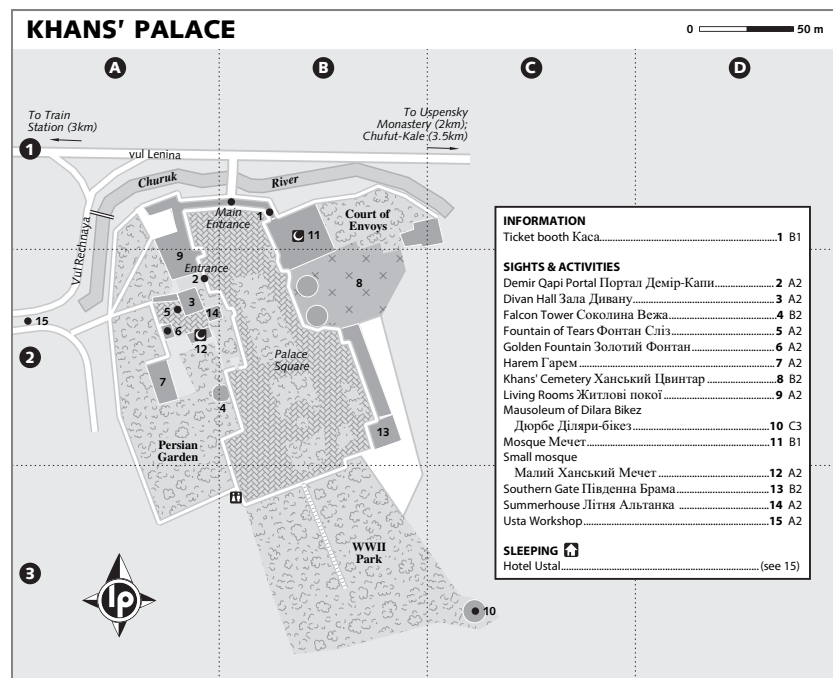
one yellow for chagrin – are placed atop the fountain; Pushkin was the first to do this.

Off the courtyard are two other rooms: a **small mosque**, restored to its original 16th-century appearance, and the 18th-century **summerhouse**, with stained-glass windows and divans arranged around a central fountain.

Behind the palace is the only surviving **harem** of the four that were traditionally attached to the palace and belonged to the khans' wives. Across the yard you can see the **Falcon Tower**.

The palace's north wing houses the **living rooms**, which feature various historical exhibits on Tatar culture (nothing on the deportations) and the life of the khans.

The main palace **mosque** (1740) is in the east wing and has now reopened for believers. (Tourists might be allowed in, but be respectful and remove your shoes. Women of course will have to cover their heads.) The **Khans' Cemetery** is beside the mosque, and way back in the grounds' southeast corner is the **mausoleum of Dilara Bikez**, who may or may not be the Polish beauty who bewitched the khan (see the boxed text, p196).



Souvenir and fast-food stalls line the street in front of the palace and dot the main courtyard, selling *chebureky* (meat- or cheese-filled pastries), Crimean Tatar baklava (large honeyed pastries different from Turkish baklava), and hiking maps to Chufut-Kale.

USTA WORKSHOP

Ten years ago Crimean Tatar handicrafts were on the verge of extinction, following the loss of traditional know-how in the aftermath of 1944's mass deportation. But in the late 1990s Ayshe Osmanova, resettled in her ancestral home of Crimea after being born in Uzbekistan, decided she wanted to help rescue her people's culture from the precipice.

Retrieving old manuals from the Khans' Palace, she taught herself embroidery, got a series of grants, formed the organisation Marama and began courses for local women. Spreading knowledge through ever-widening circles, in 10 years Marama had taught about 400 students. At the same time, Ayshe enlisted the assistance of veteran silversmiths and jewellery makers who had survived the deportation to eventually return to Crimea.

Today her efforts have culminated in **Usta Workshop** (Map p195; ☎ 473 43; www.usta.rf.crimea.ua; vul Rechnaya 125; ☎ 10am-5pm) a small workshop with attached store, which creates unique souvenirs for tourists and a source of income for local craftspeople. There are embroidered shawls and tablecloths, woven rugs and hangings, pottery and filigree jewellery. The fez hats and beaded bracelets are bestsellers among Crimea's hippy holiday-makers, but there are also evening bags, mobile-phone covers, and *matroschyky* Russian nesting dolls painted with Tatar characters.

The shop is minutes from the Khans' Palace and well signposted from vul Lenina. The turn-off to Rechnaya Street is just before the palace when coming from the station. Customers can also visit the artists in their studios.

USPENSKY MONASTERY

Stop for a moment and say 'aah!' at possibly the cutest little church in a country absolutely jam-packed with them. Part of the small Uspensky Monastery, the **gold-domed church** has been built into the limestone rock

THE BAKHCHYSARAY FOUNTAIN

The Fountain of Tears in the Khans' Palace is a case of life imitating art imitating life.

The fountain was commissioned for the last Crimean khan, Giri, whose hard heart was revealed to have a chink when he fell in unrequited love with a Polish beauty enslaved in his harem. But she resisted his advances and wasted away, unable to endure harem life. After this the khan began weeping uncontrollably day and night. Worried that important state matters were being neglected, the court ordered the Persian master craftsman Omer to build the fountain to give an outlet to the khan's grief.

On visiting the fountain, Russian writer Alexander Pushkin was so moved by the tragedy he wrote the poem 'The Bakhchysaray Fountain' (1823).

The artful verse became so famous in Russia it continued to ensure the survival of the palace itself.

of the surrounding hill, probably by Byzantine monks in the 8th or 9th century. Whitewashed monks' cells, a 'healing' fountain and tiled mosaics cling to the hillside too. Of course, the Soviets closed the place down, but it's been operating again since 1993.

CHUFUT-KALE ЧУФУТ-КАЛЕ

For many visitors, Chufut-Kale (chew-*few*t kar-*lay*) will prove to be Bakhchysaray's highlight. Rising 200m, this long and bluff plateau houses a honeycomb of caves and structures where people took refuge for centuries. It's wonderful to explore, especially (but gingerly) the burial chambers and casemates with large open 'windows' in the vertiginous northern cliff. These are truly breathtaking, as is the view into the valley below. Although the joint entrance to the Uspensky Monastery and Chufut-Kale looks a bit touristy, the 1.5km walk to the cave city ensures it's not too overrun with people.

First appearing in historical records as Kyrk-Or (Forty Fortifications), the city was settled sometime between the 6th and 12th centuries by Christianised descendants of Sarmatian tribes. The last powerful ruler of the Golden Horde, Tokhtamysh, sheltered here after defeat in the 1390s, and the first Crimean Khanate was established at Chufut-Kale in the 15th century, before moving to nearby Bakhchysaray. After the Tatars left, Turkish-Jewish Karaites occupied the city until the mid-19th century, which won the mountain its current name of 'Jewish Fortress'.

Following the track from Uspensky, the best idea is to keep bearing right. The main entrance is not under the flat tin roof to the left of the Chufut-Kale sign, but further up the hill to the right. At this, the 14th-century

main **South Gate**, you'll usually be hit for a 12uah entrance fee. It's a cheek given it's a mountain you're visiting, but increasingly hard to ignore.

Soon after the gate, you enter a Swiss-cheese composition of carved-out rooms and steps. Behind this a stone path heads along the top of the plateau, past two locked **kenassas** (Karaites prayer houses) in a walled courtyard to the right. To the left of the first intersection stands the red-tile roofed **Muslim mausoleum** (1437) of Dzhhanike-Khanym, daughter of Tokhtamysh; to the right is an archway. Head left behind the mausoleum towards the cliff edge and enjoy the view into the valley below. To the right (east), a grassy track leads to two **burial chambers** in the northern side of the cliff.

From here it's hard to get lost; there are more caves until you reach the locked **East Gate**, where the road loops back on itself towards the main gate.

Sleeping & Eating

Crimean Tatars are renowned as industrious and entrepreneurial, and their former capital is now a great base for budget travellers. For more, visit the **Crimean Association of Local Tourism Initiatives** (www.ethnotour.crimea.biz).

Hotel Prival (☎ 478 46, 522 70, 472 35; www.prival.crimea.com; vul Shmidta 43; dm bed \$10-16, d \$45-50, tr \$48, 2-3 person cottages \$66-100; P ☎ 📺 📺) This Butlins-style holiday camp (that's Butlins, Ukrainian division) offers breathtaking vistas of the limestone cliffs, a sauna, pool, Jacuzzi, tennis court, restaurant and more. It's a little further than the 0.5km advertised by the signs near the Khans' Palace, but the trail's well-marked. You can usually just show up, but it occasionally gets booked up with large groups.

our pick **Hotel Ustal** (Map p195; ☎ 8-050 647 7188; www.usta.rcf.crimea.ua; vul Rechnaya 125; per person with shared/private bath \$20/25; ☎ reception 10am-5pm; P) Managed by the Crimean Tatar collective in the adjoining Usta Workshop (see p195), this small, white concrete guesthouse is a breath of fresh air. Built in 2007, it's stylishly cheerful, with wooden floors, splashes of green and curiously retro-style, faux-bamboo lattice wallpaper in some rooms. Front rooms have balconies overlooking the Khans' Palace, and there's a small kitchenette and a garden gazebo with low Turkish-style seating. The reception is open after hours by appointment only.

Efsane (☎ 478 61; 8-066 570 7845; vul Basenko 32; per person \$15-30) Although the accommodation at Ustal is fabulous, this humble B & B really offers non-Russian speakers a greater chance to learn firsthand about Crimean Tatar culture. That's because hostess Shevkiye is a teacher/translator who speaks superlative English. This quiet, fairly observant Muslim household (no alcohol) will better suit properly house-trained guests, but you can also ask about local tours or cooking courses. Mouth-watering homemade sweets too...

Visiting the Khan (☎ 8-050 275 3847; vul Lenina; most mains 6-15uah) Not all Crimean Tatars are teetotal, despite being Muslim, and the sociable owner of this pleasant casual restaurant can often be seen sharing shots of vodka with her guests as she works the room. Nab a bench seat on the terrace, order *plov* (lamb, carrot

and rice stew) or *chebureky* (meat or cheese turnovers/pastries) and gaze over the netting at the valley beyond. Look for a white building and a sign в гостях у хана picturing a camel caravan.

Karavan Sarai Salachik (☎ 452 220; vul Basenko 43a; mains 8-25uah; ☎ 24hr) Hookah pipes replace alcohol at this round-the-clock restaurant, in which individual gazebos with low Turkish-style seating (or *topchans*) are dotted across a landscaped lawn. There are all the usual Crimean Tatar dishes, including *sheker keyeks* (a little bit like traditional Turkish baklava) for dessert.

Pushkin Le Café (☎ 447 61; <http://petka.silver.biz.ua>; vul Lenina 106; mains 18-45uah) Tapping into the legendary Russian poet's connections with the Khans' Palace (see the boxed text, opposite), this outstanding restaurant combines a charming 19th-century drawing-room atmosphere with a skilfully executed menu that runs the gamut from Russian to Crimean Tatar, via French and Italian. The grilled salmon comes highly recommended.

Getting There & Away

At least 11 buses a day travel from Sevastopol (6uah, one hour) and up to 26 a day are scheduled in summer. At Simferopol's main bus station you can catch either a direct service or one going on to Sevastopol via Bakhchysaray (6uah, one hour). Services usually leave at least hourly in summer.

A TASTE OF CRIMEAN TATAR CUISINE

As founder of the craft studio and shop Usta Workshop (p195), Ayshe Osmanova has become a champion of traditional Crimean Tatar culture.

Tell me a little bit about Crimean Tatar cuisine. I'm not sure I recognise everything on the menu. Well, the obvious national dishes are *plov*, which is a meat, rice and carrot pilaf, *manty*, which is lamb ravioli, and *shashlyk* meat skewers or kebabs. There's also *lagman*, a beef and noodle soup, and *sarma*, which is minced meat with rice, pepper, zucchini and eggplant wrapped in grape leaves.

So similar to Uzbek and Turkish. Is it a spicy cuisine? It's not as spicy as Turkish. We like a lot more natural flavours. We do use aromatic spices like cumin, coriander and saffron as well as marjoram, bay leaves, dill seeds and pepper, but we rely more on using fresh meat and vegetables to impart flavour.

So what's your favourite dish? *Shurpa*, which is a meat bouillon with large pieces of beef and mutton and lots of onion, carrots and other vegetables, plus spices.

Anything for vegetarians? No! (Laughs.) It's a very meat-eating culture, but I suppose you'll get cheese *chebureky* in restaurants, and *bakla ash* (a soup made from green peas or beans) in private homes.

Nothing else? I know...sweets! (Rest of room suddenly becomes very animated.) Yes, ok, our *sheker keyeks* are very popular.

Meanwhile, local *elektrychka* shuffle back and forth between Sevastopol and Simferopol seven times a day in each direction. For these, you will need to buy your ticket at the *prymisky kasa* (local ticket office) of either train station. Trains from Simferopol (2uah) to Bakhchysaray take 45 minutes, those from Sevastopol (3uah), 1½ hours.

Getting Around

All buses to Bakhchysaray stop at the train station, 3km west of the Khans' Palace. Through services, however, often lazily stop at the start of the street to the station plaza, so stay alert and alight immediately if you hear the word *'vokzal'*. When leaving town, buses depart from outside the station.

From here, *marshrutka* 2 (1uah) shuttles constantly to the Khans' Palace. A taxi will cost up to 10uah. To get to the palace on foot (a 45-minute hike), walk 300m east of the train station, to the large intersection, then straight ahead (third road from left).

Uspensky Monastery and Chufut-Kale are another 2km up the same road; you can walk or catch a passing *marshrutka*. Near a cluster of Tatar restaurants, a paved path heads up the hill on the right to Uspensky Monastery (a five- to 10-minute walk) and Chufut-Kale beyond.

MANGUP-KALE МАНГУП-КАЛЕ

If you liked Chufut-Kale and want more, head to **Mangup-Kale** (www.mangup.bigyalta.net), the peninsula's most spectacular cave city.

Located 22km south of Bakhchysaray, this remote plateau is in the shape of a hand with four fingers and occupies a whole day at least, if not two. Unofficially, you can camp on the summit; others do.

CAVE CITIES

Mangup-Kale (above) and Chufut-Kale (p196) are just two of about 20 Crimean cave cities, with the most obvious third choice to visit being Tepe-Kermen, about 2km east of Chufut-Kale. If you really get the bug, you'll find that hiking maps to all the cave cities are sold at the souvenir stalls below the path to Chufut-Kale. Most maps are in Russian but keep an eye out for the English-language booklet *Cave Cities of the Crimea*.

Formerly the ancient capital of Feodor, the principality of the 6th-century 'Crimean Greeks' (actually Greeks, Goths and Sarmatian descendants), was an excellent fortress due to its sheer cliffs. It was finally abandoned in the 15th century.

The closest village, Zalisne, is reached from Bakhchysaray bus station or by taking a taxi. Some accommodation places in Bakhchysaray, particularly Efsane (p197), will also help get you to Mangup, where there is a tourist lodge at the base of the trail.

From the southern end of Zalisne walk about 1km until you see, on your left, four rock peaks rising in a row out of wooded ravines. Turn off the road towards the small hamlet at the base of the ridge. On the furthest fingertip east you'll see small holes and some cave openings – that's where the biggest concentration of caves is. The best way up is between the first two fingers; a trail leads up to your right.

At the top of the ridge follow the trail to the furthest finger of land until you see a large stone gateway and long wall. Beyond are carved-out chambers and caves. The most impressive is the final cave room carved out of the very tip of the cliff with stairs leading down the west side to a burial chamber.

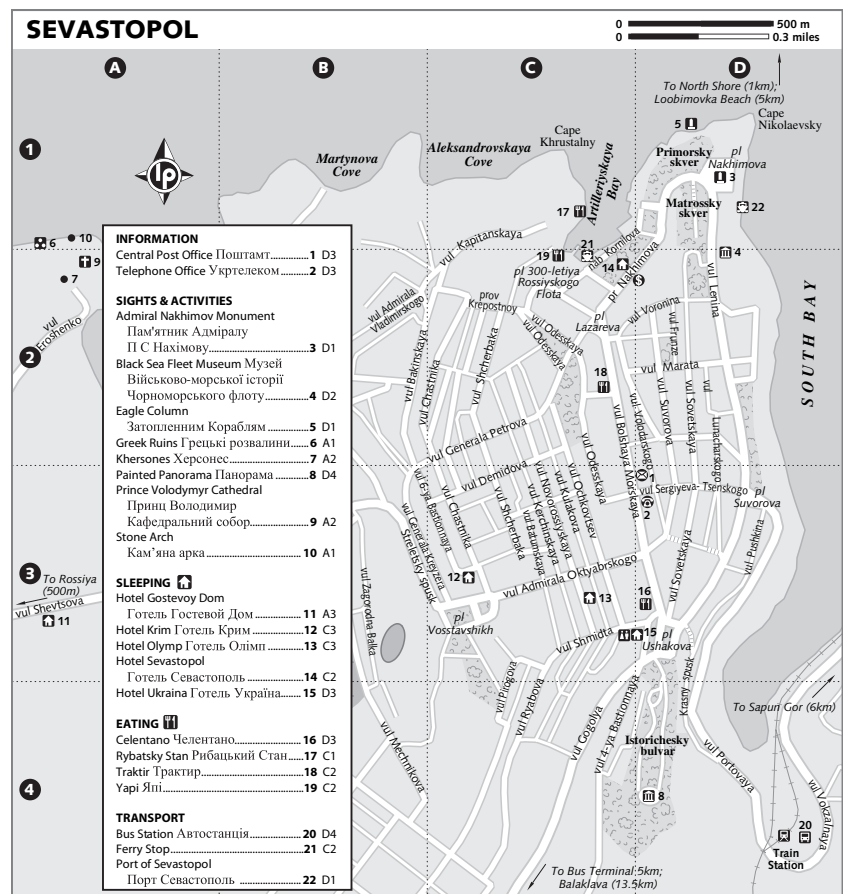
SEVASTOPOL СЕВАСТОПОЛЬ

☎ 0692 / pop 330,000

In a dozen short years, naval Sevastopol has changed enormously. Seeing it overrun with rich Russian tourists today, it's hard to imagine that until 1996 it was closed off to all but official permit-holders. Now Moscow's Black Sea Fleet, which has dominated Sevastopol life for more than two centuries, has been told it has to leave.

To the casual observer there's no doubt this port city looks good; for Ukraine it's pristine. Whitewashed neoclassical buildings and stone forts parade before a cerulean bay, and there's a real sense of civic pride as early-morning cleaners sweep the waterfront promenades of the previous evening's detritus.

Yet behind the attractive appearance there's a vaguely unsettled air. Some citizens still hark nostalgically back to the Soviet era, when the city's strategic importance meant preferential treatment. Almost all locals retain some allegiance to Russia. Sailors still swarm over town and will continue to do so for many years, but before Sevastopol has even properly



bid farewell to the past, you can already sense another major sea change looming.

History

Modern Sevastopol (pronounced see-vas-to-pple locally) has an attractive appearance, but it was a different story when the city was making international headlines during the Crimean War. After 349 days of bombardment by the British, French and Turks in 1854–55, it lay devastated by the time of its defeat. Arriving 10 years later, Mark Twain still felt moved to remark: 'In whatsoever direction you please, your eye encounters scarcely anything but ruin, ruin, ruin!'

History repeated itself in 1942, when the city fell to the Germans after a brutal 250-day

siege. Stalin promptly proclaimed it a 'hero city' for holding out so long. Only 10 buildings in town today date from before 1945.

In 1997, after long negotiations in the wake of Ukrainian independence, Russia and Ukraine inked a lease for Moscow's Black Sea Fleet to use the port. Ukraine recently ruled out any extension past 2017. Thereafter Russia says her ships may move to Novorossiysk – or even Syria! There won't be a complete loss of Sevastopol's nautical character, however. The port also moors and will continue to moor the smaller Ukrainian Navy.

Orientation

The train station is south of the town centre and main seafont. To get into town, cross

the metal pedestrian bridge over the tracks and wait at the bus shelter for any trolleybus or *marshrutka* marked 'центр' or '5км'. The main street, pr Nakhimova, begins soon after you pass the roundabout with the unmistakable Admiral Nakhimov monument.

Information

Central post office (☎ 544 881; vul Bolshaya Morskaya 21; ☎ counters 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat, internet centre 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun) Internet available too.

Telephone office (☎ 9am-10pm) In the side street next to the post office.

Sights & Activities

Sevastopol is a nice-looking city, but most overseas visitors will be in town because of an interest in the Crimean War.

Some of that history is celebrated in city monuments. The **Eagle Column** (1904), atop a rock in the sea, commemorates Russian ships deliberately scuppered at the mouth of the harbour in 1854 to make it impossible for enemy ships to pass. The **Admiral Nakhimov monument** (1959) literally puts on a pedestal the man who led the city's sea and land defence.

The focus of Sevastopol's wartime memories is the **painted panorama** (bul Istorychny; adult/child & concession 20/10uah, English/German guide extra 10uah; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun), on a hill near the centre of town. A painting around the inner wall of a circular building is supplemented with 3-D props designed to bring the 349-day siege of Sevastopol to life. Entry is only as part of a group tour, leaving at allotted times (usually every hour in summer; last entry is 45 minutes before closing). Some of the signage below the platform is in English.

Behind the panorama are several original gun emplacements and redoubts from the Crimean War. From here you can also see Russia's Black Sea Fleet still controversially nestling in South Bay (Pivdenny Bay), beside ships of the Ukrainian Navy. More Crimean War snippets, but not in English, are found in the **Black Sea Fleet Museum** (☎ 542 289; vul Lenina 11; admission 15uah; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun).

The ruins of the ancient Greek city of **Kherones** (☎ 241 304; admission 15uah; ☎ 9am-7pm May-Oct, 9am-4pm Nov-Mar) have great significance for local visitors. Founded in 422 BC, Kherones is where Volodymyr the Great was famously baptised into Christianity in 989 AD, launching what would become the

Russian Orthodox Church. Tatars destroyed the city in the 14th century, but excavations have revealed a row of marble columns a few metres from the shore. For overseas travellers, it's just a nice seaside photo opportunity, particularly with the **stone arch**, whose bell comes from a Crimean War cannon. There's also the restored **Prince Volodymyr Cathedral**.

Local bus/*marshrutka* 22 goes directly to Kherones. Or if you catch trolleybus 2 or 6 westwards to the Rossiya (россия) stop, turn back to the first street (vul Eroshenko or Eroshenko) next left and walk for half an hour, you'll come to it.

Catching a **ferry** around the bay is a nice leisurely pursuit and there are some wide sandy beaches further north (see the boxed text, p207).

Sleeping

Even by Crimean standards, Sevastopol's hotels are unimpressive (or nice but overpriced). So renting an apartment deserves extra special consideration here. English-run **Travel 2 Sevastopol** (☎ 8-050 757 5952; www.travel2sevastopol.com) responds promptly and is knowledgeable and remarkably helpful.

Hotel Krim (☎ 469 000; vul 6-ya Bastionnaya 46; s/d from \$40, tr from \$60; (P) (Q)) Some 400 guests get an hour of hot water in the evening, plus another in the morning – phew – immediately followed by an hour to all have breakfast, which usually includes meat and rice, sweet tea and chocolate biscuits (!). There's no doubt the authoritarian ghost of the Soviet Union is alive and well in this frumpy concrete high-rise. At least the views from the higher floors are good.

Hotel Gostevoy Dom (☎ 553 228; www.gkandt.com; vul Shevtsova 27; s \$45 d \$70-82, ste from \$116; (P) (Q)) Not as far from the centre as other private modern hotels and not as pricey as those right in the centre, this unusually pleasant establishment is probably Sevastopol's best compromise, although there are few singles. With comfortable if occasionally mismatched rooms and a small pool, it's near the vul Eroshenko turn-off to Kherones. Take trolleybus 2, 6 or 10, or *marshrutka* 105, 107, 109, 100 to the stop Dmitriya Ulyanova (дмитрия ульянова).

Hotel Ukraina (☎ 542 127; www.ukraine-hotel.com.ua; vul Gogolya 2; s \$75-86, d \$100-106, king r \$140; (P) (Q)) Helpful staff, a café producing good coffee and some decently renovated 'superior'

rooms might make this hotel seem worth the premium. The black wood panelling in the lobby is a Viennese Secessionist/Bauhaus touch, and some of the 'king' rooms feel remotely Japanese. However, the horrendous additional booking fee is going to put most customers off.

Also available:

Hotel Sevastopol (☎ 466 400; fax 466 409; pr Nakhimova 8; s \$12-42, d \$18-66, tr \$25-90) Creakily atmospheric old pile on the noisy seafloor.

Hotel Olymp (☎ 455 758, 455 789; www.olymphotel.com; vul Kulakova 86; s \$110, d & tw \$140, ste \$180; (P) (Q) (R)) The helpful staff partially atones for the faux-Greek motifs and nouveau riche customers in this 'elite' residence.

Eating & Drinking

Possibly because the city was closed for so long, the notion of good service is still a foreign concept. For cheap eats, head to the waterfront, particularly behind the Hotel Sevastopol, where there are some pizza places and kebab outlets. Bars and clubs are found down here, too.

Celentano (vul Bolshaya Morskaya 52; pizzas from 6.50uah, extra toppings 2-6uah) The national pizza chain is a much-appreciated addition to reasonably priced meals in Sevastopol. This particular branch has even been known to offer broccoli as a topping: something you'll eagerly fill upon if you've spent much time in Ukraine.

Yapi (☎ 556 142; Artillyerskaya Bay; mains 8-110uah) Although it's sort of a chain – with two other outlets in Kyiv and Lviv – this sushi restaurant feels perfect for the Sevastopol waterfront.

Flavours are wonderfully crisp and fresh, the service less so.

Traktir (☎ 522 127; vul Bolshaya Morskaya 8; mains 22-45uah) Gimmicky but sometimes fun, this place has staff decked out in jaunty white and blue sailors suits. Dishes whose names allude to the Crimean War – pies called 'Malakhov Hill' for example – join Russian standards like *kurnyk* (chicken, kasha and pancake pie).

Rybatsky Stan (☎ 557 278; Artillyerskaya Bay 1; most mains 50-125uah; ☎ 11am-3am) Steeply escalating prices and popularity with wealthy Russians along with cheesy dinnertime music have slightly spoiled this one-time gem. However, come at lunch and you'll concede its cooking is still rather good, with fresh produce and carefully sourced ingredients. There aren't too many places in regional Ukraine where you encounter Thai basil, after all.

Getting There & Away

There are two mainline trains a day from Kyiv direct to Sevastopol (120uah, 17 hours), as well as *elektrychka* trains to/from Simferopol (5uah, two hours, seven daily in each direction). The latter service stops en route in Bakhchysaray (2uah, 1½ hours).

There are buses every half-hour or hour to/from Bakhchysaray (7uah, one hour), Yalta (18uah to 21uah, two hours) and Simferopol (17uah to 20uah, two hours).

Weekly ferries travel between the **Port of Sevastopol** (☎ 8-069 254 4082, 540 522; www.morport.sevastopol.ua; s from \$140) and the Turkish capital, Istanbul (from Sevastopol 7pm Sunday, from Istanbul 10pm Thursday; 25 hours' duration).

THE CAUSES OF THE CRIMEAN WAR

The Crimean War of 1854–56 resulted from imperial Russia's attempts to gain unfettered access to the Mediterranean. It lost the war, but within 20 years was breathing down the back of the Balkans again.

Russia initially wanted control over parts of the decaying Ottoman Empire (particularly Moldavia and Walachia) to secure a route from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. Britain and France opposed the move as it was a threat to their routes to India and their North African colonies. The first skirmishes were in Turkey in 1853, from which the Russians quickly withdrew. However, the allies were now fired up and joined the Turks in sending a punitive invasion force to Crimea the following year.

The fighting centred on Sevastopol, Russia's main Black Sea port, which the allies surrounded for 349 days.

Each side lost an estimated 250,000 during the war. Many allied soldiers died from disease, bad hospitals and poor supplies, all conditions to which British nurse Florence Nightingale drew attention.

AROUND SEVASTOPOL

Balaklava Балаклава

☎ (8-)0692

Thinking of the full-face ski mask to which it gave its name – the 19th-century equivalent of a ‘hoodie’ – you might not be expecting Balaklava to be particularly beautiful. But, oh, it is. Arid, scrub-covered hills rise on either side of a narrow, curving blue bay once reserved for secret Cold War manoeuvres. Now the former Soviet Union elite park their multi-million-dollar yachts in the inlet’s Mediterranean-like waters, while humble fishing boats ferry tourists to nearby coastal beaches with names like ‘Golden’ and ‘Silver’. Overlooking the whole scene are three Genoese towers, beyond which the headland offers a bird’s-eye view of the cove and the Black Sea. And that’s when you may wish you had a balaclava – to keep your jaw from dropping off.

HISTORY

The British navy made Balaklava its base during the Crimean War, but during the stormy winter of 1854 many ships sank and sailors began dying of cold. Reading about this in the *Times*, concerned English women began knitting full-cover woolly caps and sending them to ‘Balaclava’. They became known as Balaclava helmets and eventually just balaclavas.

During the war Florence Nightingale ran a field hospital on one of the plateaus above the village, and the infamous charge of the ill-fated Light Brigade took place in a valley north of the city (see the boxed text, opposite).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Unsurprisingly, others discovered this wonderful cove before the British navy; the settlement is about 2500 years old and even mentioned in Homer’s *Odyssey* as a pirate’s den. Today the oldest surviving reminders of earlier habitation are the three towers from the 15th-century **Genoese Fortress of Cembalo** on the hills above town. These are probably still under scaffolding, as there’s an (overly?) ambitious plan to reconstruct the entire fortress. Cembalo (pronounced ‘chembalo’) was the village’s name before 1475, when conquering Turks rechristened it Balaklava, or ‘Fish’s Nest’.

The surrounding hills are perfect for scrambling over, but the town’s quirkiest sight lurks across the bay from the main stretch of restaurants and cafés. The concrete opening in the

harbour wall is the mouth of the so-called ‘fish’s nest’, a natural underwater cave and harbour inside the hills, which the Soviets turned into a secret nuclear submarine factory. Today it’s a **naval museum** (☎ 535 990; vul Miramornaya 1; adult/child 15/8uah; ☎ 10am-6pm, ticket desk to 4.45pm, excursions on the hr & 4.45pm), where you can breach the huge nuclear-blast-proof doors and wander some of the 600m of the former repair docks, mess rooms and thankfully now empty arsenal on a one-hour-long guided tour. When MTV launched in Ukraine in 2007, this is where it held the party. But take a jumper; it gets chilly inside.

PADI-approved **Akvamarin** (☎ 637 348; www.voliga.ru; vul Nazukina 1) offers dives through the watery channels of the factory, or in the bay or sea. Tour operators along the harbour tout regular, short **cruses**.

SLEEPING

Balaklava Hostel (☎ 636 666, in Russian; www.hilhostels.com.ua; vul Drapushko 18; dm \$10-12; (P)) Not an establishment that scores highly on the Hostelworld-o-meter and with good reason. In a derelict-looking building in a depressed neighbourhood in a bit of an inconvenient location, its rooms are tolerable, but the staff isn’t always welcoming and usually only one speaks English.

Listrigon Motel (☎ 463 191, 455 150, 455 870, 467 283; www.djama.com.ua/rest_eng.html, www.listrigon.com; vul 7th Noyabrya 5D; economy s/d/tr/f \$16/20/26/28, standard d \$76-80, tr \$90; (P) (2)) This Lego-like motel curving around a hillside offers great views, reasonable accommodation and decent prices. The cheapest, economy rooms (April to October only) are dormitory-style with shared bathrooms and breakfast not included; however, there’s a café where you can pay for it. More expensive accommodation includes private bathroom and is open year-round.

Golden Symbol (☎ 535 557, 535 624; www.golden-symbol.com, Russian only; vul Nazukina 1; standard r \$60-80; superior r \$140, ste \$180) The yacht-club hotel has a St Tropez feel, with luxury boats moored in front of the waterside terrace restaurant, and eight light, airy uncluttered rooms.

Also available:

Mriya (☎ 637 375, 637 893, 8-050 634 7201; vul Miramornaya 17; r \$55-70, ste \$90) Unremarkable mid-range hotel across the bay by the submarine factory.

Hotel Dakkar (☎ 637 763; www.dakkar-resort.com; vul Kalicha 13; d \$100, jnr ste \$130-150, ste \$200-220) Posh oligarchs’ favourite with a North African theme and numerous photos of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

INTO THE VALLEY OF DEATH

Unquestioning loyalty, bravery and inexplicable blunders leading to tragedy – these ingredients turned an engagement lasting just minutes into one of the most renowned battles in military history. The action in question is the ill-fated charge of the Light Brigade, which occurred during a Russian attempt to cut British supply lines from Balaklava to Sevastopol during the Crimean War.

The battle began northeast of Balaklava early on 25 October 1854. Russian forces based on the east-west Feduikine Hills also wrested control of allied gun (Turkish-held) positions lining the parallel southern ridge of Causeway Heights. Then they moved towards Balaklava itself.

Initially the Russians were blocked by the ‘thin red line’ of the British 93rd Highlanders, and repulsed by Lord Lucan’s Heavy Cavalry Brigade. But four hours later, they appeared to be regrouping at the eastern end of the valley between the Feduikine Hills and Causeway Heights. British army commander Lord Raglan sent an order for the cavalry ‘to try and prevent the enemy carrying away the guns.’

The order was vague – which guns exactly? – and misinterpreted. The Earl of Cardigan headed off down the wrong valley, leading his Light Cavalry Brigade into a cul-de-sac controlled on three sides by the enemy. The numbers are disputed, but nearly 200 of 673 were killed.

‘*C’est magnifique, mais ce n’est pas la guerre,*’ exclaimed a watching French general. (‘It’s magnificent, but it’s not war.’) Later, romantic poet Lord Alfred Tennyson would lionise the ‘noble six hundred’ who rode into ‘the valley of death’. His poem ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’ did more than anything to mythologise the event for posterity. On its 150th anniversary, the charge was even recreated in front of British dignitaries, including Prince Phillip.

The ‘Valley of Death’ is now a vineyard, just north of the M18 road from Sevastopol to Yalta. You can look down on it from the hill of Sapun Gor (Сапун гор), where there’s a WWII **diorama** (☎ 9.30am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4pm Nov-Mar) and Memorial. *Marshrutka* 107 (1.50uah) will get you there from downtown Sevastopol.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

In Sevastopol, take any trolleybus or *marshrutka* heading away from the train station or south down vul Bolshaya Morskaya to ‘5KM’. (The sign looks the same in Cyrillic). This transport terminus 5km south of town is huge and chaotic. The bus drops passengers off at one entrance and the *marshrutky* to Balaklava (2uah to 3uah) leave from the back of the far left-hand corner. Continue along the food-stall lined footpath until you see a white cabin set back from the street on your left. Cut through the forecourt here to the street behind; *marshrutka* 9 to Balaklava departs to your left.

Sevastopol to Yalta

The drive between Sevastopol and Yalta is one of the most scenic in Crimea. The road twists and turns along a coastal escarpment, with the Black Sea far below and the sheer cliffs of the Crimean Mountains rising behind. Vineyards and cypress trees line the route.

Thirty kilometres from Sevastopol lies the small village of **Foros**, notable for three things. This is where Gorbachev was held under house arrest during the 1991 counter-

Soviet coup attempt in Moscow. Locals will happily point out his dacha, which has a terracotta roof.

The second attraction is the small, gold-domed Resurrection Church, also known as the **Church on the Rock** for its dramatic perch on a precipitous crag overlooking the sea. The 19th-century tea tycoon Alexander Kuznetsov built the church in thanks for the survival of his daughter, whose runaway horse stopped at the edge of the cliff.

Thirdly, Foros is popular with rock climbers because of the left-hand face of Mt Mshat-Kaya, the Foroskiy Kant, which rises above the village. The face lies above today’s Sevastopol-Yalta road, near the Baydarsky Vorota pass. For details contact guide Sergey Sorokin (www.mt.crimea.com).

YALTA ЯЛТА

☎ (8-)0654 / pop 80,500

It’s just too easy to make fun of Yalta – an exclusive 19th-century resort founded on the Russian aristocracy’s struggle with tuberculosis, then a 20th-century workers’ paradise where model Soviet citizens frolicked

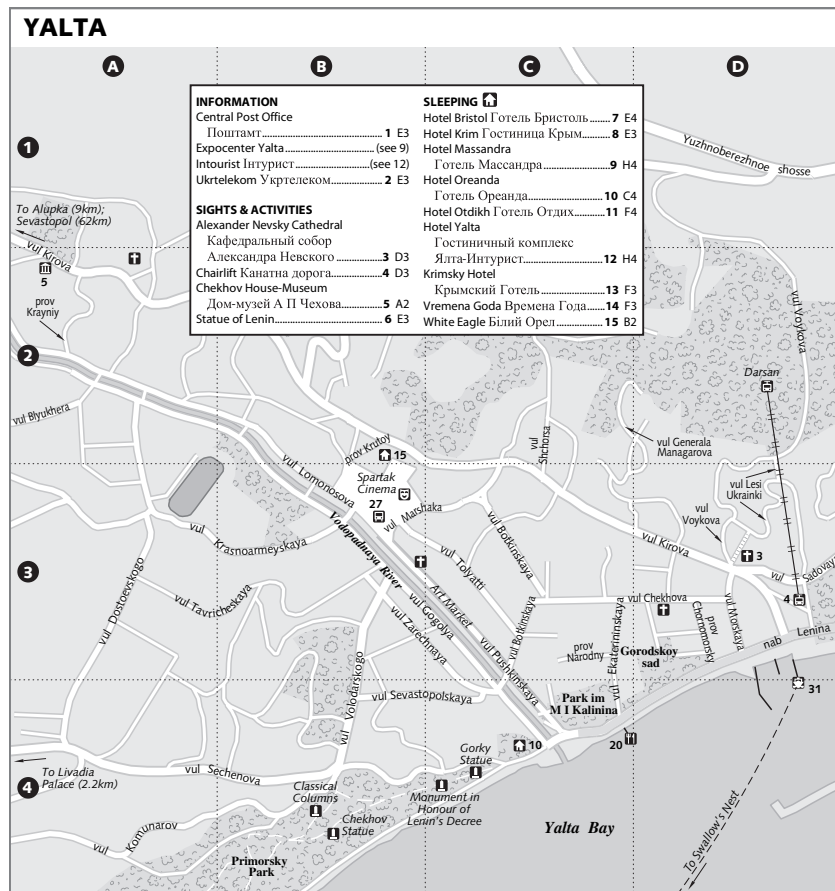
between concrete sanatoriums and pebbly beaches. Twinned with the English seaside town of Margate, it's an easy satirical target, what with all the speak-your-weight and test-your-punch machines lining its waterfront promenade. That's not to mention the gob-smacking night-time scene, when hundreds of metres of crinolines, powdered wigs, spiky leather jackets, Harley Davidson motorbikes and more are lined up as souvenir-photo props.

However, Crimea's leading tourist trap has much more to offer than a celebration of kitsch. It bursts with so much good-time energy that people remain unruffled by the high-season downsides of crowding, high prices and poor service.

The setting is convenient and extremely beautiful too, with waving palm trees in the background and chalky mountain faces rising up to bluey-green tips. Gazing up at yet another statue of Lenin to survive in Crimea you're forced to reflect that the socialist leader could rarely have been in such luxuriant surroundings – even if he now has to share the scene with a McDonald's restaurant.

Orientation

Yalta lies on the gently curving shore of Yalta Bay (Yaltinsky Zaliv), with two rivers flowing at opposite 45-degree angles running into the sea. The waterfront promenade, nab Lenina, stretches from the mouth of the Bystraya River west to the Vodapadnaya River.



The Yalta main bus station is 1.5km north of the centre. Take trolleybus 1, 2 or 3 down (not up) the hill to the town centre.

Information

Dozens of tourist booths line the waterfront and around, selling reasonably priced Russian-language day trips and, occasionally, maps. Remember, some attractions don't need much commentary. Many hotels can also help with information.

Central post office (☎ 312 073; pl Lenina 1; 🕒 8am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat, 8am-4pm Sun in summer, reduced hours in winter)

Expocenter Yalta (☎ 272 546, 8-050 324 2350; www.travel2crimea.com; Hotel Massandra, vul Drazhinskogo 48; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, plus 9am-5pm Sat May-Sep)

With years of experience, excellent English and a helpful manner, owner Ihor Brudny runs a superior travel service. Website is in conjunction with guide Sergey Sorokin.

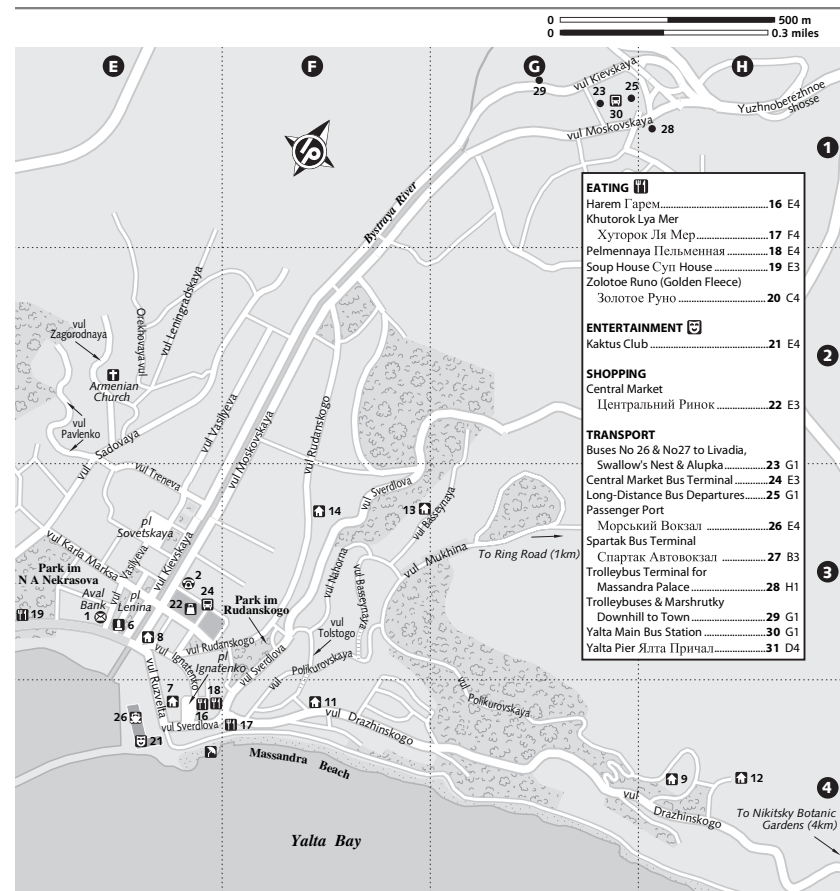
Intourist (☎ 327 604, 270 260, 270 270; Hotel Yalta, vul Drazhinskogo 50; 🕒 8am-8pm summer, 9am-5pm other times) If you're happy to tag along on one of Intourist's many crowded day tours, great. If you want something different, tough. Customisation isn't a speciality here.

Ukrtelekom (vul Moskovskaya 9; per hr 5uah) Telephone and internet centre.

Sights & Activities

THE CENTRE

Step right up! Take a stroll along nab Lenina, the good-time seaside promenade. The sea view is not at its best here – rusting ships along the jetty, anyone? – but it's the town's



HIKING GUIDES IN CRIMEA

Crimea has some fantastic hiking opportunities but a scarcity of really good topographical maps with marked routes. In addition, a total lack of English signs mean that Westerners will find the going more challenging than usual.

If you're still determined to strike out by yourself, read the tips on camping restrictions, registration and mountain rescue at www.tryukraine.com/crimea/hiking.shtml beforehand. And remember some areas are officially off-limits (see the boxed text, p60).

If you'd prefer to go with a guide, the following are both highly recommended:

- **Sergey Sorokin** (☎ 8-067 793 9100; www.mt.crimea.com)
- **Outdoor Ukraine** (☎ 8-097 327 8698, 8-067 915 1257; www.outdoorukraine.com).

main artery, pulsing with life. The pedestrian zone passes palm trees, restaurants, clubs, shops, stalls and photographers before reaching **Primorsky Park**.

Minor attractions en route include a flimsy plastic-bucket-style **chairlift** (vul Kirova, behind nab Lenina 17; return trip 20uah; ☎ 11am-5pm Apr-Sep, 11am-11pm Jul & Aug) that swings above the rooftops to Darsan, to a bizarre pseudo-Greek temple and lookout that's popular for impromptu teenage parties. Just before Hotel Oreanda, there's also an **art and souvenir market** heading off the promenade to the Spartak Cinema and bus stop.

Elsewhere, **Alexander Nevsky Cathedral** (vul Sadovaya 2) is a beautiful piece of neo-Byzantine architecture with fantastic detailing.

CHEKHOV HOUSE-MUSEUM

With many of Yalta's attractions a short distance away, the **Chekhov House-Museum** (☎ 394 947; www.chekhov.com.ua; vul Kirova 112; adult/student 15/10uah; ☎ 10am-5pm, last entry 4.30pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, Wed-Sun Sep-May) is the only must-see in town. It's sort of *The Cherry Orchard* incarnate. Not only did Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) pen that classic play here, the lush garden would appeal to the most horticulturally challenged audience.

A long-term tuberculosis sufferer, the great Russian dramatist spent much of his last five years in Yalta. He designed the white dacha and garden himself and when he wasn't producing plays like *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*, he was a legendary host and *bon vivant*, welcoming the Russian singer Feodor Chaliapin, composer Rachmaninov and writers Maxim Gorky and Leo Tolstoy.

After the exhibition at the entrance, you head down the path to the dacha, where all nine rooms are pretty much as Chekhov left them upon his departure from Yalta for

Germany in May 1904. Explanation sheets are available in several languages.

Take *marshrutka* 8 from the Spartak bus terminal to the Dom-Muzey A P Chekhova stop, or catch trolleybus 1 from pl Radyanska (Sovetskaya), alight at the sixth stop, walk up the concrete stairs shortly afterwards to the right at Крауни (краиний) pereulok and turn left into vul Kirova at the top. It takes 15 to 20 minutes to walk from the Spartak Cinema.

Sleeping

APARTMENTS & HOSTELS

A hostel was due to open in Yalta in early 2008; see www.hihostels.com.ua for the latest.

Apartments are available from the Crimean-based, English-run **Travel 2 Sevastopol** (☎ 8-050 757 5952; www.travel2sevastopol.com). UK-based operator **Black Sea Crimea** (☎ +44-(0)7808 160 621; www.blacksea-crimea.com) has slightly more expensive offerings.

In summer, locals at the main bus station do offer homestays and apartments, but it can be a rapacious business and once they realise you're foreign it's hard to get too many great bargains. (Better to negotiate with middle-aged individual women than the professional operators.)

Prices below are for July to August, and they reduce drastically out of season. Booking hotels ahead in the high season is a good idea. However, many local apartment owners don't like to release their rooms more than a day in advance, even in summer. With them, it's better to book late.

HOTELS

Hotel Krim (☎ 271 701; baza@hotelkrim.yalta.crimea.ua; vul Moskovskaya 1/6; s \$8-11, d \$18-50, tr & q \$22-70; ☎) Despite its best efforts to be dour and utterly unwelcoming, this ex-Soviet number remains

megapopular for its low prices and central location (expect noise). The cheaper rooms for each category have a shared bathroom, and the priciest doubles and triples have air conditioning.

Hotel Otdikh (☎ 353 069; otdyh@yalta.com; vul Drazhinskogo 14; s \$30-70, d \$45-100; ☎) Hotel 'Relaxation' was a 19th-century brothel for visiting government dignitaries; now it's a decent enough budget *пension*. Some of the bathrooms are a bit whiffy and there's some street noise, but staff speak ok English and the location is convenient.

Krimsky Hotel (☎ 231 211, 231 209; www.krimsky-otel.crimea.ua in Ukrainian; vul Basseynaya 20; s/d from \$60, tw \$85; ☎) The views here are fit for a tsar, even if the accommodation isn't. The outdoor bar, pool and balconies of this prefab concrete hotel all have wonderful views of Yalta Bay, but the rather dowdy rooms have tiny bathrooms and the hotel is a 30-minute trudge uphill, well off transport routes. In this overpriced city, many guests still find this a good deal.

Hotel Massandra (☎ 272 401, 272 427; www.hotel-massandra.com.ua; vul Drazhinskogo 48; s/d \$58/78, with air-con from \$66/88; ☎) The Massandra is an average hotel at an average price in an average location. But in Yalta's polarised hotel market, as with the Krimsky Hotel, that ordinariness is a relief. Renovations mean the rooms are a bit more aesthetically appealing, and even if it's a half-hour (1.5km) walk into town, down poorly lit streets, the park location is pretty. *Marshrutka* 34 from the central market also stops nearby.

our pick White Eagle (☎ 327 702, 8-050 324 2161; prov Krutoy 13; s/d \$80/90; ☎) summer only; ☎) Built in late classical Russian style, this boutique hotel is a chic, relaxed oasis in an otherwise chaotic district. The six air-conditioned rooms are comfortably and tastefully furnished, but the highlight is the outdoor terrace where you can enjoy breakfast or an evening glass of wine. Excellent, English-speaking staff share local tips, and guests have access to Hotel Oreanda's private beach.

Hotel Yalta (☎ 270 260, 270 270; www.hotel-yalta.com.ua; vul Drazhinskogo 50; s/d \$90/115; ☎) No-one chooses the famous Yalta for comfort or convenience. They stay for the novelty of checking in to a 2230-bed ex-Soviet behemoth. Rooms are ordinary and the hotel is as poorly located as the neighbouring Massandra. However, given 10 bars, seven restaurants, numerous shops, a dolphinarium, a sauna, a lift to a private beach and myriad sporting activities, some guests probably never set foot off the premises.

Hotel Bristol (☎ 271 602, 271 603; www.hotel-bristol.com.ua; vul Ruzvelta 10; standard s/d \$130/145, business class s/d \$175/190; ☎) Few of us ever really need more comfort than this central, three-star establishment provides. The town's oldest hotel is in a heritage-listed, 19th-century building, but its rooms were thoughtfully renovated in 2003, many in yellow and blue hues. Throw in a good breakfast buffet and reasonable service, and your stay will usually be straightforward and uncomplicated.

Vremena Goda (☎ 230 852, 234 111; www.hotel-seasons.com.ua; vul Rudanskogo 23; s/d from \$90/165;

'MY FAVOURITE CRIMEAN BEACH'

Australian and Caribbean tourism chiefs are never going to lose sleep over the competition from Crimean beaches. However, not all the peninsula's *plyazhy* (beaches) are crowded and pebbly, as these local residents assure us.

- **Yashmovy, Cape Fiolent** (Trolleybus 12 to 5KM depot, walk 100m in the same direction and change to *marshrutka* 2 or 3, or bus 19 or 72) 'Seven kilometres south of Sevastopol, this regularly cleaned beach is next to an Orthodox monastery with forested cliffs semicircling it. The 800 stairs down deter many people, and there's an additional limit on numbers.' *Rick de Long, Try Ukraine*
- **Loobimovka, north of Sevastopol** (Ferry from downtown Sevastopol to the north shore, then bus 52) 'It's a clean, quiet beach with mostly locals and more sand than other beaches. There's wine-tasting nearby.' *Anna Frumes, Peace Corps Volunteer, Bakhchysaray*
- **Ordzhonikidze & Zolotoy, outside Feodosiya** (*Marshrutka* 20 to Ordzhonikidze; bus 4 to Zolotoy) 'I can't choose. Each is sandy, but special in its own way. Ordzhonikidze is clean and quiet. Zolotoy has Beach Club 117 in summer, which is famous for its trance music.' *Levent Alver, Feodosiya*.

(P ☒ ☒) For something a little special, visit this spa hotel and medical centre for its chocolate massages and mud treatments. With clean, modern lines complemented by a few Art Nouveau stained-glass windows, the 'Four Seasons' is within fairly easy reach (a 10- to 15-minute walk) of the high-season action.

Hotel Oreanda (☎ 274 274, 274 250; www.hotel-oreanda.com; nab Lenina 35/2; s/d \$200/305, superior s/d \$230/360; P ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒) The crème de la Krim is favoured by oligarchs, expense-account bunnies and others who wish their wealth to be seen. Rooms are elegant and tasteful – which is more than can be said for the hotel's casino and club. However, they're also small and only superior accommodation enjoys sea views. So this place for special occasions is wildly overpriced on any everyday analysis.

Eating

Like its hotels, Yalta's eating options are quite polarised. Cheap *stolovy* (canteens) are here in abundance to cater for the ordinary CIS tourist, while glitzy up-market restaurants cater to big-spending 'new Russians'. The waterfront is lined with restaurants, including the usual Pizza Celentano and Kartoplyanoye Khata chain outlets, plus a huge, hard-to-miss Greek galley on stilts with wobbly stairs called **Zolotoe Runo** (Golden Fleece; nab Lenina; mains 50-155uah).

Pelmennaya (☎ 323 932; vul Sverdlova 8; mains 5-15uah; ☎ 8am-10pm) This is the best workers' caff in town because it makes your order fresh, rather than doing the usual of placing dishes in a glass display cabinet for hours. *Varenyky*, *blyny*, *borshch* and good, crisp salads all join the namesake dish of *pelmeni* (ravioli-like dumplings).

Soup House (nab Lenina 7; mains 8-22uah) While its food is better earlier in the day, this nouveau *stolova* (cafeteria) gets bonus points for its stylish, cheerful décor and wide range of Ukrainian staples, from green *borshch* and berry-filled *varenyky* to cranberry juice.

Harem (☎ 326 318; vul Ignatenko 6/22, cnr vul Sverdlova; mains 25-40uah; ☎ 11am-2am) Harem is an unusual thing – an upscale Crimean Tatar restaurant. Mostly, they're quite casual. But on the terrace or in the lovely tiled Oriental room, you can sample a wide range of the Tatar cuisine, from top-notch *deniz* (seafood soup), *biber-sarma* (sweet peppers stuffed with minced beef, rice and spices) and *lampa bykadina* (bulls' testicles grilled in brandy). French, Italian,

Chilean, Argentinean and Georgian wines provide libation, and there are hookah pipes.

Khutorok Lya Mer (☎ 271 815; vul Sverdlova 8; mains 40-120uah; ☎ 11am-2am) Overlooking the sea at Massandra Beach, this restaurant is designed to look like the interior of a ship, but the theme isn't overdone and there's only a small fish section on the menu. The cuisine is Ukrainian meets Russian meets Crimean Tatar meets European, with dishes like *varenyky*, veal stroganoff, and pork fillet shashlyk with Provençal herbs. The seaside back terrace is a lovely spot.

Drinking & Entertainment

In many ways, Yalta in summer is one big open-air nightclub. At Massandra Beach head past the seaport building and on to the waterfront, clubs and bars around Khutorok lya Mer and you'll find one of the town's biggest hangouts.

Kaktus Club (☎ 321 614; vul Ruzvelta 5) Across from the Hotel Bristol in the seaport building, this is a Tex-Mex restaurant on the ground floor, and Yalta's premium club on the 1st. Strong electro-techno tradition and extremely pricey cocktails.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

Some international cruise ships now stop here but Yalta's **passenger port** (morskoy vokzal; ☎ 320 094; vul Ruzvelta 5) is largely underused. In 2007 there was a Yalta-Sinop (Turkey) catamaran in summer. It's uncertain this will continue, but you can check with Odesa's English-speaking **London Sky Travel** (☎ 8-0482 729 3196; www.lstrav.el.com.ua).

BUS & TROLLEYBUS

Trolleybuses to Simferopol leave from beside **Yalta main bus station** (☎ 325 777, 342 092; vul Moskovskaya 8); see p190 for details.

Buses depart from Yalta main bus station to/from Sevastopol (18uah to 21uah, two hours, departing half-hourly to hourly) and Bakhchysaray (25uah, three hours, three daily). Buses to Feodosiya (46uah, five hours, every two hours in summer, two daily otherwise) go via Simferopol.

Getting Around

There are several bus/*marshrutka* stations in town. You'll arrive at the main bus station, which is about 1.5km from the waterfront.

From here, trolleybuses 1, 2 and 3 go down the hill along vul Kievskaya to the centre.

Behind the main bus station, on the lower level, you'll find the buses and *marshrutky* going to the sights around Yalta. The 27, for example, heads to Alupka (5uah). See the following West of Yalta (see below) and East of Yalta (p210) sections for more details.

Other *marshrutky* leave from the bus terminal near the central market (eg the 34 to the Nikitsky botanic gardens) or the Spartak Cinema (eg unnumbered *marshrutky* to Livadia Palace).

There are several metered taxi firms and they're definitely cheaper for journeys within the city. **Avka-Trans Taxis** (☎ 231 085, 8-067 563 0444) is good, but you can generally find some sort of metered cab at the intersection of vul Ruzvelta and nab Lenina.

WEST OF YALTA

☎ (8-)0654

Yalta's most popular attractions are lined up like ducks in a row several kilometres west of the city. Many *marshrutka* routes (most notably the 27) pass them all. However, the least confusing way to arrive at Livadia Palace is via the summertime *marshrutka* 5 and the most scenic way to arrive at the Swallow's Nest castle is by boat. Both of which can upset the sequence.

Livadia Palace Лівадія Дворец

It's not the most sumptuously furnished Crimean interior, but **Livadia Palace** (Livadia Dvoretz; ☎ 315 579, 315 581; adult/child 20/10uah; ☎ 10am-5.45pm Tue-Thu) reverberates with history. It's the site of the 1945 Yalta Conference, where dying US president Franklin Roosevelt and heat-allergic British prime minister Winston Churchill turned up to be bullied by Soviet leader Josef Stalin. While here, Churchill declared steamy Crimea 'the Riviera of Hades'. No wonder, given the high temperatures and the company he was keeping. Stalin's insistent demands to keep Poland and other swathes of Eastern Europe shaped the face of postwar Europe. Even as huge tour groups nearly trample you in a race to the overflowing souvenir shops in the furthest rooms, it's hard not to be awed wandering these corridors of power.

In the enormous **White Hall**, the 'Big Three' and their staff met to tacitly agree that the USSR would wield the biggest Eastern Europe influence, in exchange for keeping out of the

Mediterranean. The crucial documents, dividing Germany and ceding parts of Poland to the USSR, were signed on 11 February in the English billiard room. The most famous Yalta photograph of Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin is hung on a wall, along with the awkward outtakes, which bring history to life.

It's upstairs, however, that Livadia's other ghosts genuinely move you (yes, even complete antimonarchists). This Italian Renaissance-style building was designed as a summer residence for Russian Tsar Nicholas II in 1911. But he and his family spent just four seasons here before their arrest by Bolshevik troops in 1917 and execution in Yekaterinburg the following year. Photos and some poignant mementos of the doomed Romanovs are still in their private apartments.

Livadia's coastal **gardens** (admission free; ☎ sunrise-sunset) are also beautiful, and behind the palace you'll find the **Sunny Path** (Solnechnaya Tropa). This was built on the recommendation of Tsar Nicholas II's doctor, who believed that regular outdoor exercise would improve the royal family's tuberculosis. The path stretches nearly 7km to Swallow's Nest, but while the first kilometre is beautifully landscaped, it becomes progressively littered, unpleasant and isolated after that. If you turn right at the Sunny Path's entrance, you'll find the Romanovs' chapel. The family has been beatified as martyrs by the Russian Orthodox Church.

Marshrutka 5 (1.50uah; summer only) from the Spartak Cinema drops you right in the palace grounds. On bus 26, 27, 32 or 47 (3uah) from behind the main bus station, you'll need to ask the driver for the 'Livadia Dvoretz' stop on the main road. Cross this road (carefully) and follow the little path off it down the hill. Find the concrete stairs beside the pinky-orange building. Head down these, take the stone stairs behind the big tree at their foot, and where the road forks near a sanatorium, veer left, taking the lower, larger road towards all the tour buses.

Swallow's Nest Ласточкино Гніздо

Like many movie stars, **Swallow's Nest** (Lastochkino Gnizdo; ☎ 8am-6pm Tue-Sun) is shorter in real life than it appears in pictures. This toy-town castle is a favourite subject for Crimean postcards, but it's only big enough to house an expensive and exceedingly disappointing Italian restaurant.

Instead, it's the castle's precarious perch on the sheer cliff of Cape Ay-Todor, 10km west of Yalta, that gives it a minor thrill. On the surrounding walkway, you realise that the castle actually overhangs the cliff. Although the castle looks medieval in style, it was built in 1912 for German oil magnate Baron Steingel, as a present to his mistress.

The most spectacular approach to the castle is over the water, via the ferry (adult 20uah, child 10uah; up to 20 daily in high season, four in October) that heads from Yalta pier to the beach and jetty just below Swallow's Nest.

Buses 26 and 27 also pass this way, both stopping directly in front of a row of restaurants, shops and multicoloured plastic palm trees above the castle. In summer there's usually a small fee of 3uah to 8uah at this entrance.

Cable Car Канатна дорога

About 1km east of Alupka, behind a little cluster of market stalls, is the **cable car** (kanata dorogy; each way 20uah; ☎ ticket office 10am-5pm, services every 20 min until 6pm) up the cliff of Mt Ay-Petri. It's a truly dizzying ride across the foothills and up the mountain's sheer face, during which you overlook the coast and the sea. Until the end of 2007, when they were ripped down, one of the most enjoyable things about journeying to the peak was the Crimean Tatar food stalls here. With any luck, they might be rebuilt.

There's no guarantee – as there is in Switzerland – that the cable cars are given an overhaul each year, but they seem in much better condition than most Ukrainian transport.

Alupka АЛУПКА

Crimea's most exotic palace-park complex is wedged between the coast and Mt Ay-Petri, in a stunning setting 16km west of Yalta at Alupka. The **palace** was designed by English architects for the English-educated Count Mikhail Vorontsov, the immensely rich regional governor; and it's a bizarre combination of Scottish castle on its landward side with Arabic-Asian fantasy facing the sea. Vorontsov brought serfs from his estates all over Russia to build the palace and park in 1828-46. A century later Winston Churchill stayed here during the 1945 Yalta Conference.

Visiting the **Alupkinsky Palace Museum** (☎ 722 81; adult/child 20/10uah; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun Jun; 8am-7.30pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug; 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr, May, Sep &

Oct; 9am-4pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar) takes you firstly into the palace's luxuriant interior, which includes an imitation Wedgwood 'blue room', an English-style dining hall and an indoor conservatory. However, the best views are from the lush gardens behind the palace, where six marble lions flank the staircase framed against the backdrop of Mt Ay-Petri. British PM Churchill joked that one of the lions looked like him – minus the trademark cigar.

Bus 27 shuttles back and forth to Alupka (5uah). Just 50m back from the bus stop is the **Massandra wine-tasting centre** (☎ 721 198; admission 17uah ☎ tours Tue-Sat May-Nov, Tue, Thu & Sat Dec-Apr). Here you can participate in a tasting tour of Crimean wines, although you need to appreciate Madeiras, sweet dessert wines or sherries to really enjoy the experience.

Uchansu Waterfall & Mt Ay-Petri Водопад Учансу та Ай-Петри

Heading northwest from Yalta, bus 30 from the main bus station takes you within walking distance of two beauty spots in the mountains off the Bakhchysaray road. From the Vodopad (Waterfall) stop about 11km out, you can walk to a platform (5uah) beside the 100m-high **Uchansu Waterfall**. From the Karagol stop, 3km further up the road, a track leads to forest-ringed **Lake Karagol**. Both spots have a restaurant.

Continuing past the Karagol stop, the road winds spectacularly up to the top of the range 13km on; the summit of **Mt Ay-Petri** (St Peter, 1233m) sits to the left. This route, and several others up Mt Ay-Petri, are ideal for **mountain biking** (for more details, see www.mountainbiking.velocrimea.com). Meanwhile, the Ay-Petri cable car whisks passengers down to Alupka (see left).

The views from the mountains are spectacular, and the dry plateau itself feels otherworldly, or at least Central Asian. Below is Crimea's so-called **Grand Canyon** – not very big, really, but a pleasant enough walk.

EAST OF YALTA

☎ (8-)0654

Nikitsky Botanic Gardens

Нікітський Ботанічний Сад

The **Nikitsky Botanic Gardens** (adult/child 10/5uah; ☎ 8am-6pm) let you sample a wide range of the world's flora, just wandering around the 3 sq km of their hillside (and seaside) grounds. Founded under the order of the tsar in 1812,

they were designed to collect and then disseminate the planet's species throughout Russia. Today 'Nikita', as they're nicknamed, house up to 28,000 species, including olive trees and roses, cacti, ancient yews and pistachios. An on-site café only improves the experience.

From Yalta's central market bus terminal, take bus 34 to the Upper Gate bus stop. For a pleasant excursion, boats (20uah) also sail from the Yalta waterfront to the gardens.

Massandra Palace

Массандровський Дворец

A cutesy hunting lodge built to resemble a French chateau, the turreted **Massandra Palace** (☎ 321 728; adult/child 20/10uah; ☎ 9am-5pm Wed-Mon May-Oct, 9am-4pm Wed-Mon Nov-Apr) was completed by Tsar Alexander III in 1889. It's better known, however, for what it became: Stalin's summer dacha.

The restored palace contains paintings and antique furniture, although the surrounding parkland is probably more beautiful. There is also **wine tasting** here, but only try if you have a sweet tooth. Take trolleybus 2, heading uphill opposite the Yalta main bus station.

GURZUF ГУРЗУФ

Gurzuf's steep, winding streets and old wooden houses, backed by Mt Roman-Kosh (1543m), were traditionally a magnet for artists and writers. Today they're a site for more inquisitive travellers. The village, 18km northeast of Yalta, is built around a picturesque bay with the rocky Genoese Cliff (Skala Dzhenvez) at its eastern end. Ayu-Dag (Bear Mountain or Gora Medvid, 565m) looms along the coast to the east, protruding into the sea.

Overhanging wooden balconies, a few cafés and the odd shop adorn the curving, picturesque main street. The beach just west of the town centre is backed by **Gurzufsky Park**. The dacha of the Duc de Richelieu, governor of Odesa (1803-14), today houses the **Pushkin in Crimea Museum** (☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun, closed winter), a history museum.

Chekhov's dacha (vul Chekhova 22; ☎ Tue-Sun, closed winter), also a museum, sits close to the foot of Genoese Cliff. At the eastern end of Gurzuf's main street are the remains of a 6th- to 15th-century **cliff-top fortress**, founded by the Byzantines and rebuilt by the Genoese. A path round to the left leads through a rock tunnel to the sea-cliff edge. Beyond is a swathe of beach.

Bus 31 (every 30 to 45 minutes) links Gurzuf with Yalta's main bus station.

ALUSHTA АЛУШТА

☎ (8-)06560

Among Ukrainian and Russian tourists, Alushta is second only to Yalta in popularity, but it's hard to imagine too many Westerners staying here. Alushta's beaches are, frankly, dumpy and while there are some truly impressive 'elite' hotels and restaurants, they're laughably overpriced for the locality (see eg www.crimeanriviera.com). Organised excursions to Mt Demerdzhi (55uah) are sold by the waterfront stalls, but even those don't go every day and such trips can be bought in Yalta (75uah), too.

For those who still insist, comparatively good-value rooms can be found at the complex **Crimean Zori** (☎ 255 50, 255 02; www.crimeanzori.ru; vul Oktyabrskaya 5; dm bed \$26, economy s \$36-52, economy d \$72, other s/d from \$45/90). Some travellers rave about **Hotel Vodoley** (☎ 257 98, 8-067 780 6951; Naberezhnaya 26; s/d \$100-150) and it's true it's a lovely small collection of wooden huts on a seafront hillette. However, you'll find cheaper Crimean accommodation than this.

Trolleybus 52 (Yalta-Simferopol train station) trundles from Yalta (4uah, one hour, every 20 minutes), while 51 runs to Simferopol train station (6uah, 1½ hours, every 20 minutes).

AROUND ALUSHTA

Although the following natural attractions are closest to Alushta, they can also be visited from Yalta (on organised tours) or Simferopol (if hiking).

Mt Demerdzhi Гора Демерджи

If you don't have time to get out to eastern Crimea and the striking Kara-Dag Nature Reserve, the **Valley of the Ghosts** under Mt Demerdzhi also contains some stunning rock formations. These have been created by wind erosion of sandstone, rather than volcanic eruptions, but the freaky pillars with vaguely human features are certainly memorable.

If you get off the trolleybus at the Angarskii Pass (on the left side of the road coming from Simferopol) or Luchistoye (Лучистое) on your right, you can hike towards Mt Demerdzhi and the Dzhurla waterfall, before turning south to the valley. Two other options include taking an organised mountain-bike tour (www.mt.crimea.com) or

booking an organised excursion from a stall in Alushta (55uah) or Yalta (75uah), although the latter usually only leave on certain days. If you go by yourself, take a good topographical map. Starting from either direction, the return hike is at least a full day's trip.

Mt Chatyr-Dag Чатир-Дог

Mt Chatyr-Dag (1527m) lies west of the Alushta–Simferopol road and is renowned for the numerous caves that lie beneath it. The most famous is the **Mramorna Cave** (Marble Cave; admission 16-46uah depending on tour length; tour mandatory) and the **Eminé-Ba'ir-Khosar** (Well of Maiden Eminé; admission 16-46uah). They're not world-beating, but maybe worth seeing if you're staying longer in Crimea.

Mramorna Cave is a long, shallow cave (68m deep and nearly 2km long) full of strangely shaped stalactites and stalagmites, nicknamed after various animals, objects, fairy-tale characters and international buildings, such as the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

Eminé-Ba'ir-Khosar spirals down to 120m, with jade-like stalagmites, crystal flowers and a lake. According to legend, Eminé threw herself to the bottom of the cave after her lover was killed by her father's family.

Unless you're hiking in the region, the simplest way to reach the caves is via a day trip from one of the excursion stalls in Yalta (95uah). 'Extreme' tours of the lower level of the Mramorna Cave (three hours) are organised by **Onyx Tour** (☎ 8-065 224 5822, Russian only).

EASTERN CRIMEA

Despite possessing some outstanding natural and historical attractions, eastern Crimea has traditionally seen fewer visitors than the peninsula's west. However, that's all been changing in the last few years, with a significant buzz developing – including among Russia's *zlotaya molodezh* (gilded youth) – around hippy seaside hamlets like Koktebel and Kurortne. Many pundits believe the development accompanying this sudden inrush of tourists is already detracting from the natural beauty. So perhaps now is the time to visit, before things genuinely start to deteriorate.

SUDAK СУДАК

☎ (8-)06566 / pop 14,500

As an important stop on the Silk Road from China, Sudak was a major and well-defended

trading centre. Its central claim to fame is the fortress that survives from that era, but that's not quite all in this overcrowded resort. Just a few kilometres away lie the popular beaches of Novy Svit.

Orientation & Information

The town centre is 1.2km south of the bus station. It's another few hundred metres ahead to the beachfront *naberezhna* (promenade) and a further 2km right (west) to the fortress. There are plenty of buses (see p214) but it's easy to walk to the centre. Descend the small slope behind the main bus station building, head across the tarmac and out to the road on the left, which carries you straight downtown.

Sights & Activities

Visiting the **Kara-Dag Nature Reserve** (p217) from Sudak is feasible. Local bus routes and frequently booked-out buses do mean it's less convenient from here than from Feodosiya. However, boat trips can be arranged via your hotel or on the waterfront.

FORTRESS

Its vertiginous location is one of the major appeals of Sudak's **Genoese Fortress** (Sudak'ska Krepost; adult/child 12/5uah, still & video photography 5uah; ☎ 9am-8pm Jun-Sep, 9am-5pm Oct-May). This once impregnable complex is perched on a massive seaside cliff and in true Ukrainian fashion you're allowed to clamber all over it, at times perhaps unsafely.

Built during the 14th and 15th centuries, the fortress still cuts a magnificent silhouette. The remains of its crenulated walls (6m high and 2m thick) extend for 2km, encircling more than 30 hectares of dry sloping terrain.

Ten original towers remain. The unfenced seaside rampart from the large **Tower of St George** (uphill on the left from the main entrance) to the **Dozorna Tower** (Virgin's Tower) at the apex now only continues a precarious 100m. But that doesn't stop visitors approaching the Dozorna Tower from the other direction. For a bit of extreme sightseeing you can **rappel** down part of the mountain on a handhold rope nailed into the rock. A tame castle visit this ain't.

Every summer the fortress plays host to the medieval festival **Genoese Helmet** (adult/child 40/20uah; ☎ set days between mid-Jul and end of Aug), where you can watch actors dressed as knights fight

with swords or 'storm' the fortress on horseback. Stalls offer blacksmithing, crafts from the Middle Ages and, erm, AK-47 shooting.

NOVY SVIT

Although 7km outside Sudak, the **beach** at Novy Svit (Новий Світ; New World) is very much part of the same experience. In high season, buses and *marshrutky* wind regularly across the slightly hairy but breathtakingly gorgeous mountain road connecting Sudak with this popular satellite. Each bus is jam-packed with day-trippers coming to water-ski, jet-ski, scuba dive, hire pedalos and swim.

Whether in the high season or the more relaxed and arguably more amenable shoulder period, Novy Svit bay is generally considered to have some of the best beachfront in Crimea. And that's not just because there's sand, albeit of a greyish complexion; it's also because of its scenic setting between the 474m Mt Sokil (or Kush-Kaja in Tatar, meaning 'Falcon Mountain') to the east and the much lower Mt Orel (or Koba-Kaja, 'Eagle Mountain') on its western cape. Coastal and cypress pines only serve to improve an already beautiful picture.

To cap it off, Novy Svit is also famous for its (overly sweet) champagne. Buying a bottle of bubbly and drinking it on the beach, or in the sometimes lengthy queue for buses back to Sudak, is another favourite activity.

Once you alight at Novy Svit, most amenities are clearly signposted or easily apparent. However, it's worth knowing about the **Novy Svit Botanic Reserve** (Ботанічний Заказник Новий Світ; admission 10uah) winding around the base of Mt Orel. This path takes you on a picturesque, if rather slippery, coastal walk through a seaside grotto where local 19th-century tycoon Prince Holitsyn used to hold high-society parties. Today there's a funfair atmosphere down here, with costumes hired out for photos and a famous bungee-jump type contraption, where brave – or perhaps foolhardy? – souls swing on a rope over the mouth of the grotto for just 20uah. It's called 'the leap into the future'.

To find the entrance gate, continue towards the *naberezhna*, turn right at Café Paradise and follow the words Тропа Голицына around to the left.

Sleeping

Hotel Bastion (☎ 223 88, 945 24, 8-050 200 2710; www.hotel-bastion.info; vul Ushshakova 3 & Morskaya 36; s \$32-47, d

\$64-94, tr \$108; ☎ ☎ ☎) Spread across five buildings below the fortress, with excellent amenities and prices targeted at differing budgets, this is the hotel to book. Relatively tasteful modern rooms join an alfresco restaurant, outdoor heated pool and Jet Skis to rent. The cheapest cottage rooms in building No 2 close for winter; building No 3 usually also shuts.

Tok Gorizont (☎ 221 79; www.gorizont.biz.ua; vul Turistikoyu 8; s/d from \$45/75, ste from \$80; ☎ ☎ ☎) With its 2nd, 3rd and 4th floors renovated during 2006-07, the Gorizont now presents a sleek(ish), modern(ish) appearance in most of its rooms. Of course, its biggest draw remains its location near Sudak fortress. This place is especially popular, so try to book ahead.

Hotel Forum (☎ 338 76; www.hotel-forum.crimea.com; vul Lenina 88; standard s/d from \$57/70, superior d \$92-110; ☎ ☎ ☎) If you really must have generously sized, well-appointed bedrooms and a downtown location, book in here. However, beware that the restaurant service, mouldy bathrooms and temperamental lift are ever so slightly disappointing. It's the big concrete building opposite the town hall and the route to the *naberezhna*; the nameplate is not so visible from street level.

Also recommended:

Hotel Surozyh (☎ 211 37; surog@mail.ru; vul Lenina 75; s \$25-28, d \$44, tr \$60-105) Although slightly dowdy and ex-Soviet, this downtown hotel is well kept and tolerable.

Hotel Royal (☎ 750 375, 750 327, 8-095 429 6888, 8-095 526 0788; www.bogema.crimea.com; vul Molodezhnaya 11; d/f \$70/120; ☎ ☎) A calm and cool 27-room oasis. Massage showers, but no in-room phones.

Eating

Eating in summertime Sudak isn't about individual restaurants; it's about wandering down vul Molodezhnaya to the *naberezhna* in total amazement and then choosing. Things here are geared towards 'new Russian' tastes, with opulent dining rooms designed as theatres, OTT theme outlets, exotic Tatar tearooms and even a French patisserie turning out fresh-baked goods.

Kafe Viktoriya (cnr vuls Lenina & Spendarova; mains 6-28uah; ☎ 8am-midnight) A spot to try in winter, Viktoriya's homemade cooking turns out all the usual Russo-Ukrainian fare, including exceedingly good and popular soups.

Getting There & Away

There are frequent bus services to both Simferopol (23uah, 1¼ hours, up to 20 buses

each way daily in season) and Feodosiya (15uah, 1½ to 1¾ hours, up to 20 each way per day in season) but at the time of research there were significantly more available seats to Simferopol. So if you come to Sudak in high season and are travelling on/back to Koktebel or Feodosiya, get a ticket out of Sudak as soon as possible.

Unofficial 'taxis' will assist stranded travellers. A place in a private car will cost around 20uah to 30uah to Koktebel and 40uah to 50uah to Feodosiya, but it can take time for the driver to find other passengers. Sudak is by no means the only Ukrainian town with this set-up, but here it's particularly rapacious.

Getting Around

Any of the Sudak–Novy Svit buses (1uah to the centre, 2uah to Новий Світ) departing from the bus-station tarmac pass through the town centre to the fortress. Дачное-Уютне *marshrutky* heading to Уютне (oo-yout-nay) will also get you to the fortress.

FEODOSIYA ФЕОДОСИЯ

☎ (8)-06562 / pop 72,000

Feodosiya is to eastern Crimea what Yalta is to the peninsula's west – the good-time resort with a central location and convenient transport routes around which much else revolves. Founded by ancient Greeks, it was given the name Kaffa by the time Genoese merchants purchased it from the Mongols in the 13th century. The Crimean Khanate rebranded it as Kefe after wresting this strategic east-west trading port back from the 'interfering' Italians in the 15th century.

As Kefe, the city spent two centuries as the Black Sea's largest slave-trading centre. Today, anointed with the Russified version of its ancient Greek name (Theodosiya) it is more fondly remembered as the birthplace of leading seascape artist Ivan Aivazovsky. His works are often compared to British master JMW Turner's and fill the town's leading museum.

Orientation & Information

The main thoroughfare, pr Aivazovskogo (formerly pr Lenina), runs north to south along the seafront, becoming vul Gorkogo a little south of the train station. Vul Galereyna is the busiest cross street.

Ekma Internet Cafe (pr Aivazovskogo 9; per hour 3-6uah; ☎ 24hr in summer) Actually in the small alley leading off the prospekt on the corner of Hotel Astoria

(look for the sign to the public showers), this also offers cheap international calls.

Rentmyflatinfoedosia.com (www.rentmyflatinfoedosia.com) This private apartment for rent (see opposite) also has an informative English website, with detailed museum, restaurant and bar listings.

Sights

In the small central park just south of the train station, stop to admire the statue of **Alexander Pushkin**, which emphasises what statues in northern Russian cities often forget – the lauded poet's African heritage. A little further south you'll come to the charmingly oriental **Aivazovsky Fountain**, designed and funded by the eponymous painter during the 1887 drought.

Continue in the same direction along vul Gorkogo, turn right at the park into vul Armyanskaya (formerly vul Timiryazeva) and you'll arrive at the 14th-century Armenian **Sergiya Church** and the adjoining **Tomb of Aivazovsky** (1817–1900). The painter spent most of his life in Feodosiya, but was of Armenian descent. Feodosiya's **Genoese citadel**, back along vul Gorkogo and south as the bay curves, is outshone by the one in Sudak (p212).

No visit to Feodosiya is complete without also strolling north of the train station, among the chaotic seaside stalls.

The **Aivazovsky Museum** (☎ 309 29; vul Galereyna 2; admission adult/child 15/10uah; ☎ 10am-6pm Thu–Mon, 10am-1pm Tue, last entry 30 mins before closing) demonstrates why the local-boy-made-good is so revered, with hundreds of his paintings of breaking waves and ships. His luminescent skies draw parallels with England's Turner (who became an Aivazovsky

A POX ON ALL YOUR HOUSES

Feodosiya wasn't always the kitsch, happy-go-lucky resort it is today. In the 14th century it was at least one, if not the port through which the bubonic plague entered Europe. While still under Genoese control, 'Kaffa' was besieged by Mongol tribes newly arrived from the Asian steppes. They carried the Black Death with them, and as their warriors died they used the infected corpses as biological weapons – throwing them over the city walls into the population's midst. Many terrified Genoese fled home to Italy in 1347, from where the plague spread across Europe, eventually killing up to 50% of the continent's citizens.

fan), while his moody seas are reminiscent of Germany's Caspar David Friedrich.

Another 20-minute walk north, past elegant mansions, stands the Ottoman-style **Dacha Stamboli** (pr Aivazovskogo 47). Once home to a wealthy tobacco merchant, the building's exterior is a trifle weather-beaten, but its ornate restored interior is one of Crimea's best.

Sleeping

Rosa Vetrov (☎ 315 30; fiord06@mail.ru; vul Kuibisheva 28A; r \$30; ☎ ☎) Cute as a button and right on it, too, this private hotel's most eye-catching feature is its tiny atrium, with slit windows, oleanders, tea roses, a marble floor and curved staircase. The seven cosy bedrooms and equally snug bathrooms are well-cared-for and comfortable.

Sunflower Hotel (☎ 432 881, 8-050 769 3421; www.lidiya-hotel.com; vul Fedko 59; s/d \$25/50, extra \$10 for first night; ☎ ☎ ☎) Hotel Lidiya's cheap little sister is lovely in a Spartan sort of IKEA fashion, and there's a kitchen. Only its location is a wee bit inconvenient.

U Sestry (☎ 302 35, 353 68; vul Russkaya (formerly vul Sverdlova) 2; r \$50-56, ste from \$96; ☎) Aqua walls and brownish furniture somehow conspire to give this humble central hotel a vaguely Art Deco feel. Decent bathrooms too.

Rentmyflatinfoedosia.com (☎ 8-097 375 1552, 8-067 652 4418; www.rentmyflatinfoedosia.com; vul Revoliucionnaya 16/7; r \$70, \$50 in winter; ☎ ☎ ☎) Tastefully decorated and with its own water supply, kitchen, balcony and internet connection, the apartment has only one drawback: it's not perfectly central – and even that means less street noise. The incredibly helpful, English-speaking owners are Feodosiya's go-to people.

Hotel Lidiya (☎ 309 01, 211 11, 211 12; www.lidiya-hotel.com; vul Zemskaya (formerly vul K Libknekhta) 13; high season s/d \$70/82, winter s/d \$48/70; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Rub shoulders with Russia's gilded youth in this up-market hotel that's still quite affordable for Western tourists. Built in 2001, its rooms are a tiny bit disappointing for the price. But the swimming pool on the 3rd floor (yes, really) is fantastic and the location can't be beaten. The breakfast buffet (17uah for nonguests) is a major plus, but if eating dinner in the restaurant you might feel you're interrupting the staff's social lives.

Eating

Mercury (☎ 343 83; pr Aivazovskogo (formerly pr Lenina) 1; most mains 6-25uah, pizzas 10-33uah) Behind the Krym

Kino Teatr, this popular Tatar restaurant is just as famous for owner Sakine's ability to read your future in the grounds of your Turkish coffee as it is for its excellent cuisine. The *basturma* (pork steak) comes highly recommended and the 1kg 'Kazan kebab' (100uah) will feed four or five people.

Captain Grey Bar (Albe Parusa; ☎ 295 29, 294 92; www.a-parusa.com; pr Aivazovskogo 47B; most mains 18-56uah) While the efficient and astoundingly unsnobbish service at this luxury hotel Albe Parusa wouldn't be out of place in a leading Western capital, room prices (single/double \$88/162 in summer, \$72/116 in winter) are outrageous for Feodosiya. What is worth indulging in is a meal or coffee on this terrace restaurant. The panoramic views of the beaches, sea and town include the neighbouring Dacha Stamboli.

Getting There & Away BUS

Feodosiya has two bus stations. The main bus station, serving long-distance destinations, is 4km north of the centre. Buses go to/from Simferopol (24uah, 2½ hours), Sudak (15uah, 1¾ hours, departing hourly) and Kerch (18uah, two hours, departing hourly).

There's also a bus station downtown where *marshrutky* and smaller buses leave for nearby resorts such as Koktebel (3.50uah), the Kara-Dag биостанция (bio-station, 5uah), Ordzhonikidze (2.50uah) and Zolotoy (4uah).

Local bus 2, or indeed any *marshrutka* leaving from just outside the main outlying bus station (same side of the road), will take you into the centre.

TRAIN

Rail services are less useful, although in summer there are services to Moscow (410uah, 24 to 26 hours, two daily) and Kyiv (115uah to 145uah, 18 to 19 hours, up to four daily) running either via Kherones (five hours) and up the centre of the country, or up east via cities like Kharkiv (85uah, 12 hours). Local trains travel to Dhzankoi (four hours) from where you can change for Simferopol.

KOKTEBEL КОКТЕБЕЛЬ

☎ (8)-06562 / pop 2,500

Koktebel, whose Tatar name means 'land of the blue hills', gained a fabled reputation after it became an artists colony in the early Soviet era. Poet Maximilian Voloshin came to live on this bay beneath the anthropomorphic

SOARING ABOVE CRIMEA

The Soviet aviation and aerospace industries were born in the hills outside Koktebel, and paragliders still come here to enjoy the thermal uplifts where sea breezes meet sun-drenched, long mountain ridges and steppes beyond. In the 1920s and '30s, aircraft designers Sergey Korolyov, Sergey Ilyushin and Oleg Antonov tested gliders on the 180m-tall, 6km-long ridge of Mt Klementyeva (Uzun-Syrt in Tatar). Koktebel was initially called Planerskoye because of this (*planer* meaning 'glider' in Russian).

Today there are still paragliding, hang-gliding and speed-flying schools up here, complete with a landing strip, museum, accommodation and competitions. If you speak Russian, stalls in Feodosiya and Koktebel sell paragliding (about 180uah), gliding (360uah to 420uah) and microlight (230uah) flights, or you can contact the paragliding school **Breeze** (☎ 8-065 622 4526, 8-065 622 3071, 8-050 598 1311; zhukarin@feo.net.ua; www.breeze.crimea.ua, in Ukrainian; ☎ Apr–Nov). The mountain ridge is off the Feodosiya–Koktebel road, signposted *ролёты*.

For flights elsewhere in Crimea with an English-speaking guide, visit www.paragliding-crimea.com.

shapes of the Kara-Dag Nature Reserve, and his **home** (☎ 365 06; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun) turned into a meeting place for other literary figures like Osip Mandelstam and Maxim Gorky.

The village's boho reputation was reinforced by its naturist beach and cognac factory. In the 2003 film *Koktebel*, in which a recently unemployed aerospace engineer from Moscow and his son were trying to reach it, the village acted as a symbol of lost innocence.

How things change. Koktebel has certainly lost its own innocence recently, as rapid development has engulfed it, and the only constant remaining is its reputation as St-Petersburg-on-sea. But today's holidaying Petersburgers aren't intellectuals and aesthetes; they're mainstream university students wearing Turkish skullcaps and carrying guitars (the guys) or headscarves and shorts (the gals) who've come to partake of the chaotic assortment of bars, shops and stalls along the crowded waterfront. This once quiet village now boasts Jet Skis and even a ruddy great 'Aquapark' with multi-coloured slides like liquorice.

Still, it's worth coming to Koktebel on a day trip or overnight stay just to see what the fuss is about. Every September the village hosts the **Koktebel International Jazz Festival** (<http://jazz.koktebel.info>) and in the off season the village reverts to being the relaxing idyll it once was.

On the eastern (clothes-optional) end of the beach there's a popular tent city, although you're using public toilets and bathing in the sea here. Locals everywhere offer accommodation (*zhilyo, жильё*).

There are several overpriced hotels, but one good-value establishment is the charming **Talisman Hotel** (☎ 244 76, 244 80; vul Lenina 97; high season s/d from \$56, superior d \$70, winter s/d \$12/24, superior d \$36; P), just around the corner from all the chaos and overlooking the Kara-Dag foothills. Looking like a large Turkish tent is the pleasant blue-roofed **As-El** (☎ 8-050 497 6735; <http://as-el.com.ua>; vul Lenina 127; r \$56–96; ☎ May–Sep; P ☎). The cheapest rooms don't have air-con.

The best way to reach Koktebel from Feodosiya is either a *marshrutka* to the resort itself (3.50uah) or to the Kara-Dag bio-station (биостанция; 5uah). Both leave every 10 to 15 minutes from the central Feodosiya bus station in summer and when they're full in winter. Larger buses travelling between Feodosiya and Sudak also stop in Koktebel (5uah) but these services, from the main, outlying bus station, leave less often. In summer it's hard to get a seat on them, too.

KURORTNE КУРОРТНОЕ

☎ (8-)06562

Tiny and remote Kurortne is where hardcore travellers now head, although it already boasts a modern resort complex. Construction continues apace – possibly at an alarming pace – in this hamlet below the striking rock formations of the Kara-Dag Nature Reserve.

One of Kurortne's most popular attractions remains the nearby **Lissya Bukhta** (Fox Bay). For the full libertarian experience, you can pitch a tent at this sandy beach about a 2.5km walk west from Kurortne. Clothing is optional here and the place is isolated. See www.blacksea-crimea.com/places.html for a fuller description.

The relatively new tourist complex **Krimsky Prymore** (☎ 262 18, 262 20, 262 22; a-ledenev@mail.ru; vul Moskva 1; standard s \$25–35, standard d \$45–60; ☎ ☎) is like a tiny village in itself, with space for 500 guests in 300 well-equipped rooms, plus doctor, cinema, tennis courts and swimming pool.

The easiest way to reach Kurortne is on a биостанция (bio-station) *marshrutka* (6uah). These travel from the downtown Feodosiya bus station via Koktebel to central Kurortne (5uah), before continuing to the Kara-Dag Nature Reserve.

KARA-DAG NATURE RESERVE КАРА-ДАГ ЗАПОВІДНИК

☎ (8-)06562

The Kara-Dag Nature Reserve is a true Jurassic park. Its dramatic landscape is the work of an extinct volcano (Kara-Dag, or 'Black Mountain' in Tatar) that spewed lava and debris over land and sea during the Jurassic period. Over millennia, the elements have moulded the volcanic rocks into striking shapes, with names like 'The Devil's Finger', 'The King and the Earth', and the most striking, 'Golden Gate' (*Zolote Vorota*), a freestanding arch in the sea. These all circle the 575m craggy Mt Kara-Dag; the friends of Koktebel-based poet Maximilian Voloshin used to tell him he looked like it!

The area is also full of many rare minerals and crystals, as well as lots of flora and fauna. You could see cormorants, eagles and storks, and walk past pistachio, pine and juniper trees.

The Kara-Dag Nature Reserve **bio-station** (☎ 262 87; ☎ 9am–8pm Wed–Mon, May–Sep) is on the outskirts of Kurortne hamlet. Anyone is free to visit the aquarium, dolphinarium and bo-

tanian gardens, but for environmental reasons you're not allowed on the main part of Kara-Dag territory without a guide.

The park administration usually offers two group hikes a day (except on Tuesdays), which cover 7km and last four hours (30uah per adult, 15uah per child). It's sometimes easiest to buy these hikes via the many 'excursion' stalls in Feodosiya. They cost 70uah this way, but include bus transport to and from the reserve and automatically attach you to a group. You'll need to bone up on a little Russian (ie the days of the week) to buy one of these tickets. Naturally, the tour commentary is in Russian, but the otherworldly landscape speaks for itself.

An alternative is a boat trip around the Kara-Dag coast from Feodosiya. These are also sold by excursion stalls for 70uah or from the port administration stall opposite the Feodosiya train station. Services depart from pier one.

The three to four-hour journey on the deck of a tug-sized ship doesn't get as up close and personal to the reserve as a hike. However, it's less strenuous and your boat does sail through the arch of the lava-formed Golden Gate. Bring your swimming costume for one of the most pleasant dips in Crimea, when the boat stops for 20 to 30 minutes in a deep, clean stretch of the Black Sea.

In very hot weather the Kara-Dag administration may cancel all hikes and then a boat trip is the only option.

KERCH КЕРЧЬ

☎ (8-)06561 / pop 151,000

Although on a clear day you can just about see Russia from the top of Kerch's Mithridates

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK: TSARSKÉ KURGAN & ENI-KALE

Two of Kerch's most talked-about attractions are actually out in the boondocks and require genuine interest and tenacity. **Tsarske Kurgan** (☎ 547 13; ☎ 9am–6pm Tue–Sun) is an empty 4th-century BC burial mound, thought to be the grave of a Bosphoran king. Its exterior is typically Scythian but its symmetrical interior was built by Greeks. To get here, catch the hourly bus 4 to the stop 'Muzei', walk back past this obviously Soviet 'Underground Museum of the Defence of the Adzhimushkai Quarries', down the dirt track (vul Skifskaya) under the buzzing electricity pylons, and past the rubbish dump and savage baying dogs. Veer left before the rail tracks and follow the track around. Leave yourself *plenty* of time, and if in doubt ask at the museum or one of the local homes. You're looking for a fairly anatomical slit in a hill – when you see it, you'll know what we mean.

The Turkish fort of **Eni-Kale** looks great in photos, with its four pointed capsule-like turrets. But be warned: it's slightly more unassuming in real life. To get here, catch *marshrutka* 1 to Стройгородок and change to a *marshrutka* 24.

Buying a city map will help in both instances.

Hill, this industrial port still feels like the end of the road. Of course, for travellers without Russian visas it literally is. Even those on-wards bound might decide that, for all its seafaring ways, the city feels quite insular and provincial. The wave of change that has been sweeping through much of Ukraine recently is only now lapping at its feet.

Frankly, most visitors will come out of necessity rather than curiosity. However, Kerch, stuck out on a 100km limb from Feodosiya, is one of Ukraine's oldest cities. As the ancient Greek colony of Panticapaeum, it was capital of Bosphoran Kingdom from the 6th to 7th centuries BC. So inevitably it contains some interesting sights, although much of its gold treasures have ended up in St Petersburg's Hermitage Museum. The oil spill that made global headlines in late 2007 occurred on the Russian side of the strait (see p61.)

Sights

The first thing to do in Kerch is to take the 432 stairs up the central Mithridates Hill – even if you have to pick your way through the broken beer bottles that litter every single one of those steps. The view from the summit is brilliant, and on the leeward side the ruins of the ancient city of Panticapaeum have been revealed in an ongoing archaeological dig. (Be careful coming back down the stairs, especially at the prime viewing time of dusk, as a crucial railing is missing.)

Also in the centre is the faded but still candy-striped **Church of St John the Baptist** (pl Lenina). Dating back to 717, this Byzantine building is Ukraine's oldest surviving church.

Sleeping & Eating

Hostel Kerch-Efsane (☎ 8-067 398 7888; www.hihostels.com.ua; vul Kolkhoznaya 70; dm \$5-7, d/f \$40/50; 📍) Nowhere near as central as the hostel website might lead you to believe, this is an old Soviet 'pensionat' repositioning itself as a hostel. Go to www.efsane-kerch.com and click on фотоальбом for pictures.

Hotel Meridian (☎ 615 07; avers@kerch.com.ua; vul Marata 9, cnr Sverdlova; beds in 'blok' dm from \$10, s/d from \$32/42; 📍) Although far from perfect, this is easily the best choice for most Westerners. Never mind that its café seems permanently shut and its restaurant keeps strange hours. It's a hard-to-miss high-rise not too far from

FROM KERCH TO RUSSIA

Regular ferries travel from Kerch's **Port Krym** (☎ 695 88; adult/child 24/12uah, car 115-200uah; 35 mins) to the Kafkaz Port in Russia's southern Krasnodar region. There are eight services a day in summer; six in winter (see p258 for more details). *Marshrutka* No 1 gets you from Kerch's bus station to the port in about 45 minutes.

the centre with plenty of modern, clean and well-priced rooms. There's also a good supermarket in the same building. Take *marshrutka* 3, 5, 6, 19 or 20 to the Bosforsky stop.

Café Uyoot (☎ 200 84; vul Lenina 42; most mains 18-42uah) Acquaint yourself with one of Kerch's main eating avenues in this popular casual café. Fish dishes seem to be popular choices and its calamari with fried onions is delicious.

Chai Dom (☎ 216 67; vul Teatralnaya 42; ☎ 10am-10pm Tue-Sun, noon-10pm Mon) This charming tearoom, located in another nice stretch of restaurants, is good for beverages, hookah pipes and snacks like fruit salads and blinis. At times, however, the sulky-teenager service is laughable.

Getting There & Around

The most useful bus connections are to Feodosiya (18uah, two hours, departing hourly), Sudak (23uah, 3½ hours, one daily) and Simferopol (52uah, 4¾ hours, at least hourly in summer), although there are services to most other Crimean destinations. Odesa-Krasnodar and Yalta-Novorossiysk buses also pass through to/from Russia.

Kerch's small train station is a lot quieter than its bus station, with services including a snail-like overnight train to Simferopol (46uah, nine hours) and trains to Dzhankoi (six hours), from where you can change to Simferopol. Summer trains also head to Moscow (from 410uah, 32 hours, every second day) and Kiev (110uah to 145uah, 20 hours, daily).

Marshrutka 5 is the most frequent of many services between the bus station and the centre, leaving whenever full. *Marshrutka* 16 is just one of several routes between the bus and train stations.

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