# History

Although their northern neighbours disparagingly refer to Ukrainians as 'little Russians', it was Ukraine that was home to the first eastern Slavic state. So historically Ukraine is the birthplace of Russia rather than vice versa. Another irony is that this initial state, Kyivan Rus, was founded in the 9th century by neither Russians nor Ukrainians, but by Vikings – an indication of just how much foreigners have meddled in the region's convoluted history.

Invaded by Mongols from the east, encroached upon by Poland and Lithuania from the west and requisitioned by Russia from the north, Ukraine's national culture was principally forged in the wild, Cossack-held steppes in the middle. The baton of nationalism was taken up again in the 19th century by western Ukrainians under Austro-Hungarian rule, but it took the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union for a centuries-old dream of an independent state to be realised.

For an easy-to-absorb, chronological listing of Ukrainian events from the 9th century to the 20th, set alongside those in the rest of the world, head to www.brama.com/ukraine/history.

## CIMMERIANS TO KHAZARS

Before Kyivan Rus, Ukraine's prehistory is tribal. First came the Cimmerians in the 12th century BC. Then, fierce warrior Scythians from Central Asia settled the steppe in the 7th century BC, while Greeks from western Asia Minor established city-states around the Black Sea. The two groups formed a symbiotic relationship. The famous gold work found in Scythian tombs is believed to have been commissioned from Greek artisans; a fine collection is found in Kyiv's Kievo-Pecherska Lavra (Caves Monastery, p75).

Orest Subtelny's 700-page *Ukraine, A History* is widely considered the definitive work on the subject, narrowly edging out Paul Magosci's equally long *History of Ukraine*. Both end in the 1990s.

Successive waves of nomadic invaders (Sarmatians from the east, Germanic Ostrogoths from northern Poland and Huns from Mongolia) continued to sweep into Ukraine. However, the Slavs, thought to originate from near the borders of present-day Poland, Belarus and northwestern Ukraine, remained untouched by these invasions. Turkic-Iranian Khazars from the Caucasus were probably the first to bring the Slavs under subjugation, in the 8th century AD.

## KYIVAN RUS

Meanwhile, Scandinavians – known as Varangians or Rus to the Slavs – had been exploring, trading and setting up small states east of the Baltic since the 6th century AD. Travelling south from the Rus power centre of Novgorod (near modern-day St Petersburg) in 879, King Oleh stopped just long enough to declare himself ruler of Kyiv. The city handily lay between Novgorod and Constantinople on the Dnipro River, and under Oleh's urging it became capital of a huge, unified Rus state. At its largest, under the rule of Volodymyr the Great (978–1015), this empire stretched from the Volga to the Danube and

### TIMELINE

**482**

One of Eastern Europe's oldest settlements, Kyiv's origins aren't historically crystal-clear. But as with Rome, legend has stepped in, claiming that Slavic brothers Ky, Shchek and Khoriv and their sister Lybid founded the Ukrainian capital.

**879**

Powerful Nordic King Oleh travels to Kyiv. Liking its strategic position on the Dnipro between Scandinavia and Constantinople, he wrests control of it from his own emissaries Askold and Dir – by killing them.

**989**

With Kyivan Rus now established as the first eastern Slavic state, Volodymyr the Great decides it will adopt Orthodox Christianity. A mass baptism in the Dnipro River seals this early pro-European decision.

Neal Ascherson's *Black Sea* is a fascinating tale of the civilisations – and barbarians – that jostled for supremacy around this coast, from prehistory's Scythians to multicultural Odesa's 19th-century founders.

to the Baltic, its prosperity based on trade along the Dnipro. Despite Nordic rule, the territory's underlying culture remained essentially Slavic.

As well as consolidating Rus territory, Volodymyr firmly established Orthodox Christianity as the pre-eminent religion. By accepting baptism in 989 and marrying the Byzantine emperor's daughter (at Khersones outside Sevastopol), he opened the door to Byzantine artistic influences and cast Kyivan Rus as a European, rather than Islamic Asian, state. St Sofia's Cathedral (p70) in Kyiv is still testament to Kyivan Rus' greatness and the importance of Orthodox Christianity within the state.

After the death of Kyivan Rus's last great ruler, Yaroslav the Wise, in 1054, the empire began disintegrating into separate princedoms. When Mongol warriors sacked Kyiv in 1240, it largely ceased to exist. According to Russian and Western historians, who believe present-day Russia, Ukraine and Belarus all stem from Kyivan Rus, the centres of power then simply shifted north and west, with Russia evolving from the northern princedoms of Novgorod and Vladimir-Suzdal. Some Ukrainian historians, however, prefer to treat Russia as a distinct civilisation – emanating from and returning to Novgorod after 1240.

## MONGOLS, TATARS & TURKS

The web page www.tatarworld.com/history.htm provides a quick primer on the complicated history of the Crimean Tatar people.

The Mongol invasion that sounded the death knell for Kyivan Rus in 1240 was led by Genghis Khan's grandson Batu. As a result of his handiwork, a large swathe of the Rus empire was subsumed into the so-called Golden Horde ('horde' meaning region) of the Mongol empire. This encompassed much of eastern and southern Ukraine, along with parts of European Russia and Siberia, with the city of Sarai, on the Volga, as its capital.

Over time, Mongol leaders were gradually replaced by their Tatar colleagues and descendants, and when the horde began to disintegrate in the 15th century, it divided into several smaller khanates.

One of these – the Crimean Khanate – eventually became a client state of the Constantinople-based Ottoman Turk Empire in 1475. The Crimean Tatars, as the people of the khanate were known, made frequent slave raids into Ukrainian, Russian and Polish territory until the 18th century. When Russia overran Crimea in 1783, it retaliated. The Tatars suffered dreadfully and often have ever since. Reminders of their once-powerful civilisation can be seen in Bakhchysaray (p193), which is finally becoming resurgent in the 21st century.

## GALICIA-VOLYNIA

Meanwhile, from 1199 under the rule of Prince Roman Mstyslavych, the region of Galicia-Volynia (most of present-day western, central and northern Ukraine, plus parts of northeastern Poland and southern Belarus) became one of the most powerful within Kyivan Rus. This enclave's geography differentiated it from the rest of the empire. It was far enough west to avoid conquest by eastern invaders like the Mongols and more likely to fall prey to its Catholic neighbours Hungary and Poland – or, later, Lithuania. More densely populated than any other part of Kyivan Rus, it developed a rich agricultural society.

Until 1340 Galicia-Volynia (also called Halych-Volhynia) enjoyed independent rule under Roman, his son Danylo, grandson Lev and descendants, who kept the Mongols at bay and helped Lviv and other cities to flourish. Political control was wrested from this local dynasty by the Poles and Lithuanians in the 1340s, who split the kingdom between them and used it as a base to expand eastwards into other areas of Ukraine, including Kyiv. However, its brief period of early self-determination seems to have left Galicia-Volynia with a particularly strong taste for Ukrainian nationalism, which is still evident.



## COSSACKS

A letter by Ukrainian Cossacks has been called 'the world's most defiant'. When the Turkish Sultan demanded they accept his authority in the 1660s, they resoundingly answered 'no' – or so the story goes.

Later lionised – perhaps overoptimistically – by nationalist writers such as Taras Shevchenko and Ivan Franko, the Cossacks are central to the country's identity. They arose out of the steppe in the country's sparsely populated mid-south. In the mid-15th century, it was a kind of no-man's-land separating the Polish-Lithuanian settlements in the northwest from the Tatars in Crimea.

However, the steppe offered abundant natural wealth, and poorer individuals in Polish-Lithuanian society began making longer forays south to hunt or forage for food. The area also attracted runaway serfs, criminals, bandits and Orthodox refugees. Along with a few semi-independent Tatar bands, the hard-drinking inhabitants formed self-governing militaristic communities and became known as *kozaky* (Cossacks in English), from a Turkic word meaning 'outlaw, adventurer or free person'. The people elected the ruling chieftain (hetman). The most famous group of Cossacks was based below the rapids *(za porozhy)* on the lower Dnipro, in a fortified island community called the Zaporizhska Sich (see p232).

Although officially under Polish-Lithuanian rule from 1569, and sometimes joining the commonwealth army as mercenaries, the Cossacks were largely left to their own devices. They waged a number of successful campaigns against the Turks and Tatars, twice assaulting Istanbul (in 1615 and 1620) and sacking the Black Sea cities of Varna (in today's Bulgaria) and Kaffa (modern-day Feodosiya). While millions of peasants in the Polish-Lithuanian state joined the Uniate Church (see p39), the Cossacks remained Orthodox.

Roxelana, the powerful wife of Ottoman emperor Suleyman the Magnificent, was originally a Ukrainian slave from near Lviv, who was sold at Kaffa (today's Feodosiya) and taken to 16th-century Turkey.

As Poland tried to tighten its control in the 17th century, there were Cossack-led uprisings to try to win greater autonomy. In 1654 the Cossacks formed their own so-called Hetmanate to assert the concept of Ukrainian self-determination. While initially successful, ultimately the Cossacks' military

**1199**

West of Kyiv, Prince Roman Mstyslavych merges the densely populated regions of Galicia (aka Halych) and Volynia into one Grand Duchy. Although landowners continue to rebel against his rule, a thriving agricultural society emerges.

**1240**

A pivotal moment in Kyivan Rus history is reached, as Mongols sack the capital city. The already fragmented empire's eastern regions are absorbed into the Mongolian Golden Horde. Many Kyivans flee to the Carpathians.

**1349**

Ukrainian territory comes under attack from the opposite direction, as Poland overruns the region of Galicia and its capital Lviv. Nearly 40 years later, Poland teams up with Lithuania as they both inch further eastwards.

**1475**

The Crimean Khanate, which succeeded the Mongolian Golden Horde in 1428, becomes a client state of the Ottoman Empire and remains so until 1772. During this era, Crimean Tatars frequently take slaves from mainland Ukraine.

**1554**

Some 60 years after rampaging Cossacks first appear in the historical record, the fiercest and most famous band of warriors – the Zaporizhzhya Sich – sets up on an island in the Dnipro River rapids.

**1569**

The Union of Lublin builds on existing links to establish the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This powerful monarchical democracy also includes swathes of Belarusian, Estonian, Latvian, Russian and Ukrainian territory.

**PARADISE LOST**

To avoid offending Ukrainians, one should never say out loud that one of their country's greatest heroes ultimately led it to defeat. Unfortunately, it is at least partly true. The hero in question is the Cossack Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky, who led a huge rebellion against the Poles in 1648. Aided by Tatar cavalry, the Cossacks destroyed the Polish army at the Battle of Pyliavtsi (near present-day Khmelnytsky). Storming past Lviv, Khmelnytsky was poised for an invasion of Poland, but decided to accept an armistice and returned triumphantly to Kyiv. The following year, at another battle against Polish King Casimir, near Zboriv, Khmelnytsky was betrayed by his Tatar allies and forced to sign an armistice. A further forced armistice in 1651 made Khmelnytsky finally realise that foreign support was necessary for a decisive victory over the Poles. He signed a military alliance with Russia in 1654, which eventually also betrayed him.

Instead of supporting the Cossacks, Russia went into battle against Poland in 1660 for control of Ukraine. In 1667 and 1668 the two powers signed treaties carving up the country between them. Russia got control over Kyiv and northern Ukraine east of the Dnipro. The Poles kept territory to the west of the river.

Later, Hetman Ivan Mazepa, aiming to unite Polish- and Russian-dominated Ukraine, allied with Sweden against Russia's Peter the Great but was beaten at Poltava (1709). After victories against the Ottomans, Catherine the Great destroyed the Cossack Sich at Zaporizhzhya in 1775.

Bohdan Khmelnytsky, though, is still revered for his initial storming victory against the Poles. He's remembered not as a man who hesitated, but as one who was fatally betrayed.

uprisings only led to a change of overlord – from Polish to Russian (see the boxed text, above).

## RUSSIAN CONTROL

Without Ukraine and its abundant natural wealth, Russia never would have been such a powerful player. It also offered access to the Black Sea, so after a series of wars with the Turks in the 18th century, Russia was keen to expand into southern Ukraine. Catherine the Great led the charge to colonise and 'Russify'. In 1775, the same year she destroyed the Zaporizhska Sich, she annexed the region to the imperial province of 'New Russia' and charged governor Grygory Potemkin with attracting settlers and founding new cities. Potemkin helped establish today's Dnipropetrovsk, Sevastopol and Simferopol, but died before Odesa was completed.

Terry Brighton's *Hell Riders: The True Story of the Charge of the Light Brigade* interweaves participants' accounts and factual reports to unravel the Crimean War's greatest blunder.

In 1772 powerful Prussia, Austria and Russia decided to carve up Poland. Under the resulting Partitions of Poland (1772–95), most of western Ukraine was handed to Russia, but the far west around Lviv went to the Austrian Habsburg empire. The Ukrainian nationalist movement was born in Kyiv in the 1840s, but when the tsarist authorities there banned the Ukrainian language from official use in 1876, the movement's focus shifted to Austrian-controlled Lviv.



## CIVIL WAR

Following WWI and the collapse of the tsarist monarchy, Ukraine had a shot at independence, but the international community was unsupportive and none of the bewildering array of factions could win decisive backing. In Kyiv, the first autonomous Ukrainian National Republic (UNR) was proclaimed in 1918 under president Mykhailo Hrushevsky. Meanwhile, Russian Bolsheviks set up a rival Congress of Soviets in Kharkiv. Civil war broke out, with five different armies – Red (Bolshevik), White, Polish, Ukrainian and Allied – vying for power, while various anarchist bands of Cossacks (the most famous led by Nestor Makhno) roamed the land. Author Mikhail Bulgakov estimated that Kyiv changed hands 14 times in 18 months.

Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *The White Guard* enlivens the confusion reigning in Kyiv during the 1918 Civil War – and better explains the competing factions than most history books do.

Just as any UNR victories in Kyiv proved short-lived, so too did the West Ukrainian National Republic (ZUNR) in Lviv. Proclaimed in October 1918, it was overrun by Polish troops the following summer. Under the 1919 Treaty of Versailles negotiated after WWI and the following Treaty of Riga in 1921, Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia took portions of western Ukraine, while Soviet forces were given control of the rest. Nationalist leader Semyon Petlyura set up a government in exile, but was assassinated in Paris in 1926.

## SOVIET POWER

Thus handed to the Soviets, Ukraine was at the founding of the USSR in 1922. Behind Russia, it was the second largest and second most powerful republic in the union, but despite – or perhaps because of – that 'little brother' status, it came in for some particularly harsh bullying from the top. When Stalin took power in 1927, he looked upon Ukraine as a laboratory for testing Soviet restructuring while stamping out 'harmful' nationalism. In 1932–33 he oversaw a famine (see the boxed text, p30). Executions and deportations of intellectuals and political 'dissidents' followed, along with the destruction of numerous Ukrainian palaces, churches and cemeteries. During the great purges of 1937–39, an estimated one million people in the USSR were executed and a further three to 12 million (the numbers are difficult to quantify) sent to labour camps, a high proportion of them from Ukraine.

When a language census was taken in cosmopolitan Odesa in 1897, nearly a third of the population named their mother tongue as Yiddish.

## WWII

Even by the standards of Ukrainian history, WWII was a particularly bloody and fratricidal period. Caught between Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany and an ongoing struggle for independence, some six to eight million Ukrainians, at least 2½ million of them Jews, were killed. Entire cities were ruined. The Red Army rolled into Polish Ukraine in September 1939, the Germans attacked in 1941, and the Nazis and their Romanian allies occupied most of the country for more than two years. Two million Ukrainians were conscripted into the Soviet army and fought on the Russian side. However, some nationalists hoped the Nazis would back Ukrainian independence and collaborated with

The 'Ukrainian Katyn' (mass grave) was revealed globally in 2007, when authorities reburied 2000 victims of the Soviet Secret Police (NKVD). The deaths at Bykovyna, near Kyiv, occurred in the 1930s and '40s.

**1648**

Central Ukrainian Cossacks decide they're fed up with foreign rule and rebel against the Poles. The move backfires. Twenty-two years later, after various skirmishes and treaties, the Cossacks find themselves asking for Russian protection.

**1709**

Cossacks seize another chance to throw off the colonial yoke, by joining Sweden in its 'Northern War' with Russia. But the Battle of Poltava doesn't go their way and victorious Tsarist forces execute them.

**1772**

What a carve-up! Under the three Partitions of Poland, Russia, Prussia and Habsburg Austria divvy up the weakened Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Austria gets Galicia around Lviv and eventually Bukovyna near Chernivtsi.

**1775**

As her army moves south, and her lover Grygory Potemkin follows, blithely building film-set villages, Russian empress Catherine the Great successfully orders the destruction of the Cossack settlement at Zaporizhzhya.

**1783**

Russia reaches the prized Crimean peninsula and establishes her sovereignty by demolishing mosques. Many Crimean Tatars flee. The Khans' Palace at Bakhchysaray survives because Empress Catherine finds it 'romantic'.

**1854**

France and England have been watching Russia's moves towards the Black Sea and Mediterranean with unease and decide to put a stop to it. During the resulting Crimea War, Sevastopol comes under 349 days' siege.

### EUROPE'S HIDDEN HOLOCAUST

Between 1932 and 1933, some three to five million citizens of Ukraine – 'Europe's breadbasket' – died of starvation while surrounded by fields of wheat and locked government storehouses full of food. How did this happen? Stalin collectivised Soviet farms and ordered the production of unrealistic quotas of grain, which was then confiscated.

Many historians believe this famine was part of the Soviet leadership's wider plan to solve the 'nationality problem' within several troublesome republics, especially Ukraine. Undoubtedly the agricultural collectivisation of the time was ideologically driven. However, as the USSR's leading farmlands, Ukraine was particularly hard-hit, and documents released in 2006 suggest that Ukrainians were deliberately targeted in the 'Great Hunger'. For example, Ukraine's borders were reportedly shut to prevent its people leaving.

A total of seven to 10 million people died throughout the USSR. (It's difficult to quantify, partly because those who took the next census were, in Stalin's inimitable style, immediately ordered shot.) Yet the true scale of the disaster has rarely been appreciated in the West.

As Soviet collectivisation began in the 1930s, combining individual farms into huge state-run communes (kolkhozes, or *kolhospy* in Ukrainian), wealthier peasants (kulaks, or *kurkuli* in Ukrainian) who resisted were deported or starved into submission. By 1932, Communist Party activists were seizing grain and produce from collectives and houses. Watchtowers were erected above fields. Anyone caught stealing was executed or deported. As entire villages starved, people committed suicide and even resorted to cannibalism.

At the time Soviet authorities denied the famine's existence, but damning facts have emerged since Ukrainian independence. In 2003 Kyiv designated the Holodomor, or Ukrainian famine, as genocide, and a handful of other governments followed suit. In 2005 president Viktor Yushchenko declared 26 November as official Holodomor remembrance day, and called on the international community to recognise the famine as genocide. Critics, however, continue to argue that the famine was aimed at certain social, rather than ethnic, groups. And Russia remains firmly opposed to any 'genocide' description.

Germany. This was a source of much post-war recrimination, but many partisans in the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) fought both German and Russian troops in a bid for an independent state. The catacombs just outside Odesa (p181) sheltered a celebrated group of partisans.

In the end the Soviet army prevailed. In 1943 it retook Kharkiv and Kyiv – the latter on 6 November, now a national holiday – before launching a massive offensive in early 1944 that pushed back German forces. In the process any hopes for an independent Ukraine were obliterated. Soviet leader Stalin also saw fit to deport millions of Ukrainians or send them to Siberia for supposed 'disloyalty or collaboration'. This included the entire population of Crimean Tatars in May 1944.

Towards the war's end, in February 1945, Stalin met with British and US leaders Churchill and Roosevelt at Yalta's Livadia Palace (p209) to discuss



the administration of post-war Europe, among other things. The fact that the Red Army occupied so much of Eastern Europe at the end of WWII helped the USSR hold onto it in the post-war period.

## POST-WAR PERIOD

For most, WWII ended in 1945. The Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) continued a guerrilla existence well into the 1950s, taking pot shots at the Soviet authorities, especially in the Carpathian region. A government in exile was led by former partisan Stepan Bandera, until he was assassinated in Munich in 1959.

Elsewhere, Ukraine rapidly developed into an important cog in the Soviet machine. Eastern regions became highly industrialised, with coal and iron-ore mining around Donetsk, arms and missile industries in Dnipropetrovsk, and Dniproges, a huge hydroelectric dam near Zaporizhzhya (p233).

While Ukraine acquired strategic technological and military importance during this era, at least one Ukrainian rose to become Soviet leader. Leonid Brezhnev graduated from metallurgy engineer to Communist Party General Secretary from 1964 to 1982. Brezhnev's predecessor, Nikita Krushchev (Soviet leader from 1953 to 1964) was born just outside Ukraine but lived there from adolescence and styled himself as a Ukrainian. Khrushchev's post-Stalin reformist agenda led him to create the Autonomous Crimean Soviet Socialist Republic in 1954, and transfer legislative control over the peninsula to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

*New York Times* journalist Walter Durranty is a controversial Pulitzer Prize winner because he covered up the Ukrainian famine when reporting from the 1930s USSR.

## NATIONALISM REAPPEARS

The brave new world of Soviet high tech was cruelly exposed by the nuclear disaster at the power plant Chornobyl (Chernobyl in Russian, see p61) on 26 April 1986. Ukrainians weren't just killed, injured and appalled by the radioactive material that spewed over their countryside, but also by the way the authorities attempted to cover up the accident. The first Kremlin announcement wasn't made until two days after the event – and only then at the prompting of Swedish authorities, who detected abnormal radiation levels over their own country.

As more information came to light, discontent over Moscow's handling of the Chornobyl disaster revived nationalist feeling. Ukrainian independence had become a minority interest, mainly confined to the country's west, but slowly, the hard-core in the West started to take the rest of Ukraine along with them. In 1988 marches rocked Lviv, and the Uniate Church, banned by Stalin in 1946, emerged from the underground as a pro-independence lobby. In 1989 the opposition movement Rukh (Ukrainian People's Movement for Restructuring) was established. By 1990 protest marches and hunger strikes had spread to Kyiv.

It was historian Robert Conquest's *Harvest of Sorrow* (1986) that first brought the 1932-33 Soviet famine to Western attention. Well researched and detailed, it still makes for shocking reading.

**1876**

With a new Ukrainian nationalist movement bubbling up since the 1840s, Tsar Alexander II issues his *Ems Ukaz* (a decree) banning the use of the Ukrainian language in printed works, plays or public lectures.

**1918**

In the chaotic aftermath of WWI, Ukrainians try to form an independent republic but are hamstrung by internecine fighting. Fourteen different factions control Kyiv in 18 months. Four years later the Soviets barge in.

**1932–33**

Millions of Ukrainians die in a famine engineered by Stalin. Some historians believe farm collectivisation not only hit rural Ukraine hard, but that other grain-grabbing, border-closing measures deliberately targeted its people.

**1941**

During WWII, Ukraine becomes a bloody battleground for opposing Nazi, Soviet and nationalist forces and some six million locals fall victim. The death toll includes almost all of Ukraine's then 1½ million Jews.

**1943**

The Red Army liberates Kyiv from the Nazis on 6 November. Earlier, retreating Soviets had dynamited buildings along the main street of Khreshchatyk, meaning these had to be replaced post-war with today's Stalinist architecture.

**1944**

Stalin deports the entire 250,000-strong Crimean Tatar population in just a few days, beginning on 18 May. He accuses them of 'Nazi collaboration'. Thousands die during this genocidal journey of 'Sürgün'.

## INDEPENDENT UKRAINE

With the nationalist movement bubbling up and the USSR disintegrating, many politicians within the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU) saw the writing on the wall. After the Soviet counter-coup in Moscow in August 1991 failed, they decided that if they didn't take their country to independence, the opposition would. So, on 24 August 1991, the Verkhovna Rada (Supreme Council) met, with speaker Stanyslav Hurenko's wonderfully pithy announcement recorded by the *Economist* for posterity: 'Today we will vote for Ukrainian independence, because if we don't we're in the shit.' In December some 84% of the population voted in a referendum to back that pragmatic decision, and former CPU chairman Leonid Kravchuk was elected president.

As the new republic found its feet, there were more than the usual separation traumas from Russia. Disagreements and tensions arose, particularly over ownership of the Black Sea Fleet harboured in the Crimean port of Sevastopol. These were only resolved in 1999 by offering Russia a lease until 2017.

Economic crisis forced Kravchuk's government to resign in September 1992. Leonid Kuchma, a pro-Russian reformer, came to power in July 1994 and stayed for 10 years.

During Kuchma's tenure, the economy did improve. Today's relatively stable hryvnia was introduced and inflation was brought down from a spiralling 10,000% in 1993 to 5.2% in 2004, by which time GDP was growing at a rate of 9%. Kuchma's reign is also remembered for its extreme cronyism. Foreign investors complained that companies being privatised were frequently sold to Ukrainian ventures with presidential connections, sometimes for well under market value, and international watchdog Transparency International named Ukraine the world's third most-corrupt country.

One major scandal surrounded the mysterious beheading of campaigning opposition journalist Georgiy Gongadze in 2000. Kuchma was widely rumoured to have ordered the killing. Although this was never proved, Gongadze became a posthumous cause célèbre.

Svetlana Alexievich's masterful and heart-wrenching *Voices from Chernobyl* conveys more than any guided tour ever could, by telling the stories of people there in 1986. Essential reading before visiting the Chornobyl exclusion zone.

Leading 20th-century artist Joseph Beuys was rescued by Crimean Tatars when he crash-landed on the peninsula during WWII, and his oeuvre of sleds, felt and honey recalls their healing methods.

Aleksei Stakhanov, whose name now represents near-impossible work achievements, was a miner near Donetsk. This 'hero of labour' extracted record (now contested) amounts of coal during 1930s shifts.

## THE ORANGE REVOLUTION

Former central banker Viktor Yushchenko had proved too reformist and pro-European for his masters when he was Leonid Kuchma's prime minister from 1998 to 2001. However, in 2004 as Kuchma prepared to stand down, Yushchenko re-emerged as a strong presidential contender.

Kuchma's anointed successor, the Kremlin-friendly Viktor Yanukovych, had expected an easy victory and the popularity of Yushchenko's Nasha Ukraina (Our Ukraine) party looked threatening. During an increasingly bitter campaign, and seven weeks before the scheduled 31 October election, Yushchenko underwent a remarkable physical transformation – disfiguration that Austrian doctors later confirmed was the result of dioxin poisoning.

After an inconclusive first round, a second vote was held on 21 November. A day later, contrary to the exit polls and amid widespread claims of vote-rigging by overseas electoral observers, Yanukovych was declared the winner.

This was too much for Yushchenko supporters who, over the next few days and weeks, staged a show of people power unlike any Ukraine had ever seen. Despite freezing temperatures, they took to the streets, brandishing banners and clothes in the opposition's trademark orange. They assembled to listen to Yushchenko and his powerful political ally Yulia Tymoshenko at mass rallies in Kyiv's maydan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square). They surrounded parliament and other government buildings and established a demonstrators' tent city along Kyiv's main Khreshchatyk boulevard to keep up constant pressure on the authorities.

The Yanukovych camp refused to respond to a parliamentary vote of no-confidence in the election result and his many eastern Ukrainian supporters threatened to secede if Yushchenko was declared president. Despite this, on 3 December the Supreme Court annulled the first election result, and the way was paved for a second poll on 26 December.

Viktor Yushchenko won that second election, with 52% of the vote compared to Viktor Yanukovych's 44.2%. This result stood, despite numerous legal appeals by Yanukovych's Partiya Regioniv (Party of the Regions), and the tent city was dismantled just in time for Yushchenko's swearing-in on 3 January 2005.

Even with the political disillusionment that followed, the Orange Revolution was a watershed in the nation's history. The historically passive Ukrainian population had stood up for its rights and, perhaps to its own amazement, learned it had the power to change things.

The independent spirit of murdered 1990s opposition journalist Georgiy Gongadze lives on through *Ukrayinska Pravda*, the online newspaper he founded. See www.pravda.com.ua/en for an English version.

A highly individual, entertaining and ultimately moving short photo-essay, www.theorangerevolution.com looks back on Ukraine's momentous winter of 2004.

Yushchenko, Yanukovych, Tymoshenko, Kuchma and the Supreme Court – want to understand the key players and sequence of events of 2004? *Ukraine's Orange Revolution* by Andrew Wilson helps you do it.

## THE ORANGE GLOW FADES

Alas, the course of true reform never did run smooth in Ukraine (to paraphrase a *Time* magazine observation on Russia) and anyone hoping for a fairy-tale ending would be swiftly disappointed. Less than a year after they had stood shoulder to shoulder on the maydan in Kyiv, the Orange Revolution's heroes had fallen out with each other.

In September 2005 Yushchenko's chief of staff resigned, alleging corruption on the part of several officials. That same month the president sacked the government of his former ally and prime minister, Yulia Tymoshenko. This removal of Tymoshenko, 'Ukraine's iron lady', would eventually pave the way for Yushchenko's resurgent political enemy Viktor Yanukovych to step into her prime ministerial shoes.

Every move Russia or Europe has made towards Ukraine in the post-revolutionary period played out through the prism of a polarised society. In December 2005 Moscow began demanding markedly higher prices for natural gas from Ukraine, and in January 2006 even cut off supplies in what

**1945**

British PM Winston Churchill and ailing US president Franklin Roosevelt travel to 'the Riviera of Hades' so Stalin can bully them. At the Yalta Conference, the Soviet leader demands Poland and other eastern European territory.

**1959**

Stepan Bandera, the exiled Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) leader, is killed in Munich by the KGB. Ukrainian partisans had continued taking pot shots at Soviet police until the mid-1950s, especially in the Carpathians.

**1986**

Reactor No 4 at the Chornobyl nuclear power plant explodes, after a failed safety test. More than 90 Hiroshimas are spewed out over the Ukrainian and Belarusian countryside. Sweden is first to raise the alarm.

**1991**

As the Soviet Union falters, Ukraine's parliament votes for independence 'because if we don't, we're in the shit'. Some 90% of the population figures that's about right and backs the decision in a referendum.

**1994**

Former rocket scientist Leonid Kuchma takes office as president. With inflation running at 10,000%, he moves quickly to reform the economy, but his popularity wanes when he's implicated in a series of corruption scandals.

**2000**

After opposition journalist Georgiy Gongadze is murdered, an earlier recording emerges of President Kuchma asking his staff to 'deal with' the journalist. Kuchma later claims the tape has been selectively edited.

was widely seen as punishment for Ukraine's more pro-Western outlook (it declared that it wanted to join the EU by 2017). In June 2006 huge protests erupted when US and other NATO sailors arrived in Crimea for joint military exercises.

In elections held in March 2006 to try to break the ongoing parliamentary deadlock, Viktor Yanukovych's party topped the poll and he became prime minister. This meant working alongside former enemy Yushchenko, whose own powers as president had now been diminished by constitutional amendments shifting greater control to parliament.

Lots of absorbing facts and details can be found on www.infoukes.com/history, which concentrates particularly on the last two centuries of Ukrainian history.

Yanukovych and the increasingly weak Yushchenko made noises about uniting the country, but their partnership just led to more bickering and a stalemate, which Yushchenko again attempted to break with a snap election in September 2007. This time Yulia Tymoshenko's party topped the polls, but difficult coalition talks dragged out for ages, and there had to be two parliamentary votes before Tymoshenko just sneaked in for her second term as Prime Minister.

By now, ordinary folk were bored with what one analyst has termed 'Ukrainian political porno'. Instead they were concentrating on booming business and taking pleasure in other victories, like hosting Eurovision 2005 and winning the competition to co-host (with Poland) the European Football Championships 2012.

**2004**

Thousands take to the streets in freezing weather to protest that vote-rigging has robbed their candidate, Viktor Yushchenko, of the presidency. The 'Orange Revolution' leads to a fairer second election, which Yushchenko wins.

**2006**

Russia gives Ukraine a New Year's gift, by cutting off its gas on 1 January. Kyiv suspects punishment for becoming more pro-European. Moscow says it just wants a fair price – nearly five times the existing level.

**2007**

Some 100 people die in the worst mining accident in Ukraine's history. The disaster at Zasyadko, eastern Donetsk, highlights safety concerns about all of the country's deep ageing coalmines.

# The Culture

## THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

It wasn't an unburnished political success, but the Orange Revolution of 2004 did mark a social and psychological shift, consigning one national 'flaw' to the dustbin of history. It was long said that Ukrainians were, above all, stoic and willing to accept what fate dished up. The success of opposition protestors, camping out for a month in subzero temperatures to get what they wanted, reawoke the nation and scotched that entrenched notion of passivity.

Having endured centuries of many different foreign rulers, Ukrainians are a long-suffering people. They're nothing if not survivors; historically they've had to be. But after suffering a kind of identity theft during centuries of Russian rule in particular, this ancient nation that 'suddenly' emerged some 20 years ago is starting to forge a new personality.

Traditionally, many patriots would unite behind a vague sense of free-spirited Cossack culture and the national poet Taras Shevchenko (see the boxed text, p43). This is a religious society, a superstitious society and one in which traditional gender roles, strong family and community ties still bind. It's a culture where people are sometimes friendly and more generous than they can really afford to be. Paradoxically, it's also one in which remnants of Soviet mentality – of unofficial unhelpfulness and suspicion of saying too much – remain.

However, as contemporary commentators love to point out, Ukraine is also a patchwork nation. City dwellers and farmers, east and west, young and old, Russian-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking, Hutsul and Tatar have very different attitudes. Broadly speaking, Russian-speaking easterners look right towards the former Soviet Union, while Ukrainian-speaking westerners look hopefully left towards a future in Europe. But for every rule, there's an exception too.

In *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation* academic Andrew Wilson examines Ukraine's founding myths, how its history and culture have shaped its national identity and what it all means for this ancient but young nation.

## LIFESTYLE

Just as there is no one 'typical' Ukrainian, so there is no single average lifestyle. This is still a relatively poor, second-world country. However, it's fair to say that daily life has become marginally easier for most households since 2005. The average national wage has been increasing at about 36% a year. In 2007 it was at 1426uah ($275) a month, peaking in Kyiv at an average 2400uah ($480).

### UKRAINIAN SYMBOLS *Marc di Duca*

The colours of the Ukrainian flag, yellow and blue, are unusual for a Slavic nation; most opt for red, white and blue. Several theories exist as to why. Some claim the combination officially adopted in 1918 dates from pagan times when it represented fire and water. Others say it reflects Ukraine's 18th-century alliance with Sweden, whose flag is a yellow cross on blue. But the most common, and yet still not definitive, theory is that the band of blue over a strip of yellow represents swaying fields of wheat under an azure sky. Another informal Ukrainian symbol is also yellow. It's the sunflower, fields of which cover the steppes in summer.

On a more official note, the *tryzub* (trident) adorns government buildings, police officers' epaulettes, banknotes and stamps. This insignia, officially the country's coat of arms adopted in 1917, dates back to 11th-century Kyivan Rus where it was embossed on seals, coins, pottery and bricks. It symbolises the three elements – air, water and earth – as well as a universe divided into heaven, earth and the beyond.

Middle-class Ukrainians have always had ways of getting by, holding down several jobs, pursuing a number of money-making schemes and looking out for each other. Outside big cities, it's also been common for people to grow food in their back garden and for extended families to divvy up domestic duties. *Baba* (grandma) is frequently a respected household member.

Old appliances or unreliable hot water and power supplies mean domestic life can be more arduous and time-consuming for both urban apartment-dwellers and rural inhabitants. Old Soviet apartments are quite compact and old-fashioned, but people always remove their shoes carefully at the door. Some Ukrainians still do laundry in the bathtub and eating out is usually reserved for celebrations.

Yet, amid the old housing stock and creaking public transport infrastructure, young Ukrainians are avid users of new technology and media. Everyone has at least one mobile phone (usually more). Internet cafés are usually packed and ICQ chat is huge.

Israeli prime minister Golda Meir and film star Milla Jovovich were both born in Kyiv, Bolshevik Leon Trotsky hailed from outside Odesa, and both Dustin Hoffman and Sylvester Stallone have Ukrainian roots.

Even after some sticking-plaster, post-Orange reforms, there's still a huge gap between average Ukrainians and the super-rich elite. It's the country's oligarchs and 'new Ukrainian' businesspeople you see driving the black Mercedes SUVs and shopping in Kyiv's designer boutiques.

At the lower end of the scale are the elderly and other pensioners. Although the basic pension increased from 170uah ($32) a month in 2004 to 450uah ($90) in 2007, some 29% of Ukrainians remain below the poverty line. Thanks to WWII, many of the elderly are women, and they often sell their home-grown produce on the street to make ends meet.

## ECONOMY

Although Ukraine remains one of the poorest countries in Europe – and in some rural regions looks it – its economy has been in rude health recently. There's even a danger of overheating, as price rises (over 14%) outpace wage gains (about 6.8%). Property price hikes are extreme. In Kyiv they've shot up by at least a third in recent years, making this the most expensive eastern European city. With one-bedroom apartments starting at around $100,000, the capital is even dearer than Amsterdam.

Whatever its current situation, Ukraine has plenty of underlying economic potential. It was easily one of the most productive regions of the USSR, with a huge agricultural heartland complemented by heavy industry and military technology in the east. In the 19th century its wheat fields made it the breadbasket of Eastern Europe and its beets produced nearly all Tsarist Russia's sugar. Today the country remains the world's second-largest producer of sunflower oil, but its principal exports are steel and other metals.

Many of the corruption scandals of the Kuchma years centred on company privatisations, where foreign bidders complained firms were being sold off to the president's cronies for well under market value. Outrage over the $800 million sale of the huge metals concern Kryvorizhstal to a consortium headed by Kuchma's son-in-law, Victor Pinchuk, was even a motivating factor for the Orange Revolution. In 2005, as part of Orange politicians' reform pledges, this original sale was annulled. The lucrative Kryvorizhstal, which produces seven million tonnes of steel annually or one-fifth of national output, was auctioned to Anglo-Indian Mittal Steel for $4.6 billion.

Greater transparency and more pro-European government policies in 2005 gave the economy a boost, although Russia remains Ukraine's biggest trade partner and its reliance on Russian energy makes it vulnerable. When a dispute erupted with Moscow over gas prices in late 2005 and early 2006, Ukraine, which imports three-quarters of the energy it consumes, was eventually forced to pay twice as much for natural gas as it had done.



**A CARPATHO-RUSYN WEDDING** *Lisa Dunford*

*Hospodi pomiluj, Hospodi pomiluj…* Long forgotten Old Church Slavonic chants from my childhood came back to me as I stood, about to be married, in the Greek Catholic Cathedral in Uzhhorod – a hundred years to the month after my great-grandfather was married, and subsequently ordained, there. Growing up I'd thought we were Hungarian, until I tried to translate a novella he wrote and it turned out to be in a Slavic dialect.

The confusion is understandable given the history of the Carpathian region. The origins of the first Slavic settlers are a bit fuzzy – a mixture of White Croats, Slavs who came with the Huns and Slavs from Galicia (Poland). How they got their Orthodox religion is also unclear as the region was never part of Kyivan Rus; from the 11th century until WWI it was under Hungarian and Austrian rule. So perhaps they brought it west with them or maybe it was spread by wandering Kyivan Rus missionaries. What's better known is that in 1646, at the Union of Uzhhorod, a group of Orthodox churches in Transcarpathia accepted the authority of Rome, creating the unique hybrid that is the Greek Catholic (or Uniate) religion. The traditions of Orthodoxy remain – plain-chant liturgies, onion-dome architecture, icon veneration, married priests – but the leader of the church is the Pope, and the theology Catholic.

Faith was the defining factor in the identity of the Carpatho-Rusyns like my great-grandfather who lived in the region before the war. As a priest, he spoke Slavonic, Rusyn, Hungarian, Slovak and probably some Polish dialect. Under the Soviet Union, Greek Catholicism was outlawed, priests were sent to hard labour in Siberia and churches were seized. The Rusyn and Hungarian languages were taken out of schools – only Russian and Ukrainian were allowed. Post-communism, the Greek Catholics recovered some of their churches, including the cathedral. And in 1996 the Rusyn language was codified. That's the language Grandpa's book was written in; the story tells of a village wedding party where a gypsy played.

Standing before the two-storey gold icon screen shimmering in the soft light as crowns of flowers were placed on our heads, I realised the ancient words being chanted were the same words sung a hundred years before. Sixteen relatives, descendents of my great-grandfather's brother who we'd lost touch with for decades after WWII, stood behind me at the dais. My great-grandparents had a town wedding, so probably no three-day feast and gypsy violinist for them. We had a cousin serenade us with a Mozart piano recital. At the dinner party the relatives spoke a mishmash of languages: me in English, Hungarian and Slovak; them in Hungarian, Ukrainian and English. In Transcarpathia, a Greek Catholic wedding and a mix of languages seemed entirely appropriate.

That has already cost it up to $2.2 billion and means inflation will stay relatively high in coming years.

The World Bank worries that Ukraine's high rate (1.4%) of HIV/AIDS infection could eventually impact its economy. However, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit, solid domestic demand for goods and services, improving export prospects and a stable currency should keep things on track for the foreseeable future.

## POPULATION

As a crossroads between Europe and Asia, Ukraine has been settled by numerous ethnic groups throughout history (see p25) and has a fascinating underlying mix. However, most people still describe themselves as Ukrainians and, hence, of Slavic origin. According to the last census, taken in 2001, 78% of the country's population are ethnically Ukrainian. The other large ethnic group is Russian, who account for 17% of the population, and are mainly concentrated in the east.

Other minorities include, in order of size, Belarusians, Moldovans, Tatars, Bulgarians, Hungarians, Romanians, Poles and Jews. Almost all of the country's 260,000 Tatars live in Crimea. No-one measures the size of

western Ukrainian Hutsul communities, which in any case are seamlessly integrated into the wider community. In 2007 the 800,000 Rusyns (an ethnic group of the Carpathians spread across Ukraine, Poland and Slovakia; see the boxed text, p37) were recognised by Transcarpathian authorities as distinct from mainstream Ukrainians.

Since independence, Ukraine's population has fallen more dramatically than that of any other country not affected by war, famine or plague. The number of citizens plummeted from 52 million in 1993 to 47 million in 2003, as people emigrated in search of a better life, and as birth rates and life expectancy dropped concomitantly. This demographic trend slowed slightly in 2006 and 2007, as the government increased a one-off childbirth allowance tenfold to $1600 (and politicians promised more again in future). The resultant mini baby boom saw the population fall more slowly, but it continued downward as deaths still outnumbered births.

A large Ukrainian diaspora of some 2½ million people exists. Many live in North America, particularly Canada.

## SPORT

As football continues its inexorable domination of sports TV schedules, Dynamo Kyiv is no longer the only well-known Ukrainian team. Play-offs between foreign clubs and Shaktar Donetsk or Metallist Kharkiv have also guaranteed those teams prominence. Chelsea striker and national team captain, Andriy Shevchenko, has truly overshadowed his namesake Taras Shevchenko (the Ukrainian national poet) on the world stage, despite not having had the most promising first season at his mate Roman Abramovich's London club.

Dynamo Kyiv's official website at www.fcdynamo.kiev.ua now has an English section. You can also follow the domestic Ukrainian league at www.ukrainiansoccer.net.

Ukraine also enjoys ice hockey and has had an international presence in boxing with the brothers Vitaliy and Volodymyr Klytschko. Vitaliy in particular gained prominence as the world heavyweight champion. Injury forced him to retire in November 2005, when he was still the titleholder, and this staunch backer of Viktor Yushchenko announced a desire to become involved in politics. After running unsuccessfully for mayor of Kyiv, Klytschko announced a boxing comeback. It seems probable he'll keep a gloved fist in each pie in forthcoming years.

For popular participation sports, see p241.

## MULTICULTURALISM

The 'ethnic' schism between western and eastern Ukraine was under the spotlight during the Orange Revolution, with brief but serious fears the country might split. With Russian immigration into Ukrainian territory from the late 17th century, some Russian Ukrainians still feel their allegiance lies more with Moscow than with Kyiv. But the divisions are neither as clear-cut nor as intractable as some politicians like to suggest.

Patriotic western Ukrainians often liken the difference between themselves and Russians to that between Canadians and Americans. (Other comparisons include the Spanish and the Portuguese or, perhaps most accurate historically, the British and Irish.) However, not all Ukrainians feel quite so strongly and in public the divisions are principally played out in religion and language (see opposite and p268).

Different tensions exist in Crimea, where some 260,000 Tatars have resettled since the 1990s. After early clashes, 14 Tatar seats were granted in the Crimean parliament and the situation quietened down. Disturbingly, there have been recent attacks by skinhead 'Cossack paramilitary' groups on Tatars and their property. In August 2006 there was a particularly ugly confrontation between Tatars who wanted a market removed from one of their burial grounds and a violent pro-Russian group. In late 2007 there were



### THE ROAD TO EURO 2012

With football being the leading spectator sport in Ukraine, the country was delighted, and not a little surprised, to be chosen with Poland as joint hosts of the European Football Championships in 2012. Chelsea striker Andriy Shevchenko, former boxer Vitaliy Klytschko and president Viktor Yushchenko were all cheerleaders for the Euro 2012 bid, the first time Ukraine will be involved in hosting such a major event.

Games are to be played in four far-flung Ukrainian cities – Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk and Lviv – and the country is supposed to be giving its stadiums and other infrastructure a much-needed upgrade. But in late 2007, with Ukraine in the usual political limbo (having a team row in the dressing room) a late kick-off threatened. Only the stadium in Donetsk was well under way, and that was thanks to football-crazy oligarch Rinat Akhmetov, Ukraine's richest man and owner of the Shaktar Donetsk football team.

Work in Dnipropetrovsk was also progressing. However, in Kyiv, president Yushchenko himself had to step in and issue demolition decrees after the Union of European Football Associations gave the capital's Olympic Stadium a yellow card because of an adjoining shopping centre that was blocking safe exits. Ukraine also faces huge logistical problems upgrading its hotels and transport systems in time for the competition.

further ugly scenes as police demolished 'illegal' Tatar cafés atop Mt Ay-Petri. Whether or not they're in the news, the Crimean Tatars undoubtedly face racism, of both a casual and deep-seated nature, on a daily basis.

## MEDIA

For the lowdown from Tatars themselves on their history, culture and contemporary issues, visit www.tatar.net, which links to excellent sites like www.iccrimea.org and www.euronet.nl/users/sota/krimtatar.html.

The press has been one of the big winners in the new Ukrainian era. Indeed, after years of following daily government directives *(temnyky)* about what they would report, they helped usher in 2004's Orange Revolution by insisting, at the critical moment, on more freedom. In October that year, seven journalists from TV channel 1+1 resigned in protest against censorship. In November, a sign-language interpreter on channel UT-1 apologised to her deaf viewers for 'telling such lies' about Viktor Yanukovych's putative win. In the months following the revolution, journalists queued to say sorry for misleading viewers and readers during the Kuchma era.

Today, news coverage in Ukraine has improved markedly, with criticism of government policies given free rein and even genuine political debates on TV. As the *Kyiv Post* has pithily put it: 'The media, once toothless, are now free to grill Ukraine's leaders on anything from their tax returns to Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych's criminal record [later overturned].'

Ukraine has a wide range of print and electronic news outlets – too wide a range, some critics say. Yet, despite this diverse media ownership, there are still problems with oligarchic control, journalistic self-censorship and the increasing practice of *jeansa* ('money in the pocket' or paid-for news).

In its annual Freedom of the Press report in 2007, the Washington-based monitoring organisation Freedom House designated Ukraine's media as only 'partly free'. However, it was encouraging about the future, saying the country already had the freest press in the former Soviet Union and had achieved a degree of independence previously unthinkable.

## RELIGION

As the sheer number of churches in Ukraine attests, religion is pivotal. It has provided comfort during many hard times and even shaped Ukrainian identity, as by accepting Orthodox Christianity in 989, Volodymyr the Great cast Kyivan Rus as a European, rather than Islamic Asian, state.

Today the country's sizable Christian population is confusingly splintered into three Orthodox churches and one major form of Catholicism.

In the 17th century, when Ukraine came under Russian rule, so did its Orthodox Church. Even now, nearly two decades after independence, the largest Orthodox congregation in the country belongs to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC-MP), the former Ukrainian section of the Russian Orthodox Church that still pays allegiance to the Moscow Patriarch. There are also two smaller, breakaway Orthodox churches, which are both more 'Ukrainian' in nature. A Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC-KP) was formed in 1992 after independence to pay allegiance to a local Kyiv Patriarch. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), formed during the 19th century in patriotic western Ukraine and suppressed by the Soviets, has bounced back since independence.

For a detailed portrait of all Ukraine's major and minor religions, head to the excellent www.risu.org.ua, which also offers relevant news and statistics.

To complicate matters, another five to six million Ukrainians follow another brand of Christianity entirely. In 1596 the Union of Brest established the Uniate Church (often called the Ukrainian Catholic or Greek Catholic Church). Mixing Orthodox Christian practices with allegiance to the pope, this essentially Catholic church was, and is, popular in the western part of the country once controlled by Poland. In 2005 it shifted its headquarters to Kyiv to position itself as more of a pan-Ukrainian faith.

The two main Orthodox churches – Moscow Patriarchate and Kyiv Patriarchate – have had territorial disputes in the past. The Ukrainian government's 1995 refusal to allow Kyiv Patriarch Volodymyr Romanyuk to be buried inside Kyiv's St Sophia's Cathedral, for fear of reprisals from Moscow, is a good example. Today they confine themselves to more low-level bickering, about how many adherents each has, for example. The Moscow Patriarchate has the greater number of parishes at 10,875, but in some polls up to 50% of Orthodox believers claim to follow the Kyiv Patriarchate, so the picture is completely muddled.

Religious distinctions also play out in politics. The UOC-MP favours close ties with Russia and backed Viktor Yanukovych during the Orange Revolution. The UOC-MP, the UAOC and the Uniate Church all welcome greater Western ties and they were all behind Viktor Yushchenko (he's an Orthodox believer).

#### A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

It involves fire, water, dancing, fortune-telling, and strong overtones of sex. So is it any wonder the Soviets tried to quash the festival of Ivana Kupala, a pagan midsummer celebration? Indeed, leaders since the Middle Ages – including Cossack hetmans – have tried to outlaw it, but all without success. The festival is still marked across Ukraine and beyond.

To ancient pre-Christians, Kupalo was the god of love and fertility, and young people would choose a marriage partner on this eve. Today's rituals vary, but typically begin with folk singing and a maypole-style dance performed by young women wearing white gowns and flower wreaths in their hair. After this, the women float their wreaths (symbolising virginity) down the requisite nearby river or other body of water. A wreath that sinks indicates bad fortune in love for its owner.

Later a bonfire is lit, around which young couples dance. Couples will also jump over small fires, holding hands, to test whether – if they maintain their grip – their love will last. In ancient times, the young men would go off into the woods to seek a special 'magical' fern before dawn.

After Kyivan Rus adopted Christianity, the festival became mixed up with the birthday of John the Baptist. This not only means the festival has largely been shifted from the summer solstice on 22 June to 7 July, it sometimes means people walk in the fire or jump in the river as a 'cleansing' act. A good spot to join Kupalo celebrations is Pyrohovo (p79) in Kyiv or head to the countryside for more traditional rituals.



#### DOS & DON'TS

Religious Ukrainians are a pretty tolerant lot, but women should cover their heads when entering Orthodox churches. There's an even stricter dress code (no above-knee skirts and no trousers) when visiting particularly holy sites such as the Kievo-Pecherska Lavra (p75) and Pochayiv Monastery (p130).

Crimean Tatars are Muslim, but only a few are really devout and many others even drink alcohol. Nevertheless, women should dress modestly when entering mosques. A scarf to cover the head and shoulders is definitely needed when visiting Yevpatoriya's Whirling Dervish Monastery (p192) – the strictest Muslim place in Ukraine we've encountered.

Minority faiths include Roman Catholicism, Judaism and, among Crimean Tatars, Sunni Islam. Ukraine's religious freedom means Evangelical, Buddhist, Jehovah's Witness and neo-pagan communities have also emerged since independence from the atheist USSR. In 2007 a Pentecostal church called the Embassy of God was sweeping across Ukraine, and claimed to have 25,000 members in Kyiv, including mayor Leonid Chernovetsky.

## WOMEN IN UKRAINE

Cynically speaking, its women have been one of independent Ukraine's biggest tourist attractions. Combine their legendary beauty, devotion to personal grooming and sometimes outrageous, sexualised fashion sense with a relatively impoverished society, especially in the early 1990s, and you were always going to have fertile ground for online 'dating agencies', 'marriage agencies' and straight-out sex tourism. Sex trafficking of Ukrainian women and girls is now a serious problem, too.

These myriad dating agencies, introducing sometimes not-so-attractive overseas men to beautiful Ukrainian women, are the reason you'll notice an awful lot of oddly matched couples in Ukraine. Victor Malarek, author of *The Natashas: The New Global Sex Trade,* even contends: 'These agencies…are usually nothing more than online brothels.

Traditional gender roles are quite entrenched in Ukraine's paternalistic society. Even the country's many young career women unashamedly place much greater emphasis on their looks than their Western counterparts would. The press coverage devoted to high-flying politician and billionaire businesswoman Yulia Tymoshenko is a case in point, with its continual habit of commenting on her beauty, even once questioning whether her typically Ukrainian blonde braid was real.

In 2003, Human Rights Watch was concerned that Ukrainian women faced job discrimination, with age, appearance and family circumstances often excluding them from roles they were professionally qualified for, and because they were most likely given the lowest-paying roles. The group opined: 'The job market in Ukraine reflects some highly archaic stereotypes about women's capabilities.'

## ARTS

### Literature

Taras Shevchenko (see the boxed text, p43) is the figure towering over all Ukrainian literature. However, two other writers rate a mention. Ivan Franko (1856–1916) is another hero who promoted the Ukrainian language (see the boxed text, p138). His better-known writings include *The Turnip Farmer, The Converted Sinner* and *During Work,* while some of his poems can be found at www.franko.lviv.ua/ifranko/franko_eng.html.

Equally distinguished was Larysa Kosach (1871–1913), known by her pen name, Lesia Ukrainka. Her frail health inspired her to compose deeply

moving poetry expressing inner strength and inspiration – symbolic beatitudes for the Ukrainian people. Her *Forest Song* inspired a ballet, an opera and a film.

There are several other proudly Ukrainian authors, but none are translated into English. On the other hand, two internationally renowned authors usually claimed by Russia are Ukrainian-born. Mikhail Bulgakov's (1891–1940) first novel, *The White Guard,* is set in his native Kyiv. Nikolai Gogol's (1809–52) novels *Evening on a Farm near Dikanka* and *Dead Souls* and short story 'Taras Bulba' (about a Cossack hero and included in the collection *Mirgorad, Myrhorad* in Ukrainian) both have links to his country of birth. Odesa-born Isaac Babel (1894–1939) was the most famous chronicler of that city (see p161).

As far as contemporary writers go, Kyiv-based author Andrey Kurkov (b 1961) has been called Bulgakov's heir. That might be taking things a bit far but Kurkov is widely known abroad and his *Death and the Penguin, Penguin Lost* and *The President's Last Love* do indulge in the same flights of fancy as Bulgakov's classic *The Master and Margarita*. In *Death and the Penguin,* for example, would-be novelist Viktor is eking out a miserable existence with his pet penguin Misha, when suddenly he gets a great gig writing stock obituaries for still-living prominent people. Then suddenly, one by one, the subjects of his profiles all start dying. (For our interview with Kurkov, see p74.)

Facebook and MySpace have competition in Ukraine. As a social networking site for low-key political activism, maidan.org.ua has been very popular in the post-Orange years.

More for the Ukrainian cognoscenti are the works of Yuri Andrukhovych (b 1960), a western Ukrainian and cofounder of the Bu-Ba-Bu (loosely 'burlesque, side-show, buffoonery') poetry group. Andrukhovych's *Recreations* is a burlesque retelling of four poets' time at a pagan festival cum orgy-of-excess, while *Perverzion* presents a twist on *Death in Venice*.

Oksana Zabuzhko (b 1960) is another major contemporary name, best known for her 1990s Ukrainian-language novel *Field Research on Ukrainian Sex*.

## Cinema

'Basically, the Ukrainian film industry is dead right now,' producer Vladimir Horunzhy told movie-trade bible *Variety* in 2006. 'The only filmmaking that's going on is production servicing for Russian films and TV,' Horunzhy asserted, before modestly announcing that he and his partners were starting a revival with their sentimental AIDS drama *Orange Love* (www.orangelovethemovie.com).

Horunzhy is right that independent Ukraine hasn't had enormous cinematic success. Links to Russia and, further back, the USSR are inextricable. Indeed, some of the best 'Ukrainian' films have always been multicultural affairs. A Georgian-Armenian made one of the most celebrated Ukrainian-language movies under the reluctant auspices of the USSR, and one of the world's greatest silent films was directed by a Latvian Jew in Ukrainian territory. But apart from producing 1964's *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (the Georgian-Armenian director was Sergiy Paradzhanov; see p149) and 1925's *Battleship Potemkin* (filmed in Odesa; see p173), Ukraine was also the birthplace of leading Soviet film maker Alexander Dovzhenko. His silent films *Arsenal* (Arzenal; 1928) and *Earth* (Zemlya; 1930) remain classics (available on DVD).

During Soviet times, the only distinctive Ukrainian cinema was produced by émigrés like Slavko Novytsky – *Pysanka: The Ukrainian Easter Egg* (1975) and *The Harvest of Despair* (1972), about the 1932–33 famine. And since independence, pure Ukrainian Cossack-style epics, such as Yuri Ilyenko's *A Prayer for Hetman Mazepa* (2002) and Oles Sanin's *Mamay* (2003), have never fared particularly well. The old rule of thumb – the more multicultural



### ALL HAIL THE NATIONAL POET!

Taras. Shevchenko. Etch that name on your memory; you'll be hearing it a lot in Ukraine. In fact, statues of its owner now stand on pedestals vacated by Lenin across the entire west of the country. Shevchenko (1814–61) is *the* Ukrainian writer. He embodied and stirred the national consciousness, while achieving literary respectability for a Ukrainian language then suppressed under tsarist Russian rule. Born a serf and orphaned as a teenager, Shevchenko studied painting at the Academy of Arts in St Petersburg, where in 1840 he published his first work, *Kobzar* (The Bard), a book of eight romantic poems. It was a great success and his epic poem *Haidamaky* (1841) and ballad *Hamaliia* (1844) followed soon afterwards. Later works, such as *Son* (The Dream), *Kavkas* (Caucasus) and *Velyky i Lokh* (The Great Dungeon), were not immediately published but are now held in great affection.

Through Shevchenko's prolific work, Ukrainian was elevated from a peasant tongue to a vehicle of eloquent and poetic expression. Combining vernacular expressions and colloquial dialects with Church Slavonic, he formed a unique voice. He passionately preached social justice, in universal terms as well as to the downtrodden peasant and to the Ukrainian nation, referring to 'this land of ours that is not our own'. A staunch anti-tsarist, the poet was banished to Siberia for 10 years, which led to his premature death in 1861. In 1876 Tsar Alexander II banned all Ukrainian books and publishing, but Shevchenko's message remained. He was a Ukrainian hero.

Some of Shevchenko's works – namely *Kobzar* – have been translated widely, but English editions are usually out of print or expensive collector's books. However, among other extensive detail, 24 Shevchenko poems are found in English at www.infoukes.com/shevchenkomuseum.

the better – seems to still hold true in the 21st century. Good examples are lauded Russian-Ukrainian co-productions such as 2004's *A Driver for Vera,* featuring Ukrainian star Bohdan Stupka and shot in Crimea, and *Koktebel* (2003; see p215), a Russian film also partially shot in Crimea.

Of a handful of films about 2004's historic events, *Orange Revolution* (www.orangerevolutionmovie.com), a 2007 documentary by Steve York, and *Orange Winter* (another 2007 documentary by Andrei Zagdansky) have been produced overseas. The Ukrainian-produced *Orange Sky* (2006), by Alexander Kirienko, uses the revolution as a backdrop to a Hollywood-style love story.

Legendary Soviet director Kira Muratova (b 1934) still lives and works in Ukraine. However, many Ukrainian directors need to work abroad to access the international market. Eva Neymann (b 1974) had been living in Germany for years when she made *U Reki* (By the River, 2007), a drama about a mother and daughter odd-couple, which was seen in various overseas film festivals.

In Pavla Fleischer's funny and moving film *The Pied Piper of Hützovina,* madcap NYC-based Gogol Bordello singer Eugene Hutz returns to trace the roots of gypsy music in his native Ukraine, including the west and Kyiv.

## Music

### FOLK: BLIND KOBZARY & HUGE BANDURAS

Ukrainian folk music developed as a form of storytelling. The guardians of Ukrainian folklore, *kobzary* were highly respected wandering minstrels who travelled from town to town spreading news through an extensive repertoire of songs. These included *bylyny,* epic narrative poems relating the courageous deeds of the heroes of Kyivan Rus, and *dumy,* lyrical ballads glorifying the exploits of the Cossacks.

Traditionally, *kobzary* were required to be blind and they used the lute-like *kobza* to accompany their historical narratives. In the 18th century the *kobza* was replaced by the *bandura,* a larger instrument with up to 65 strings. Popular *bandura* choirs accompanied Ukrainian national songs and folk dances and this unparalleled instrument soon became a national symbol.

The **Ukrainian Bandura Chorus** (www.bandura.org) was founded in Kyiv in 1918 and still performs worldwide today, although mainly in the US. To find

a *bandura* concert in Ukraine, check listings magazines. The National Philharmonic in Kyiv (p91) is a reasonable bet.

Traditional *kobzary* themselves suffered the all-too-familiar and miserable fate of many who lived under Stalin. During the Soviet era they kept Ukrainians apprised of collectivisation, famine and repression. When Stalin heard about them, he immediately ordered a national *kobzary* conference, feigning great interest – and then killed all attendees.

### CLASSICAL MUSIC & OPERA

The most notable local composer remains Mykola Lysenko (1842–1912). The 'father of Ukrainian national music' applied the logic of Ukrainian folk songs to piano-based classical music. Ukrainian operettas combine more acting and dancing than typical operas.

### ROCK MUSIC

Ukraine's active rock scene provides a welcome antidote to the Russian pop streaming in over the eastern border. Broadly, the scene can be split into five categories: the legends, the nationalists, mainstream alt rock, hip-hop and chick pop.

The legends are Vopli Vidopliasova (VV) and Okean Elzy. Both have been going since the 1990s and have charismatic front men – Oleh Skrypka and Svyatoslav Vakarchuk respectively – who seek to promote the Ukrainian identity through music. Both tend toward the progressive; VV is more up-tempo, Okean Elzy more melancholic.

All Ukraine's major rock stars have their own websites, but few are such fun to scroll through as crazee Verka Serduchka's at www.serduchka.com.

The nationalists, from Lviv and the west, are defenders of Ukrainian heritage. This category, including Plach Yeremiyi, Mertvy Piven and Mandry, might also fit into the category of folksy alt-rock, alongside the edgier but higher profile Druha Rika.

Next up are popular hip-hop acts, like TNMK, Tartak, Boombox, Vova z Lvova and Greenjolly (see p145). Acoustic reggae duo 5'nizza and ska band Haydamaky boast large followings thanks to their often exceptional arrangements.

Finally, Ukey chick pop follows the tried-and-tested formula of scantily clad singers belting out studio-driven pop. Ukraine's Eurovision entries – including Tina Karol (2006) and even 2004 winner Ruslana – tend to hail from this group, as do high-profile video stars Ani Lorak and all-girl band Via Gra (geddit?).

Ukraine's 2007 Eurovision entry and overall runner-up – cross-dressing comedian/signer Verka Serduchka – occupies a category all his/her own. The same is true of NYC gypsy punk outfit Gogol Bordello, whose eccentric singer, Eugene Hutz, is originally from Kyiv. Another unusual hit are the hard-rock Death Valley Screamers, fronted by a Yorkshireman, Sean Carr, now married to politician Yulia Tymoshenko's daughter, Evgeniya.

## Architecture

Church design has wrought a vast influence on Ukrainian architecture. Byzantine layout has at various times been merged with traditional wooden Hutsul churches (colonnaded porches and free-standing belfries) and 17th-century baroque to produce unique styles. 'Ukrainian baroque', with its trademark green helmet-shaped dome, is typified by St Andrew's Church (p73) in Kyiv.

Otherwise various styles have come in and out of vogue. After St Petersburg proved such a success in Russia, its planned layout and neoclassical architecture was copied in Odesa and Korpusny Park (p222) in Poltava. In the 19th century there were revivals of Byzantine design (as seen in St Volodymyr's Cathedral in Kyiv, p79) and Renaissance style merged with baroque – for example in the opera houses in Kyiv (p91), Odesa (p179) and Lviv (p125). A modern Ukrainian style based on Art Nouveau featured in the Regional Museum (p222) in Poltava and the eclectic Metropolitan Palace, or university (p152), in Chernivtsi.

The Soviets had a penchant for pompous 'monumental classicism', with enormous temple-like state edifices. Extensively rebuilt after WWII, Kyiv is full of such buildings.



## Painting & Sculpture

### ICONS

Icons are small holy images painted on a lime-wood panel with a mix of tempera, egg yolk and hot wax. Brought to Ukraine from Constantinople by Volodymyr the Great in the 10th century and remaining the key religious art until the 17th century, icons were attributed with healing and spiritual powers. Icon painters – mostly monks – rarely signed works, and depicted only Christ, the Virgin, angels and saints. Church murals, mosaics and frescoes, as well as manuscript illuminations, developed at the same time. Some of the oldest frescoes are found in Kyiv's St Sophia's Cathedral (p70).

According to local superstition, women should never sit down on steps, walls or anything concrete, lest their ovaries freeze and they can't bear children. Remember this when tired from sightseeing!

### PYSANKY

Painted Easter eggs *(pysanky)* are an ancient Slavonic art. Designs are drawn in wax on the eggshell (these days hollowed out beforehand), the egg is dyed one colour and the process continually repeated until a complex pattern is built up. Different symbols represent varying natural forces – a circle with a dot in the middle is the sun, and so on – but each Ukrainian region has its own traditions. The country's largest collection of *pysanky* is found at Kolomyya's Pysanky Museum (p146).

### ROMANTICISM

The first break from religious art occurred during the Cossack Hetmanate. A secular, romantic trend of folk painting slowly developed, common themes being the *Kozak Mamay* (a Cossack playing a *bandura* or *kobza*), country life and folk traditions. Most of these paintings remained unknown, but Ukrainian-born Ilya Repin gained international fame. His famous *Zaporizhsky Cossacks Writing a Letter to the Turkish Sultan* and other Romantic paintings are found in the Art Museum in Kharkiv (p226). The art museums in Kyiv (p81) and Odesa (p175) also display typical Romantic art.

Ivan Ayvazosky is regarded as one of the world's best painters of seascapes. Ethnically Armenian, he was born and lived in Feodosiya, Crimea, where hundreds of his works are found in the Ayvazosky Museum (p214).

### SOVIET ERA & BEYOND

Socialist realism propagated Soviet ideals – the industrialised peasant, the muscular worker and the heroic soldier. Take, as an example, the sculptural reliefs near Kyiv's Museum of the Great Patriotic War (p78). Ukrainian nationalism asserted itself through the age-old tradition of folk art, leading the Soviet authorities to ban folk embroidery.

In the aftermath of independence, Ukrainian art enjoyed a reawakening, with art schools in Kyiv producing new stars, like painter Maxim Mamsikov (b 1968), sculptor Zhana Khadyrova (b 1981) and multimedia artist Kyril Protsenko (b 1967). One of the most important artists to emerge at this time was the Ukrainian photographer Boris Mikhailov. Born in Kharkiv in 1938, he now divides his time between there and Germany (see the boxed text, p46).

**BARE-ARSED IN SNOWY KHARKIV**

He paid one homeless Kharkiv woman to pose for his camera in the snow, with her knickers pushed to her knees and her blouse above her breasts and scarred stomach. In another picture, a naked woman with a large cancerous growth jutting from her stomach tends a flower bush. Yet Ukrainian photographer Boris Mikhailov wasn't censured or censored for such shocking images. He was awarded the prestigious Citibank Photography Award. That same year, 2000, he also won the Hasselblad Photography Award for a career in which he has continually challenged viewers.

Like all his work, Mikhailov's award-winning *Case History* – 450 photos of Kharkiv's *bomzhy* (homeless) – is about the 'dissolution of beauty'. And it's an aesthetic that has kept him in the public eye.

Still the most important eastern European photographer today, he first entered professional photography in the 1970s, after the KGB found some nude amateur shots of his wife and had him fired from his engineering job. Originally satirising Soviet realism, he later shifted to documenting society in independent Ukraine, including its poverty. Rebutting claims of voyeurism, he says homelessness didn't exist in the Soviet Union, and it's better to bear witness to the suffering of these people than to wish it away. He pays his subjects, believing it immoral not to, but also admits that such payments reflect the new capitalist realities.

Whatever his politics, Mikhailov's work is always compelling and ironically often beautiful. One of his latest exhibitions, *Moments/Monuments* (2006; in Berlin, in conjunction with fellow Ukrainian Illya Chichkan) captured people in scenes that will be all too familiar to travellers to Ukraine – at the country's markets and bus and train stations.

Since 2006, art-lovers in Kyiv have been making a beeline to the PinchukArtCentre (p80). This not only has major international exhibitions and works from the likes of Damien Hirst, Anthony Gormley and Andreas Gursky; it's also a good place to learn about leading local artists such as Illya Chichkan (b 1968), who favours staged photos, or painter and installation artist Alexander Hnylytsky (b 1961). There are also some photos by Ukrainian-born, Moscow-based Oleg Kulik (b 1963), who is usually more famous for his performance art, in which he habitually acts like a dog. (He's even been arrested for biting people.)

There've been three new books of Boris Mikhailov's photography in recent years. *Yesterday's Sandwich* (2007) is a collector's edition of 52 artfully double-exposed prints. *Crimean Snobbism* (2006) and *Suzi Et Cetera* (2007) go back to the 1980s, the latter in Kharkiv.

## Theatre & Dance

Ukrainian folk dance falls into two broad categories: Hutsul and Cossack. Both originally emanate from calendar feasts in peasant life – winter *(koliada),* spring *(vesnianky),* summer *(kupalo)* and autumn or harvest *(obzhynky)* – as well as rituals attending birth, marriage and death. The *hahilky,* performed by girls during Easter, combines the rituals of prayer with the celebration of spring.

Hutsul dances include a minimum of circular movement. Largely they rely on stamping feet and jumping up and down. (Some say this has to do with the Hutsuls' hillside lifestyle, which made this less awkward.) By contrast, Cossack dancers frequently link arms and twirl around in a circle. Such dances developed via the drunken celebrations that followed the Cossacks' successful military campaigns, and include movements like the 'duck-kick'.

# Food & Drink

'*Borshch* and bread – that's our food.' With this national saying, Ukrainians admit theirs is a cuisine of comfort – full of hearty, mild dishes designed for fierce winters – rather than one of gastronomic zing. And yet, while it's suffered from negative stereotypes of Soviet-style beetroot slop and chicken kiev, Ukrainian cooking isn't bad these days. In recent years, chefs have rediscovered the wholesome appeal of the national cuisine. Plenty of Ukrainian-themed restaurants offer the chance to sample *varenyky* (stuffed, ravioli-like dumplings), *kruschenyky* (beef roulades with prunes, bacon and spinach), elaborately stuffed fish dishes or red-caviar pancakes, washed down with chilled vodka or freshly pressed cranberry juice.

Obviously, the country's weather has always had an influence on its cuisine. As London restaurant reviewer Tom Parker-Bowles put it, this is 'the sort of food you eat before venturing out into the snow to wrestle a bear'. However, successive invaders and immigrants have left their mark on a menu heavily reliant on local produce. So while Ukrainians love the carp, pike-perch and salmon found in their rivers, the pork and game roaming their lands, and the wheat and barley from their fields, they're also familiar with Russian beef stroganoff and Jewish-style dishes.

Kyiv is the culinary capital, but there are interesting regional sidelines, too. The Hutsul people of the Carpathians favour berries and mushrooms, plus their own speciality cheese *brynza* (a cross between cottage cheese and feta) and polenta-style *banush* or *mammlyha* (see p140). Central Asian–style Tatar cuisine spices up the menus in Crimea, with specialities like *shashlyk* (shish kebab). For more on Crimean food, see A Taste of Crimean Tatar Cuisine, p197. Another unmistakable feature across the country is the recent success of restaurant chains (see below).

*Borshch* is imbued with all kinds of magical powers, including the ability to melt the hardest heart.

## STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

Many of the country's specialities stem from down-to-earth peasant dishes, based on grains and staple vegetables like potatoes, cabbage, beets or mushrooms, then seasoned with garlic, dill and vinegar.

**Borshch** Locals would have you know that *borshch* (борщ) is Ukrainian – not Russian, not Polish, but Ukrainian – and there's nothing better than a steaming bowlful in winter. A typical version of the national soup is made with beetroot, salted pork fat and herbs, but the aromatic 'green' variety, based on sorrel, is also popular. Regional *borshch* recipes can include sausages, marrows or marinated apples.

### THE UKRAINIAN FOOD CHAIN

It if ain't broke, don't fix it...just open another one. That seems to be the mantra among Ukrainian restaurateurs. For it seems that, when they find a formula that works, they certainly stick to it. This has recently led to the emergence of several dominant restaurant groups. The mega-successful **Pizza Celentano** (www.pizza-celentano.com) has joined the widespread **Kartoplyanoye Khata** (www.potatohouse.biz), and a handful of Yapi sushi bars as part of the overarching **Egoisty** group (www.egoisty.com).

**Kozyrnaya Karta** (Royal Card; www.2k.com.ua) has more than 60 restaurants across the country including the likes of Khutorok, Pantagruel and Varenichnaya No 1 in Kyiv and Nobu in Donetsk and Yalta. There are more chains based only in Kyiv, but the last of the big three national chains, **Myrovaya Karta** (www.kartamir.com.ua), runs the gamut from Tequila House in Kyiv to Marrakesh in Donetsk.

**Bread** Visiting Ukraine in the 1840s, French writer Honoré de Balzac counted '77 ways of preparing bread'. Dark and white varieties of *khlib* (хліб) are available every day, including the white *pampushky* (soft rolls rubbed with garlic and oil and then fried) served with *borshch*. Ceremonial breads are quite spectacular and often sweet; for a few more details, see Celebrations below.

Nearly 20 *borshch* recipes can be found at www.borschrecipe.info – just a tiny sample of the more than 300 different varieties that exist.

**Holists** *Holubtsy* (голубці) are cabbage rolls stuffed with seasoned rice, meat or buckwheat, and topped with a tomato-based sauce.

**Kasha** Pretty much any grain is called *kasha* (каша) in Ukrainian, and while the word might be used to describe what Westerners would call porridge, more commonly it turns out to be buckwheat. The latter appears as a side dish, as stuffing or as an unusual breakfast gruel. More strongly flavoured than you'd expect, it's an acquired taste.

**Pancakes** Three types of pancake might land on your plate. *Deruny* (деруни) are potato pancakes, and are served with a cream sauce and vegetables or meat. *Nalysnyky* (налисники) are thin crepes; *mlyntsy* (млинці) are thicker and smaller, like Russian *blyny*.

**Varenyky** Similar to Polish *pierogies, varenyky* (вареники) are to Ukraine what dim sum is to China and filled pasta to Italy. These small half-moon shaped dumplings have more than 50 different traditional vegetarian and meat fillings. They're usually served with *smetana* (сметана; sour cream) and an oily sauce.

## DRINKS

Ukrainians love *salo* (raw pig fat) so much they even smuggle it. In 2007, one group was caught at the Russian border near Donetsk trying to illicitly bring three tonnes of the stuff into Ukraine.

On street corners in summer, you'll see small drinks' tankers selling *kvas* (квас), a gingery, beer-like soft drink, which is made from sugar and old black bread and is mildly alcoholic; look for the big vats with hosepipe attachments. *Kvas* is proffered in a mug or cup that everyone shares, so you might want to bring your own glass. Alternatively, head to the supermarket, where it's now available in bottles.

## CELEBRATIONS

Ukrainian food truly comes into its own during Christmas, Easter and wedding celebrations. Marta Pisetska Farley's *Festive Ukrainian Cooking* (1990) will give you chapter, verse and recipes.

At Easter, certain foods are taken to church in a covered basket to be blessed. These usually include hard-boiled eggs, baked cheese and Easter breads like round *paska* (паска; decorated with crosses) or tall, cylindrical *babka* (бабка; a sweet egg bread). Think hot-cross bun meets panettone.

Ukrainians also have a range of special wedding breads, including the large circular and decorated *korovay* (Коровай).

### WE DARE YOU

Ukrainian food could sometimes be described as bland, but there's nothing shy and retiring about the following delicacies.

- **Salo** Eating this raw salted pig fat is a centuries-old tradition that runs deep and thick, also literally, in the Ukrainian blood. Songs and poems are even dedicated to this product, which long provided a cheaper and more preservable alternative to meat. You'll find *salo* (сало) flavoured with garlic and salt, and spread on thick bread, on many menus. Occasionally, you'll even alight on the 'Ukrainian Snickers bar' – *salo* in chocolate. In Kyiv it's found at the restaurant Tsarske Selo (p88).
- **Churchkheli** Originally from Georgia, these nut-based sweets could easily be mistaken for a thin sausage or candle. What's slightly alarming about the Ukrainian versions, seen predominantly in Crimea, is just how brightly coloured they are – are there E-numbers in there? In the final analysis, though, *churchkheli* (чурчхели) turn out to be delicious. They're an innocuous combination of hazelnuts (although walnuts are more traditionally used in Georgia) dipped in a gel of wine, or in apple or pomegranate juice.
- **Sheep and bull's testicles** Sold charcoal-grilled at some Tatar roadside stalls and restaurants in Crimea, this he-man dish reportedly tastes like kidneys crossed with that old staple – chicken.



### BEER, WINE & VODKA – THOSE ARE OUR DRINKS *Marc di Duca*

It may come as a surprise to hear that Ukraine, a country where every occasion or meeting is steeped in vodka, produces some very quaffable beers. In fact, the beer market is booming, with many young people, especially in the cities, turning their backs on vodka for it.

Breweries produce various light, dark, unfiltered and flavoured lagers; there are at least 40 different domestic varieties, including the following leading brands:

- **Chernihivske** (www.chernigivske.com.ua/en) This brewery (Чернігівське) originally hails from Chernihiv, but now has some beers from Mykolayiv on its roster of light, premium, strong and dark labels. The fashionable stand-out of late has been its Bile (біле), a German-style wheat beer.
- **Lvivske** (www.lvivske.com) In the Galician capital from which it originates, you can learn more about delicious львівське on a brewery tour (p120).
- **Obolon** (www.obolon.com/en) Named after a Kyiv suburb, Obolon (Оболонь) is the third largest brewery in Europe, and Ukraine's largest manufacturer and number-one export beer.
- **Slavutych** (www.slavutich.ua) Hailing from Zaporizhzhya, Slavutych (Славутич) comes in three labels: blue (light), green (classic) and red (dark).

In 2004 Ukraine's **Pshenychne Etalon** (www.etalon-beer.com.ua), another German-style wheat beer, won acclaim and major awards internationally.

The situation with Ukrainian wine is not so rosy, with production having fallen by almost three quarters since Gorbachev's 'dry law' saw many vines pulled up in the late 1980s. Crimea still produces wines, but most of them are sugary dessert wines akin to Madeira or sherry. Some Koktebel-label whites and Inkerman reds are probably the best you will drink in Ukraine. Wines are also grown in the Transcarpathian region, and some top restaurants in Kyiv now source their wines in this area. Sadly, the best wines available in Ukraine still come from neighbouring Moldova.

The biggest name in Ukrainian vodka is undoubtedly **Nemiroff** (www.nemiroff.ua). However, although they seem to imbibe an awful lot of the stuff, surveys show Ukrainians don't drink anything like as much as Russians – which is probably a good thing.

## WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

A series of updated and adapted traditional recipes from American-Ukrainian homes is brought together in *Ukrainian Recipes* (1996) edited by Joanne Asala. Daily staples and festive fare are both included.

Restaurant (ресторан) and café (кафе) sound similar in English and Ukrainian. Some Ukrainian restaurants specialise in a particular dish, such as a *varenychna* (варенична), which serves only *varenyky*. A *stolova* (столова) is a Russian-style self-service canteen. Visiting Ukraine, you should probably swallow any dislike you may have of theme restaurants – they're as trendy here as in Russia.

Most restaurants are open from 11am or noon to 11pm or midnight, serving food constantly throughout. Cafés and canteens often open at the earlier time 8am, but frequently stay open late too.

When eating in restaurants, be aware that prices for many meat and fish dishes are listed on the menu by weight. For example, the *shashlyk* that looks good value at 10uah, might actually be 10uah per 100g, so read the menu carefully and if in doubt, ask. Bread and condiments are never complimentary, but they cost very little.

Tips aren't obligatory, although they are increasingly expected (especially from foreigners) in the more cosmopolitan centres such as Kyiv, Odesa and Yalta. Around 10% will usually do.

## Quick Eats

Food kiosks selling drinks and snacks sprout on every spare inch of pavement in Ukraine, especially around train and bus stations. Mostly they deal in cigarettes, sweets and the ever-present chewing gum. The bottles on the shelves range from water and soft drinks to beer, which is also considered a soft drink in Ukraine and is legal to drink on the streets.

Other stalls sell pastries or warm snacks, including hamburgers, hot dogs, *shashlyky* (шашлик) and *perepichky* (перепічки), fairground-style frankfurters deep-fried in dough. It's not as if you need triple-strength health insurance to eat at these. However, if you have a delicate stomach, give them a wide berth.

If you're self-catering, head to the local market *(rynok)*, which always provides a colourful experience. Old-style food stores *(gastronomy)* tend to be reminiscent of the USSR, but plenty of modern supermarkets now exist.

For details of more than 450 great restaurants, with reviews and ratings, log on to www.chicken.kiev.ua/eng. Rival website www.lasoon.com.ua/eng even includes some menus.

Get a tiny taste of Crimean Tatar cuisine, with the recipes for *manti*, *cheburyk*, *gubadia* and *köbete* at www.euronet.nl/users/sota/recipes.html.

## VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

While most Ukrainians are carnivores by nature, vegetarians won't find eating out too trying, especially in the larger cities where pizza joints and international restaurants abound. Even Ukrainian cuisine can be meat-free if you stick to a fairly bland diet of *deruny* or potato-and-mushroom *varenyky*. However, it's always a good idea to specify that you want a meat-free salad and *borshch* is, sadly, best avoided if you're strict about your diet. Even 'vegetarian' versions are often made using beef stock.

Vegans are much worse off. In a land that adores *smetana* (sour cream) and slathers its salads in mayonnaise, dining out will prove a trial. The best thing to do is stay in apartments and visit the local markets for cooking ingredients. Alternatively, come to Ukraine for Christmas (see p48).

## EATING WITH KIDS

You might have other concerns about bringing children to Ukraine (see p242), but dining out should never be one. Kids are a common sight in restaurants, and staff are usually very solicitous, rustling up high-chairs if they can. As it's not very spicy, the national cuisine is gentle on young palates; few young children will turn down well-cooked *varenyky*. Ukrainians have an extremely sweet collective tooth, so treats won't be hard to find, either.

### UKRAINE'S TOP FIVE

- **Concord, Kyiv** (p88) Mouth-watering Euro-Asian cuisine in a chic dining room overlooking the city
- **Vernisazh, Kyiv** (p88) Eclectic multicultural dishes by a talented chef, served in a bohemian atmosphere
- **Amadeus, Lviv** (p124) A delicious surf-and-turf *shashlyk* tops a wide-ranging Ukrainian-European menu
- **Reflection, Chernivtsi** (p155) Croissants, Waldorf salads and vegetable fajitas, served with freshly squeezed mango juice, are just some of the surprises at this impossibly good regional restaurant
- **Reporter, Dnipropetrovsk** (p231) Even the *varenyky* – plump, homemade and the best we've ever had – have been given a *nouvelle cuisine* twist in this chic upmarket bar-restaurant



### DOS & DON'TS

- Do bring a small gift if you've been invited to lunch or dinner.
- Do inform your hosts beforehand of any dietary needs; refusing food can be seen as rude.
- Do take off your shoes on entering your host's house.
- Do say *'smachnoho'* (bon appetit) before starting to eat.
- Do down your shot glass of vodka in one gulp when drinking a toast.
- Don't bring an even number of flowers; that's for funerals.
- Don't shake hands across the threshold; it's bad luck.
- Don't refuse a drink without a 'proper' excuse, ie for religious or health reasons.
- Don't leave an empty bottle on the table during a meal; it's bad luck.
- Don't expect to keep up with Ukrainians making toasts – they can outdrink all comers.

## HABITS & CUSTOMS

Lunch is traditionally the main meal of the day, although changing lifestyles mean many workers now eat lunch on the run. Breakfast (sni-*da*-nok in Ukrainian) is usually very similar to lunch (o-*bid*) or dinner (ve-*che*-rya); you'll rarely see muesli or toast.

The best Ukrainian food is home-cooked and if you get invited to someone's house for a meal you're in for a treat. Ukrainian hospitality is legendary and having guests around turns the meal into a drawn-out, celebratory banquet, with plenty of courses and toasts.

## EAT YOUR WORDS

In Kyiv and other major cities, it's always worth asking if there's an English-language menu. Sometimes one is available, even when the waiters don't speak a word of English (you simply point). Mostly, however, you will be faced with Cyrillic script – a good incentive to learn the language.

For pronunciation guidelines see p268.

You can learn how to cook everything from different types of *borshch* to delicious *medovyky* (honey cakes) with Hippocrene's *Best of Ukrainian Cuisine* (1998) by Bohdan Zahny.

### Useful Phrases

**Do you have any free tables?**
У Вас є вільні столи? — u vas ye *vil'*·ni *sto*·ly?

**Can I/we see the menu?**
Можна подивитися на меню? — *mo*·zhna po·dy·*vy*·ty·sya na me·*nyu*?

**Do you have a menu in English?**
У Вас є меню англійською мовою? — u vas ye me·*nyu* an·*hliys'*·ko·yu *mo*·vo·yu?

**I'm a vegetarian.**
Я вегетаріанець/вегетаріанка. — ya ve·he·ta·ri·*a*·nets'/ve·he·ta·ri·*an*·ka (m/f).

**What do you recommend?**
Що Ви порадите? — shcho vy po·*ra*·dy·te?

**What is this/that?**
Що це? — shcho tse?

**I'd like ...**
Я візьму ... — ya viz'·*mu* ...
Я б хотів/хотіла ... — ya b kho·*tiv*/kho·*ti*·la ... (m/f)

**I've been waiting for a long time.**
Я вже давно чекаю. — ya vzhe da·*vno* che·*ka*·yu

**Bon appetit!**
Смачного! — smach·*no*·ho!

**'НЕМАЄ'**

A phrase you often hear in Ukrainian restaurants, particularly in smaller towns, is 'ne-*ma*-ye', meaning 'there isn't any'. It turns out many menu items aren't always available. This is because eating out is still quite a treat for many Ukrainians, who mostly only come for slap-up feasts and celebrations booked in advance. Many restaurants, in turn, have written their menus for these banqueting groups. While they might be happy to pre-order in a dish for a party, the ingredients won't normally be in their pantry, even if that dish stays on the menu. Since only nouveau riche Ukrainians eat out regularly, restaurants outside Kyiv are often quite empty.

**Cheers!**
Будьмо! *bud'*·mo!
**Thanks, I'm full.**
Дякую, я наївся/наїлася. *dya*·ku·yu, ya na·*yi*·wsya/na·*yi*·la·sya (m/f)
**I don't drink (alcohol).**
Я не п'ю. ya ne pyu
**The doctor doesn't allow me to eat/drink that.**
Мені не дозволяє лікар їсти/пити. me·*ni* ne do·zvo·*lya*·ye *li*·kar yisty/pyty
**Could we have the bill?**
Можна рахунок? *mo*·zhna ra·*khu*·nok?
**Could I have a receipt please?**
Дайте квитанцію, будь ласка? *da*·yte kvy·*tan*·tsiyu bud *la*·ska?
**Thank you.**
Дякую. *dya*·ku·yu
**The meal was delicious!**
Було дуже смачно! bu·*lo duz*·he *smach*·no!
**Compliments to the chef!**
Передайте подяку кухареві! pe·re·*day*·te po·*dya*·ku *ku*·kha·re·vi!

## Food Glossary

### POPULAR DISHES

асорті овочеве (a·sor·*ti* o·vo·*che*·ve) – mixed vegetables
бануш (ba·*nush*) – cornmeal-based dish, like wet polenta
біфштекс пяний (bif·*shteks pya*·ny) – 'tipsy' beefsteak, cooked in alcohol and flambéed
блинчики (*blyn*·chy·ky) – oft-used Russian name for pancakes or pikelets
борщ зелений (borshch ze·*le*·ny) – green *borshch,* made with sorrel
борщ з пампушками та часниковою підливою (borshch z pam·*push*·ka·my ta chas·ny·*ko*·vo·yu pid·*ly*·vo·yu) – *borshch* with dumplings and garlic sauce
борщ Український (borshch uk·ra·*yin*·sky) – Ukrainian *borshch,* made with beetroot
вареники з картоплею та грибами (va·*re*·ny·ky z kar·*top*·le·yu ta hry·*ba*·my) – ravioli-style dumplings with mashed potato and mushrooms
вареники з квашеною капустою (va·*re*·ny·ky z *kva*·she·no·yu ka·*pus*·to·yu) – ravioli-style dumplings with sauerkraut
вареники з м'ясом (va·*re*·ny·ky z *mya*·som) – ravioli/dumplings with meat
відбивна (vid·byv·*na*) – steak
відбивна із лосося з креветками (vid·byv·*na* iz lo·*so*·sya z kre·*vet*·ka·my) – salmon steak and prawns
голубці з грибами (ho·lub·*tsi* z hry·*ba*·my) – cabbage rolls stuffed with mushrooms
деруни з грибами та сметаною (de·ru·*ny* z hry·*ba*·my ta sme·*ta*·no·yu) – potato pancakes with mushrooms and sour cream
запечені баклажанчики (za·*pe*·che·ni ba·kla·*zha*·ny) – baked aubergine (eggplant) dish
картопля відварна (kar·*top*·lya vid·var·*na*) – boiled potatoes
картопля запечена (kar·*top*·lya za·*pe*·che·na) – baked potatoes
картопля фрі (kar·*top*·lya fri) – French fries



ковбаса (kov·ba·*sa*) – smoked ham sausage
котлета по-київськи (kot·*le*·ta po *ky*·yiv·sky) – chicken kiev, a crumbed chicken fillet, filled with butter and deep fried
кров'яночка (kro·*vya*·noch·ka) – blood sausage filled with buckwheat, bacon and calf's liver
крученики (kru·*che*·ny·ky) – beef roulades stuffed with prunes, bacon and spinach, served with red-wine sauce
курина грудинка з курагою та миндалем (ku·ry·na hru·*dyu*·ka z kura·*ho*·yu ta myn·*da*·lem) – chicken breast with dried apricots and almonds
лососина в шампанському (lo·*so*·sy·na v sham·*pan*·sko·mu) – salmon in champagne
мамалига (ma·ma·*ly*·ha) – cornmeal-based dish, like firm polenta
млинці з медом та маслом (mlyn·*tsi* z *me*·dom ta *mas*·lom) – pancakes with honey and butter
налисники з червоною ікрою (na·*lus*·ny·ky z cher·*vo*·no·yu ik·*ro*·yu) – crepes with red caviar
налисники з чорною ікрою (na·*lus*·ny·ky z *chor*·no·yu ik·*ro*·yu) – crepes with black caviar
овочі гриль or овочевий шашлик (*o*·vo·chi hryl/o·vo·*che*·vy sha·shlyk) – vegetable *shashlyk*
омлет (om·let) – omelette
пельмені (pel·*me*·ni) – Russian dim sum, akin to *varenyky*
печеня домашня (pe·*che*·nya do·*mash*·nya) – home-style roast beef
плов (plov) – dish of rice, meat and grilled vegetables, often served with a spicy sauce
пюре картопляне (pyu·*re* kar·*top*·lya·ne) – mashed potatoes
салат (sa·*lat*) – salad; looks like 'салам' when handwritten
свина ребрина в медовому соусі (svy·*na* reb·*ry*·na v me·*do*·vo·mu *so*·u·si) – pork ribs in honey sauce
солянка (so·*lyan*·ka) – slightly sour-tasting soup made with olives and salted cucumbers, plus meat or fish
студень (*stu*·den) – see холодець
шашлик (sha·*shlyk*) – shish kebab
шашлик із осетрини (sha·*shlyk* iz o·se·*try*·ny) – sturgeon *shashlyk*
шашлик із сома (sha·*shlyk* iz *so*·ma) – catfish *shashlyk*
шашлик із свинини (sha·*shlyk* iz svy·*ny*·ny) – pork *shashlyk*
шуба or оселедець під шубою (*shu*·ba/o·se·*le*·dets pid *shy*·bo·yu) – herrings under a layered salad of carrot, beetroot and mayonnaise
холодець (kho·lo·*dets*) – meat, usually pork, in jelly
чебуреки (che·bu·*re*·ky) – pastry pocket filled with meat or cheese, like a Turkish *burek*
юшка (*yu*·shka) – thin soup or gruel

### BASICS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| хліб | khlib | bread |
| чорний | ... *chor*·ny | black |
| білий | ... *bi*·ly | white |
| мед | med | honey |
| перець | *pe*·rets | pepper |
| сіль | sil' | salt |
| цукор | *tsu*·kor | sugar |
| варення | va·*ryen*·nya | jam |
| яйце | *yay*·tse | egg |

### DAIRY PRODUCE МОЛОЧНІ ПРОДУКТИ

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| кефір | ke·*fir* | drinking yogurt |
| масло | *ma*·slo | butter |
| молоко | mo·lo·*ko* | milk |
| сметана | sme·*ta*·na | sour cream |

### FRUIT ФРУКТИ

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| апельсин/помаранча | a·pel'·*syn*/po·ma·*ran*·cha | orange |
| банан | ba·*nan* | banana |

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| гранат | hra·*nat* | pomegranate |
| кавун | ka·*vun* | watermelon |
| ківі | *ki*·vi | kiwi fruit |
| малина | ma·*ly*·na | raspberry |
| виноград | vy·no·*hrad* | grapes |
| яблуко | *ya*·blu·ko | apple |

| **VEGETABLES** | ОВОЧІ | |
|---|---|---|
| буряк | bu·*ryak* | beetroot |
| гриб | hryb | mushroom |
| капуста | ka·*pu*·sta | cabbage |
| картопля | kar·*to*·plya | potato |
| морква | *mor*·kva | carrot |
| цибуля | tsy·*bu*·lya | onion |

| **MEAT** | М'ЯСО | |
|---|---|---|
| баранина | ba·*ra*·ny·na | lamb |
| індик/індичатина | in·*dyk*/in·dy·*cha*·ty·na | turkey |
| качка/утятина/гусятина | *kach*·ka/u·tya·*ty*·na/hu·*sya*·ty·na | duck |
| курятина/курка | ku·*rya*·ty·na/*kur*·ka | chicken |
| свинина | svy·*ny*·na | pork |
| телятина | te·*lya*·ty·na | veal |
| яловичина | *ya*·lo·vy·chy·na | beef |

| **SEAFOOD** | РИБНІ СТРАВИ | |
|---|---|---|
| ікра | i·*kra* | caviar |
| червона | ... che·*rvo*·na | red |
| чорна | ... chor·*na* | black |
| форель | fo·*rel* | trout |
| короп | *ko*·rop | carp |
| краби | *kra*·by | crabs |
| лосось/лососина | lo·*sos'*/lo·*so*·sy·na | salmon |
| оселедець | o·se·*le*·dets' | herring |
| осетрина | o·se·*try*·na | sturgeon |
| судак | su·*dak* | pike-perch (Russian) |

| **CONDIMENTS** | ПРИПРАВИ | |
|---|---|---|
| гірчиця | hir·*chu*·tsya | mustard |
| кетчуп | *ket*·chup | ketchup or tomato sauce |
| майонез | ma·yo·*nez* | mayonnaise |
| олія | o·*li*·ya | oil |
| оцет | o·*tset* | vinegar |
| соус татарський | *so*·us ta·*tar*·sky | tatar sauce |
| хрін | khrin | horseradish |

| **PIZZA TOPPINGS** | НАЧИНКА ДЛЯ ПІЦЦИ | |
|---|---|---|
| ананас | a·na·*nas* | pineapple |
| кукуруза | ku·ku·*ru*·za | sweet corn |
| курятина/курка | ku·*rya*·ty·na/*kur*·ka | chicken |
| оливки/маслини | o·*lyv*·ky/ma·*sly*·ny | olives |
| основа | o·*sno*·va | base (often refers to a pizza margherita) |
| пепероні | pe·pe·*ro*·ni | pepperoni |
| перець | *pe*·rets | peppers/capsicum |
| помідори/печериці | po·mi·*dor*·i/pe·che·*ry*·tsi | tomatoes/tomato paste |
| салямі | sa·*lya*·mi | salami |
| шинка | *shyn*·ka | ham |
| сир | syr | cheese |
| тунець | tu·*nets* | tuna |

| **SNACKS & SWEETS** | ЗАКУСКИ ТА СОЛОДОЩІ | |
|---|---|---|
| чіпси | *cheep*·si | chips/crisps |
| морозиво | mo·*ro*·zy·vo | ice cream |
| печення | pe·*chen*·nya | biscuits |
| шоколад | sho·ko·*lad* | chocolate |
| торт | tort | cake |
| жувальна резинка/ жувачка | zhee·*val*·na re·*zyn*·ka/ zhu·*vach*·ka | chewing gum |

| **DRINKS** | НАПОЇ | |
|---|---|---|
| чай | chay | tea |
| з лимоном | ... z ly·*mo*·nom | with lemon |
| горілка/водка | ho·*ril*·ka/*vot*·ka | vodka (Ukrainian/ Russian) |
| кава/кофе | *ka*·va/*ko*·fe | coffee (Ukrainian/ Russian) |
| з молоком | ... z mo·lo·*kom* | with milk |
| з цукром | ... z *tsuk*·rom | with sugar |
| мінеральна вода | mi·ne·*ral'*·na vo·*da* | mineral water |
| без газу/не газована | ... bez *ha*·zu/ne ha·*zo*·va·na | still |
| з газом/газована | ... z *ha*·zu/ha·*zo*·va·na | sparkling |
| пиво | *py*·vo | beer |
| сік/сок | sik/sok | juice (Ukrainian/Russian) |
| фруктовий | ... fruk·*to*·vy | fruit |
| апельсин | ... a·pel'·*syn* | orange |
| апельсиновий | ... a·pel·*sy*·no·vy | freshly squeezed orange |
| вино | vy·*no* | wine |
| біле | ... *bi*·le | white |
| червоне | ... cher·*vo*·ne | red |

# Environment

## THE LAND

Largely ignored by the outside world until recently, Ukraine surprises many people with its size. It's the largest country lying wholly within Europe, so how can something this big have ever been overlooked? Stretching some 2000km east to west and 1000km north to south, Ukraine outdoes both France and Germany in area and is only dwarfed by Russia, which stretches into Asia.

Vast, open steppe – flat plains and gently rolling grasslands – covers the heart of the country. You'll really appreciate this if travelling by day from Kyiv to Odesa, for example, where the plain stretches interminably in all directions and makes one feel very small. A small belt of forested highland interrupts the horizon in the north, while in the southeast there are river gorges and ravines near the Dnipro River.

Ukrainian babushkas (old women) are great believers in herbal remedies. Their favourite is wormwood *(hirky polyn)*, which is thought to help with toothache, coughs, fever, kidney and liver ailments, and even memory.

Of the four rivers crossing the country, the Dnipro is the biggest and most revered. Some 980 of its 2201 kilometres flow north to south through Ukraine. It's Ukraine's main transportation artery, with enormous hydroelectric dams harnessing its power at Kremenchuk, Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhya. The last of these has even swallowed the legendary waterfalls that existed in Cossack times. The Dnister, to the west, is the secondary river.

The only serious mountains are a short stretch of the Carpathians in the west and the Crimean Mountains in the far south. Even these are modest by world standards, with the highest peaks being the Carpathians' Mt Hoverla (2061m) and Crimea's Mt Roman Kosh (1543m).

Ukraine's rich natural assets belie its current economic poverty. A central belt of deep, thick, humus-rich soil *(chornozem)* covers almost two-thirds of Ukraine, constituting one of the world's most fertile regions. Meanwhile, coal and iron are mined in the far eastern and south-central regions.

## WILDLIFE

Ukraine is rarely a top priority on wildlife-lovers' lists. However, it's full of quirky surprises, from safaris where you can view zebras, camels and antelopes to riverine forests that qualify as 'jungles'. Home to Europe's largest wetlands, it's a genuine treat for bird-watchers, while animal populations have multiplied in the zone around the Chornobyl nuclear plant – largely abandoned by humans since the catastrophe in 1986.

### WORLD HERITAGE SITES

There are just four Unesco World Heritage Sites in Ukraine (http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/ua), although another 11 have been nominated for future consideration, including the town of Kamyanets-Podilsky (p106) and the Khans' Palace (p193) in Bakhchysaray. The four already inscribed on the list include two transnational entries.

The Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (p184) is also part of Unesco's global network of biosphere reserves.

- **St Sophia's Cathedral** (p70) and **Kievo-Pecherska Lavra** (p75) – a joint entry from Kyiv
- **Lviv** (p116) – Lviv's historic centre made the list in 1998
- **Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians** – consisting of 10 separate patches of forest stretching from Rakhiv into Slovakia
- **Struve Geodetic Arc** – a chain of scientific survey markers (1816–55) in a long arc from Norway to the Black Sea

### RADIOACTIVE WILDERNESS?

As early as 2001, well-known British scientist and Gaia environmentalist, James Lovelock, was talking publicly about the surprising reappearance of wildlife within the Chornobyl exclusion zone. In 2005, when journalist Mary Mycio published her decade-long observations in *Wormwood Forest: A Natural History of Chernobyl* the word spread that mammals like boar, deer, elk, foxes, rabbits, rodents and wolves were booming in the irradiated but uninhabited zone. A paper published in *American Scientist* in 2006 kept the ball rolling. Professors Robert Baker and Ronald Chesser from Texas Tech University concluded that the benefit brought to animal populations by the removal of people outweighed any harm inflicted by raised levels of radiation.

However, even these commentators were careful to qualify their statements. Baker admits on his website that it cannot be said that radiation is positively good for wildlife, just that it isn't as detrimental as expected. Mycio has also pointed out that scientists study overall animal numbers and aren't so interested in the life expectancy of individuals.

More recently, other scientists have tried to completely quash previous optimistic thinking. In late 2007, US scientist Tim Mousseau and his French counterpart Anders Moller published a paper disagreeing with earlier findings.

Professor Mousseau, who has studied Chornobyl's bird life, told the BBC that while the exclusion zone looked like a thriving ecosystem, the impression was misleading, adding that 'When you do controlled ecological studies, what we see is a very clear signature of negative effects of contamination on diversity and abundance of organism.'

Interestingly, parts of the Chornobyl exclusion zone in Belarus have been turned into a nature reserve. It remains to be seen whether the same will happen on the Ukrainian side.

## Animals

### BEARS, BISON AND WOLVES

International environmentalists often reverentially refer to the Carpathian Mountains (p141) – whose eastern section falls in Ukraine – as Europe's last refuge for large mammals like the brown bear, wolf and lynx. Large numbers of wolves are found in parts of the mountains (though most notably in Poland) and a relatively pure breed of the European wildcat is also found here.

However, when you talk to Ukrainian scientists about the largest mammals, they sound a more realistic note. Dr Andriy-Taras Bashta, a Lviv-based senior research scientist at the Institute of Ecology of the Carpathians, tells us that while there have been several reintroductions of European bison in the past few decades, today only 85 to 90 bison survive on Ukrainian territory, mostly in Bukovyna. This is down from about 200 in the year 2000, as the animals continue to die through disease, road accidents and poaching. Meanwhile, the number of brown bears is estimated at 300 or fewer.

Try to get your head around all the conflicting statistics and see what's being done for the catastrophe's victims at the official Chornobyl site, www.chernobyl.info.

Unlike in neighbouring Romania, there are no animal-spotting tours in the Ukrainian Carpathians.

### HORSES, DEER AND BOAR

The best place to head to in Ukraine if you wish to see large animals is the wildlife park of the Askaniya Nova Reserve (p182), established on Europe's largest remaining steppe in the 19th century. Founder Friedrich von Falz-Fein acted on his slightly mad idea to populate the reserve with rare Central Asian Saiga antelopes, along with deer, zebras, camels, gnus, and all manner of birds. Today, such exotic animals are still here, alongside a few European bison. The park famously keeps and breeds sturdy Przewalski horses. Also known as Mongolian wild horses, they are by some accounts the only truly 'wild' breed of horse still left in the world.

Bizarrely, another incongruous place you might see deer and the like is inside the Chornobyl exclusion zone (p95). Since the human population was evacuated

in the wake of the world's worst nuclear accident, wildlife has seemingly thrived in the region (see the boxed text p57). Of course, some visitors to this area see no fauna at all, but the most common animal sighted is boar. However, there's no doubt some Przewalski horses live at Chornobyl – they were transplanted here from Askaniya Nova Reserve when it ran out of room.

In the computer game *STALKER: Shadow of Chernobyl* players can virtually explore the exclusion zone after a fictitious second nuclear explosion. Although the game's Ukrainian developers expected controversy, some Chornobyl workers even became fans.

### BIRDS & FISH

With saker falcons and long-eared owls in residence, Askaniya Nova Reserve makes a decent bird-watching destination. The park has a spring-fed pool that attracts wading birds, wildfowl and common cranes. However, Ukraine's best spot for twitchers is the protected Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (p184), in southern Ukraine. At 626,000 hectares, this is Europe's largest wetlands, and is home to more than 300 bird species, including pygmy cormorants, herons, Spanish sparrows, bee-eaters, osprey, kingfishers, and the largest colony of white pelicans outside Africa. Additionally, it's a major migration hub for thousands of birds flying between Africa, Asia and Europe.

According to Paul Goriup of Salix Nature Tours (p173) bird-watchers here can not only get up close to low-nesting white storks and red-footed falcons. 'The most exciting thing,' he tells us, 'is the guarantee of seeing paddyfield warblers, a highly restricted and difficult-to-find species.'

Additionally, the waters of the delta are a major spawning ground for more than 75 species of freshwater fish. Sadly, giant beluga sturgeon, which apparently really can grow to the size of a small bus, have disappeared from the delta. However, Paul Goriup has heard of huge catfish weighing 90kg. He also insists the Ukrainian side of the delta is every bit as marvellous as the larger, more lauded Romanian section, with more birds, more upstream lakes and more riverine forest. Also, being more accessible, he believes 'You can get a real feel for the delta in one day in Ukraine,' whereas 'you need at least three in Romania.'

Bill Oddie types heading to Ukraine for some bird-watching can check recent campaigns and sightings at the Ukrainian Society for the Protection of Birds (www.birdlife.org.ua).

## Plants

### FORESTS & TREES

In 2007 there was a heartening, and rare, environmental victory in Ukraine, when some virgin beech forests of the Carpathians were inscribed into Unesco's World Heritage List. With some parts dating back 350 years, these old-growth forests are seen as an outstanding example of undisturbed temperate forests, but like most Carpathian territory, they had been under pressure from the logging industry. Ten patches of beech *(buk),* stretching 185km from Ukraine into Slovakia, are now under formal UN protection. However, they are not the region's only interesting forests.

Mary Mycio's *Wormwood Forest: A Natural History of Chernobyl* (2005) often seems as disorderly and unpruned as the vegetation growing over the abandoned exclusion zone. However, it's well worth sticking with for some fascinating details.

The Carpathians also boast some of the largest surviving riverine forests or 'jungles' in Europe. As the Tysa, Borzhava, Latorytsya, Uzh and other rivers flow down the mountainsides, their nutrient-rich water submerges tree roots and trunks, sometimes up to a metre deep. As a result, the forests are tightly packed together and grow extremely quickly. Trees here range from 100 years to, very occasionally, 400 years old. The area is also covered in vines and inhabited by creatures such as storks and huge catfish.

Forest researcher Dr Bohdan Prots, from the Ukrainian National Academy of Sciences in Lviv, told us he would love to see this area also come under Unesco protection to keep the loggers at bay. He and his team are now working to establish a nature reserve around the jungles.

Away from the Carpathians, which also house oak *(dub)* and pine *(sosna)*, the most heavily wooded parts of the country lie north in the Volyn and Polissya districts. Here, there are mixed forests of fir *(yalyna),* spruce *(kanadska ihlytsya),* beech, oak and pine. Across the country, oak and willow *(verba)* grow along the rivers, while chestnut trees (*kashtany;* the official symbol of Kyiv) line city boulevards.

The yew tree *(tysove derevo),* Carpathian rhododendron *(Karpatsky rododendron)* and edelweiss *(edelveys)* are protected species. Taras Shevchenko and other poets have lionised the white-flowered, red-berried guelder-rose *(kalina)* as a national symbol, while the aromatic scent of juniper *(mozhevelnyk)* wafts all over Crimea and its wood is used to make souvenirs.

### CROPS & FLOWERS

As the former 'breadbasket of the Soviet Union', Ukraine is unsurprisingly covered in fields of grain, including wheat and barley. It also grows enormous quantities of sugar beets. A narrow strip of Mediterranean vegetation runs along the southern coast of Crimea, where grapes and red onions are in abundance. Vineyards also thrive in Transcarpathia.

In the centre of the country, large tracts are set aside as grazing land, and in spring they explode into brilliant, swaying seas of red poppies *(maky),* sunflowers *(sonyashnyky)* and golden-coloured mustard *(hirchytsya)*. There are scores of wildflowers, and dozens of varieties are cultivated for nectar and honey *(med)* production.

Some doomsayers say 'Chornobyl' means 'wormwood' and that the nuclear accident was foretold in the *Book of Revelations* (8:10-11). In any case, *chornobyl* (black grass) is a different, if related, mugwort.

## NATIONAL PARKS

When is a national park not quite a national park? Arguably when it's in Ukraine – an answer you might already have guessed reading two of this chapter's boxed text's (Radioactive Wilderness? and Another 'Nature Reserve' that's Not Quite). The country's 10 national parks, 16 nature reserves and four biosphere reserves still only cover 4.6% of the national territory, and very few of these reserves are entirely or properly protected. Logging, both legal and illegal, occurs in the Carpathian National Nature Park, for example. Plus, there has been international outrage over the construction of a shipping canal in the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (see p60). Yet, despite official neglect, some parks do well because they're so remote and inaccessible.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Home of the Chornobyl accident, the world's worst nuclear disaster (see p61), Ukraine has a poor environmental record. The explosion was a wake-up

### UKRAINE'S NATIONAL PARKS

Listed here is a selection of parks Western tourists will most likely visit. For a full list and location map, visit http://enrin.grida.no/biodiv/biodiv/national/ukraine/prt/res.htm. If you do visit a national park, be aware that lighting fires is not allowed or only allowed in dedicated camp sites; try to find out what the situation is where you are.

| Park | Features | Activities | Best time to visit | Page |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Askaniya Nova Reserve | bison, ostrich, flamingos, zebra | sightseeing safari, zoo & garden visit | May-Nov | p182 |
| Carpathian National Nature Park | rolling mountains, pristine lakes, bears | skiing, hiking | year round | p141 |
| Carpathian Biosphere Reserve | Unesco-protected virgin beech forests | hiking | May-Sep | p150 |
| Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve | Europe's largest wetlands, pelicans, cormorants | bird-watching, fishing | Mar-Nov | p184 |
| Kara-Dag Nature Reserve | volcanic rocks, flowers, mineral crystals | guided hikes, boat trips | May-Sep | p217 |

### ANOTHER 'NATURE RESERVE' THAT'S NOT QUITE

Crimean hiking guide **Kirill Yasko** (www.outdoorukraine.com) explains the Kafkaesque goings-on in the 'off-limits' nature park north of Yalta.

'The Crimean Nature Reserve is a restricted zone, but a lot of people visit it. Firstly, you have backpackers who hike on the highest Crimean plateau, Babugan, which is part of the reserve. They dodge the forest rangers and don't light fires en route. After them come the pilgrims. Once or twice a year it's permitted to pass through the reserve to the monastery in the middle. Third on the list are government officials. The government has something akin to a villa in the reserve, and past regimes would go hunting there. Fourthly, some excursions in the reserve are allowed, but you can only go by car – no hiking or bikes. The reserve's office, in Alushta, will give you a permit and a guide, who will follow you the whole way on the old road there. There are deer, so many deer it's amazing, in the park. Finally, there are the poachers. I don't know how many people do this.'

call, and the beginning of the country's green movement. However, today, Ukraine's 500 environmental NGOs still have many issues to contend with.

Besides recognising the horrors of Chornobyl, a major conference in Kyiv in 2003 concluded that water pollution, illegal logging in the Carpathians, a loss of soil fertility from intensive agriculture, the use of old, Soviet-era pesticides, and low environmental awareness among the general public, were all big challenges confronting Ukraine.

Biodiversity and government disregard for sustainable development were other issues discussed at the conference. In 2003 the World Bank criticised the Ukrainian government for failing to make companies comply with pollution limits and for frequently exempting politically influential companies from emission limits. Between 2004 and 2007, as the country continued to plough on – literally – with a controversial shipping canal in an environmentally sensitive region, Ukraine came under fire from many more critics.

### DANUBE DELTA SHIPPING CANAL

Since 2004, Ukraine has provoked international outrage with its construction of a shipping canal in the middle of the environmentally sensitive Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, Europe's largest wetland and a major breeding ground for bird and fish species. The controversy kicked off when the former government of President Kuchma hatched a plan to overcome a natural quirk and economically regenerate a region.

About 100km before emptying into the Black Sea, the Danube River splits into three channels: the Sfântu, the Sulina and the Chilia. With only the Chilia channel within its territory, Ukraine had watched all major shipping from the Danube to the Black Sea travel through the Romania-controlled Sulina channel. This allowed Romania to collect immensely lucrative transit fees, so Kuchma decided to resuscitate an old military canal and offer a rival Ukrainian shipping route.

Environmental organisation WWF runs its own dedicated Danube-Carpathian Programme, and the well-designed and well-written web pages about it at www.panda.org make interesting and informative reading.

Work on the proposed Bystroye Canal began in 2004, was delayed by various legal actions, and only restarted in 2007. Environmentalists were worried that altering the natural flow of the delta's waters would force entire species to find new breeding grounds, and cause silting. When work resumed, Michael Baltzer, director of the WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme, objected that 'construction of the Bystroye Canal is being undertaken in contravention of international as well as national law.'

In late 2007, however, it seemed that – pardon the pun – the tide was finally turning. The Ukrainian Supreme Court ruled that the transfer of land from the reserve to the canal's builders was indeed illegal, raising new hopes not just for the future of the Danube Delta but also for the entire environmental movement in Ukraine.



### INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENTS

In 2007 two environmental catastrophes in and near Ukraine made international headlines. The first came in July when a train carrying highly toxic phosphorus derailed outside Lviv. People were taken to hospital and surrounding villages evacuated. Then in November, five ships were wrecked in a well-forecast storm off the Kerch Strait connecting Russia and eastern Crimea – one of the them spilling tonnes of oil. The shipwrecks, and most of

### CHORNOBYL: 'A MONSTER WHICH IS ALWAYS NEAR'

In perhaps the blackest of ironies ever known to history, the world's worst nuclear disaster was the result of an unnecessary safety test. On the night of 25 April 1986, reactor No 4 at the electricity-producing Chornobyl power plant in northern Ukraine was due to be shut down for regular maintenance. Workers decided to use the opportunity to see if, in the event of a shutdown, enough electricity remained in the grid to power the systems that cooled the reactor core, and turned off the emergency cooling system. For various reasons, including a design flaw in the type of RBMK reactor at Chornobyl, operational errors and flouted safety procedures, the result of the test was a power surge, a steam explosion and a full-blown nuclear explosion. At 1.26am on the morning of 26 April 1986, the reactor blew its 500-tonne top and spewed nearly 9 tonnes of radioactive material into the sky in a fireball. More than 90 times as much radioactive material as in the Hiroshima bomb was blown north and west during the next few days and weeks. Fallout dropped mainly over Belarus, but also over Ukraine, Russia, Poland and the Baltic region. Some material also wafted over Sweden, whose scientists were the first to alert the world.

The Soviets initially remained silent while the emergency unfolded. Two people died in the explosion and another 29 firemen – sent in to clean up without proper radiation protection – died in the following weeks. Some 135,000 people were evacuated from the satellite town of Prypyat and a 30km radius around the plant, but were told it was only 'temporary'. Six days after the disaster, with radioactive clouds blowing over Kyiv, May Day parades in the blissfully ignorant city went ahead.

Today the long-term effects of the disaster are still being felt and assessed. The most obvious impact has been an upsurge of thyroid cancer in children, with nearly 2000 cases reported. Studies suggest that of the 600,000 'liquidators' brought in to clean up the site, more than 4000 have died from exposure and 170,000 suffer from terminal diseases. In addition, some 35,000 sq km of forest have been contaminated, and the meat, milk, vegetables and fruit produced there have higher than normal levels of radioactivity. Silt carried down the Dnipro is radioactive, although the extent is still not fully known. Birth defects, suicides, deaths from heart disease and alcoholism are also unusually high in the region. It's estimated that by 2015 the disaster will have cost the economy $200 billion, although, of course, all the figures surrounding the disaster and its toll are disputed.

The last working reactor at Chornobyl, No 3, was finally shut down in 2000. However, reactor No 4 remains 'a monster, a monster which is always near', according to one of the 8000 scientific staff and monitors who still work on site, half of them commuting there daily from the new town of Slavutych.

After the accident, the damaged reactor and 180 tonnes of radioactive mess were hastily enclosed in a concrete-and-steel sarcophagus. However, no-one really knows the state of the radioactive core inside the ruined reactor and that hastily built sarcophagus has long been crumbling. After several false starts, and a growing sense of outrage, a deal was finally signed in 2007 to begin building a secure new steel covering. Construction of this $1.7 billion shelter is being overseen by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and should be completed by 2012.

the pollution and resulting bird deaths occurred on the Russian side, but there were worries of at least some environmental consequences for Ukraine.

Although one ill-advised politician compared July's train derailment to Chornobyl, neither of the 2007 disasters was anywhere on the same scale. However, both underlined the dangerous combination of ageing equipment and a cavalier attitude to safety that sometimes still exists in the region. This combination has also come under the spotlight following tragic coal-mine explosions and cave-ins.

It's Russian tradition to tie a ribbon to a tree in an area to which you wish to return, hence the 'littering' of tree branches with weather-washed ribbons in Crimea. In the Carpathians, it's the sign of a Hutsul wedding.

## LITTER

In few European countries today would the subject of discarded rubbish warrant a separate discussion. However, the complete and utter disregard shown by the majority of Ukrainians for some of their country's most beautiful regions infuriates many foreign visitors, as well as the environmentally conscious local minority.

In Ukraine, it's nothing to find hundreds of plastic water bottles strewn over remote, clear-looking rivers, hiking paths lined with discarded sweets wrappers and broken glass encircling idyllic picnic areas. Equally, your fellow *marshrutka* (minibus) passengers who shiver so violently when you try to open a window in 30°C heat will happily slide back the panel when they need to offload some packaging.

During his 2004 campaign for the presidency, Viktor Yushchenko made the highly symbolic gesture of leading a group of supporters to the top of the country's highest peak, Mt Hoverla, to pick up the rubbish that's nearly always there. However, with Ukraine in almost constant political crisis since 2004, the environment swiftly fell to the bottom of the government agenda. Until there's at least a change in public attitudes, there's nothing for it but to arm yourself with a few bin bags when you go hiking and do your own little cleanup.