

# IS UKRAINE REALLY SAFE TO VISIT?

## **Why “safe treks” is better than abstinence when travelling to Ukraine**

“You live in Ukraine.....is it safe there??” Well, that’s a tricky question to answer. Outside Ukraine, what most people see on the news are constant reports of fighting, shelling, and deaths. When they hear about Ukraine now, they hear only of war. They are flummoxed, for example, to hear that Lviv is as close to London as it is to Donetsk. They seem to have no idea at the size of the country; that you could fit all of Germany and the United Kingdom inside the country and still have room for most of Luxembourg. Yet, the distance between Lviv and the ATO (anti-terrorist operation) theatre, doesn’t ensure Western-style safety either. So the question remains, is Ukraine really safe to visit?

## **Abstinence is Not the Best Policy**

The short answer is not entirely, but it is not the complete answer – so keep reading. Many foreigners come from countries that haven’t seen war since our grandparents were younger than us. We live in relatively safe places where the biggest safety concern is a terrorist attack. Ukraine, on the other hand, has seen nearly 7,000 killed since the fighting began. On top of that, there are significant concerns for escalation in fighting in other centres – several Western countries recommend against travel to Kharkiv, and there are genuine safety concerns in both Mariupol and Odesa. Even Western Ukraine has seen an uptick in violence this summer, with isolated attacks on banks, police stations, and even the mayor’s house. The country still remains at war, and any country in a state of war is pretty much necessarily less safe as compared

to the security offered in most Western states. Just as a high school sex education teacher may preach that abstinence is the only 100% method to prevent STIs and unwanted pregnancies, the only 100% method to steer clear of the danger in Ukraine is to stay away. However, much like those same sex ed teachers present other alternatives than abstinence, Western governments instead are advising what I like to call “Practicing Safe Treks”.

## **Practicing Safe Treks**

What many foreigners don’t see about Ukraine is that life goes on – just as it has done during every other war. Kids go to school, people go to work, lovebirds fall in love and get married, and life continues on as best as possible. Flip through the pages of this month’s magazine and you’ll find new restaurants being opened, big name concerts being held, elite level football being played, and pretty much everything else that you might have seen before the fighting began (except, of course, Champions League games at Arena Lviv...). Western governments do not advise against travel to most areas of the country, including the capital of Kyiv and all of Western Ukraine. Instead, they recommend “exercising caution”. For those of us that love this country, that love living in this country, it remains sage advice. So what do I tell those that question me about whether it is safe to visit Ukraine? I say “practice safe treks”. Just like taking precautions when engaging in sexual activity with a new partner, read up on safety provisions you can take before travelling to this wonderful country. Just as practicing safe sex allows us to minimise risk while engaging in an enjoyable activity, practicing “safe treks” will allow you to enjoy, discover, and learn about Ukraine in what is right now a seminal moment in this young nation’s history. So welcome to Lviv and happy trekking!

*Lee Reaney*

