

# Lviv Today

THE HEART OF EUROPE - THE SOUL OF UKRAINE

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**On the cover:** Andriy Porodko, founder and director of non-profit organization SAMI (check out story about this positive man on page 42)  
**Special thanks:** Vajsmann and Pako Lorente boutiques (TM Forum Lviv) for kindly provided outfits  
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## The 44 Days of Christmas...

*The holiday season in Ukraine is long, action-packed, and like nowhere else on earth. So get ready for weeks of eating, drinking, and celebrating – Ukrainian-style.*

While in the West, the 12 Days of Christmas might be little more than an antiquated reminder of days of yore in the face of the modern onslaught of never-ending Christmas commercialism, with all of the celebrating required of Ukrainians during the holiday season, they'd be forgiven for finding the number 12 just a touch quaint. Lying as it does at the crossroads of several worlds – European and Slavic, Catholic and Orthodox, modern and pagan – Lviv remains the perfect crucible for all the traditions to come together. This might explain why the holiday season in Ukraine is so long, and so jam-packed. But really, if you're fortunate enough to be in the country during this time of year – there is no other place in the world that celebrates the holidays quite like Ukraine.

### Double the Fun

Lying at the crossroads of civilisations has its advantages. Hundreds of years ago Lviv first prospered by acting as a trading post along the Spice Road between the East and West. Nowadays, perhaps the clearest reminder is that Ukrainians, during the holiday season follow two calendars – the Gregorian and the Julian. This is one reason why the holiday season lasts so long – some Ukrainians follow the Gregorian calendar, like those in the Western world; others follow the Julian calendar, like much of the Slavic world. So for some Ukrainians, the holiday season begins with St. Nicholas Day on December 6th, like in Europe. For others, it falls on December 19th, like in Belarus and Serbia. Ditto for Christmas (December 25th & January 7th) and New Year's (December 31st & January 13th). Like a step-child that celebrates Christmas with both her parents, Ukraine doubles the fun by celebrating each day twice.

### The More the Merrier

Ukraine is a country that knows how to celebrate. Throughout the year there are days to celebrate your name, your city, and even your occupation. There are also special days to mark religious, communist, and even pagan traditions. The Christmas season is no different. When the country

converted to Christianity in the 9th-Century, pagan beliefs were so widespread that instead of rooting out the practices, early missionaries allowed for pagan and Christian doctrine to be mixed. This means that today, in addition to the many religious holiday celebrations, a number have their roots in pagan festivities. Yet Ukraine is also a modern country, and has adopted some of the more popular modern traditions, including Christmas trees and Santa Claus. So in Ukraine, you can see a wheat sheaf (didukh) – a traditional Ukrainian symbol of the holidays – in the same living room as a Christmas tree, and it could be either St. Nicholas, Did Moroz (Grandfather Frost) or Santa Claus that brings the gifts.

### Lviv – the Grand Melting Pot of Christmas Traditions

Looking through the pages of this month's Lviv Today, you can get a taste of the variety that Lviv has to offer over the holiday season. There are festivals like Blaze of the Christmas Star and the Pampukh Holiday, old-fashioned Ukrainian carolling concerts and modern pop stars in holiday-themed shows, and there is the spectacular Christmas tree (yalinka) in front of the Opera & Ballet Theatre (be sure to look for the spider web – check out our story on this totally unique Ukrainian tradition) and there is the festive Christmas parade that winds along Lviv's cobblestone streets on January 7th. The parade, in fact, is a large version of a popular tradition of holiday house-to-house carolling in Ukraine. The tradition is wonderfully representative of the holidays in Ukraine. A group of young men and women go house-to-house to perform a Christmas play. While the play is usually centred around the Christian nativity story, a goat will always be present; the goat, of course, representing the pagan god of fertility. The same play might also feature Did Moroz and Santa Claus, the grim reaper and an angel, and Angela Merkel and Yuliya Tymoshenko. East and west, pagan and religious, traditional and contemporary – the holidays in Ukraine have it all. So get ready and enjoy – there is no place in the world quite like Ukraine during the holiday season.



Lee Reaney, editor at Lviv Today

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