

Chernobyl



Dark Tourism? It refers to travel to places associated with death and tragic occurrences. The 9/11 Memorial at Ground Zero in New York City, Alcatraz in San Francisco, Pearl Harbor, Pompeii, and The Killing Fields of Cambodia are all popular examples. Visitors to Ukraine can add the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, ground zero for the disaster, to the list.

The explosion, which took place in 1989, is located in the town of Pripyat in the Northern Ukraine. The sight has recently been open to the public—but you must visit with an authorized tour company. If you are worried about radiation, tests conducted disclose that travelers receive more exposure on a transatlantic flight than they receive during a visit to Chernobyl. Close to 65 miles from Kiev, it's an easy, full-day trip from the capital with a Chernobyl Tour. Tour operators can pick up visitors at their hotel and drop them off after the tour.

St. Sophia's Cathedral



Saint Sophia's Cathedral, Kiev

As a UNESCO World Heritage Site since the 1980s, St. Sophia's Cathedral (also called Saint Sophia Cathedral) is a favorite of visitors. With an elaborate Baroque exterior consisting of 13 golden domes, this cathedral stands out among the other historic buildings. Its beauty draws you into a jaw-dropping interior.

Inside, you'll find the space filled with beautiful murals, ancient mosaics, and frescoes that are centuries old. Take a tour or sit through a service to get the full experience. Named for Hagia Sophia, St. Sophia's is one of Kiev's most noted landmarks since its construction in 1037. One of the best views in Kiev is from the bell tower—it's well worth the hike to the top!

Visit L'viv's Historic Center, a UNESCO World Heritage Site



L'viv historical center skyline, Western Ukraine

One of the most charming and well-preserved Ukrainian destinations for visitors is the city of L'viv. The entire historic center has been awarded UNESCO World Heritage status, and tourists will love walking the cobbled streets taking in the sights.

Often called "the Paris of Ukraine," the old city has a very traditional European feel, with the addition of modern conveniences and excellent restaurants. Coffee lovers will find the café scene hard to beat. This is an area that takes its caffeine in all forms very seriously.

For a bird's-eye view of the town, climb the 1,000-plus stairs of the bell tower. The landscape in all directions is breathtaking.

Visit a Sunflower Field



A field of sunflowers in Ukraine

Sunflower oil is one of Ukraine's largest exports; as a matter of fact, the country is the 2nd largest producer of the oil in the world. Tourists will find enormous fields of the flowers all over the country. With shades ranging from buttercup to golden orange, these platter-size beauties thrive in the area's soil and climate.

While setting up the perfect location for that Instagram selfie, just make sure to stay close to the edge of the field. The flowers are enormous, and those that get carried away wandering off might find themselves soon lost in a sea of yellow and green.

Kamenets Podolsky Castle



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Located in Kamianets-Podilskyi, a short walk from the old town, Kamenets Podolsky Castle is a striking landmark. This fortress, which has been in existence since before the 14th century, is the perfect place in the canyon to take pictures and explore. It's reminiscent of a fairy-tale castle.

Take a tour around the inside with all of its passageways and marvel at the manicured grounds. Even though this castle is centuries old, it has modern amenities like bathrooms and a café to make sure you enjoy your visit. The castle is especially beautiful at night when it's illuminated.

After spending the day exploring, take the short trip into the old town and grab a bite to eat at one of the many diverse restaurants.

Mezhyhirya: Former Presidential Palace, Kiev



Mezhyhirya, Kiev

Mezhyhirya is situated on the banks of the beautiful Dnieper River and is the former residence of ex-president of the Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich. There is no shortage of things to do here, and it may be the most interesting and over-the-top place you have ever visited. Today, in all its glory, the extravagant building is a symbol and reminder of institutional greed and corruption. Within its gated walls, there are tennis courts, a shooting range, an equestrian club, helicopter pad, ostrich farm, dog kennel, golf course, and hunting grounds. Be sure to check out the auto museum that houses Yanukovich's former exotic cars; head to the main mansion, nicknamed "Honka;" or explore the grounds with heated lakes. Excess is the theme here, and some attractions are more ridiculous than others, from the exotic animals at the president's farm to the restaurant in the form of a Spanish galleon.

Odessa Opera and Ballet



Odessa National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet

The Odessa Opera and Ballet is located in a historic building in the center of town and is the oldest theater in Odessa, opening in 1810. Visitors can take in shows like *Swan Lake* or *Madame Butterfly*, all for about the price of a cup of coffee here in the United States. The unique horseshoe hall allows for excellent acoustics and gives the audience a full view of the performers on the stage.

If you are here when they are offering tours, this is a great way to get a behind-the-scenes look at this magnificent piece of architecture. If you are lucky enough to be in town during the holidays, even better. The **Christmas Festival** is not to be missed.

Visit a Local Outdoor Market



Traditionally embroidered blouses at an outdoor market in Lviv

Although there is much debate about the origin of the famous nesting **"Russian" dolls**, there's no denying the talented skill of the craftspeople making them. Visit a market and find a wide variety of handicrafts highlighting traditional arts in the country. Textiles are many, especially the traditionally embroidered blouses, called vyshyvanka, and hand towels used in many homes around the country.

Another favorite of visitors are the many vintage war items found at these flea market locations along with fun floral headpieces used for festival celebrations.

Tarakaniv Fort, Dubno



Tarakaniv (Dubno) Fort ruins

Grab your flashlight or headlamp and head to the Tarakaniv Fort, located just outside the village of **Dubno** and about two hours from Lviv, near the Ikva River in the west of Ukraine. It was originally built to protect the Lviv-Kiev railroad route, and visiting it is a one-of-a-kind experience.

This ruin has a tunnel entrance and is not for those with claustrophobia. Dating back to Imperial Russia, there are centuries-old tunnels and passages to explore. Visitors will want to get here early to access the attraction before the groups. It's a great place for photographers, history buffs, and adventurers, but be sure to wear good shoes and watch out for the sometimes treacherous terrain. Getting here is easy—take a cab from Dubno. There are many tours on offer as well.

Tunnel of Love, Klevan



Tunnel of Love in the spring, Klevan

Just outside of the town of Klevan, the Tunnel of Love is another popular spot to visit in Ukraine. For lovers and singles alike, the Tunnel of Love is a two-mile stretch of private railway that gives the illusion of a never-ending tunnel. A canopy of trees over the tracks are actually what makes the "tunnel."

Bridal parties and romantics head here to make a wish or take a romantic stroll. Legend says that for couples who make a wish together here, if the love is real, the wish will come true. It's also **one of the most photographed spots in Ukraine.**