

# Chernobyl as the Most Exotic Destination

Twenty five years ago the USSR nuclear energy triumph turned out to be a failure and the biggest technological catastrophe in human history. On the 26th of April, 1986 at 1:24 am the Reactor No 4 of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant exploded. The cloud of radioactive elements – 500 times bigger than the one after the Hiroshima bombing – rose 1 km into the sky and eventually reached the USA, Japan and Australia.



Chernobyl and Pripjat are the two towns that suffered the most from the nuclear meltdown. The catastrophe forced 300,000 people to leave their homes. Currently, a huge territory around the Chernobyl nuclear plant is abandoned. There are thousands of completely neglected and uninhabited houses surrounded by new living exuberant plants.

## Chernobyl: The Tourism Hot Spot

Foreigners as well as Ukrainians overcame their fears of radiation and began to visit Chernobyl in the nineties. In 2002, the UN published a report which stated that most of the places in the Chernobyl Zone are safe. A new wave of tourists headed to the Zone. In 2009, when Forbes named the Chernobyl Zone the most exotic place for tourism in the world, a lot of tourists from Western countries rushed to the Zone. That year almost 7,000 tourists visited Chernobyl without being too much concerned about the radiation.

Every year the number of tourists grew by 1,000–1,500 visitors. In 2008, 5,500 people came from 58 different countries; in 2009, there were 6,900 tourists from 64 countries. Interestingly, the annual growth was mainly due to overseas tourists, not the Ukrainians or Russians. According to StayinKiev's statistics, most of the tourists came from USA, UK, Scandinavian countries, Czech Republic, Poland, Australia, Canada, Spain, Germany and France.

Today, tours to Chernobyl are extremely popular. First and foremost people want to see with their own eyes what happened inside the Zone. Second, they want to experience the consequences of the catastrophe. Third, they want to learn the basis of survival in the contaminated territory.



### **Tours: Reactor, Hotel, Ferris Wheel**

The standard tour covers the most impressive places: the Reactor No 4 (which can only be observed from 100 m distance), the cooling channel, the red forest, the dead town of Pripyat with its hotel, its school, its swimming pool and the Ferris wheel in the children's playground. Additionally, individual tourists can also visit the "Opachychi" village and meet "resettlers" (people who moved back to the Zone after the evacuation). All tourists undergo a full body scanning of the radiation level when leaving the Zone after the excursion.

The radiation issue raises most of the debates. According to Volodymyr Babeshko's interview in the Ukrainian news magazine Korrespondent (on 15 January, 2010), a person staying in Chernobyl is exposed to the same level of radiation as a person staying on a beach in any southern country. Therefore, short visits to the Chernobyl Zone are safe and harmless.

Anyone interested in a trip to the Zone can easily book a Chernobyl visit with a tour operator, which provides the special permission to enter the Zone for each tourist. Every tourist has to send a request with passport details to the tour operator. The tours to the Zone are all inclusive. Tourists are picked up and taken back to Kiev. An English speaking guide meets tourists in Chernobyl and shows them all places. Lunch is served around 3 p.m., and people should not worry, because all food and drinks are delivered from Kiev. It is even possible to stay for one or two nights in the small hotel in Chernobyl; it gives more time for exploration of the abandoned territory.



A lot of tour operators foresee a big potential in this kind of tourism; however, there is a lack of proper marketing on the national and international levels. With the relevant promotion, Ukraine would be able to attract more and more people who are interested in the biggest manmade catastrophe.

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