

LIES & CORRUPTION: UKRAINIAN TOURISM FACES SERIOUS OBSTACLES



Ukraine allegedly lures numerous foreigners but it desperately needs to improve its tourism infrastructure to really exploit its potentials. Currently, the country fights with an unsatisfactory level of tourism services.

Ukraine, as other countries, intensively promotes itself as a tourism destination in foreign media in an attempt to lure more visitors. Officials claim that tourism arrivals rise significantly and that the tourism industry is booming. There are, nevertheless, doubts about the official numbers boasting 25 million foreign visitors in 2008. Critics state that actually Ukraine was visited by not even half of this amount of foreigners.

The image of Ukraine is somehow damaged by the fact that it is often seen as a **sex tourism destination**. Various women initiatives have been fighting more or less unsuccessfully this unfavorable image of the country. Also, it has a rather unsatisfactory infrastructure. Visitors complain about **low-class and overpriced service, unfriendly staff and low quality meals**. **Safety** is an issue as well as the **political (in)stability**. Tourists may be robbed on buses or overcharged in taxis.

Ukraine tourism industry also lacks sufficient number of **information centers**. There are only 48 of them in the whole country with more than 46 million inhabitants. Many travelers also complain about unfriendly or even **corrupt police officers** who are not of much help when people get lost. To help foreign tourists Kyiv city administration launched a 24-hour English-speaking hotline. However, the operators do not speak English very well if at all.

Ukraine, nevertheless, despite all the above mentioned issues represents a luring destination for some foreigners. The relatively cheap Ukrainian currency and the fact that after the 2004 "Orange Revolution" the new administration scrapped visas for citizens of EU member states and several other countries is helping the sector. There are, however, reports that Ukrainian officials consider reintroducing visa requirements for European Union citizens. The alleged reason is the slow advance of introducing visa-free regime for Ukrainians traveling to the EU.

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Date: 2009-04-13

Article link: <http://www.tourism-review.com/travelers-complain-about-low-quality-services-news1542>