

HOW UKRAINIAN (IN)HOSPITALITY IS DAMAGING THE COUNTRY'S IMAGE



Ukraine is a country that has for years been relying on tourism as a crucial sector to support the stagnating economy. At its peak, Ukraine welcomed 24.7 million foreign visitors (2014). However, since the conflict in the country broke out, numbers have fallen rapidly and the country's image has been damaged.

In 2015, 12.4 million people visited the country and since then Ukraine has been taking baby revival steps. But there are some problems connected to a possible tourism revival in the Eastern European state.

In the past months, many cases of inhospitality and violence towards foreign visitors have been registered. On the eve of the Champions League final in Kiev, Liverpool fans were beaten up in a restaurant by 20 men in masks. The hooligans started beating the foreigners without any negotiations, throwing chairs and tables at them.

In November last year, five unknown persons attacked the second secretary of the US Embassy in Ukraine. In January 2018 a British citizen was beaten by a group of three for his "unusual appearance" – purple hair and piercings.

The motives of the attacks were all very different, as the Liverpool fans were attacked by Kiev ultras, but the result is one – some foreigners leave the country with unpleasant memories. They are unlikely to return and will not recommend the destination to their close ones. It is not easy to improve the country's image once spoiled.

In Ukraine's defense, this is a result of overall crime rate growth. Victims of robberies and attacks are mostly Ukrainians themselves, but foreigners are also, as mentioned, potential targets. The reason for this is also the fact that visitors are richer and not as well oriented in the daily life of the country. They do not understand that danger can come from the most innocent people.

However, xenophobia is often the cause of the attacks. Unusual or non-European appearance is a risk factor.

Another danger for foreigners comes from the sex industry. It is no secret that foreigners in Ukraine often use the services of illegal prostitutes. Such practices can result in poisoning for the purpose of robbery or a simple attack.

Foreign officials are aware of these dangers associated with Ukrainian prostitutes. The French Foreign Ministry reports that foreigners in Ukraine are the main targets of thieves and swindlers.

Many experts say that there is no need to exaggerate. “The main problem is that investigation of such crimes does not become public. The media are concentrating on scandals, but the work of the police, disclosure of offenses etc. remains out of the public attention,” says Maxim Reznik, PR specialist.

Others consider the country somewhat chaotic, lacking an understandable mechanism for protecting investments, transparent justice and the rule of law. And obviously **the rule of law and security of not only foreigners, but also citizens of Ukraine, is an indispensable condition for the normal development of the country.**

Overall, it should be noted that not only the European prospects of the country, but also the real economy depends on the image of Ukraine in the world. Readiness and, most importantly, ability to protect ordinary tourists from criminals, should demonstrate the authorities’ intentions to attract investments and guarantee their safety.

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