

# CHERNOBYL TOUR NUMBERS REACH A RECORD HIGH



Known as the site of the most significant man-made disaster in human history, Chernobyl is a point of interest for people all over the world. The name conjures up images of abandoned and crumbling structures, overgrown fields, and wildlife that has reclaimed the city without any humans to stop them. However, Chernobyl is not as uninhabited as you might expect it to be. The city and the surrounding area were quickly evacuated following the explosion but over the years some of the residents moved back into the area and it is currently home to around 1,000 people.

In 2002 Chernobyl began allowing tours. Initially, the turnout was understandably underwhelming, but as the years passed the number of tourists steadily grew. In 2004 the site saw approximately 840 visitors, which was a small number, especially when compared to the nearly 200,000 tourists the site welcomed in 2019. This increase is partially due to the length of time that has passed since the disaster and increased safety precautions, but credit must also be given to the [2019 HBO miniseries, Chernobyl](#). Following the series premiere, public interest in the area and the historic event spiked and many people were interested in visiting the site and seeing it for themselves.

If you would like this sort of experiences, you can do so safely by booking a legal guided Chernobyl tour. These tours are required to see the site, and anyone 18 years or older can book one that fits their schedule and budget. Some of the tours offered include unique experiences such as spending the night in Chernobyl. One of the many benefits of taking a guided tour is the fact that guides are extremely knowledgeable, not only about the safety measures that should be followed but about the history of the area and the event as well.

Guides can share vivid stories about the events of April 26, 1986, and explain how the disaster unfolded. The affected area is now called the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, and the plant itself is the only inactive nuclear power plant in the world, offering a one-of-a-kind behind-the-scenes opportunity.

Despite the tragic history of the area, there are many reasons to visit, including the opportunity to see Chernobyl in person and learn about the unique history and remember the people who experienced the catastrophe that occurred there. Chernobyl and the neighboring town of Pripjat both provide visitors with distinct opportunities to see what Soviet-era life was like for the people there in the 1980s. When they were evacuated, the residents did not get much lead time, and they were told that their time away would be minimal so they did not take everything. What is left is a unique time capsule, showcasing what life was like on the very day of the disaster.

Ecotourism is also popular in Chernobyl, and many visitors come to see how the natural environment persists. It's also one of the only examples of secondary succession that followed a man-made disaster. Secondary succession refers to the return of plant and animal life to an area that was decimated by a disaster of some kind. While there are high levels of radiation in the area, nature pushes forward, and the area has become a unique wildlife sanctuary.

While visiting, it is highly important to remain respectful and honor the sacrifice and suffering that happened there. Despite popular perception of the disaster as an isolated event, the effects were far-

reaching and persistent as people to this day are living with the residual effects.

As the number of people taking Chernobyl tours have increased, there are more instances of people taking selfies or other casual photographs to post online. These posts caused a fair amount of controversy, and the creators of the HBO show begged fans to remain respectful and remember that the history and the tragedy of the location is real. While the morality of so-called “dark tourism” sites is often called into question, these sites are visited regularly and tourists are asked to remain courteous.

Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky has expressed a desire to change the discourse around Chernobyl and ensure that tourism continues to be safe and that it becomes more and more accessible as time goes on. In 2019 he officially designated the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone as an official tourist attraction and aims to create a “green corridor” that will allow more entry points into the area while still prioritizing safety. In the coming years, it is the hope of many that Chernobyl will come to represent Ukrainian resilience and determination to overcome.

There are many reasons to visit Chernobyl, including the boost to the local economy. Whatever your reason are for visiting, you will have the incomparable experience of seeing these cities and sites that speak to the fragility and dynamic nature of human life.

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