

New-and-Improved Ukrainian Immigration Rules

Alex Frishberg

If I didn't know Ukraine a little bit, I would have found it disappointing

However, Frishberg is refreshingly honest about how little you can really know about how the immigration system works. As I write this there is an article in the newspaper that the immigration process has changed - they are reducing the number of visa types from 22 or so down to three. However, as Frishberg would tell you in the book, it is not the law which is important, but the interpretation of the law. There are many different agencies involved in immigration, and they did not share either a database or a common point of view. This is unlikely to change.

The book is definitely worth its minimal price on Kindle. It will not answer all of your questions, mainly because they simply cannot be answered. It is, however, a quick read and well worth reading if you are in Ukraine and want to know some of the mechanics of the immigration system.

Staying in Ukraine: visas, work permits and residency. something added by this reviewer

A Westerner comes up against several different bureaucracies attempting to stay in Ukraine. These agencies do not seem to work together and did not appear welcoming to foreigners other than tourists. This is a survey – I invite people with more experience to please post comments. I also suggest that you look at the www.tryukraine.com website.

An American or Western European tourist is allowed into the country for three months without a visa. This is more liberal than other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries such as Russia and Belarus, which require visas even for tourists.

The law is written such that a tourist can stay only 90 out of 180 days. In other words, after being here for 90 days you have to go away for 90 days before you can come back. The law is not uniformly enforced; some tourists are able to reenter in fewer than 90 days. The application of penalties for overstaying the 90 day limit is also variable. It is often possible to use a small emolument to satisfy immigration authorities as you leave.

Although many people appear to stay in Ukraine year in and year out on the strength of tourist visas alone, it is generally considered advisable to get some form of multi-entry visa. With a letter of invitation from a business such as an English school, it is possible to get up to a five-year multiple entry visa. This regularizes your presence in the country. Instead of leaving after 90 days, you have to go to the Department of the Interior Department of Citizenship, Immigration, and Registration of Physical Persons (OVIR, for Оидел виз и регистрации), buy some mandatory insurance and pay \$100 or so to stay up to a year or so. It is cheaper and easier than traveling out of the country, and gives a bit more legitimacy to your presence. Note the frequent use of "or so" in this discussion. Things change frequently.

If you work at a regular job for a foreign employer you should have a work permit, and your employer should pay the standard payroll taxes. The payroll taxes cover unemployment, pension, and other social benefits. The legislated levels of withholding are quite high, as a consequence of which most employees in the country receive a significant portion of their salary "in an envelope" so it remains untaxed. This is an issue to be addressed in another post. However, for here it is sufficient to say that work permits are hard to get. A foreigner who is sent to Ukraine by his company usually gets one; a foreigner who arrives on his own and looks for work usually works on a cash basis. A

major advantage of the work permits is that it gives you temporary resident status, making your presence in the country fully legal. TryUkraine.com describes the process in detail.

The gold standard is a permanent residency permit. You can become a permanent resident by marrying a Ukrainian citizen and waiting two years, or having a baby with him or her. A second alternative, investing \$100,000 in the country, appears to be seldom used and fraught with problems, not the least of which might be the security of your money. I asked several law firms how to do it and nobody even knew how to start. The third and fourth alternatives are to be immediately descended of a Ukrainian or to be a celebrity whose presence in Ukraine will be of benefit to the nation. In any case, as a permanent resident you don't have to leave the country periodically and presumably have fewer hassles with everyday problems such as registering where you live, buying real estate and the like.

Given the difficulty of getting permanent residency in Ukraine, you might ask why bother? My opinion is that the mere difficulty makes it worthwhile. This country is not going to be inundated anytime soon with immigrants of any type, which will tend to preserve its homogeneity. Ukraine therefore does not have to deal with issues of multiculturalism, diversity, second-language education, hard decisions on illegal immigration, or most of the other issues that affect Western Europe and North America. I believe that this will be seen as an asset within the next couple of decades.

Ukraine's inaccessibility protects its conservative nature from the onslaught of Western culture. As I note elsewhere, Ukrainians generally still believe in marriage, even that it should be between a man and a woman. They believe in family. One reason to think about staying in Ukraine is that if you marry a Ukrainian woman, her family is part of the package. She will probably want to talk to her mother just about daily and see her fairly frequently. You give up a bit of your freedom, but you gain a babysitter. Anyhow, it's part of the culture.

You know the catalog of things conservatives believe are wrong with America. The meddlesome and intrusive government, obese kids, the fact that we drive every place instead of walking, a decline in religious beliefs, increasingly confused sexuality, high rates of crime, stultifying political correctness, and rampant materialism. I'll address these in other blogs, but in general I think the situation is better here in Ukraine. Perversely, the heavy-handed government probably tends to preserve many of the things I like about it. People here are relatively free without being relatively rich. They do not see this as a good thing, but I am not so sure.

Ukraine is not alone in resisting immigration. Japan, China, and Korea are unapologetic about their ethnic purity and their desire to stay the way they are. A Westerner immigrating to those countries will always be an outsider whatever his status: we are visually different, in addition to which it is quite difficult for a Westerner to learn to be at home in an Oriental culture. While in Oriental country might be attractive to Oriental Americans, Caucasian Americans will probably find Eastern Europe easier.

You can feel at home in the Eastern Slavic countries, Belarus, Russia, Moldova and Ukraine. Provided he buys his clothes and shoes in a local market, a Western European will be indistinguishable from anybody on the street until he opens his mouth. And although there are cultural differences, they are not nearly as marked as those which separate Oriental societies from those of the West. A Westerner has a prayer of someday thinking that he understands how things work here. However difficult Ukraine is, the visa regime is easier than Russia and Belarus. Moldova is very small and offers little opportunity for work. For a Westerner attracted to Eastern Europe, Ukraine is the best among difficult alternatives.