

Facts about Odessa

Brief presentation of Odessa

-Odessa is the most dense and 3rd largest city in Ukraine (1, 1 million people)

-The most important port and largest fishing fleet of Ukraine

In addition to the importance of the seaport, which is also the home of a Ukrainian naval base, the city's industries include ship building and repairing, oil refining, metal working, food processing, chemical and textile industries.

-The most important city for trade and the largest one along the entire Black Sea.

Many years ago, Odessa was the 3rd leading trading city in old Russia, after Moscow and St. Petersburg. It is also known for its huge outdoor market, the "Seventh-Kilometer Market" (over 15 miles long), the largest in Ukraine, as it covers 0.69 square kilometers, has about 6,000 traders, and 150,000 customers per day! There are more than 500 businesses in Odessa which attract foreign investments. Most of them belong to the former immigrants, who came back to Odessa.

-Odessa has a more industrious culture than most other cities in Ukraine.

People always keep themselves busy doing some kind of trade (the former Jewish influence) such that a church in that city has more financial resources for autonomy and full time paid pastors than most other churches in the rest of the country.

-The 2nd most popular city for tourism in Ukraine.

With its beautiful harbor on the Black Sea, Odessa has become Ukraine's southern window to Europe and an important cultural center. Thousands of tourists multiply during the summer the town's population from 2 to 5 times. They are attracted by Odessa's scenic boulevards, the 200 steps of Potyomkin's stairs, the maritime railway, beautiful sandy beaches along the Black Sea, shops, restaurants with many different cuisines, numerous new structures, and the unusual classic architecture of old Odessa. Modern Odessa is a city rebuilding itself, and its downtown is slowly being revitalized. It actually looks more like a city located on the Mediterranean, having been heavily influenced by French and Italian architectural styles. Of particular interest is the famous Opera House in which some of the best musicians of the world have performed.

-A high percentage of students.

Its

scientific and cultural institutions serve the entire southern Ukraine. They include four leading scientific medical research institutions, 14 universities and polytechnic institutes, over 25 technical colleges and two medical colleges.

-A mild and dry weather.

Odessa

is situated on terraced hills overlooking a small harbor and its weather averages temperatures in January of 29 F and 73 F in July. Odessa averages only 35 cm (14 in) of precipitation annually with more than 290 sunny days in the year. Odessa has many therapeutic resorts, as it known for its healing mud and mineral springs, which explains as well why tourism is the most rapidly growing industry in Odessa.

- A city with many nationalities.

Odessa

has always had a spirit of freedom, probably endowed by its ability to accept many different people. Compared to the rest of the country, the region has a significantly more mixed population in terms of nationality. There are over 100 nationalities residing in Odessa. The main national groups are: Ukrainians 49%, Russians 30%, Bulgarians 6%, Moldovans 5%, Jews 5% and various others making up the remaining 5% of Odessites. This is why it is the site of consulates and trade missions of many countries and many cultural exchange societies are active in the city.

-The city which has more local character than any other city in Ukraine

It

is always celebrating something. It is constantly hosting exhibits, symposia, and conferences, and. With a reputation for big city adventure, a spirit of entrepreneurship, sunshine, laughter and sophistication, the locals have always considered themselves Odessites first, and Russians or Ukrainians after. In fact, 85% of the people in Odessa speak Russian and consider it as their first language, Ukrainian coming only after. People of Odessa are famous for their canny trading abilities and their sharp wit (the most popular holiday is Umorina (humor day) which is on the 1st of April).

-The city is famous for its nightlife.

There

are many nightclubs, disco clubs, casinos and entertainment places here. Especially in the summer, you can visit Arcadia beach where more than 20 different types of night clubs are located. After the sun has set the music takes over and the Arkadia strip comes alive with dancing and nightlife, becoming what some call the biggest party in Ukraine. In the wintertime, the nightlife does not let up a bit; it simply shifts downtown where there are numerous clubs, cafes and lounges awaiting its raring clientele.

-Ukraine's third busiest airport.

Over

700,000 passengers flew to Odessa in 2009. 17 Ukrainian and foreign airlines originate regular flights to 30 countries of the world. On average, there are 52 flights a week including 34 international flights. You can fly here directly from Vienna, Warsaw, Moscow, Budapest, Istanbul, Tel Aviv and many other cities. In addition, the Odessa Sea Port is a busy hub for commercial and tourists activities.[1] Most westerners do not need a visa if they come to Ukraine for less than 90 days

[1]http://www.travel-to-odessa.com/about_odessa

the socio-cultural needs of Odessa

Like the rest of Ukraine, Odessa has the usual problems of:

- Many unemployed (5 % official, but unofficial stats could easily be 15%)
- Rampant alcoholism (at least 40% of the men drink)
- More than half of the women raise their children alone (usually only one child).
- Most people still struggle with poverty on a daily basis.

Even

if life has improved for a few, for most it has not (the monthly average salary in Odessa is 400\$). Ukraine's real GDP has not grown since 2007 and it is expected to shrink significantly in the next few years. It remains burdened by excessive government regulation,

corruption, and lack of law enforcement. Older people are suffering the most with little money for retirement. The "orange" revolution has not worked, the prices of goods have increased and the wages of most people have not followed. Whether the government looks to the east or to the west, most Ukrainians have little hope that it will bring any long term improvement to their daily economic survival.

-The Las Vegas of Ukraine

It has enough nightclubs, disco clubs, casinos and entertainment places, as well as hedonistic festivities (like "Body Art Festival" where nude bodies are being painted and then paraded) to be known as the biggest and best party in Ukraine. The summer months draw thousands of international tourists to Odessa's coast, in which

-Prostitution

is a major attraction for those who come from Western Europe. Although it is illegal, it remains widely tolerated and practiced. Poverty drives rural villagers to Odessa seeking work, but rising unemployment in the city leads many to drug trafficking and prostitution. Tourism creates a growing demand for the illegal sex trade. Each summer, an estimated 6,000 rural girls and women converge on Odessa to work as prostitutes. Many who return home after the tourist season carry the HIV virus with them.[1]

-150,000 people are infected with HIV/AIDS (WHO estimates for Odessa)[2].

-A key gateway for Asian drug.

Odessa' strategic port location is not only making it a major center of drug shipments to Europe[3], but its famous "7th kilometer" hosts the largest open air market of counterfeit goods in Europe[4].

-Biggest hubs for the sex slave industry in Eastern Europe.

Many young women from impoverished areas in Ukraine, Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe are being offered jobs abroad in hotels and restaurants, but in most cases, the girls merely end up as sex slaves, often in far away countries. Even if some progress have been made against this trend, any recession in the region will always leave many women vulnerable to human trafficking [5].

-Homeless.

The beaches and mild climate on the black sea attracts not only hundreds of thousands of tourists each year. The poor from the rest of Ukraine come down with the hope of better surviving on the streets, as the winter in Odessa is much milder than in the northern part of the country. According to official statistics, there are some thousand homeless people currently in Odessa. The homeless situation in Ukraine is different from the situation in other western countries. If a person loses his place of residence, he loses his "propiska"- that is, his official registration. If a person without a

"propiska" loses his passport, then it is a real possibility that he will never get it back. The whole state system of medical and social services is linked to "propiska", which homeless people simply do not have. They therefore effectively do not exist for the municipal and state structures that have to deal with these people. They are deprived of medical and social help, shelter, and the possibility of a legal income. Their lack of personal hygiene disgusts many of the more safe social classes. The threat of homelessness, however, is very real for every Ukrainian citizen today[6].

-Between three to five thousand street children

They sleep in the potholes and underground shady tunnels of the city, and most of them have STDs and many of them are HIV positive. Almost all of them use drugs[7].

The reason why so many are on the street is that they ran away from government run orphanages (according to official stats in Ukraine they are more than 100.000). Often called "street children," these forgotten children are abused and used in trafficking drugs and child prostitution. 20% of Ukrainian adolescents have 2 or more socially contracted diseases; sexually transmitted infections, tuberculosis, HIV and Aids[8]

-Orphanages are similar to the rest of Ukraine

300,000 children in Ukraine are living in orphanages where the government is only able to meet 45% of their need. Only 10% of these are orphaned due to death of a parent; the rest are social orphans - due to alcoholism, abandonment, or imprisonment of parents. Most of them have experienced abuse and violence from parents who were drug addicts or alcoholics. They older they get, the chances for their adoption drastically decrease. Each year many orphans between 15 to 18-years-old leave the orphanages, and most of them have no one to turn to for help. 10% of them will commit suicide after leaving the orphanage before their eighteenth birthday. 60% of the girls will end up in prostitution, while 70% of the boys will enter a life of crime. Only 27% of these youth will find work.

[1] and 3 http://www.genevaglobal.com/docs/focused_funds/Ukraine_HIV-AIDS_Fund_2009.pdf

[2]<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,639246,00.html>

4 <http://euobserver.com/9/32277>

[4] <http://tvnews.over-blog.com/article-document-sur-france-3-enquete-de-barbara-conforti-sur-la-contrefa-on-73143257.html>

[5]http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/07/27/sex-slave-industry-thrive_n_660605.html

[6]<http://www.streetkidsodessa.com/homeless>

[7]<http://bezumnypiero.livejournal.com/184151.html>

[8]<http://www.ukrainianchildrensfund.org>

The religious needs of Odessa

-A city with 5% Jews.. and at least 5% Muslims

When

Odessa was founded it became the first city of the Russian Empire, where Jews were allowed to settle. By the time of the WW II Odessa Jewish community became the third largest in the world, after New York and Warsaw, having reached almost 47% of the city population. It is hard to overestimate the contribution of Odessa Jews not only to the world Jewish history, but to the city itself. Walking through the streets of any Israeli city you will find that many of them are named after famous Zionists, Jewish writers, historians or political activists, who come from Odessa. In 1967 there were 350,000 Jews in Odessa; today, there are only 45,000 Jews and one-third of those who remain are 70 or older. Nevertheless, a Jewish religious awakening has started to take place in recent years so that today the city has two functioning synagogues, a few ulpanim (schools for the intensive study of Hebrew), a handful of Jewish schools, of which one is run by the state, a Jewish museum and two kosher restaurants, a social services agency, Hillel, two Jewish Community Centers (and a third on the way), and Chabad has opened the country's first accredited Jewish University with an enrollment of 60 students[1]. One Jew, Eduard Gurvits, was even Mayor of the city from 1994-1998 and from 2005 - 2010 [2]

-Odessa is the least evangelized city in Ukraine (less than 1%)

In Odessa there are:

0,5 % Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (the Eastern Rite Catholic church that does not recognize the Pope) and 0.1 percent Roman Catholic Church
1 % Ukrainian Autocephalous and other types of Orthodox Church
3 % Ukrainian Orthodox Church -Kiev Patriarchate (which means pro-Ukrainian)
17 % Ukrainian Orthodox Church -Moscow Patriarchate (which means pro-Russian). This group tends to dominate in Odessa as they own most of the church buildings. (This "high" percentage of Orthodox is actually more indicative how people want to define themselves than their actual church attendance.)

Less than 1% Protestants denominations, all put together, but 3 % in the surrounding region, outside of the city, as smaller towns and villages have more openness to the Gospel, maybe more as not all churches register officially [3]:
77% Not religious or not clear on any church allegiance

-There are no large protestant churches in Odessa

Unlike other large cities like Kiev or Kharkov that have a few churches of 2 to 3 thousands members, the largest church in Odessa has 700 members (central church), one of 400, and all others churches do not exceed 200. This problem is amplified by the fact that there are no large buildings where religious organizations are allowed to meet.

-Few of the older denominations grow and reach the youth

Many of the older churches tend to protect their members against an evil world by building a religious culture that is not open to use a language and a music that speaks to outsiders. The result of this "spiritual protectionism" is that few are effective in reaching the young people and planting dynamic and growing churches.

-Internal divisions and gossips

Politically, Ukrainians (and Odessites) are strongly divided between Western Europe and Russia, and so are they religiously. The largest church, the Orthodox Church is bitterly divided between a Kiev and a Moscow patriarch, and even the Catholic Church is separated between the east and the west. On one hand this religious fragmentation has played strongly in favor of Protestant churches until now, as no church that can claim a national religious monopoly, but on the other hand unity and trust do not come easily for most churches. Denominations in Odessa have a good collaboration between them, but many experience internal gossips and divisions. Few leaders know how to create an atmosphere of trust and franc communication.

This divisive aspect is reinforced in Odessa, as its culture has long been influenced by Jewish values (as the saying goes "where you have 2 Jews, you have 3 political parties and 4 opinions" !)

-A large leadership vacuum

Decades of mutual political oppression have created a culture where it is very difficult for most people to trust their leaders. The only model of leadership that most pastors have from their own culture is one of overcontrolling authority. This is why the fear of telling the truth, gossips and unresolved conflicts are the biggest problems of most churches. Even if the country has a huge openness to the Gospel and in some ways is the "Bible belt" of Eastern Europe, capable leadership is still the biggest need of the Ukrainian Church. Forceful and yet graceful leaders who can be trusted and unify believers into powerful churches are crucially lacking.

-Insecurity regarding the future

Protestant

Ukrainians live with a heightened sense of urgency as Russia will do everything to influence the political future of Ukraine. If they succeed, the Orthodox Church will be able to determine religious laws and possibly mistreat or even persecute Protestant denominations [4].

[1]<http://www.nytimes.com/1996/09/05/world/jews-in-odessa-rediscover-their-heritage-through-yiddish.html>

[2]<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:pG1zSCP0eGkJ:www.odessaglobe.com/publicationen.php%3Fid%3D2189+percentage+of+jews+in+odessa+today&cd=17&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ca>

[3]<http://old.risu.org.ua/eng/religion.and.society/processes.of.religion/org.regions>

[4]http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122100831438617621.html?mod=hps_us_at_glance_opinion

Links to pics & videos of Odessa

A few pictures and videos of the city:

<http://www.brama.com/travel/odesa.html>

<http://www.alanier.at/Odessa.html>

<http://fiveprime.org/hivemind/Tags/odessa%2Cukraine>

<http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=55368&id=41966832321#!/pages/Odessa-Ukraine/41966832321?v=wall>

<http://www.5min.com/Video/Prostitution-and-Drugs-Problems-in-Odessa-Ukraine-516902332>

A few touristic YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SA0-l2pcQiY>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzVzL-ENKfs&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSalMrngpR4&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crnWxnR2BYo&feature=related>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHhW_R6R_I8&feature=related

More touristic info on the city:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odessa>

http://www.odessaapts.com/about_odessa.php

<http://www.odessa-apartments-rent.com/travel.htm>

<http://wikitravel.org/en/Odessa>

<http://www.travel-to-odessa.com>