



# chicken kiev

QX's own kicking Cossack, Adrian Gillan, explodes onto the horny gay, post-Soviet chic scene in Ukrainian capital, Kiev.

THE former Soviet state of Ukraine is a land of extremes. Despite bordering the Black Sea, its continental climate can make winters as cold as summers are hot! And bootleg vodka-fuelled Bentleys ride rough-shod over begging Babushkas!

## History & rights

THE Ukraine has had a rollercoaster history. Ever since its famous kick-ass Cossack farmers rebelled against the Poles, it has fought to assert its independence and identity – most recently against the Nazis, and the Soviets. Ukraine declared independence from the USSR in 1991. Memories of the 1986 Chernobyl blunder and attempted Soviet cover up may have faded, along with the radiation; but disillusion has crept back after the famous 2004 “Orange Revolution”. President Yushchenko was swept into power on a ticket of loosening the lingering, corrupt economic and cultural grip of old “Mother Russia”. Little has changed, and pro-Russia parties are regaining ground. Age of consent here is 16 for all persuasions and homosexuality has been legal since post-Soviet decriminalisation. However, the Ukraine enjoys none of the EU's protective laws - not that they've helped queers in EU members Poland or Latvia much, anyway - and the country remains under the sway of its old conformist Soviet culture, not to mention the queer-loathing Russian Orthodox Church.

Although there's a thriving gay scene in Kiev and President Yushenko has made some positive pro-gay noises, outside the capital people are more conservative, and can be openly homophobic. There are no plans to introduce civil

unions or other equality measures.

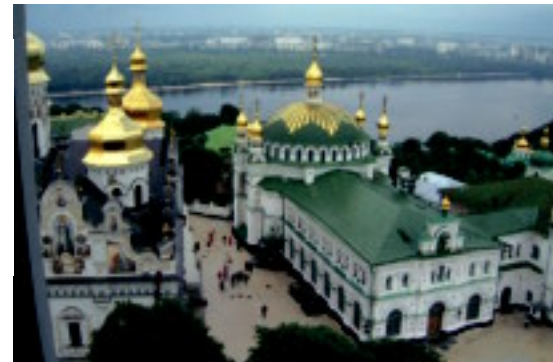
## Scene & sights

KIEV'S 2.5 million inhabitants straddle the mighty River Dnepr, with most interesting sights perched on the west bank. Museums, opera houses, monuments, parks, shops and rich pastel-hued, gold-domed churches crowd around **Maidan Nezalezhnosti** (“Independence Square”). A little north, you descend into the old merchant district of **Podil** by steps or funicular from St Andrew's and St Michael's monasteries. To the south, explore the “old town” **Pechersk** district, with its famous Caves Monastery – an underground warren of cadaver-filled tunnels and grottos beneath an imposing cathedral.

But Kiev's real glory is her men. The young'ns – with their natural, non-steroid-ridden physiques, picture perfect glowing skins and winning smiles – seem naively, unselfconsciously sexy; physically and mentally unspoiled by the artificial stimuli and excesses of the West.

The main gay hub - night in, night out - is **Kiber** (Proreznaya 21): a bar-eatery-club combo, just off main Indi Square. You cannot help but be swept along by the nightly drag and cabaret acts. Caution: foreigners whiff of cash, so expect to be surrounded by local rent on entry.

Kiev's main gay club proper, **Androgin** (26/2 Garmatna vulitsa) – a 10 minute cab ride west of Indi – could teach UK club promoters a thing or two. In an imposing building of palatial proportions, local lads (thankfully minus the rent) flock here in droves, weekend-long, to bop to the latest sounds in a state of the art space, dominated by massive plasma screens awash with digital, psych-



edelic art. The main cruising ground is central **Shevchenko Park**, a mere five minute walk from Kiber - in front of the imposing red-brick building of Kiev State Uni. Sometimes it's so busy, the action spills out onto nearby **Kreschatik vulitsa** - from Metro Kreschatik to Bessarabsky market. And, by day, not least mid-summer, locals flock to the southern sections of the huge mid-stream island in the mighty Dnepr, whose **Hydropark** boasts a nudist beach, including a gay zone. Although Kiev's gay sauna is closed, you'll enjoy a uniquely homoerotic experience at any of the city's traditional all-male, clothes-free bath houses, or “banyas”. The main one - **Tsentralnye Torgovye Bany** (Malaya Zhytomyrskaya 3a) is a mere spit-and-a-spunk off Indi Square. In just two hours, I met a pair of stunning identical 21-year old twins; had myself flogged silly with birch twigs in the sauna by a complete stranger (a delightful local custom, renowned for its health benefits, so just enjoy); and had a long, full-body massage for less than a fiver! And everyone's starker! All pretty macho tho', so do be discrete if you make any passes!

Accommodation, like everything else here, is pretty cheap. Though there's nothing overtly gay-run, we could certainly recommend **Hotel Kozatsky** (1/3, Mykhailivska vulitsa; T: +38 (0)44 279 49 25; E: kozatsky@ukrnet.net; www.kozatsky.kiev.ua), actually on Independence Square - near scene and sights. It's probably simpler and easier to just ask for two twin beds, which – I assure - readily push together. You'll get a spacious apartment overlooking their equivalent of Trafalgar Square - with balcony and breakfast - for around £30 a night!

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