

## **Ukraine Culture (from Ukrainian Dating Site!)**

### **Hospitality**

In Ukraine guests are given lots of attention. If you are someone's house guest, your hosts will likely take you around town and show you the sights for several days. Traditional Ukrainian attitudes dictate that guests be well-fed and entertained for as long as they stay at your home. Offering a guest a glass of ice water (common behavior in the U.S.) seems an absurdity to Ukrainians, the more so because ice water is thought to cause colds. In the business world, however, drinking bottled water has started to catch on, and being offered a glass of water is no longer an extreme rarity.

### **Body language**

On average Ukrainians' personal space is smaller than in Western cultures. Some people touch each other quite a bit during conversations if they are standing. Greeting women with a kiss on the cheek is common. On the gesticulation scale Ukrainians are more subdued than southern Europeans but more animate than Scandinavians. Gestures tend to be smaller—no American arm-flapping here! Also, smiling is usually reserved for friends. Stiffness and formality is the rule during public speaking.

### **Illnesses**

Physical sensations and ideas about what makes one sick differ from culture to culture. In Ukraine it is worse to be cold than to be hot. In the U.S. the opposite seems to be true. In the cold necks and heads need to be covered, but gloves are not mandatory. Cold drinks and drafts and sitting on cold surfaces can give you a cold. A draft (draught) is a stream of colder air that seeps into a warm room through a window or open door and cools the area of skin that is exposed to it. So, if you are riding in a stuffy bus on a cold winter day, be careful about opening the window. You may get some nasty remarks from the old ladies.

### **Superstitions and mysticism**

Ukrainians have preserved superstitions and omens about things like shaking hands through a doorway, whistling indoors, and other things. Everyone knows these omens and jokes about them, but they avoid breaking them all the same. Western society is more rational not only in this regard, but in every other. Ukrainians' religious views (especially in areas where Orthodoxy dominates) have elements of mysticism and uncertainty, while Western Christians tend to think in terms such as, "to get to heaven you need to do A, B, and C."

### **Count the number of flowers you give...**

It is considered a courtesy to bring flowers when you visit someone's home for the first time. Remember that an even number of flowers in a bouquet means you are at a funeral. Always make sure that there is an odd number of flowers and that you give them to the lady of the household.

### **Never shake hands over the threshold...**

In Ukraine, it is considered bad luck to shake hands across the threshold of an open doorway. When you are greeting your friend or business associate, wait until you are both on the same side of the doorway before offering your hand.

### **Never place empty bottles on a table...**

Empty bottles bring bad luck and even disaster when placed on a table, especially during a

party. When celebrating a new contract with a Ukrainian partner, remember to take all emptied bottles off the table.

### **Leave your glass on a table while someone is filling it with a drink...**

A lot of superstitions are related to the process of drinking. Should you pick up your glass before someone stops pouring a liquid into it, you can expect to encounter bad luck for the foreseeable future.

### **Sit down before leaving for a trip...**

No matter, whether you are going on a trip or just seeing someone off, everyone should sit down for a moment. This is meant to ensure the trip goes smoothly - and as a gesture to the departing for a safe and quick return...

### **When referring to the country do not use the article "the"...**

It's a common practice in the West to refer to Ukraine as "the Ukraine". Ukrainians find that offensive because it denotes the country as a region, not a nation. You would be making the same mistake if you said "the Uganda" or "the Canada".

### **Seating arrangements...**

When making seating arrangements for a sit-down meal, make sure that you never place an unmarried woman at any of the corners of the table. Otherwise, a Ukrainian superstition holds, she will never get married.

### **Ukrainians and public behavior**

Ukrainians in public tend to demonstrate restraint and avoid attracting attention to themselves. In small towns where everyone knows each other this is less noticeable. Ukrainians usually speak quietly in the presence of strangers. Loud foreigners who are oblivious to their surroundings always draw smiles.

Despite the concern with standing out, in Ukraine it is more customary to show negative emotions in public than in western countries that are obsessed with always being positive. Strangers bond by sharing indignation (about packed public transportation, for example) or by making sarcastic remarks. Drivers yell at each other freely. Don't let this rudeness and indifference fool you, however. Ukrainians tend to be warmer in their personal relationships than is typical of most western countries.

### **Toasting the hostess...**

If you are enjoying a drink with your dinner, Ukrainians traditionally say toasts prior to each drink. Impress you Ukrainian hosts by showing that you know that the third toast is always raised in honor of women.

### **Offer to help a lady...**

Ukrainian women are not oversensitive to gender issues. Be assured that a lady will be pleased if you help her out of a car or get up as she enters the room.

### **Home and family in Ukraine**

Ukrainian culture has agrarian roots. Just two generations ago the urban population was a fraction of what it is today after the Soviets' experiment in forced industrialization and urbanization. Almost everyone has grandparents or relatives that live in the countryside. People

do not move around as much as in the West, especially the middle-aged and elderly. Often one or both grandparents will live with their children and help take care of small children. This was a necessity during Soviet times, when women were drawn into the workforce en masse.

### **Friendship and making acquaintances**

The word "friend" in Ukrainian or Russian implies a closer relationship than in most other European languages. One has one or two "friends" and many "acquaintances"—quite the opposite of the Western countries, where many people have dozens of "friends" but often have no really close friends. In Ukraine, it seems, such aloofness is unheard of. The tendency to form informal relationships easily is part of the national character.

Many foreigners note that it is easier to form friendships and relationships in Ukraine. In the West., for example, it is easy to get an invitation to do things like play volleyball, go see a movie, go waterskiing, etc., but hard to become someone's friend. In Ukraine people will get together to talk about things that are important to them personally. Westerners often find their emotional needs are met better in Ukraine.

At the same time, clubs and hobby groups and other "collectives" in Ukraine tend to become closed to the outside world because of their emotional attachments and informal relationships. In Ukraine it may be harder to keep focused on one's individual goals because of this emotional collectivism.

### **Holidays and traditions**

Ukrainians, like other nations, have many colorful traditions and holidays. Here is a list of some of the most popular Ukrainian holidays:

**New Year's Day.** New Year is everybody's favourite holiday in Ukraine. This holiday serves as the Ukrainian equivalent to Christmas in the United States and Europe. Traditionally it is celebrated together with relatives and friends. People usually decorate a fir or a pine tree with shining balls and toys, cook festive dinner, present gifts to each other, sing songs and dance. Children of all ages find it hard to fall asleep. They know that Father Frost ("Ded Moroz", closely related to Santa Claus) is on his way and that he's bringing gifts to put under the tree for everyone who hasn't been naughty. New Year in Ukraine is not only a time for gifts, but also a time for remembrance and hope for the future.

**January 7, Eastern Orthodox Christmas.** Unlike Christmas in America and Europe, this is primarily a religious holiday.

**Valentine's Day** is a day to express your love, and to celebrate the spirit of love. This holiday is becoming more and more popular in Ukraine. St.Valentine's Day is now celebrated in Ukraine like everywhere in the world. The Ukrainians give presents, flowers, and Valentine cards to loved ones.

**NB** *Don't miss this opportunity to let her know how much she means to you!!!*

**International Women's Day (March 8)** is one of Ukrainian's most important holidays. This is an occasion to display love, tenderness and gratitude to the women you love.

**NB** *All women receive flowers on this day. Forgetting to send a lady a card, or a gift on this day would be equal to forgetting her birthday.*

**Orthodox Easter** is usually about two weeks after Catholic Easter (this year *Ukrainian Pysanky* - March 29). On Saturday afternoon or Sunday morning Ukrainian people put an Easter cake, painted eggs, butter and cheese into a basket and go to church for the blessing of the food. "Pysanka" (a painted Easter egg) is one of the most interesting sorts of Ukrainian decorative art. "Pysanky" are typically made to be given to family members and respected outsiders. To give a pysanka is to give a symbolic gift of life.

**May 1-2, Spring and Labor Days.** These primary Soviet holidays have lost their political meaning and are now traditional days off, celebrated as picnics or barbecue-parties with the loved ones, family and friends.

**May 9, Victory Day.** This is the day of commemoration of those who perished in the war against fascism. Here is hardly a Ukrainian family which would not suffer from Nazis in the Great Patriotic war 1941-1945. There is always a military parade involving all the people who took part in World War II. The veterans wear all their old uniforms with the awards. And their family and friends give these old soldiers flowers and congratulations. Families get together for nice dinners, and go for picnics.

**August 24, Ukrainian Independence Day.** The military parade takes place at Khreshchatyk street (Kiev) August 24, in honor of an anniversary of the Ukrainian Independence, with the performance of military orchestras.