



FACT FILES

POLAND

- ▶ **NUMBER OF UK VISITORS:** 1.4 million leisure visitors in 2011 (3% down on 2010).
- ▶ **CONTACT:** Polish National Tourist Office. T: 020 8991 7073. www.poland.travel
- ▶ **CAMPAIGN:** The Move Your Imagination campaign aims to generate interest by word of mouth.
- ▶ **GEOGRAPHY:** In central Europe, Poland has a 450-mile coastline to the north and the High Tatra mountains on its southern border.

UKRAINE

- ▶ **NUMBER OF UK VISITORS:** 50,000 leisure visitors in 2011 (a 5% increase since 2006).
- ▶ **CONTACT:** Embassy of Ukraine, London. T: 020 7727 6312. www.mfa.gov.ua/uk/en
- ▶ **CAMPAIGN:** We Are Waiting for Euro! is the current campaign, focusing specifically on football fans.
- ▶ **GEOGRAPHY:** Ukraine is the largest country to sit fully within Europe, stretching more than 700 miles from west to east.

This summer's Euro 2012 football championship in Poland and Ukraine will spotlight the eight host cities.

Andy Jarosz checks them out

WHEN POLAND AND Ukraine were announced as joint hosts of the Euro 2012 football tournament, the decision raised a few eyebrows. Doubts were voiced almost immediately about the ability of either country to build the infrastructure required to put on such a major sporting event.

However, Poland and Ukraine have invested a huge amount of effort and money to be ready for Euro 2012, which starts on 8 June with the final on 1 July. For these countries, it represents a golden opportunity to boost their profile in front of a global audience.

In Ukraine, many of the pot-holed lanes that previously linked the country's major cities have been upgraded to modern highways, while the state railway system has undergone modernisation, new hotels have been built and city centres given a makeover. Poland, already one of Europe's most rapidly developing nations, has transformed its four host cities into shining examples of 21st-century urban living spaces.

While government officials of both nations are boldly predicting a 2012 tourism bonanza, UK tour operators are taking a longer-term view. So much so that some are even stopping their tours to Poland and Ukraine for the summer months as hotel beds become increasingly difficult (and expensive) to secure.

Michael Fleetwood, Europe product manager for Cox & Kings, which offers tours to both countries, predicts that while the number of non-football visitors will drop around the games, there will be a lot of post-tournament interest. He suggests that new enquiries may be particularly strong for Ukraine, which has received less pre-event media coverage than Poland. Meanwhile, lack of accommodation has led Thomson Sport to offer day trips as the only option for fans wishing to see England's matches in Donetsk.

Poland is already well-known in the UK market as a city break destination, with Warsaw and Krakow traditionally the most popular places to visit. In recent years, the ski resort of Zakopane, for long a well-kept secret among Poles, has seen a spike in international visitors. Ukraine remains very much an unknown entity in the UK market, with only a few operators offering group itineraries. A lack of quality accommodation and reliable transport has meant that until now, mainstream tourism has bypassed what is Europe's largest country after Russia.

Poland and Ukraine are the most easterly countries to be chosen to host the European Championship finals, and they have a great deal to gain from their month at the centre of the continent's sporting stage. Here's our guide to the tournament's eight host cities. ▶

HOST CITIES

GDANSK

► **Games:** Three group matches and one quarter-final.

► **Lowdown:** The largest city along Poland's Baltic coast, Gdansk forms part of the Tricity conurbation alongside neighbouring Sopot and Gdynia that has long been a favourite holiday destination for Polish families. The city rose to global prominence in the 1980s as the birthplace of the Solidarity trade union, which eventually helped bring down the communist regime.

► **Highlights:** St Mary's Church dominates the rebuilt Old City and is the world's largest brick-built church. Views from the top of the tower stretch far across the city and along the Baltic coastline. Visit the Roads to Freedom exhibition at the old shipyard to learn about Solidarity and Poland's path to democracy, from the 1956 uprisings to the eventual collapse of communism. Stylish Sopot is Poland's premier spa resort, while Gdynia boasts two magnificent ships as its principal attraction: *Blyskawica*, the only surviving World War II destroyer, and *Dar Pomorza*, a classic white tall ship.

► **Contact:** Gdansk Tourist Office. T: 00 48 583 014 355. www.en.gdansk.gda.pl

POZNAN

► **Games:** Three group matches.

► **Lowdown:** This city on the Warta River in west-central Poland was the country's first capital around 1,000 years ago and despite having quickly lost its status, it still makes much of its former glory. Now a bright, modern city, Poznan is Poland's main conference and trade show venue. It's currently bidding to host the 2018 Summer Youth Olympics.

► **Highlights:** Poznan's Old Town is a maze of narrow alleyways flanked by tall burgher houses, with the Royal-Imperial Route linking important sights. A climb to the top of the Economics Academy provides great views over the roofs of the Old Town. Crowds gather outside the Old Town Hall every day at noon to see a pair of mechanical goats butt heads above a door. It sounds strange, but visitors have been enjoying this spectacle for 500 years. The National Museum in Poznan is considered to house one of the finest art collections in Poland.

► **Contact:** Poznan Tourist Office. T: 00 48 618 519 645. www.poznan.pl

SAMPLES

► **BALTIC HOLIDAYS** offers The Many Faces of Poland, a 14-day tour which includes all four of the country's Euro 2012 host cities. The tour starts and ends in Warsaw. Prices start at £1,489 per person, sharing a twin room and including transfers, guides and some meals, but not international flights.

T: 0161 860 5248. www.balticholidays.com

► **TRAVELSPHERE** has a five-day fully escorted tour of Warsaw and Krakow. Prices start at £669 per person, including flights, transfers, all taxes and most meals. Accommodation is in three-star hotels in Warsaw and Krakow. An optional full-day excursion to the former Auschwitz concentration camp is available.

T: 0844 318 8139. www.travelsphere.co.uk

► **THOMSON SPORT** offers a two-night package to Kiev to see England vs Sweden from £1,349 per person. The price includes three-star accommodation with breakfast, airport and match transfers, and a match analysis session. Other England and Republic of Ireland packages are available. T: 0845 805 1749. www.thomsonsport.com

► **REGENT HOLIDAYS** offers a three-night city break in the Ukrainian city of Lviv. Prices start at £435 per person and include return flights to Ukraine by Polish carrier LOT via Warsaw and three-star hotel accommodation with breakfast at a choice of hotels. Departures are daily, with airport taxes included. T: 0117 921 1711. www.regent-holidays.co.uk



WARSAW

- ▶ **Games:** Three group matches (including the opening ceremony), one quarter-final and one semi-final.
- ▶ **Lowdown:** The centre of the Polish capital was entirely rebuilt after being reduced to rubble in World War II. In preparation for Euro 2012, Warsaw has once again gone through a major transformation, with new hotels, restaurants and a modern transport system worthy of any European capital.
- ▶ **Highlights:** Get lost in the Old Town, where all roads lead to the Market Place, an immaculate 17th-century square completely rebuilt in the 1950s. Other highlights include the new Copernicus Science Centre and the moving Uprising Museum, while the royal Lazienki Palace offers neoclassical opulence in the city's largest park.
- ▶ **Contact:** Warsaw Tourist Office. T: 00 48 22 194 31. www.warsawtour.pl



WROCLAW

- ▶ **Games:** Three group matches.
- ▶ **Lowdown:** Wroclaw has changed hands many times during its turbulent history and its past rulers have left their mark on the city's architecture. Bohemian, Prussian and Habsburg influences are in evidence in the churches and government buildings scattered around the city's rebuilt centre.
- ▶ **Highlights:** More than 100 bridges span Wroclaw's many canals, creating an impression of a city built on water. At the heart of the city is the Market Square, a colourful collection of old buildings that now accommodate restaurants, banks and upmarket shops. Most sights in Wroclaw's compact centre are reached by a pleasant short stroll. Ostrow Tumski (Cathedral Island), the oldest part of the city, has housed a religious presence for more than 1,000 years and is home to the stunning Wroclaw Cathedral.
- ▶ **Contact:** Wroclaw Tourist Office. T: 00 48 713 420 185. www.wroclaw.pl ▶

Above: Lazienki Palace.
Left: Wroclaw Market

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KIEV

► **Games:** Three group matches (including England v Sweden), one quarter-final and the final.

► **Lowdown:** Kiev has long since emerged from Soviet gloom and established itself as one of Europe's most beautiful cities. A splendid blend of very old, ultra-modern and the downright weird are delighting a small but steadily increasing number of UK visitors.

► **Highlights:** Kiev's undisputed star attraction is Pechersk Lavra, or Monastery of the Caves. Awarded UNESCO World Heritage status in 1990, it's considered the holiest site in Ukraine with an atmospheric complex of tunnels and underground rooms. Providing a sharp contrast is the nearby Hydropark, Kiev's giant outdoor play area complete with fairground rides, table-tennis tables and paintball arenas. The Museum of the Great Patriotic War is hard to miss, if only because of the 62-metre high Motherland statue. Khreshchatyk Steet is the place to go shopping by day and partying by night.

► **Contact:** Kiev City 2012. T: 020 7727 6312
(Embassy of Ukraine). www.city-kyiv.com.ua



LVIV

► **Games:** Three group matches.

► **Lowdown:** Many east European cities boast of being 'the next Prague'. Lviv certainly has one of the strongest claims to this accolade, with a host of stunning buildings, tree-lined boulevards and a cafe culture that rivals many European capitals. The city is perhaps only a direct no-frills flight route away from becoming the next hot weekend break destination.

► **Highlights:** The market square is a constant hive of activity, with tourists and businessmen making way for musicians, singers and chess players as day turns to night. At one end of the square is the Lviv Theatre of Opera & Ballet, built at the end of the 19th century, while there are 10 churches within 200 metres of the square. Work up a good appetite by climbing the steep hill to Vysoky Zamok (High Castle), a popular spot where the city's residents come to relax and enjoy the finest views of the city.

► **Contact:** Lviv 2012. T: 020 7727 6312 (*Embassy of Ukraine*). <http://uefaeuro2012.lviv.ua/en>

KHARKIV

► **Games:** Three group matches.

► **Lowdown:** In Soviet times, Kharkiv played a dominant role in the development and production of heavy military equipment. After independence in 1991, the city's industrial importance declined, although it has adapted to modern demand and is now a leading centre for aerospace manufacturing. Kharkiv now has a reputation as the Ukrainian cultural capital.

► **Highlights:** Ploshcha Svobody (Freedom Square) isn't really a square, but it does constitute one of Europe's largest urban spaces. On the edge of the 'square' is Derzhprom, an imposing constructivist building, which was the first skyscraper erected by the Soviets. The Annunciation Cathedral in Kharkiv is remarkable for its beautiful brickwork and one of the country's tallest bell towers, while a complete contrast is provided by the impressive Ho Chi Minh temple, the largest Buddhist temple in Europe.

► **Contact:** Kharkiv 2012. T: 020 7727 6312 (*Embassy of Ukraine*). www.city-kharkiv.com.ua

Below: Shakhtar Donetsk football stadium. Opposite: Monastery of the Caves

DONETSK

► **Games:** Three group matches (including two England games), one quarter-final and one semi-final.

► **Lowdown:** Donetsk was founded by a Welshman. John Hughes established the town in 1869 to support the coal mines and steel plant he constructed in the area. The town was originally named Yuzivka (from the Ukrainian pronunciation of Hughes) in his honour, and there's a statue of the Merthyr Tydfil-born founder in the city.

► **Highlights:** The scenic bank of the Kamius River, close to the city's main square, is perfect for an stroll and a great place to find your bearings. Follow up with a visit to the Lenin Komsomol Park — home to many of the giant steel sculptures that helped spread the socialist message in the post-war years.

► **Contact:** Donetsk 2012. T: 020 7727 6312 (*Embassy of Ukraine*). <http://uefaeuro2012.donetsk.ua/en> ►



WHERE ELSE?

► **KRAKOW:** Warsaw may be Poland's capital city, but Krakow has long been the country's shining star. The majestic Wawel Castle sits high above the city's winding streets, while the delightful central square and Sukiennice (Cloth Hall) constitute a photographer's dream. Excursions include Wieliczka salt mines and the site of Auschwitz concentration camp.

► **ZAMOSC:** The UNESCO-listed town of Zamosc in south-east Poland is considered by many to be 'the perfect Renaissance town'. Its giant market square is flanked on all sides by impossibly pretty houses, laid out in the classic style of 16th-century Italian trading cities.

► **ODESSA:** Once a place for Russia's high and mighty to come and flaunt their wealth, Odessa retains its air of grandeur, even if the architecture betrays signs of gradual decay. It's a popular spa resort with visitors from around the world who come to bathe in the mineral springs and mud baths.

► **YAREMCHE:** A mountain resort town in the Carpathians of south-west Ukraine, Yaremche is a popular destination among Ukrainian families for outdoor activities, including hiking, mountain biking and whitewater rafting. Others come here just to enjoy the region's fresh air and spectacular scenery. ■



MAP: JOHN PLUMER. IMAGE: SUPERSTOCK

IN THE KNOW

POLAND

WHEN TO GO

Summer is the ideal time to head for the Baltic Sea resorts, while the slopes of the Tatra mountains are busy in winter. In the cities, summer is hotter and winter colder than in the UK.

► **CURRENCY:** Polish zloty (PLN). £1 = PLN5.

► **TIME:** GMT +1.

► **INTERNATIONAL DIAL CODE:** 00 48.

► **LANGUAGE:** Polish. English is generally spoken in tourist establishments, especially by younger people.

GETTING THERE

British Airways, LOT, EasyJet, Wizzair and Ryanair all operate direct flights from the UK to Poland.

► **AVERAGE FLIGHT TIME:** 2h.

GETTING AROUND

Poland's extensive rail network offers good value fares and a fairly reliable service. The country's roads have improved greatly with recent investment.

UKRAINE

WHEN TO GO

Ukraine has a similar climate to Poland, with hot summers and harsh winters. Spring and autumn are ideal for touring.

► **CURRENCY:** Ukrainian hryvnia (UAH). £1 = UAH12.50.

► **TIME:** GMT +2.

► **INTERNATIONAL DIAL CODE:** 00 380.

► **LANGUAGE:** Ukrainian. Russian is widely understood. There are few English speakers, especially outside Kiev.

GETTING THERE

British Airways, Ukraine International and Wizzair operate direct flights to Kiev from the UK.

► **AVERAGE FLIGHT TIME:** 3h.

GETTING AROUND

Distances between major cities are large. Travel by train or along the patchy road network is feasible, but can sometimes be slow. Roads have improved greatly with recent investment.

