Population: 44,429,471
Area: 603,550 sq. km (Slightly smaller than Texas)
Capital: Kyiv (2.6 million)
Languages: Ukrainian (official) 67%, Russian 24%, other 9%

The education system in Ukraine has experienced numerous reforms over the past two decades. It currently has a compulsory 11-grade education system for ages 6-17. Grading is on a 5-point scale (5=excellent, 4=good, 3=acceptable, 2=unacceptable). The literacy rate for 15 and over is 99.7%. As of 2010, 70% of students attend Ukrainian-language schools and 29% attend Russian-language schools. Traditionally, greater emphasis has been placed on rote-learning rather than inquiry-based or critical thinking and exams are typically oral. According to the World Bank, Ukrainian students outperform their American counterparts in math and science, but fall to the bottom when it comes to critical thinking and problem solving.

RELIGION
There is no official state religion. However, the Eastern Orthodox Church has been the dominant religion since the 10th century. Ukraine's Jewish population dates back to Kievan Rus and comprised 1/3 of Ukraine's urban population before WWII. Recently, Ukraine has been dubbed the Bible Belt of Eastern Europe and a hub of evangelical church life. Religion was forbidden during the Soviet period but has enjoyed a resurgence since independence. Ukrainian Orthodox—Kyiv Patriarchate 50%, Ukrainian Orthodox—Moscow Patriarchate 26%, Ukrainian Greek Catholic 8%, Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox 7%, Roman Catholic 2%, Protestant 2%, Jewish 0.6%

ETHNICITY
Ukrainian can imply a nationality, ethnicity or language and not all citizens are ethnic Ukrainians. While Ukrainians make up 78% of the population, there are also many ethnic Russians (17%) predominantly in the east and south as well as Ukrainian citizens of Belarusian, Moldovan, Crimean Tatar, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian, Polish, and Jewish heritage.

FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS & CUSTOMS
Due to tradition as well as social and economic factors, Ukrainian youth tend to live with their parents through their education and after marriage. Grandparents often play a significant role in the upbringing of grandchildren. “Thank you” and other polite words commonly used by Americans are reserved for more formal exchanges. Their omission by Ukrainians should not be perceived as impolite. Flowers are a common gift, given in odd numbers for auspicious occasions and even for sad occasions, such as funerals. Ukrainians never interact over a door threshold. Some major holidays include: Orthodox Christmas (January 7 according to the Julian calendar), Women's Day (March 8), Orthodox Easter, Labor Day (May 1 and 2), Victory in Europe Day (May 8), and Independence (August 24).
CONTEMPORARY UKRAINE
Caught between larger powers, the 20th century saw Ukraine gain independence from the Russian and Austrian empires, only to be divided and conquered soon after by the Soviet Union. In the 1930s, more than 7 million peasants died as a result of man-made famines and another 7 million perished during World War II (The Great Patriotic War). The population experienced further hardship in 1986 when a reactor at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant exploded, releasing a radioactive cloud, that killed over 10,000 and affected the health of millions. Today, Ukraine has one of the fastest de-population rates in Europe, attributed in part to declining fertility rates and high mortality rates largely due to chronic disease.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, a newly independent Ukraine embarked on a challenging path of political and economic reform, oscillating between Russia and the West. In November 2013, the Ukrainian government of Viktor Yanukovych made a decision not to sign an Association Agreement with the EU, instead privileging ties with the Russian government. This led to months of protests in the central square in Kyiv (the Maidan). In February 2014, a pro-Europe opposition took control of government buildings and eventually the government after President Yanukovych fled. At the end of February, unmarked Russian soldiers and pro-Russian groups in the southern Crimean Peninsula took control of local government buildings and Ukrainian military bases. In March, Crimea held a highly criticized referendum in which on joining the peninsula with Russia. Russia quickly recognized Crimea as independent from Ukraine and then absorbed it into the borders of the Russian Federation, a move that has not been recognized internationally. Meanwhile, violence continued to escalate in the Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine, leading to the intervention of several thousand unmarked Russian troops in mid-2014. Russian-backed separatists shot down Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 in July, sparking international outrage. Efforts to end the conflict, including the Minsk I and Minsk II accords, have had limited success. Since mid-2015, the conflict has reached a stalemate, with occasional skirmishes breaking out along the front lines. Despite the conflict with Russia, Ukraine continues to improve relations with the West, joining the EU’s Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area in January 2016. Corruption, however, is rampant in the Ukrainian government, and current President Petro Poroshenko is the richest leader in Europe. American diplomats have characterized Ukraine as a “kleptocracy.”

UKRAINIANS IN THE USA
While the first Ukrainian may have arrived in the Jamestown colony in 1608, large-scale immigration did not begin until the 1880s. The largest wave was after 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed. Significant numbers of migrants were Jewish, but many were Pentecostal as well. There are just under 1 million Ukrainian Americans in the US today with the largest populations in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, LA and Detroit.

THE FLAG OF UKRAINE

Yellow represent the golden wheat fields of Ukraine and blue represents the sky.

NAMES
First names, or given names often originate from the Orthodox or Catholic faiths. Surnames can have both masculine or feminine versions with the latter designated by the ending --a. Patronymics (ending in --ich or --na) are often used in lieu of family names when addressing teachers or in formal or professional situations. Due to transliteration from Cyrillic, there can be variation in spelling.

FAMOUS UKRAINIANS
A few famous Ukrainians include: Golda Meir, Vitali Klitschko, Mila Kunis, Max Levchin (co-founder of Pay Pal), Karina Smirnoff and Maksim Chmerkovskiy. Many more famous Americans have roots in Ukraine including: Sylvester Stallone, Stephen Spielberg and Dustin Hoffman.

UKRAINIAN WORDS

Hi .......................... Pryvit
Bye .......................... Pa-Pa!
Good morning ............... Dobroho ranku
Yes ............................ Tak
No .............................. Ni
Please/You’re welcome  .. Proshu, bud’laska
Thank you .................. Dyakuyu
How are you? .............. Yak spravvy?
I do not understand ...... Ya ne rozumiyu
Do you understand? ...... Rozumiyesh?
What is your name?....... Yak vas zvut?
My name is ................ Mene zvati...
Where are you from? .... Zvidky Vy?

USEFUL LINKS
CIA World Factbook: Ukraine
BBC Country Page: Ukraine
National Geographic: Ukraine
Kyiv Post English