

Exploring the Ukrainian Culture

Background

Ukraine is the second largest country in Eastern Europe, with Kyiv as the nation's capital and largest city. The landscape of Ukraine consists mostly of fertile plains and plateaus, ranging from highlands to lowlands and the Carpathian Mountains in the west. Ukraine is among the world's top agricultural producers and is considered the "breadbasket of Europe." Ukraine gained independence in 1991 when the Soviet Union dissolved. In 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine that is still ongoing. Ukraine is a republic with a president elected by popular vote every five years.



Traditions and Customs

Many Ukrainian customs reflect Orthodox Christianity, the country's prominent religion. Ukrainian traditional folk dress consists of intricate embroidery, weaving, and lace-making. The use of color is very important and has roots dating back to Ukrainian folklore. The designs have a long history of motifs, choices of colors, and types of stitches.



Holidays and Celebrations

Most Ukrainians celebrate many religious holidays, especially Christmas. Celebrations begin on Christmas Eve with the family gathering for a dinner which includes 12 dishes. On Christmas Day, they attend church and visit relatives. Caroling, singing traditional songs, and giving gifts are ancient customs. Annual Christmas markets are also held in the town squares. *Malanka* on January 13 is another holiday to mark the beginning of the new year with celebrations consisting of comical costumes with singing and acting. Many Ukrainians celebrate Easter by painting intricate designs on eggs. *Ivana Kupala* on June 23 marks the summer solstice with dancing around a fire in costumes. Independence Day is celebrated on August 24 with concerts, festive competitions, and military parades.



Education and Literacy

Ukrainian is the official state language. Most natives know Russian as a second language. Education is free for all citizens and the literacy rate is estimated at 99%.



Health Disparities

There is a high death rate among working age males from alcoholism and smoking.

Traditional Food Practices

Ukrainian cuisine is a collection of various cooking traditions with hearty and flavorful ingredients. Many dishes are prepared using a complex heating process, including frying or boiling, then stewing or baking. The national dish is red borscht, a beet soup served hot. Another staple is cabbage rolls (Holubtsi). Ukrainian foods descended from ancient peasant dishes rich in grains such as wheat, rye, and barley, as well as staple vegetables such as potatoes, cabbage, and beets. Ukrainian hand pies (pyrizhky) are filled with various ingredients, including fruit or cabbage, peas, cheese, and meat. These pies are popular in the home or served as street food. Ukrainian cuisine features a variety of fermented foods, including sauerkraut and pickles. Ukrainian soups are packed with earthy mushrooms and tender barley and are known for their hearty, comforting flavors. Ukrainian cuisine also includes popular beverages, such as kefir (fermented milk) and kvass (fermented bread beverage). Desserts include a variety of sweet treats, such as fruit-filled dumplings (varenyky) and stuffed crepes (nalysnyky). Paska, a traditional Easter bread, is a sweetbread made with eggs, butter, and sugar and decorated with intricate designs and symbols.



Considerations for WIC Educators and Counselors

- Family is very important, with extended families living together, participating in childcare, and supporting parents in raising their children.
- Pregnant Ukrainians typically value medical care, seek regular check-ups, and take prenatal vitamins.
- Postpartum practices often include encouraging the mother to rest, recover, and bond with their baby during the first 40 days after childbirth.
- They generally breast/chestfeed up to age two, and extended family members are often in a supportive role.
- Families often introduce complementary foods between four to five months of age and prefer homemade baby food using fresh ingredients.



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