

I'm visiting Kyiv for a few days, trying to drum up a bit of media attention for "In The Trenches". It's a fine place, a true capital, full of parks and patriotism, murals and monuments, orthodoxy and ostentation. Not as arty as Odesa, but not lacking in whimsy. A giant statue of 10th century Princess Olga, for example, sports an enormous flak jacket.



Russian missiles paid us a call last night, injuring two people and damaging various buildings. And of course the power was out for hours. But this is no different from most other Ukrainian cities, towns, and even villages.

The beauty is that Kyiv, given its size and diversity, provides endless distractions. Walking, as one does in all great cities, I see any number of things that amuse and move me. A flock of yoginis, all carrying their mats, heads happily into a cafe after completing their sun salutations (or whatever it is that yoga people do).

Two rustics pass me, each leading a goat on a rope. Another pair of men, in well-worn army fatigues, one enormous, a large cast on his arm, the other tiny, take pictures of everything, including the "Wall of the Fallen" outside St. Michael's cathedral. They focus on



the image of a portly older man. Perhaps an uncle or their commander. In front of the wall, covered with

photos of thousands of the dead, flowers are sold and a young girl, perhaps Roma, carefully bundles bouquets of lavender. Today is the feast of Pentecost, a major holy day, and the cathedral is overflowing, many faithful forced to stand outside.



Continuing on my way, I note approvingly that there are real canines in Kyiv, not just the annoying little purse dogs that Odesans favor. I pass a multitude of art nouveau buildings that grace the prosperous downtown, but Kyiv has graffiti and grit too. Perhaps a bit too much for some residents, although it feels about right to this American barbarian.

The city offers more than just visible treats. I overhear foreign voices in the elegant downtown, mainly English, but French too. Ukrainian is spoken much more frequently than in Odesa, although a guy at a neighboring coffee shop table orders his



espresso

in Ukrainian, starts a phone conversation with a hearty "Shalom!", and continues it in Russian.

Remembering the first time I came here, in 2015 from Kharkiv where I was based, the war in the Donbas was a world away. This proud and cultured European city, not unlike Vienna or Budapest, seemed immune to the ugly little conflict in the east. How absurd that seems today. Yet, as Kyivans have since learned, it's a place well worth fighting for.

www.inthetrenchesukraine.org