# An unusual journey: An IT worker's experience in Lviv, Ukraine



Ollie Whitelegg, a 27-year-old IT worker from Stockport, embarked on an unusual first trip abroad to Lviv, Ukraine, a destination that may not be the typical choice for international travel, especially given the ongoing conflict in the country. His journey was prompted by a conversation with his neighbours, Ukrainian journalist Maria Romanenko and her partner Jez Myers, who organise trips to Lviv to showcase Ukrainian culture and support the local community, particularly soldiers recovering from injuries sustained in combat.

“I’d never taken a trip abroad so I thought, why not?” Ollie recalled in an interview with the Manchester Evening News. Lviv, located in western Ukraine, is further from the active conflict zones compared to cities like Kyiv and Kharkiv, but it remains a warzone with signs of the ongoing battle present throughout the city.

Ollie's concerns ahead of travel were not primarily about potential airstrikes but rather the typical anxieties of navigating airport security. “When I got to the airport and decided to go through security I was nervous, like what if I bring something prohibited?” he expressed, illustrating the uncertainty often felt by first-time travellers.

After flying to Poland and taking a bus across the border into Ukraine, Ollie was immediately enchanted by Lviv. His enthusiasm was partially rooted in his family’s Ukrainian heritage, which provided him with a significant motivation to connect with his ancestry and explore the rich culture of Ukraine. He was so impressed by his initial experience that he returned for a more extended visit in 2025 and began to learn the Ukrainian language. “I managed to order my breakfast in Ukrainian this time,” he shared, emphasising the personal growth he found in this linguistic journey.

However, upon his second arrival in Lviv, the atmosphere was notably tense; the group was greeted by an air raid warning due to a Russian bomber being detected. This stark reality highlighted the dangers still present in the region, despite the relative calmness of his previous visit.

A significant aspect of Ollie’s travels included visiting the Unbroken Cities project, a rehabilitation centre where injured Ukrainian soldiers recover. These experiences altered his perspective profoundly. “There was speaking to the soldier who had lost limbs but still wanted to keep fighting,” he noted, reflecting on the resilience he witnessed. He articulated how his understanding of the conflict shifted from a distant issue to a more personal narrative, shaped by his interactions with people affected by the war firsthand.

Maria Romanenko articulated the purpose behind their trips, stating, “The whole idea was that there's a lot to see, to do, to try, to taste. Ukrainian culture is so rich and it goes back hundreds of years ago.” She emphasised the importance of visitors not only experiencing the culture but also engaging with those who embody the resilience of Ukraine, stating, “They can meet the people thanks to whom Ukraine still stands, and Europe still stands.”

Reflecting on the long-standing peace in Europe, Ollie added, “We've had this long unbroken period of peace in Europe, and that's come to an end.” His journey highlights the significant impact of personal experiences on one’s understanding of international affairs and the complex socio-political landscape in which they unfold.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)