

Outdoor cafes and parks reopen as Ukraine eases virus lockdown

May 11 2020, by Olga Shylenko



The seats outside this cafe in Kiev are the requisite distance apart

Mitya Yatim, the owner of a wine bar in central Kiev, opened to the public on Monday for the first time after nearly two months of lockdown that left his business reeling.

He says the anti-virus restrictions introduced in Ukraine two months ago to slow the spread of the [coronavirus](#) "hit us hard".

"We were not ready for it," Yatim, who runs the Malevich wine bar, told AFP on Monday as Ukraine eased its lockdown by opening outdoor areas of cafes and coffee shops.

"We had to go into debt to pay rent. Our people were left without work," Yatim explained.

Ukraine in mid-March ordered all non-essential businesses to close, with only [grocery stores](#) and pharmacies permitted to remain open as part of the efforts to stop the pandemic.

Public transport has been reserved for employees of essential services, including police and [hospital staff](#).

Under new government regulations which entered into force Monday, Ukrainians are now also permitted to visit beauty salons, dental clinics, and parks and public squares.

"This day has come because most of us adhered to the rules," Ukraine's [health ministry](#) said Monday.

"However, this doesn't mean we can neglect security measures. About 500 new coronavirus infections are confirmed in Ukraine every day," the ministry added.

The country has so far confirmed 15,648 coronavirus cases and 408 deaths.

The ex-Soviet nation with a population of 40 million is one of the [poorest countries](#) in Europe and the economic fallout from the pandemic

threatens to make matters worse.



Hairdressers were among the businesses allowed to resume business in Ukraine on Monday

Disposable plates

Georgiy Museliani, owns the Khachapuri House cafe which serves Georgian food but shut its doors two months ago.

His kitchen continued providing takeaway meals during the lockdown, but on Monday he reopened the outdoor seating area, with [live music](#) and free ice cream for children.

The food is served on disposable plates and customers are not permitted to even touch the menus, Museliani told AFP, citing new rules.

Tables must be placed one and a half metres apart and only two people can sit together. Everyone is required to wear a face mask, not ideal for diners..

"How will this mask save us? It won't! It's like putting a T-shirt on a hedgehog so that he doesn't freeze," Museliani,says.

However he told AFP he is glad to see the lockdown eased and life begin to return to normal, saying he was sceptical of the government's lockdown, which forced him to cut salaries and reduce the number of working days to "survive".

"They just locked everyone at home!" the 45-year-old said.

The shutdown of non-essential services in Ukraine means Yatim will have to reduce staff salaries at the wine bar for the foreseeable future to pay off loans.

Yet he is determined not to "abandon" his staff, many of whom are students working over the summer.

He hopes Kiev residents will be encouraged to leave their homes and visit their favourite cafes and bars, even if the new regulations means serving clientele outdoors.

"I think we can handle this," he said, adding that eventually, "people will be back."

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