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Chernobyl 30 Years Later: 'Extreme Tourism' Flourishes



A white-tailed eagle lands on a wolf's carcass near the Chernobyl nuclear reactor site. Note radiation warning sign in background. (Vasily Fedosenko/Reuters)

By Clyde Hughes | Tuesday, 19 Apr 2016 06:27 AM

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The Chernobyl disaster nearly 30 years later continues to impact Belarus, the Ukraine and Russian where more than five million people are still living on heavily contaminated land, according to **USA Today**. The only thing flourishing there is "extreme tourism."

The No. 4 reactor at Chernobyl's Vladimir Illyich Lenin Nuclear Power Station in the former Soviet Union exploded on April 26, 1986, releasing the most uncontrolled amount of radioactive material into the environment ever, noted the newspaper.

Pripyat, Ukraine, which once had a population of 45,000 people, is a ghost town of crumbling high-rise apartment buildings, hospital, shops, schools, restaurants, cultural center, and sports facilities since being evacuated.

The city, in Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, is safe enough now for tourists to visit for a short amount of time, according to **Weather.com**.

"Many of the villages in the exclusion zone, like Pripyat, barely exhibit any signs of life," said Weather.com. "A memorial to Soviet soldiers killed during World War II is nearly all that remains of the village of Besyadz, Belarus, which was once home to 150 families.

"In Bartolomeyevka, also in Belarus, only four residents still remain. Authorities concentrated their initial evacuation efforts on communities closer to Chernobyl, but by the early 1990s, they determined Besyadz, Bartolomeyevka and other nearby villages were not safe, evacuated the residents, razed nearly all structures and buried the ruins."

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The **Australian Broadcasting Corp.** said visitors are paying \$200 per person for an "extreme tourism" trip to Pripyat. ABC said more than 1,000 tourists per week go through security and radiation checkpoints before walking through abandoned sites.

"Guides in army fatigues use their Geiger counters to summon the visitors to radiation hot-spots so they may record their brush with 'danger' for social media," ABC reported. "... The accident (in 1986) put 400 times more radioactive material into the atmosphere than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945, as a massive carcinogenic cloud of radiation billowed across Europe."

ABC reported that the contaminated area was dangerous not only because of the radiation but because of wild animals that roam the lands.

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