

The port city without boats

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The HMS Trent arriving at Odesa's harbor in 2021.

Hailey Brown - Before the Russia-Ukraine war [life in Odesa](#) revolved around the Black Sea. The harbor hosted all kinds of ships: trade, fishing, and leisure. But the port brought in more than just ships — it opened the city to various cultures, languages, and architecture. While it remained operational for much of the war, Russia ended its [deal](#) to allow safe passage of Ukrainian ships in the Black Sea. So the ports were closed — to boats and residents. The port is quiet, and the reminders of its storied history are being bombed away.

The war has threatened Odesa's [sense of place](#). Places are the settings of where individuals experience their day-to-day lives — workspaces, schools, neighborhoods and cities. How people live is a reflection of the places they encounter. Many of the experiences people have daily in Odesa revolve around the ports and the Black Sea, because they are essential pieces of three elements that make a place unique: [location, locale, and identity](#). Odesa's function as a port city is a main characteristic of its role in the world. Two-thirds of Ukraine's sea-based trade flowed through Odesa's ports, bringing jobs and connecting the city to the global economy. The ports have also connected the city to [diverse cultures, unique architecture, and new innovations](#). The National University of the Odesa Maritime Academy trains seafarers, many of whom go on to work in Odesa, furthering a sense of location that revolves around the sea. The university is also a part of Odesa's locale, organizing Odesans who strive to someday work at sea, whether that be as ship captains, or in the navy. While the city is currently cut off from the ports and the Black Sea, resident's experiences are still shaped by them.

One resident and cadet in the Odesa Sea Academy, Sophia Dobrovolska, has maintained her sense of identity despite the war. She told the *New York Times* her reason for staying in Odesa through the war was because of the sea academy, and her dream to become a captain of a trade ship. But now, her plan includes joining the Navy to protect her beloved city. Odesa heralds generations of seafarers, a tradition of belonging at sea that has not been wiped away by the war.

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