Dominated by FC Basel from 2010 onwards, the Swiss Super League was won by previous three-time runners-up Young Boys in 2017-18, a first title for the Berne side since way back in 1986. Basel is the hotbed of Swiss football, its St Jakob Park, known by all as the ‘Joggeli’, providing the fieriest atmosphere for the Swiss national team as well as FCB. The other populist side is FC Zürich, who share the Letzigrund stadium with record champions Grasshoppers. Once considered footballing royalty, ‘GC’ now attract gates of well under the league average of 11,000.

St Gallen have long overtaken Grasshoppers as top dogs in Switzerland’s far north-east, up by the German border. Like several others, FCSG play in a new-build stadium. Some, such as Lucerne, Lugano, Neuchâtel and Thun, have gorgeous Alpine backdrops, within reach of a lake served by sightseeing boats.

Sion, capital of the Valais, home canton of disgraced ex-FIFA boss Sepp Blatter, is one of two current top-tier clubs from French-speaking Switzerland. With Lugano representing Italianate Ticino, the ten-team Swiss Super League is a microcosm of Switzerland’s (mainly) three-language divide.

Supporters from six teams chant in the same quirky form of Alemannic German that created the universal mantra to back the national team, ‘Hopp Schweiz!!’. We’re not in Hamburg anymore, Toto.

Like in Scotland, the modest size of the league means that teams meet each other more than once home and away. This four-game fixture set-up has been looked at by the Swiss Football League, worried by the Basel monopoly and low gates. Unlike in Scotland, the season isn’t split after Christmas. In 2017, Basel won the title with six games to spare.

In addition, for 2018-19, the Swiss champions do not gain an automatic slot in the group stage of the Champions League. Local neutrals welcomed Berne’s title triumph in 2017-18, bringing competition and variety.

For foreign neutrals, away from the big two in Basel and Berne, Swiss football is a quaint throwback. No, it’s not cheap, but then nothing in Switzerland is. The beer will be decent, the cervelat sausage too.

Station to stadium
Switzerland is well served by budget airlines, with hubs in Basel, Geneva and Zürich. Connecting all major towns, Swiss Rail (sbb.ch/en/home.html) offers Supersaver tickets online.
Those paying full fare can at least take advantage of the City-Ticket scheme that incorporates urban transport at your destination and/or setting-off point.

Areas not covered by rail are served by PostBus (www.postauto.ch/en), regional buses run by the Swiss Post Office. Some are also the main transport provider in smaller towns, such as Thun. Larger cities have a tram network.

Swiss motorways require drivers to buy an annual tax disc (vignette) of SF40, valid from December 1 of the previous year to January 31 of the following one. They are sold at petrol stations, post offices and customs posts.

**Tables & trophies**

The Swiss Super League consists of ten teams who play each other home and away twice. As of 2017-18, the winners no longer gain automatic admission into the group stage of the Champions League but must enter at the play-off round stage.

Super League runners-up join the second qualifying round. The third-placed side goes into the Europa League third qualifying round, with no play-off system in place. Similarly, the lowest-placed team in the second tier denominates to the third rung, the Promotion League, whose 16 teams face each other on the traditional home-and-away basis. The reserve sides of top clubs such as Basel and FC Zürich cannot gain promotion to the Challenge League – otherwise, the winners go up.

The last-placed team from the top division drops into the second-tier Challenge League. Also consisting of ten teams who play each other home and away twice, the Challenge League currently includes FC Vaduz from Liechtenstein, who can qualify for the Europa League by winning the national cup organised by the tiny principality.

The winners of the Challenge League swaps places with the lowest side from the Super League, with no play-off system in place. The last two clubs of the Promotion League demote to the fourth-tier Challenge League. Their replacements are decided by play-off, as the Challenge League comprises three regional groups, roughly French-speaking West, Central (German) and East (German, Italian and Liechtenstein). The top two from each of these divisions go forward to the eight-team play-off round, accompanied by the two best third-placed finishers. Play-offs are home-and-away, the semi-finals producing four winners, the finals two.

The bottom two from each regional division of the 1.Liga Classic demote to the amateur 2.Liga Interregional, currently consisting of six regional groups. Each winner goes up to the fourth flight at the end of the season.

Below this level, the Swiss league pyramid fans out into a myriad regional groups, from the sixth-flight 2.Liga to the ninth-tier 5.Liga.

The Swiss Cup, the Schweizer Pokal, begins with qualifying rounds within each level of the nine-rung pyramid – between the hundreds of clubs within the 2.Liga, the 3.Liga, and so on – before 64 teams take part in August’s Round 1. This involves all Super League clubs from two seasons before, the previous season’s top four from the Promotion League, plus the 40 to have won through by qualifying.

In 2017-18, ninth-tier Montfaucon (population 629) made Round 1, only to lose 21-0 to Neuchâtel. As for Rounds 2 and 3, the draw is seeded, lower-level
clubs granted home advantage, ties decided over one game, with extra-time and penalties if required.

Giantkilling is rare. The quarter-finals are also one-game affairs, invariably involving top-flight clubs. Semi-finals are over one leg, home advantage drawn for. The final in May is staged at a showcase stadium, the Stade de Suisse in Berne or the Stade de Genève.

Season’s dealings
The Swiss Super League starts early, usually in late July, even as early as the third week if it’s a tournament summer the following June. All stops for the winter break before Christmas, the spring season starting up in early February and running until mid to late May. Match days are Saturdays and Sundays, the usual kick-off times being 4pm or 7pm. Occasional midweek games, on Wednesdays and Thursdays, are scheduled for 8pm.

The Challenge League synchronises its July kick-off with the top tier. The weekly schedule runs from Friday to Monday evenings at 7pm and 8pm. Some Sunday games start at 4pm. The winter break comes a week earlier than the Super League’s, everything re-starting in early February and running until mid to late May.

Entry level
Apart from big games involving FC Basel and Young Boys Berne, availability is rarely a problem and pay-on-the-day the norm. Cash payments are in Swiss francs. Nearly all clubs offer advance sales, online and in person.

A place behind the goals is usually around SF25, prices rising to around SF50-SF60 on the sidelines. Home fans generally have a standing area.

Facilities are generally excellent, with beer and wine sold at stadium bars. With Lausanne’s new ground in 2019, and the overhaul of stadiums for Euro 2008, you’ll see the game in comfort, perhaps with an Alpine backdrop.

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Basel

Basel may adjoin France and Germany but this Rhine river port is the hotbed of Swiss football. St Jakob Park, home of eight-time consecutive champions FC Basel and stage for the 2016 Europa League Final, has the country’s fiercest atmosphere.

The ‘Joggeli’ was rebuilt for Euro 2008, staging the opening match and dramatic semi-final, Germany’s 3-2 win over Turkey. Four months later, Basel faced their historic cousins FC Barcelona in the Champions League. The two clubs were formed by the same man, Johannes ‘Hans’ Kamper, a young Swiss entrepreneur. On November 12, 1893, he saw an ad in the ‘National-Zeitung’ asking to form a football club, FC Basel. Five years later, business took Kamper to Barcelona. There he became Joan Gamper and founded FC Barcelona.

Back home, Basel didn’t become a regular on the European circuit until the 1970s.

The St Jakob stadium was built for the 1954 World Cup, seeing 44 goals in six games. These included the hosts dumping Italy out of the competition, 4-1. The game established the Joggeli’s credentials as a real football ground, with crowd scenes never before seen in sleepy Switzerland.

Bears

Bears

Built near St Jakob, Taxi-Zentrale (+41 61 22 2222) charges SF45 from airport to city.

German trains use Basel Bad station, on the other side of the Rhine.

City transport consists of trams and buses. A day pass is SF9.90, a single ticket SF3.80 but local hotels offer a Mobility Ticket giving checking-in guests free use of public transport.

Bed

The Basel Tourist Office (www.basel.com/en) has a hotel-booking service.

There are no hotels near the stadium. Close to Aeschenplatz on the No.14 tramline for St Jakob, the Radisson Blu, has a pool and gym.

Also central but cheaper, the Stadthof near Barfüsserplatz occupies a landmark building dating back to 1295.

By picturesque Rheingasse, the historic Hotel Merian am Rhein has balconied rooms overlooking the river.

Hotels surround the SBB station. These include upscale chains such as the Dorint as well as traditional railway hotels such as the Euler, the Schweizerhof and the Victoria. The conversion of the venerable Helvetia to the self-check-in b-smart motel Basel, however, is a sign of the times.

Beer

Barfüsserplatz is lined with restaurants and cafés – the timeless Rio (No.12) the best bar, the beerhall of Zum Braunen Mutz the best pub.

For TV sport, Swiss pub chain Mr Pickwick is central and displays seriously recherché retro football artefacts. Nearby Jerry’s is where the Swiss go to watch big matches. It’s also a decent late-night cocktail spot. The prominent Irish bar, big on sport, is Paddy Reilly’s near the station.

On Rheingasse, Fischersstube is a homely old bar that serves its own Ueli lager – regulars take turns to play the piano.
FC Basel

Formed in 1893 by Hans Kamper, the later Joan Gamper who also founded FC Barcelona, FC Basel (fcb.ch/en-US/Home) are the top dogs of Swiss football. Title winners eight times running, FC Basel have dominated the Swiss game since the turn of the millennium.

FCB’s 38,500-capacity St Jakob Park, or ‘Joggeli’, is two miles south-east of the city centre, part of a shopping complex and opposite a group of sports halls and pitches.

This is not the elegant St Jakob built for the 1954 World Cup, but a late 1990s rebuild, inaugurated in 2001, for Euro 2008.

Set beside a railway line and the St Alban stream, it allowed little room for expansion when Basel was awarded hosting rights for Euro 2008. The solution was to rebuild.

Carried out by Basel-based architects Herzog & De Meuron, of Tate Modern and Allianz Arena fame, this cost of reconstruction was SF 220 million, creating a three-floor retail complex of some 30 shops.

While capacity for Euro 2008 was 42,500, seats were later removed to provide more spectator comfort, reducing the maximum accommodation to 38,500. Considering the huge numbers heading from Liverpool, the wisdom of holding the 2016 Europa League Final at such a relatively small arena was questioned.

Today’s Joggeli comprises four stands, lettered A-D, A being the main stand with the best seats, and bars and restaurants behind it. Stands B and home end D are behind the goals. Away fans are allocated sectors B1 and B2 between Stand A and B.

Transport

The St Jakob has its own train station behind Stand C, with a regular direct connection (8min) with Basel SBB station on match days only.

Regular transport is provided by tram No.14 (direction Pratteln) that runs every 7min from downtown Barfusserplatz eight stops away. It also passes through Aeschenplatz, linked by tram No.15 to the station. Allow 10-12min from town. The tram drops you right by Main Stand A.

Tickets

There’s a ticket office (Mon-Fri 9.30am-6.30pm, Sat 9am-6pm) at the back of the club shop behind Stand A. Online sales are German-language only.

The best seats in Stand A are SF65-SF75, while a decent spot in Stand C opposite is SF48-SF59. Tickets behind the goals, and in the away sector are SF25.

Shop & Museum

Behind Stand A, the FC Basel Shop (Mon-Fri 9.30am-6.30pm, Sat 9am-6pm, match days) stocks souvenirs from doormats to FCB-branded condoms.

At the back of the main store is a ticket office, beside which is a discreet FC Basel Museum. Among the artefacts is a photo of the teams before Basel took on the great Uruguay side, Olympic champions in 1924.

Bars

The only venue near the ground is the Wirthshaus St Jakob (St.Jakobs-Straße 377), a traditional restaurant that has been serving guests since 1526.

At the stadium, behind Stand A, the Rotblau Bar-Bistro is decorated with old sports cuttings outside, and tasteful football iconography. Menfolk can lay into big burgers and Schlossgold beers while kids get their own menu and a table football table.

Bars 

Switzerland 2018-19 FC Basel

www.liberoguide.com/fc-basel
Berne

Outside the Stade de Suisse in Berne stands a reconstructed version of the famous Longines clock that timed matches here when this was the Wankdorfstadion.

The scoreline on it reads ‘Ungarn 2 Deutschland 3’. The World Cup Final of 1954, a shock German win over a previously unbeatable Hungary on a wet July afternoon, changed football history.

Set in the middle of Switzerland, easily accessible from the main airports of Basel and Zürich, this charming, cobbled capital hosted three matches for Euro 2008, the Wankdorf knocked down to make way for the eco-friendly Stade de Suisse.

A regular venue for the Swiss Cup Final, Berne is also home of Young Boys (www.bscyb.ch). Twelve times league champions, Young Boys were a constant presence in the top three of the Swiss Super League from 2008 onwards until the long-awaited title win of 2017-18.

Bearings

Berne airport, 9km (5.5 miles) south-east of town, is no longer used by Berne-based SkyWork Airlines, which went bust in 2018. Currently it only serves summer charters.

The nearest airports are Basel 117km (73 miles) and Zürich 140km (87 miles) away.

A direct train service runs from Zürich Airport (1hr 25min) and Basel SBB (1hr) to Berne station, a shortish stroll to the city centre. The Stade de Suisse is over the river north-east of town.

Buses and trams form Berne’s transport network. A single ticket is SF2.60, SF13 for six journeys or a day pass. Public transport is free for match-ticket holders for three hours before kick-off and two hours after.

Bed

The Berne Tourist Office (bern.com/en/detail/tourist-information) has a hotel-booking service.

The nearest hotel to the Stade de Suisse is the four-star, business-friendly Hotel Novotel Bern Expo, by the terminus of the No.9 tram. The more budget-conscious Ibis Budget Bern Expo stands alongside.

Also in the vicinity at Militärstrasse 38, the Hotel Jardin is a traditional, mid-range lodging with its own restaurant.

In the Old Town, equally old-school hotels include the historic Hotel Bern at Zeughausgasse 9, the Goldener Schlüssel at Rathausgasse 72 and the more affordable Metropole at Zeughausgasse 26.

Finally the hostel-like Hotel Glocke at Rathausgasse 75 has a mix of singles, doubles and multi-bed rooms with shared bathrooms, plus private doubles.

Beer

Bars dot the Old Town. Many gather on the terrace of the Leichtsinn at Kornhausplatz 10 to watch match action – inside is an intimate, two-floor contemporary space.

Round the corner, Rathausgasse is lined with cellar bars, most only open after dark.

At the edge of the Old Town, GOAL at Junkergasse 1 is a football bar with a YB bent, where Swiss, Italian, German, English and Spanish top-league matches are screened in a cellar that once hosted a Louis Armstrong aftershow in 1955. Other soccer-friendly spots include Mr Pickwick on Wallgasse near the station and, on Spitalgasse, the Nelson, both Berne branches of nationwide chains.
Young Boys

The flagship club of the Swiss capital, Young Boys (www.bscyb.ch) were crowned champions in 2017-18, after three consecutive finishes as runners-up. The Gäub-Schwarz were founded in 1898 by students from Berne University, inspired by Basel’s Old Boys in yellow and black. Early success led to the construction of the Wankdorfstadion.

Built in 1925, the then 22,000-capacity Wankdorf, named after this area of north-east Berne, was remodelled and expanded to a 64,000-capacity stadium worthy of staging a World Cup final. On July 4 1954, all-conquering Hungary fell to West Germany, a turning point in football history.

Three years later, YB won their first of four consecutive championships. This side also made the semi-final of the European Cup in 1959. When the Wankdorf was closed in 2001, Swiss watchmakers Longines renovated the famous clock from 1954 to stand outside the new Stade de Suisse, a high-tech rebuild. Built for Euro 2008, the Stade opened in 2005, solar panels covering an artificial pitch and 32,000 seats.

Attracting Switzerland’s second biggest crowds after Basel, YB have put in credible title challenges, gained a draw with Liverpool and wins over Napoli and Udinese in the Europa League.

Home fans gather behind the goal in the Ostkurve, even-numbered sectors D2-D14 standing. Away fans are allocated B12-B15 in a corner of the opposite end. The best seats and boxes are accessed through Quartierplatz, the pedestrianised square containing the Restaurant Eleven.

Transport
Bern Wankdorf S-Bahn stop is by the stadium, 5min from Bern main station on lines S1, S2, S3, S31 and S44. Alternatively, tram No.9 leaves every 5-10min from outside the station (eight stops, 10min), via the main square of Zytglogge (6 stops, 7min).

Tickets
Ticketing (Mon-Fri 8am-noon, 1pm-5pm) at Papiermühlestraße 71 (third floor) sells advance tickets, including by email (ticket@bscyb.ch) from 14 days before the game. The YB-Fanshop (Mon-Fri noon-6.30pm, Sat 9am-5pm) in the Wankdorf Center, Papiermühlestraße 85, also distributes.

Online sales are dealt with by Eventim and TicketCorner.

On match days, kiosks on three corners of the stadium open 90min before kick-off. Kassenhaus 1 on Papiermühlestraße and Kassenhaus 3 on Sempachstraße then close 15min before the match starts, Kassenhaus 2 stays open.

Prices start at SF25 to stand in the home end, Tribüne D sectors, and SF35 to sit – places limited. In Tribüne B behind the opposite goal, it’s SF35, and SF25 for away fans in the Gästesektor, B13 and B15.

Along the sidelines in Tribüne A or C, prices run from SF45 to SF70 for prime seats.

Shop
At the YB-Fanshop [Mon-Fri noon-6.30pm, Sat 9am-noon, 1pm-5pm, match days] in the Wankdorf Center, Gäub-Schwarz paraphernalia includes T-shirts bearing the foundation date of 1898, plus replica shirts.

Bars
By the stadium on Quartierplatz, Eleven (Mon-Fri 8.30am-11pm, Sat 5pm-11pm, Sun match days only) offers quality Italian food, live match screenings and YB souvenirs.
Lucerne

The lakeside resort of Lucerne is as pretty a setting as you’ll find for a football match – even in Switzerland. Home of flagship club FC Luzern, the swissporarena is not lakeside but close to snow-capped mountains, and by a classic Swiss chalet restaurant.

A city bus takes you there from Lucerne’s busy station in less than ten minutes, to the site of the old Stadion Allmend that served the club from 1934. Overlooked for the 1954 World Cup and Euro 2008, railway hub Lucerne is set in the heart of Switzerland, convenient from Zurich, Berne and Basel.

A top-flight proposition since 2006, FC Luzern have lost three cup finals in recent years but, in Swiss terms, manage to attract healthy crowds, quite used to European football.

Bearings
The nearest airport is Zürich 67km (41.5 miles) away. One train an hour runs directly from Zürich Airport to Lucerne 1hr away, tickets SF28.

Buses comprise the public transport. A single ticket is SF3.20, a day pass SF6.40. The swissporarena is in the same zone 101 as Lucerne station. There’s an S-Bahn regional train network that also serves the stadium. A single ticket is SF3, day pass SF6.

A valid match ticket allows free use of the bus or S-Bahn to and from the stadium for up to three hours before and after the game.

Ernst Hess taxis (+41 41 310 10 10) are based near the swissporarena.

Bed
The Lucerne Tourist Office (www.luzern.com/en/index.cfm) has a hotel-booking service.

The only hotel near the stadium is the Spatz, with its own restaurant. Prices are about 20% higher in high season, which runs between April and October inclusive.

In town, the Luzernerhof on Alpenstraße is a reliable mid-range choice close to the lake. Nearby Rebstock on St Leodegarstraße has a sister operation the Hotel Hofgarten on Stadthofstraße.

Overlooking the lake and the Chapel Bridge, the Hôtel des Alpes is classier (and pricier) than its three-star status might indicate. Alongside, the Pickwick is attached to the chain pub of the same name, with simpler, cheaper rooms, all with waterfront views and most with balconies.

Beer
Perhaps because of its location in the middle of Switzerland, this city with one Swiss title to its name has plenty of football bars. Eichhof is the local beer. Boat restaurants offer it with a view – though at a price.

Pick of the pubs is Legends Luzern. Run by the indefatigable Billy, it is a tucked away near the lake on Löwenstrasse. Nearby Anfield Pub (Seehofstrasse 7) is a somewhat predictably themed sports bar, busy for big matches.

The Lucerne branch of Swiss chain Mr Pickwick sticks to the standard formula of its counterparts but also offers an unsurpassable view of the lake from its terrace. It has rooms upstairs.

On the other bank on Wagenbachgasse, the Irish-run Shamrock Irish Pub has a raised terrace in the Old Town.

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On the other bank on Wagenbachgasse, the Irish-run Shamrock Irish Pub has a raised terrace in the Old Town.
Europa League competitors in 2017-18, FC Luzern (www.fcl.ch) have rarely set the Swiss League alight but can count on a loyal and lively fan base. FCL have only three major trophies to their name, one title and two cups, and their fans in blue-and-white have long envied the success of Basel or Grasshopper Zürich.

FCL had the courage to invest in the future, the €65 million swissporarena, replacing the venerable Allmend on the club’s 110th anniversary. Architects Daniel Marques and Iwan Bühler created a contemporary, 17,000-capacity venue also suitable for Switzerland internationals. Completed in 2011, it comprises a distinctive gold-tinted exterior, with interior seating in blue, FCL lettering clearly outlined. For domestic fixtures, 3,000 standing places fill sectors B2-3 in the home end, B Tribüne (blue).

Away fans are allocated C6, at the other end of Tribüne C (red), facing the main stand, Tribüne A (yellow). Tribüne D (green) is behind the other goal.

Transport
The transport stop by the stadium is for the No.20 bus (every 7min). It takes 7min from Lucerne train station, where the stop is clearly marked near the archway. Alternatively, towards town by the roundabout, Allmend/Messe S-Bahn is one stop south on the S4 (direction Stans or Wolfenschliessen) and S5 (direction Giswil) lines from Lucerne station. Trains leave every 15min, usually from platform 14.

For all-seated European games, admission is cheaper at SF43-70 in A, SF23 in B, SF29 in D, and SF41-48 in C. Away fans are charged a flat SF28 for a seat in sector C6.

Shop
You’ll find toy FCL lions amid the blue T-shirts and kits at the FCL-Fanshop (Mon-Fri 9am-6pm) behind D Tribüne. Bars
By the stadium, the Wirtschaft zum Schützenhaus is a traditional restaurant in Swiss chalet style.

Advance tickets are sold at the FCL-Fanshop (Mon-Fri 9am-6pm) behind D Tribüne and at the LZ-Corner of the ‘Neue Luzerner Zeitung’ (Pilatusstraße 12) in town. On match days, kiosks 1 and 2 operate behind A Tribüne on main Horwerstraße. Visiting fans should use kiosk No.5, cash only.

Online sales operate through the Eventim (eventimsports.de/ols/fcluzern) via the club website.

For domestic fixtures, standing tickets (B Tribüne) are SF28. Seats alongside are SF33, SF41 behind the opposite goal (D Tribüne), and SF58 in the sideline C Tribüne. Seats in the A Tribüne are SF62-100. Visiting fans are charged a flat SF28 for a seat in sector C6.

Switzerland 2018-19
www.liberoguide.com/fc-luzern
Lugano

By the pretty lake of the same name, in the Italian-speaking region of Ticino by Switzerland’s twisting border with its southern neighbour, Lugano is more suited to pleasure boats, Eurovision Song Contests and financial services than football.

FC Lugano found success in the 1940s. The Stadio Cornaredo was built for the 1954 World Cup, 24,000 Italians cheered a 4-1 win over Belgium.

Still based at the same quaint municipal stadium, i Bianco-Neri enjoyed a run in the Europa League in 2017-18.

The Cornaredo is also home to Rapid Lugano, in the regional Ticino divisions. The stadium is almost as close to the Italian border as it is to Lugano’s landmark casino.

Bearings

Lugano Airport 4km (2.5 miles) west of town receives regular services from Zürich and Geneva.

Milan’s Malpensa and Linate airports are 90km (56 miles) and 100km (62 miles) from Lugano. Lugano Servizi and Malpensa Express buses run 10-12 times a day between Malpensa terminals 1-2 and piazzale Besso in Lugano (1hr 20min journey time, €25/€40 return). There is no direct public transport from Linate to Lugano.

From Milano Centrale, a EuroCity train takes 1hr 10min, internet price €23. Lugano station stands high over the city, connected by funicular. City buses serve town and station. A single ticket (valid 30min) is SF1.90, a day pass (carta giornaliera) SF7.20. You’ll need a bus for the stadium. Some hotels offer free public transport if you book a room through their website.

Taxi Luganese (+41 91 967 24 24) is a reliable local firm.

Bed

Lugano Turismo (luganoturismo.ch) has online booking.

For age-old hospitality by the waterfront, the classic Hotel International has an outdoor pool in summer while the Walter Au Lac Lugano features a roof terrace.

Set back from the waterfront, the San Carlo is a more affordable two-star and, by the foot of the funicular, the Acquarello Swiss Quality Hotel is another handy and affordable find. Nearby, the Hotel Lugano Dante is a notch-above four-star. Round the corner, Gabbani is an urban lodging set around a pre-war delicatessen, Mediterranean restaurant and bar.

Also in the centre, the Pestalozzi hides recently rooms behind a historic facade. Nearby, the family-run Zurigo Garni has been in operation since 1951.

By the station, the Continental Parkhotel echoes the steam era.

Beer

On the main square, piazza Riforma, the classic Olimpia dates back to 1845, its lived-in bar where older Lugano supporters meet. On the waterfront, the Bar Vela has sport on TV and tables outside overlooking the lake.

Further round the lake, chic Seven is a sport-forward lounge bar, with a waterfront terrace. Upscale chatty Bistro Lugano near the Hotel Zurigo Garni buzzes during aperitif hour.

Irish pub Trinity is at via Canonica 19, by a waterway that leads from the lake.
The biggest club in Ticino, Italian-speaking Switzerland, FC Lugano (fclugano.com) are enjoying a modest revival. Swiss Cup finalists in 2016, the Bianconeri came within a point of qualification from the group stage of the Europa League in 2017.

In 2003, Lugano had been forcibly relegated, then declared bankrupt. A new outfit, AC Lugano, was created, formed of under-21 players. In 2004, it merged with nearby FC Malcantone Agno, and became FC Lugano, again, in 2008.

The Bianconeri last won the Swiss title in 1949. Lugano then prepared for 1954 World Cup hosting by building a new ground. As elegant today as when it opened in 1951, the Stadio Cornaredo is a classic Swiss stadium backdropped by dramatic hillsides and under seemingly permanent bright blue skies. Crowds have dropped dramatically since the 1950s but the graceful main stand, the Tribuna Centrale, remains, on via Trevano that runs from town.

Opposite, the Tribuna Monte Brè holds almost half the current 6,330 capacity. Each end is open to the elements, home ultras gathered in the Curva Nord, up to 800 away supporters accommodated in the Curva Sud.

The Stadio Cornaredo also hosts lower-league Rapid Lugano - supporters have their own bar behind the Curva Sud.

**Transport**

From Lugano station, lines No.4 and No.6 take 10min to reach the stadium. From Lugano Centro, on via Pestalozzi near the Hotel Zurigo Garni, the No.7 also takes 10min. The No.3 from via Pestalozzi runs along the waterfront, a pretty ride to the ground 15min away.

**Tickets**

Tickets are sold from the club office (Mon-Fri 9am-noon, 2pm-5pm) at the stadium or via national agency ticketcorner which also distributes online. On match days, tickets are sold at the kiosks behind each goal.

The cheapest seats (SF25) are in the Spalti, the areas either side of the central seats in the main stand, as far as the home and away sectors behind each goal.

A seat in the Tribuna Monte Brè is SF40, under-14s SF15, under-6s free. The main stand is divided into the Tribuna Laterale (settore 1 & 4, SF65) and Centrale (settore 2 & 3, SF80).

**Shop**

The main outlet is the Lugano Store, a match-day kiosk behind the Tribuna Monte Brè. FCL shirts with the cool V across the chest come in black, white and red versions and there are also the standard frilly pennants, scarves and keyrings.

**Bars**

Behind the Curva Sud, the Buvette Rapid is a small, basic bar with a terrace overlooking the adjoining training pitch. There’s also a Buvette Monte Brè on match days, serving local Luganighetta spiral sausages.

The main venues are the Osteria Bianconero and adjoining Bar Lugano behind the main stand. The restaurant operates during the week until early evening.

For match days, reserve via ristorazione@fclugano.ch. The bar serves Calanda beer from Chur.
A pretty historic town by the lake of the same name, Neuchâtel is the home of two-time Swiss champions Neuchâtel Xamax. Forced out of existence in 2012, Xamax took six years to climb back up the Swiss league pyramid and regain top-tier status in 2018. Neuchâtel Xamax are a post-war construct. Created from a merger of FC Cantonal and FC Xamax in 1970, the new club was overseen by, of all people, Sepp Blatter, president in the early years.

Home since 1924 has been Stade de la Maladière, overlooking the lake and reasonably close to Neuchâtel station. Trolleybuses and funiculars are run by the regional Transport Publics Neuchâtelois. You can buy regular tickets (2.30SF/30min journey) from machines at stops.

Neuchâtel station is equidistant from the town centre and the Stade de la Maladière towards the lake. A funicular also connects the station to the university below. Trolleybuses and funiculars are run by the regional Transport Publics Neuchâtelois. You can buy regular tickets (2.30SF/30min journey) from machines at stops.

Taxi-Kam (+41 32 725 22 22) has a 10SF minimum fee per ride.

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Bed
Neuchâtel Tourisme (neuchatel.tourisme.ch/en) has an accommodation database that links to a booking site.

The nearest lodging to the stadium is the contemporary Hôtel des Arts one tram stop away at Université. In the same family, the Hôtel Alpes et Lac serves the train station over the road, a modernised railway hotel with lake views from the restaurant terrace.

Overlooking the lake, a short stroll from the stadium, the pricier Best Western Premier Hotel Beaulac makes best use of its waterside location.

Further along the waterfront and close to the town centre, Hotel Touring au Lac is an old-school three-star. In the historic centre itself, the Auberg’Inn offers a mix of rooms in a building dating back 500 years. Alongside, the Aubier is run by the café downstairs – guests should arrive by 7pm.

In the same vicinity, the Hôtel du Marché is more restaurant/terrace café than hotel, with ten basic rooms upstairs.

Further up by the castle and funicular station, neat, 22-room Hotel de L’Ecluse suits the modern urban traveller.

Beer
Pubs and bars dot the historic centre, many with terraces overlooking the picturesque surroundings.

Among them, the main Irish-style place for live sport and live music is the Café du Cerf on rue Ancien-Hôtel-de-Ville, showing Premier League action. On nearby places des Halles, popular Le Charlot offers some 30 beers and a prominent terrace. Across the square, the upscale Prestige Club specialises in wine.

On rue des Fausses-Brayes, the Great Glen Scottish Tavern shows major games and has a plentiful beer selection. Nearby Les Brasseurs started out as artisanal brewers in Geneva in 1997, and set up in Neuchâtel ten years later. Across the road, Le Bistrot du Concert provides a classic zinc-bar, terrace-café experience.

In the shadow of the château, the Café de la Collegiale on the steep, cobbled street of the same name offers all kinds of beers and a stunning panoramic view.
Neuchâtel Xamax

A familiar if unusual name from European competitions in the 1980s and 1990s, Neuchâtel Xamax (xamax.ch) must be the only case of a top-tier club being founded by a ten-year-old boy.

That club, FC Xamax, later fused with Neuchâtel-Sports, known for six decades as FC Cantonal, to create Neuchâtel Xamax in 1970.

And that youngster was Max ‘Xam’ Abegglen, one of three brothers who would later earn more than 100 caps for Switzerland between them.

Formed as Xamax in 1912, the team played its first match in 1916, which was when FC Cantonal, won their only Swiss title. Cantonal then built the Stade de la Maladière in 1924, rebuilt and reopened in 2007.

Part of a sport, leisure and retail complex, the new ground holds 12,000, just less than half the crowd that crammed into the old ground for the visit of Real Madrid in 1986.

Home to 54 shops, including one stocking Xamax merchandise, the stadium is prettier than its unpromisingly functional exterior suggests. Done out in signature red and black, the stadium has a low curving roof along each sideline, offering views of the hillsides. All is offset by the bright green of the artificial turf.

Stands are designed A-D, all numbered apart from section D4 in the home end. Tribune Est, Tribune [Ouest] B is mainly for visiting supporters, allocated B1-B3. The main stand, Tribune A Sud, is VIP-only.

Transport

Even though public transport for match-ticket holders is free from 2hrs before and after the game, in practice the best way to reach the stadium from the town centre is to walk.

Bus No.121 serving Maladière runs every 15min Mon-Sat only, up to 8.20pm, and takes 4min to run the four stops from central place Pury.

From the train station, take the Fun’ambule funicular down to the lower terminus at Université. The stadium is a 5-7min walk or one bus stop away.

Tickets

Tickets are sold online for three or four home games in advance. For information, call +41 32 847 95 98 (Mon-Fri 8am-5pm).

The ticket office opens 1hr before kick-off and sell-outs are rare.

The cheapest admission is SF25 in the home end, or anywhere in Tribune D and B, away fans able to pay on the day. A decent seat along sideline Tribune C Nord, or in the corners, is SF40-SF45.

Shop

The Boutique Xamax is in the Maladière Centre mall surrounding the stadium. First-team tops of red and black melting into each other differs from the classic stripes of 2017-18. Second kit is canary yellow.

Bars

Between stadium and waterfront, the Café des Amis is more a restaurant, but you’re welcome to find a terrace table, order a Swiss beer and gaze at the lake.

Right on the water, Vio offers wok-based and grilled dishes – and that fabulous view. If you’re not in the mood for Thai soup, you can order a glass of draught Heineken at standard Swiss prices.

In the ground, kiosks serve Boxer beer from Yverdon.
The tranquil shores of Lake Constance that divide Switzerland from Germany and Austria are where football took root in Europe. On the Swiss side, St Gallen is home to the oldest club side still in existence on the Continent.

On 19 April 1879, an advert in the St Galler Tagblatt announced a meeting at the Hörnli restaurant, with a view to starting a football club. FC St Gallen duly won the Swiss title in 1904. The Grün-Weißen then went almost an entire century trophy-less.

The club’s long-term home was Esponmoos, its record attendance of 16,200 set in 1985 with the visit of Internazionale in the UEFA Cup. Fifteen years later, it witnessed St Gallen lift their first league title in 96 years.

St Gallen’s senior side moved out to a new-build on the eve of Euro 2008, Switzerland christening the AFG Arena with a 3-0 win over Liechtenstein. Before 2016-17, the stadium, at the western outskirts of town, was renamed kybunpark.

**Bearings**
The nearest international airport to St Gallen is Zürich 87km (54 miles) away. A half-hourly train runs direct from the airport to St Gallen, journey time 50min-1hr; single SF14.50. If you’re going straight to kybunpark stadium, the hourly ICN train allows you to change at Gossau for Winkeln, and reach the stadium in 1hr from the airport.

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O-Five Pub

**Bed**
St Gallen Bodensee Tourist Information (www.st.gallen-bodensee.ch/en) has a hotel database and booking function. Near kybunpark stadium, the hotel one66 is a handy three-star with weekend deals. Also close, New Star also has its own car park. Staying near the stadium means that you’ll be far from town.

Near St Gallen station, the Metropol has been serving rail travellers for over a century while the four-star Walhalla St Gallen features a popular brasserie.

By Marktplatz, traditional Hotel Am Ring gleams with historic chintz. Across the street, the Weisses Kreuz offers mid-range rooms and a modern bar.

Am Spisertor by the station of the same name comprises 12 basic rooms with limited reception hours at weekends.

**Beer**
A bar hub clusters around Augustinergasse, Engelgasse and Metzgergasse near Marktplatz. On Metzgergasse, Gallus offers those watching a whole St Gallen game a free drink should the Green-and-Whites win. The traditional Hörnli on Marktplatz is where the meeting took place to form FC St Gallen. Nearby, the Süd Bar attracts young hipsters with varied beers and cocktails until the early hours. Behind it, Seeger is another St Gallen landmark, a bar/restaurant with a popular terrace.

Towards the station, the O-Five Pub on Poststraße provides jugs of Guinness to go with the European match action. Behind Spisertor, Da Sláinte Inn goes more for live music than sport.
The oldest football club still operating on mainland Europe, St Gallen (www.fcsg.ch) have had meagre reward for some 120 years of competitive play. Rarely out of the top flight since the early 1970s, St Gallen won a rare Swiss title in 2000, moved into a new stadium in 2008 then made the group stage of the Europa League in 2013.

Opened as the AFG Arena, the currently named kybunpark holds nearly 20,000, average gates usually around 12,000.

St Gallen fans fill the home forster-Tribüne, sectors D2 and D3 standing ones behind the west goal. Visiting supporters are allocated Gästesektor 4 of the arbonia-Tribüne opposite. The main stand, the former Piatti-Tribüne now the RWD Schlatter, houses the VIP and business seats.

Transport
Public transport is free for match-ticket holders.

The quickest way to the stadium is to take the S1 (direction Wil) or S5 train (direction Weinfelden) from St Gallen main station to Winkeln, two stops/five minutes away. Winkeln is also served by the No.1 bus every 20min from the main station, journey time 20min.

After arriving at Winkeln station, take the underpass then the street ahead of you, Herisauer Straße. The stadium is about 7-8min ahead.

Tickets
Unless Grasshoppers are in town, availability is rarely a problem.

The main distribution agents are Starticket, both online and at local outlets such as the Post Office outside the train station and the Tourist Office on Bankgasse.

Match-day Tageskassen also operate but expect to pay SF5 extra. Prices start at SF20 to stand with the home fans, and for a seat in the corner of the opposite end. You’ll pay SF35 to sit either side of the standing fans in the forster-Tribüne. Seats in the sideline EgoKiefer Stand run from SF30-SF50, from corner to halfway line, and in the main stand it’s SF55-SF80, apart from the family area (A6).

Shop
The main FC St Gallen store (Mon-Sat 9am-5pm, match days 2hrs before kick-off 30min after final whistle) is in the Shopping Arena by the Eingang West.

Merchandise includes woolly Alpine hats with earflaps, baseball caps bearing the foundation date of 1879, Swiss watches, FCSG monopoly games, branded cigars, shot glasses, beer glasses and spirit flasks.

Kiosks dot the stadium on match days.

Bars
Near Winkeln station on Herisauer Straße, typical Swiss bar/restaurant Landhaus Winkeln opens on match days, serving Bratwurst and chips, and local St Galler Schützengarten beer.

Further along on the other side, the standard bar/restaurant Brücken Waage at No.54 has tables outside in warmer weather.

Of the outlets at the Shopping Arena by the stadium, chain bar/restaurant Marktplatz offers several types of St Galler Schützengarten beer on draught, schnitzels, spare ribs and burgers.

All payments at the stadium are with a Stadionkarte from orange-dressed vendors. Match-Die Stadion Bar is the main place for home fans, behind the forster-Tribüne, decorated with framed black-and-white shots of FCSG action. 

Switzerland 2018-19 FC St Gallen

www.liberoguide.com/fc-st-gallen
Sion

Capital of the canton of Valais, just down the A9 motorway from Sepp Blatter’s home village of Visp, French-speaking Sion is nestled halfway between the Matterhorn and Lake Geneva.

Here FC Sion (fcsion.ch/fr), in the 13 stars and red livery of their canton, have survived thanks to controversial president Christian Constantin and a knack for winning the Swiss Cup – even when in the second division.

Sacking coaches every other week, stepping in to do the job himself, signing unsignable players and fielding the ineligible, Constantin has made many enemies but Sion have been top flight since 2006 and regular competitors in Europe.

With no immediate rivals – although it’s always good to beat Servette – cup specialists Sion attract regional as much as local patriotism. The population of Sion is only just twice that of the Stade de Tourbillon, just over a narrow stretch of the Rhône, so many head in from around the canton, taking advantage of the A9 motorway alongside.

Bearings

The nearest airport to Sion is Geneva 160km (100 miles) away. A train runs from Genève-Aéroport to Sion (every 30min, 2hr journey time, SF26 single). Trains from Bern, Basel and Zürich, including Zürich airport, require a change in Visp.

Sion’s adjacent bus and train stations are a stroll from the town centre.

Public transport consists of buses, singles SF2.70 from the driver.

Bed

Sion Tourisme has an online booking system. The centre has three three-star hotels. Old-school Castel, closest to the stadium, has standard doubles from SF160. Also on rue du Scex, the Hôtel du Rhône Sion is quiet. The Hôtel-Restaurant Elite at avenue du Midi 6 has offers in the run-up to Christmas.

An alternative, also close to the station, is La Pension du Vieux-Canal (chemin du Vieux-Canal, +41 27 322 7200, +41 79 947 0398), with a dozen simple rooms.

Beer

Surrounded by vineyards, Sion also drinks local Walliser/Valaisanne beer.

Bars surround place du Midi, including Café de la Place, Le Brésilien, and, also with football action, old-school Au Boulevard. In summer, their terraces merge in the Valais sunshine.

Close by on rue du Scex, opened by sponsors of FC Sion, the Dugout is a standard sports bar with TVs ranged over the bar counter and tables outside in nice weather.

The main football spot in town, though, is Au Poker at avenue de la Gare 25. With a bar interior decked out in Sion line-ups over the seasons, some autographed, Au Poker also provides a large screen for match coverage.

Party-minded Saint James at rue de la Dents-Blanche 9 is more club than bar, with DJ nights and late-opening hours.
FC Sion

Run by controversial Christian Constantin, FC Sion (fc-sion-live.ch) had the envious record of winning all 13 Swiss Cup finals they appeared in – until defeat to FC Basel in 2017.

For all the criticism, this architect from nearby Martigny saved the club in 2003. Sion rebounded, and have been regulars in the top flight since.

Another feature of Constantin’s ownership, along with attacking a TV reporter in 2017-18, has been the frequent sacking of managers.

Sion moved to the Stade de Tourbillon in 1968. Nested between a winding stretch of the Rhône and the Alps, the Tourbillon was named after a medieval castle on the surrounding hilltops.

Its chalet-like home North Stand adds to the charm – behind, the A9 motorway is barely noticeable as you approach from town. However, the 14,000-capacity stadium is gradually losing its quaint feel: the wooden benches that used to line the East Stand were replaced by plastic seats in 2011.

With home fans in the standing Tribune Nord, away ones occupy blocks D5 and D6 in the standing Tribune Sud. VIPS are housed in the Tribune Ouest, the best seats in A2 and A8 facing the ones over the halfway line in Tribune Est, C3-C5.

Transport

The stadium is a 20-min walk from Sion’s main train station – head straight out to avenue de Tourbillon opposite, bear right and keep following it until the river. Cross it at the junction with rue du Scex and the stadium is ahead of you down rue du Stade.

By bus, take No.BS2 (every 20min) from the station stop by the Orient Express bar. Alight at either Promenade Rhône nearest the Café Le Parc or the next one, Manège 1, near the equestrian centre slightly closer to the stadium. It’s 10min by bus from the station, passing central place du Midi on the way.

Bars

The nearest venue is the Café Le Parc (route de Vissigen 72), a simple wooden bar with Feldschlössen beer, local Valais wine and a small front terrace.

At the equestrian centre next to the stadium, Le Paladin serves grilled meats, pancakes and cheese fondue, as well as beers – there’s a TV for football action too.

Tickets

Tickets are sold at branches of the Post Office, Manor stores and at train station offices, as well as at the stadium from 90min before kick-off by the Tribune Est. Online sales are via ticketcorner.ch.

For domestic fixtures, prices start at SF25 in the standing home end, secteur B (Tribune Nord), rising to SF35 in secteurs D1-D3 for home seats behind the opposite goal, Sud. It’s SF55 for excellent seats in secteurs C3-C5 in Tribune Est.

Switzerland 2018-19 FC Sion

www.liberoguide.com/fc-sion
South of Berne, beneath the Bernese Alps, Thun has made its footballing presence felt over the last decade or so. Flagship club FC Thun have embarked upon four European campaigns since their surprise debut in the Champions League in 2005.

Back then, Arsenal, Ajax and Sparta Prague were hosted in Berne, Thun’s venerable but modest Stadion Lachen deemed unsuitable. The last major international team to play there was West Germany, for training before winning the World Cup of 1954. In 2011, the club opened the Arena Thun, on the edge of town. It was later named after cable-car firm Stockhorn.

With average gates for domestic fixtures above 5,000, FC Thun are ticking over without making any credible challenge for major silverware. The Alps and more prestigious Berne still provide ample reason for the floating fan to spend his Saturday afternoon elsewhere.

The Stadion Lachen still stands, its bar displaying posters from that Champions League campaign of 2005-06.

**Bearings**
The nearest main airport to Thun is Basel 130km (81 miles) away. Online with Swiss Rail, a ticket all the way to Thun, including the airport bus to Basel SBB train station, costs SF27.70. The half-hourly rail service to Thun takes 1hr 20min. Thun station and main bus concourse are alongside each other on the west bank of the Aare river. The stadium on the outskirts of town is too far to walk but the city centre is close. All local STI bus lines call at the station. A single ticket, from machines or the driver, is SF3.

**Oesch Tagsi** (+41 33 222 2222) is located halfway between the stadium and the station.

**Bed**
The Thun Tourist Office (thunersee.ch/en/stadt-thun.html) has a hotel database and booking function.

Across from the club’s old ground, Stadion Lachen, the Alpha Thun Hotel provides pleasant, mid-range accommodation, close to the lake. Also nearby is the modern Holiday Thun.

Behind it on the main road, the Gasthof Rössli Dürrenast is basically an old-school restaurant with six guest rooms with or without private facilities. These three hotels are 15-20min walk to the stadium.

Of the options in the city centre, the Freienhof on Freienhofgasse enjoys waterside views but charges four-star Swiss prices.

The Krone on focal Rathausplatz was a guildhouse, now a 29-room hotel renovated in 2014. Across the square, the Hotel-Restaurant Rathaus dates back even earlier, its comfortable rooms also the result of stylish renovation.

**Beer**
You’ll find bars and restaurants on either side of Obere Hauptgasse, around Mühleplatz near the river. These include the Cadillac Café with pool and table football. Bright El Camino offers a fair range of beers on tap.

For TV football, head to McArthurs, with matches on a 55-inch HD screen, live bands and good grub. On Rathausplatz, prominent Ratsstubli also shows sport and hosts live music.

Former football bar Schleusenbar at Balliz 67 has changed its focus to food but cherishes its heritage as Tifo.
Since promotion to the top flight in 2002, FC Thun (www.fcthun.ch) have qualified for Europe four times, played Arsenal and Ajax in the Champions League and gained a new stadium.

Currently, though, this little club overshadowed by nearby Berne is treading water, surviving in the Swiss Super League but without the clout to challenge the big boys.

Home is the Arena Thun, aka Stockhorn Arena. It bears all the hallmarks of a new-build: artificial turf, out-of-town location, retail park alongside, motorway nearby, little else in the vicinity. Opened in 2011, renamed in 2014, the stadium holds 10,000, of which 2,000 are standing places in the Heimsektor, the home end of the Südtribüne. Away fans are allocated sectors D9 and D10 in the Nordtribüne.

Transport
Arena Thun has its own bus stop on the No.3 line. Buses leave every 10-15min from Kante 2 outside Thun station, taking 7min to cover the six stops there.

Tickets
Availability is rarely a problem. Advance sales in person are through Ochsner Sport in the Panorama Center next to the stadium and Sport XX in the Zentrum Oberland retail centre at Talackerstrasse 62, by the junction with Weststraße. Branches of TicketCorner also distribute.

The club offers online booking through Eventim (eventisports.de/ols/fct).

The Tageskassen kiosks outside the ground open on match days only. To stand with the home fans costs SF26, SF13 for 6-15s. The cheapest seats are Kategorie 3, in three corners of the stadium and behind the goal in the Nordtribüne, SF32/SF16 reduced. For the visits of YB Berne and Basel, it’s SF40/SF20. Kategorie 2, better seats around the corners, are SF44/SF22, SF52/SF26 for YB Berne and Basel. The priciest seats are SF64/SF32, SF72/SF36 for YB Berne and Basel. Visiting supporters pay SF25, SF20 reduced.

Shop
The FC Thun shop (Mon-Fri 8am-noon, 1.30pm-5pm, match days) is by Eingang A. Replica tops are either first-choice red-and-white or away lime green. A retro version has a string collar and a bright yellow starburst badge.

The beautifully knitted winter scarves also feature the yellow sunburst logo on red-and-white bars.

Bars
The only bars near the stadium are the two cafes at street level at the Panorama Centre opposite the Cappuccino Club, with its table football table outside, and Migros, attached to the supermarket of the same name. Both have terraces, the Cappuccino Club sells beer, Migros coffee, soft drinks and snacks.

Under the main stand on match days, the FanZelt is a beer-dispensing marquee, with sausages at SF6.50. Depending on the opposition, the beer might be alcohol-free Carlsberg.

The best FC Thun drinking spots are at the old Stadion Lachen on Gwattstrasse. The supporters’ bar is decorated with vintage pennants and autographed posters from the 2005 Champions League campaign. It should be open and serving beer most evenings. Across the street, the Restaurant Lachen is another age-old Thun haunt with pennants to prove it. Beer and main dishes, are served on the terrace.
Basel might be the hotbed of Swiss football culture but the league title has gone to the financial capital of Zürich more than twice as many times.

Switzerland’s largest city is the only one to host a long-running cross-town rivalry – between record champions Grasshoppers and the more recent winners, working-class FC Zürich, aka ‘FCZ’ or ‘Elf-Tsay-Tszett’.

Both currently share the Letzigrund, built by FCZ members in 1925. Shortly afterwards, Grasshoppers, GCZ, moved into the nearby Hardturm – and FIFA moved to Zürich.

Before Euro 2008, the original first choice of finals venue was the proposed Stadion Zürich aka Zürich West, later rejected by locals in a referendum.

Bearings
Zürich Airport is 13km (eight miles) north of town, linked by Swiss Rail and S-Bahn trains (SF6.60 one way with 1hr onward transport, SF13.20 24hr pass/return, 12min journey time) to Zürich station. A taxi should cost about SF70.

City transport consists of trams, buses and S-Bahn lines, tickets available at machines by most stops. A single is SF2.60, a day pass SF5.20/SF8.60. For a city taxi 444, call +41 44 444 44 44.

Bed
The Zürich Tourist Office (zuerich.com) has a free hotel-booking service online.

Right by the Letzigrund, the H+ Hotel Zürich is the former Ramada, still business-friendly with a gym and sauna.

Also on main Badenerstraße, one tram stop nearer to town, three more hotels are also within easy reach. First, the four-star Crowne Plaza Zürich offers a heated indoor pool, high-spec fitness facilities and the LetziLou restaurant.

Towards town, are standard four-star Mercure Stoller Zurich and old-school but comfortable Hotel Olympia.

By the station, the St Gotthard is a renovated four-star while the Schweizerhof combines the tradition of a railway hotel with modern features.

Beer
Zürich is where Hürlimann beer comes from. You’ll still see plenty of it around the bar hub of Niederdorfgasse, behind the Limmat embankment. There, the Züri Bar (No.24) is a cult spot, though it’s lost its FCZ iconography. It leads to a late-night bar, the Kontiki. Grasshopper fans conveve at the upscale Heugümpner restaurant run by the club.

On the same street towards Bahnhofbrücke, Big Ben is more bar than pub and goes big on rarer ales. Kennedy’s on Freischützgasse is the busiest pub, with a huge terrace and plenty of TVs. Irish-owned Paddy Reilly’s on Talstraße has a large screen and ten plasma ones. The Lion at Oetenbachgasse 6 is more refined and restaurant-like – but still has TV sports.

Kaiser Franz on Rolandstraße is an arty corner spot, themed after Beckenbauer, where staff of cool Swiss football mag Zwölf meet. Nearby on Schöneggstrasse, the Old Gregory Pub shows live games.

The excellent Le Calvados on Idaplatz, a self-styled bar sportif, is tastefully done out with pictures of major Swiss players when they were teenagers. Its terrace fills on summer evenings.
Letzigrund

The Letzigrund (www.stadionletzigrund.ch), created by and for the members of FC Zürich, is now shared between FCZ and Grasshoppers.

Its long history can be divided between the original stadium opening on November 22, 1925 – and the Euro 2008 rebuild on the same site, unveiled on August 30, 2007.

Top-flight football and world-class athletics have always featured. The first ratified ten-second 100-metre dash was run here in 1960.

Although ownership passed from FCZ to the City of Zürich in 1937, improvements were slow and stopped by war. The Letzigrund was overlooked for Switzerland’s hosting of the 1954 World Cup, five matches (and 28 goals) hosted at the Hardturm, Grasshopper’s ground less than 1km away.

Both grounds are set in north-west Zürich. But when it came down to which one to modernise for Euro 2008, on the table was also a proposal to build a new arena in Zürich West.

In the end, though the public voted for a reconstruction of the Hardturm, residents objected and the rebuilding of the Letzigrund was rushed through. In 2006-07, city’s two clubs shared the Hardturm for one last season. It was later demolished – and the new stadium plans rejected. In August 2006, FCZ fans were invited to enter the old Letzigrund and take home pieces of turf for souvenirs.

Exactly a year and SF125 million later, the new Letzigrund opened its doors. With a capacity of nearly 31,000 for Euro 2008, 26,000 for domestic league fixtures and 24,000 for internationals, it is the fourth-largest football stadium in Switzerland.

Apart from the skyboxes, a media centre and the Oval restaurant, the main new feature is the roof. Rust-coloured and elliptical, it complements 30 toothbrush-shaped floodlights, set beside the solar panels that generate enough heat to grill 1,800 sausages during one match.

Traditionally, FCZ fans occupy the Südkurve, with standing places in Sektor D on Badenerstraße. Away fans are allocated Sektor B opposite. Grasshoppers supporters have the Baslerstraße end, Sektor B, and away fans are allocated in Sektor D.

**Transport**
The Letzigrund has its own stop on tramline No.2 eight stops/14min from central Paradeplatz, direction Farbhof. Trams run every 8-10min.

From the Bahnhofplatz/HB stop at the train station, take Nos.3 or 14 to Stauffacher and change onto the No.2.

**Tickets**
Home clubs FC Zürich and Grasshoppers occupy different areas of the stadium and have different ticketing systems.

For international matches, the Swiss FA use online agency Ticketcorner for distribution – a seat in a corner of the main stand is just under SF50.

**Bars**
On main Badenerstraße, *Libero* (No.451) is a classic Balkan grill serving Yugo meaty favourites such as čevapčići and pljeskavica. At No.526, spacious Italian Ristorante Da Cono takes its bowls seriously. There are big screens for TV sports, and a bocciodromo, Letzi.

For beers, the Schlachthof on Herderstraße is a pre-match favourite thanks to its draught Dunkle Perle Feldschlösschen.

At the stadium, the Oval restaurant opens to all on non-match weekday lunchtimes – you’ll have to reserve a table for the game. 🍺
Switzerland’s most successful club last won the league crown in 2003. For Grasshopper Club Zürich (www.gcz.ch) – known in the English-speaking world as Grasshoppers – this has been a decade to forget, alleviated only by a solitary Swiss Cup win on penalties in 2013.

Groundsharing the Letzigrund with age-old city rivals FC Zürich since 2007, Grasshoppers are little further with the proposed Stadion Zürich than when they vacated their former home of the Hardturm before Euro 2008.

In 2017-18, average gates stayed around 7,000 while Grasshoppers hovered over the relegation zone.

For a club once perceived as representing the elite, it feels a long time since the 1980s and 1990s, when Grasshoppers were winning titles and beating Real Madrid in Europe.

Englishman Tom Griffith and pupils from Manchester Grammar School founded Grasshopper Club Zürich at the start of the new term in 1886. Blue-and-white shirts were obtained from Blackburn Rovers.

In 1909, Grasshoppers moved to Hard, an industrial district by the river Limmat. Hungarian Izidor ‘Dori’ Kürschner then brought tactical nous. Escaping the chaos of Budapest after World War I, Kürschner led Grasshoppers to three titles and two cups, the club moving to the Hardturm stadium in 1929.


Financial and boardroom upheavals then saw a swift turnover of coaches as FC Zürich and Basel monopolised the Swiss championship.

The demolition of the Hardturm, and subsequent failure to set up a new-build groundshare with FC Zürich, have dictated economics ever since.

At the rebuilt Letzigrund, Grasshoppers supporters occupy the Fancurve GC in Sektor B at the Baslerstraße end of the ground. Away fans are allocated blocks 27-31 in Sektor D on Badenerstraße.

For Transport and Bars, see Letzigrund.

Tickets
Tickets are sold online via Eventim (eventimsports.de/ols/gcz) and on the day (SF5 levy) from the Tageskassen on Baslerstraße.

Admission is SF25 for the home end, SF50 in the sideline Gegentribüne and SF70 in the main Haupttribüne.

Shops
The main outlet for merchandise in Zürich is at general football store Fussball-Corner Oechslin by Schaffhauserplatz tram stop, on the same No.2 line as the Letzigrund.

On match days, a stand sets up on the corner of Baslerstraße and Herderenstraße.

Bars
As well as the bars and restaurants near the ground – see Letzigrund – two venues in town are geared towards Grasshoppers.

Sächs Foif refers in local dialect both its address – Heinrichstraße 65, near Limmatplatz tram stop – and the scoreline of the Swiss Cup semi-final of 2004, city rivals FCZ on the receiving end. Closed whenever Grasshoppers have an away game, it’s decorated with classic line-ups down the decades.

Business clients gather at the club’s restaurant of the smart Heugümper on Waaggasse near Paradeplatz. It serves the public on weekday lunchtimes.
**FC Zürich**

Swiss Cup winners in 2018 after a last-gasp win over local foes Grasshoppers in the semi-final, **FC Zürich** ([www.fcz.ch/en](http://www.fcz.ch/en)) are the populist team in town. League champions 12 times, ‘FCZ’ share the Letzigrund with their rivals.

**Der Stadtclub** (*The City Club*) date back to 1896.

The original FC Zürich wore red, changing to their current blue and white in 1909, by which time they had picked up a first Swiss title.

Having built the multipurpose Letzigrund, stage internationals and cup finals, the club was later forced to sell it to the City of Zürich.

FCZ only picked up after legendary Edi Nägeli became president in 1957. With his trademark hat and cigar, this owner of tobacco kiosks oversaw his beloved Stadtclub during their glory years. Thanks to the toss of a coin, FCZ reached the semi-final of the European Cup in 1964. An ageing Real Madrid side duly tonked the Swiss 6-0 at the Bernabéu. After Nägeli’s death in 1979 came stagnation and relegation.

The Swiss Cup win of 2016 coincided with relegation from the Swiss Super League, and fans storming the players’ tunnel. Order was restored with a swift return to the top tier in 2017.

Sitting there costs SF25, also in the away end (Sektor B). It’s SF40 to sit in Sektor C, and SF50 for a prime seat in Sektor A.

**Shop & museum**

FCZ run their own **Fanshop** at Werdstraße 21.

Merchandise includes branded Swiss Army knives, belts and beer glasses. In the same building, the free **FCZ-Museum** contains pennants, trophies and historic club shirts.

**Bars**

For details on bars at the stadium, see Letzigrund. The one leaning towards FCZ is the **Versus-Bar** at Badenerstraße 281.

When the club had its offices on Letzigraben, nearby **Café Letzistübl** at Albisriederstraße 171 was patronised by employees and officials.