

RUSSIA

2019-20 →

MOSCOW
CSKA
TULA
SOCHI
ZENIT
TAMBOV
LOKOMOTIV
GROZNY
SAMARA
KAZAN
ORENBURG
SPARTAK
UFA
ROSTOV
KRASNODAR
DYNAMO
ST PETERSBURG

NIZHNY NOVGOROD
YEKATERINBURG



RUSSIA 2019-20

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Europe's strongest league after the Big Five, according to the UEFA rankings, the **Russian Premier (RPL)** enjoyed a post-World Cup spike in attendances in 2018-19, the near 17,000 average a significant improvement on gates that had barely scraped into five figures five years before.

Still, this is Europe's most populous country, its twin football capitals of **Moscow** and **St Petersburg** the second-biggest and fourth-biggest cities. All big clubs now play in modern, even completely new, stadiums. Eight of the 12 arenas used for the successful 2018 tournament are RPL venues in 2019-20 – factoring in second-tier **Nizhny Novgorod** hosting homeless **FC Tambov**.

The final, of course, was played at the **Luzhniki**, the nation's showcase since it opened in 1956. Regular but not permanent stage for Russia's national team, this grandiose bowl overlooking the Moskva river in the south-west of the capital rarely witnesses club football now that **Spartak** have their own stadium. The **Otkritie Arena** stands the far north-west of Moscow, with its own metro station – superb, cheap public transport is a given in all RPL cities. **CSKA** and **Dynamo** are also north-west but closer to the centre, **Lokomotiv** north-east.

For the first 15 years of the RPL after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Moscow's big clubs won all but one title. **Zenit St**

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Petersburg successfully challenged this hegemony from 2007 onwards, with **Rubin Kazan** nipping in to nab the crown in consecutive seasons immediately afterwards. The only other club anywhere close to the crown in recent seasons has been **Krasnodar** who attract, along with regular European competitors **Rostov**, the highest RPL attendances after Zenit.



Krasnodar Stadium

Distances hardly encourage away support. It would take 33 hours to drive the 2,500km from St Petersburg to **Yekaterinburg**, where Europe meets Asia, the furthest stretch in the current RPL. Fierce rivalries are only really played out between the Moscow clubs, and Zenit v anyone Moscow. Otherwise, at any game, there'll be a cluster of travelling fans and entire sections of older locals, disgruntled at current standards and wistful for the days of single-year championships rather than the current July-winter break-May arrangement.

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Station to stadium

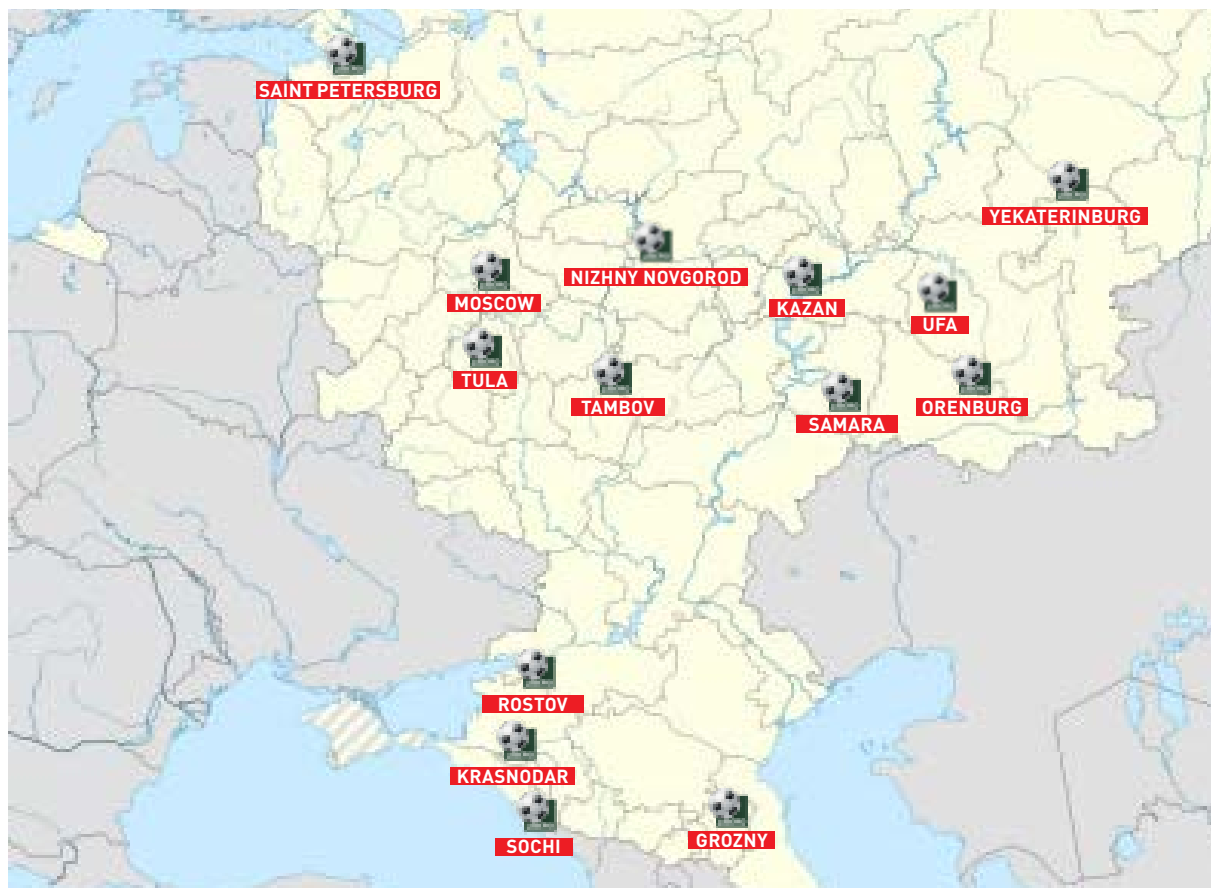
Travel to Russia requires an inordinately expensive **visa**. For most Europeans, processing at the Russian embassy in their capital takes three to ten business days, plus a five-day waiting period. Note that you can only arrange it in the country of your citizenship – you can't go along to any old Russian embassy.

A company such as **Visa to Russia** (www.visatorussia.com) currently charges €42 to help process a 30-day tourist visa – before Russia charges £185 to UK citizens to issue the actual documentation. The express service (four working days) is £285 (!).

You will also need an invitation letter from your hotel.

The Russian currency is the rouble, currently trading at €12.80 for 1,000r. All prices quoted in this guide are given approximate euro conversions. It's always a good idea to take euros and dollars in small denominations with you.

Travelling around Russia is relatively cheap and easy with local budget airlines, the best of which is **S7** (s7.ru), serving many RPL destinations via **Moscow Domodedovo**. **British Airways** also now uses Domodedovo from



Heathrow. **Aeroflot** (aeroflot.ru/en) is still based at **Sheremyetev**. Its low-cost subsidiary, **Pobeda** (pobeda.aero/en), uses **Vnukovo**.

Train tickets can be purchased online from **Russian railways** (russianrailways.com), with four

classes of comfort and overnight services.

Train stations are usually centrally located, airports – most notably the new one now serving **Rostov-on-Don** – can be a long way from town. Taxis are usually affordable but

agree a fee first. Public transport is still cheap and reliable, particularly the metro systems in many cities.

Hotels vary from extravagantly expensive to bargain-basement, sometimes with not enough options in between. Whether you're high-



end or low, always pack bathplugs and, particularly for St Petersburg, water-purifying tablets and mosquito spray.

Tables & trophies

There are three professional divisions, the top two, the **Russian Premier League** (RPL) and the **Russian Football National League** (FNL), for teams nationwide. In the case of the current FNL, this means from Baltika Kaliningrad to Luch Vladivostok, 10,000+km, between the borders of Poland and North Korea.

The RPL comprises 16 clubs who play each other home and away from summer to late spring. The top two qualify for the Champions League group stage, third gets into the Third Qualifying Round, fourth enters the Europa League Third Qualifying Round, fifth the Second Qualifying Round. ➔



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Round. The bottom two drop down to the 20-team FNL. Teams finishing 13th and 14th play off against third and fourth in the FNL, two legs home and away. Reserve sides cannot be promoted.

The third-tier **Professional Football League (PFL)** is divided into five regional zones: West, Central, South, Ural-Povolzhye (ie western Siberia) and East. Each of the first four has around 14 clubs who play home and away – East, whose participants may have been chosen from a game of Risk (yes, there is a Zenit Irkutsk), only has six, who meet each other three times every demanding season. The winners of each zone go up to the FNL, whose bottom five drop down, falling into the relevant PFL zone – currently there are Moscow clubs in both the West and Central divisions.

Referred to as the Third Division or **Russian Amateur Football League**, the fourth tier is mainly semi-pro, with 12 regional divisions, from the Far East to the North West. The more obscure, the fewer the clubs – Moscow's has 16. Promotion/relegation between third and fourth tiers is clouded by many clubs not wishing to claim professional status.

The **Russian Cup** carries over its prestige from the Soviet days. All clubs in the three top tiers participate, plus amateur ones granted access by



the Russian Football Union. Lower-league teams enter according to how many are already competing from that zone – summer's early rounds are regionalised. Ties are decided on one game, hosted by the club lower down the pyramid.

Teams from the lower-tier FNL enter the nationwide Fourth Round in August/September, RPL ones the Fifth Round in late September. By that stage, a draw decides home advantage. The final takes place in May/June, anywhere – Sochi, Astrakhan, Grozny – but Moscow, to promote the Russian game across the nation. For 2020, it's Yekaterinburg. The winners enter the Europa League group stage.

Season's dealings

The RPL season runs from mid July to early December and late February to late May. The FNL usually starts a week earlier, with the winter break from late November to early March. A



Nizhny Novgorod Stadium

bigger league means more midweek games.

For all of Russia's 11 time zones, most of the current RPL clubs are in the same one as Moscow. Of an average weekend, there will be three or four games spread between early afternoon and mid-evening on both the Saturday and Sunday, plus an evening game at 8pm Moscow time on the Monday, perhaps on the Friday, too.

By contrast, the second-tier FNL is almost absurd in scope. When a game kicks off at 8pm in Kaliningrad, it's 4am in Vladivostok. Most fixtures

take place on the Saturday, from late morning/lunchtime through to the evening, with one early-evening game on the Friday, or perhaps the Sunday or the Monday.

Entry level

All main clubs distribute online, none provide a user-friendly English-language option – but availability is almost never a problem and ticket windows (касса/kassa) operate from a few hours before kick-off. Carry ID just in case, always a good idea in Russia.

Given the new builds and overhauls for 2018, and the significant stadium

developments around Moscow, grounds are generally of excellent standard, a far cry from the Soviet days. A stand (трибуна/tribuna) is usually named A-D with English lettering – CSKA use their own acronym.

On your ticket, numbers indicate the gate (вход), block or sector (блок/сектор), in bigger stadiums the level (этаж), then the row (ряд) and seat (место). The цена is the price of your ticket, around 400r/€5 behind the goal, 1,000r-1,500r/€12-€18 for a decent seat on the sidelines. Beer (пиво) is usually plentiful, meaty snacks, too.

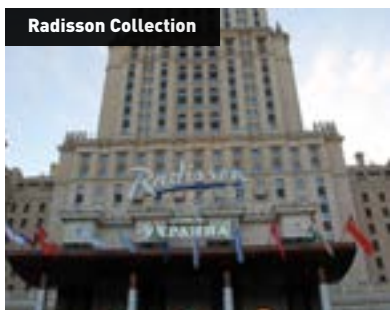


RUSSIA 2019-20 Moscow

www.liberoguide.com/moscow



Get Jerry



Radisson Collection

Moscow

Russia's capital, Europe's largest city and the most recent host of a World Cup final, **Moscow** has a long footballing heritage.

The game arrived here in the late 1880s thanks to the mill-owning Charnock brothers from Blackburn, who brought over leather balls and, of course, blue-and-white shirts. The switch to Communism pushed Moscow ahead of St Petersburg,



where the game first took root. From its inauguration in 1936 to 1991, in 54 seasons of the Soviet championship, the title went to Moscow 33 times.

In post-Soviet times, Moscow has had to share domestic prominence with St Petersburg. In 2016-17 and 2017-18, the pendulum swung back the other way, first when populist club **Spartak** won the title after a 16-year wait, then when **Lokomotiv** narrowly beat **CSKA** to the league crown. These traditional outfits, formed in the early Soviet era,

gave Moscow a 1-2-3 on the league podium in 2018. Each also now has their own stadium, after far too many years of groundshares and unsatisfying longer-than-short-term arrangements.

Spartak play at the new-build **Otkritie Arena**, venue for the Confederations Cup in 2017 and five games for the 2018 World Cup finals. The final was staged at the prestigious national stadium, the **Luzhniki**, rebuilt and reopened in November 2017.

When Russia was awarded hosting of the 2018 World Cup in 2010, there was never any question where the final – and, indeed, the curtain-raiser starring the hosts themselves – would take place.

For a start, the Luzhniki was the only one of the 12 World Cup stadiums with a capacity of 80,000-plus. Secondly, the Luzhniki has been the national stadium ever since its unveiling in 1956. The nation in question, of course, has since changed from the USSR to Russia but, with the statue of

Vladimir Ilyich still prominent outside, the former Lenin Central Stadium still feels very much Soviet. This was once a place of mass gymnastics and Spartakiads.

It was also, for many years, the home ground of once rootless Spartak. Here, city rivalries link back to old Communist allegiances, and offer an interesting historic dimension to an afternoon's football. Moscow's traditional clubs were formed in the 1920s, at the onset of the Soviet era. **Dynamo**, very much the fourth of Moscow's four clubs in the current top flight, were connected with the Ministry of the Interior, with darker ties to the KGB. Bouncing back from the ignominy of relegation by winning the second tier in 2017, Dynamo are now based at the new-build **VTB Arena**, on the same site as the old Dynamo stadium, beside **Dynamo metro station**.

CSKA represented the Red Army and Lokomotiv the railway workers.

Bearings

Moscow has three **international airports**. All are served by **Aeroexpress trains** (500r/€6.35) from machines, credit cards accepted.

From **Domodedovo**, 42km (26 miles) south of town, half-hourly trains run to **Paveletskaya** station (45min). Use exit 3 at the air-rail complex, in →



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between domestic and international arrivals. From **Sheremyetevo**, 29km (18 miles) north-west of town, they run every half-hour from terminals D-F to **Belorusskaya** station (40min). From terminals B & D at **Vnukovo**, 28km (17.5 miles) south-west of town, trains run hourly to **Kievskaya** station (35min).

Each of these destinations is conveniently located on the circle line of Moscow's ornate, cheap and efficient **metro**. Machines and windows also dispense **Troika** top-up smart-card passes (50r/€0.65) for cheaper, easier journeys at 40r/€0.50 each, 62r/€0.80 for 90 minute with changes onto the **bus**, **trolleybus** or **tram**. Plan your journey with **Moscow Transport** (transport.mos.ru/en).

Taksi Moskva (+7 495 255 3399) has fixed rates for airport transfers, around 1,000r/€12.75-1,500r/€19 depending on type of car and city destination/set-off point. Across town, a minimum price is 200r/€2.55-350r/€4.45 in a standard car.

Bed

Moscow has no tourist office – try **moscow.info**.

Hotels fall into the diverse categories of silly expensive and dauntingly cheap, with little in between. During the European season, a visiting

Ritz-Carlton



big-name team will probably stay at the high-end big hitters around Teatralnaya: the **Four Seasons**, the **Ritz-Carlton**, the **Metropol** and the **National**, all within walking distance of Red Square. Lenin was a guest at the latter two, hence the plaques.

More affordable, with advance booking, are the **Moscow Marriott Grand** near Mayakovskaya metro and the **Radisson Collection** on Kutuzovsky prospekt, set in the classic Ukraina building, a Stalinist skyscraper almost designed for King Kong to scramble up.

A perennial affordable option is the four-building **Izmailovskaya** complex built for the 1980 Olympics. With



Liga Pap

rooms from 2,100r/€27 a night, the **Delta-Gamma** section is a safe and competitive bet, near a vast flea market offering team scarves and shirts. Though way north-east of town, nearby Izmailovo metro station



High Level Hostel

is now on the No.14 line, the same as the Luzhniki.

Cheap hotels are best avoided. Filling the gap are hostels such as **Godzillas** at central Bolshoy Karetny 6 with singles and twins around 2,400r/€30 per person. Set amid the skyscrapers of Moscow's fledgling financial district, the **High Level Hostel** (Presnenskaya naberezhnaya 6), on a spur of metro line 4, has dorm beds at 1,000r/€12.75, singles at 2,200r/€28.

The **Luzhniki** is the nearest hotel to the stadium of the same name, is a standard three-star on Novoluzhnetskiy proyezd. Close to Sportivnaya metro at ulitsa 10-Letiya Oktyabrya 11, the 147-room **Gostinitsa Arena** has basic rooms from 1,750r/€22 per person. The nearby mid-range **Blues Hotel** at Dovatora 8 is in a quieter location also within easy reach of Sportivnaya. Five minutes from Sportivnaya, the **Yunost** has been serving the Luzhniki since 1961, hosting the likes of Yuri →



RUSSIA 2019-20 Moscow

www.liberoguide.com/moscow



Gagarin, Mikhail Gorbachëv and any number of famous footballers. Still very Soviet, it has a pool, sauna, gym and 200-plus rooms.

There is no lodging around the **Otkritie Arena** – and you'd be way out of town anyway – but accommodation around the **CSKA stadium** is reasonably handy for metro line 7 and closer to town. This includes the four-star **Art Hotel Moscow** on 3-ya Peschanaya ulitsa where German expertise has

created a sauna, gym, restaurant and conference facilities. Its 24-hour lobby bar doubles up as a pre- and post-match hangout for CSKA games.

Beer

The five branches of local pub chain **John Donne** all show scheduled TV football, including the most central one near Arbatskaya metro at Nikitsky bulvar 12, the first outlet to open back in 2008. Seven large screens complement 15 types of draught beer, ale and porters. **Union**

Jack is another pub mini-chain, with a branch surrounded by bars and restaurants at ulitsa Maroseyska 13, near Kitay-gorod metro.

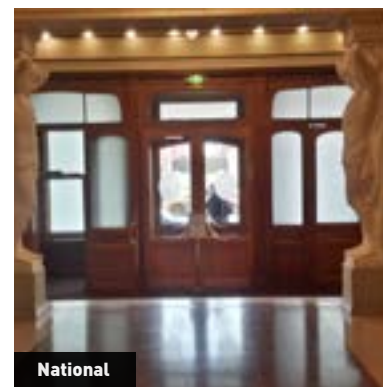
The more contemporary **One More Pub** mini-chain attracts a business crowd during the week and a sporting one at weekends, with its local craft brews, draught-beer offers and wide range of TV games. You'll find the main branch in the business centre at Butyrskiy val 5, near Belorussky station, halfway



Four Seasons

Hotel Peking building, still contains vast banks of TV screens tuned to football, along with 29 types of beer, but pan-Asian cuisine has come with a name change to **Bar2545**.

One ring further down at Tverskaya, contemporary beer-and-burger joint **Get Jerry** at Strastnoy bulvar 4 offers a big screen, a decent range of lagers and, rare for Russia, cider. Plenty of other drinking options abound within easy reach. Across Tverskaya at Maly Gnezdnikovskiy pereulok 12/27, Vsye tvoi druzya trendy **Vsye tvoi druzya** ('All Your Friends') is typical of others nearby, all craft beers, shabby-chic décor and detached affection for football.



National

between the city centre and Dynamo stadium.

In the same area, at 1-ya Tverskaya Yamskaya ulitsa 27, stands one of Moscow's eight **Harat's**, with scores of similar sport-focused pubs across the former Soviet Union.

A few hundred metres south by Mayakovskaya metro, the former **Radio City** sports bar in the

Between Kitay-gorod metro and Ploshchad' Revolyutsii at Bolshoy Cherkasskiy pereulok 15, the **Old School Pub** is neither old-school nor a real pub, but is a handy find for football watching, partly because of its round-the-clock opening, partly because of its plethora of screens.

In the Chistiye prudy metro area, **Bobby Dazzler** (Kostyanskiy pereulok 7/13) is home to the Moscow Reds – note the flag signed by ex-United star Andrei Kanchelskis. Just the other side of Turgenevskaya metro station, the popular 24-hour **Liga Pap** is a major TV football hangout, with a branch at Krasnoproletarskaya 16 to partner this original venue at Bolshaya Lubyanka 24. **LE**



RUSSIA 2019-20 Luzhniki Stadium

www.liberoguide.com/luzhniki-stadium

Luzhniki Stadium

Russia's national stadium provided the setting for the 2018 World Cup Final, opening game and five other matches. Sprawling over a tongue of land tucked in a bend of the Moskva river, facing the Sparrow Hills, the **Luzhniki** (eng.luzhniki.ru) was designed for huge communal Soviet events. The first, the sports Spartakiad of 1956, attracted 34,000... athletes. Eleven of them, including legendary goalkeeper Lev Yashin, starred for a Moscow team who beat Georgia in the final of the football tournament.

A month later, also before a crowd of 100,000-plus, Hungary had the temerity to beat USSR 1-0, the first full international played here and one of the last times that Ferenc Puskás, József Bozsik and Zoltán Czibor would team up together for the Magic Magyars.

Since then, the stadium has seen four major revamps, the most recent completed in 2017 and costing €350 million.

The first was for the 1980 Olympics, the second in the 1990s, by which time the arena had lost its official title of Central Lenin Stadium and assumed the name everyone called it anyway, Luzhniki, 'Meadows'. The stadium had acquired a roof and, lowering capacity to below 80,000, individual seating.



Then came the Champions League final of 2008, John Terry's fateful slip on the penalty spot – and another refit. After the World Athletics Championships in 2013, it closed for the construction of what is effectively a new stadium. The athletics track was removed, a whole new set of seats installed – 3,000 more than before, increasing capacity to 81,000. The roof gained an extended visor for added protection, as well as a translucent polycarbonate covering.

Yet the Luzhniki retains the same shape, the kind of neo-classical bowl favoured by Socialist stadium architects, as when Puskás graced it back in 1956. Even Lenin still stands outside, gazing purposefully at the horizon. Behind him, Tribuna A (colour-coded blue) is the main stand, C (red) the opposite sideline stand, with B (green) and D (orange) behind each goal. Smaller sports halls still surround the main stadium.



Transport

The Luzhniki has its own **metro stop** on outer circle line 14. It is slightly closer to the stadium than the traditional gateway, **Sportivnaya** on red line 1, extended here shortly after the stadium opened in 1956.

Also handy, and on the same line 1, the station **Vorobyovy gory** allows access to the main pre-match bars and eateries.

Bars

On the waterfront at ulitsa Luzhniki 24, 400 metres from **Vorobyovy**

gory metro station, the **Olymp Junior** restaurant is the classiest pre-match option, with its own enclosed garden, two floors and huge terrace. Food is the focus but there's also a separate wooden bar counter with a huge tap of beer. The **Veranda Lounge Café**, further round the riverfront where the Soho used to be at Luzhnetskaya naberezhnaya 24, is another restaurant with cosmopolitan pretensions, though dotted with TVs, and offering Spaten beer on draught and Kozel, Heineken and Bavaria by the bottle. A full menu features steak, fish and pastas. 



LUZHNIKI STADIUM



RUSSIA 2019-20 CSKA Moscow

www.liberoguide.com/cska-moscow



CSKA Moscow

With a new stadium, a title won on the last game of 2015-16 and seven consecutive seasons in the Champions League group stage, **CSKA Moscow** (en.pfc-cska.com) are very much among the Russian elite.

The Centralny Sportivny Klub Armeya grew out of the Ministry of Defence, the Army side who won the last Soviet title in 1991. A decade later, CSKA president Evgeny Giner embarked on a spending spree that shifted the balance of power away from Spartak. CSKA-Spartak became the defining Russian rivalry. Abroad, CSKA surprised everyone by beating Sporting Lisbon at their own stadium to win the 2005 UEFA Cup, Russia's first European club trophy.

Soon afterwards, work began on the **CSKA**, now the **VEB Arena**. In one



corner, the twisting Golden Tower (Zolotaya Bashnya) takes the shape of the old UEFA Cup.

Capacity is 30,000, average home gate under 20,000. Each stand bears a letter of the club's acronym, anglicised to CSKA. Home end A alongside 3-ya Peschanaya ulitsa and Tribuna S are behind the goals, C and K along the sidelines. Away fans allocated sectors 215-216 and 515-516 of Tribuna S, accessed through

the Yuzhnaya Vkhodnaya Gruppya (South Entrance) from Berëzovoi Roshchi.

Transport

The club has its own metro station, **CSKA**, on a section of new **line 11**, the Large Circle, most of which is still being completed. The next station along, **Petrovskiy Park**, is a short walk from **Dinamo** connecting with line 2, swiftly linked to major stops in the centre. CSKA is also on **line 8A**,

another currently being completed. From the station, head towards the huge Aviapark mall, then bear left towards the stadium – allow 10min.

Tickets

The main **ticket office** (Mon-Fri 10am-6.45pm, Sat-Sun 11am-6pm) is at 2A 3-ya Peschanaya ulitsa by the north entrance to the stadium. Tickets usually go on sale two days before the match. **Away fans** have their own windows by the south entrance on

proyezd Berëzovoi Roshchi, open from 2hrs before kick-off.

There are **Russian-language online sales** at events.pfc-cska.com.

For league matches, **prices** are 700r/€9 behind the goals (Tribuna S), including for away fans, running to 1,200r-2,200r (€15.50/€28) in the lower and upper tiers of the sideline Tribuna C and K.

Shops

The **Magazin CSKA** at the **stadium** (daily 10am-8pm) is by the ticket office at 2A 3-ya Peschanaya ulitsa. There's another outlet nearby at Leningradsky prospekt 37B (first floor, outlet 176) at the **Start shopping centre**, and one in town at Taganskaya ulitsa 3 (third floor, outlet 1) by Marksistskaya metro. Blue-and-red souvenirs carry that five-pointed star badge.

Bars

The best options are along proyezd Berëzovoi Roshchi and Grizodubovoi ulitsa alongside, halfway between Polezhayevskaya metro (purple line 7) and the stadium. The **Yorkshir Pub** is filled with signed memorabilia from the Moscow football and ice-hockey teams, plus banks of TV screens, while the one-room **Victoria & Albert** also shows match action. The luxuriously comfortable **Karl Balling**, near the away south end of the stadium ahead in the distance, offers fine beers from the ex-Soviet states. **LG**



RUSSIA 2019-20 Dynamo Moscow

www.liberoguide.com/dynamo-moscow

Dynamo Moscow

A club with impeccable Soviet credentials, **Dynamo Moscow** (fcdynamo.ru/en) have at last embraced the modern age with a long-overdue new stadium, the **VTB Arena**. Unveiled shortly after the bank with the same acronym assumed ownership of the club in 2019, the arena is, in fact, two stadiums in one, for Dynamo's soccer and ice-hockey sides.

The fact that VTB bought Dynamo for one rouble from the sports society formed by KGB founder 'Iron' Felix Dzerzhinsky in 1923 is telling – then again, that was the token amount paid earlier by Dynamo when they bought the club and its debts from VTB in 2016.

Without a title win since 1976, with crowds in four figures and long overshadowed by their three city rivals, Dynamo might be a hard sell, but this is the home of one-club legend, goalkeeper Lev Yashin. Only three teams have won more Soviet/Russian titles. Almost every football fan in the world has heard of Dynamo Moscow. Provided you ignore the KGB connotations, it's not a bad name to be associated with.

VTB Arena, however, is a bit of a misnomer, as the football ground within it is the **Lev Yashin Dinamo Central Stadium**, holding 25,700. Two tiers of



blue seating, with a narrow middle one, rise up close to the pitch, the home end Tribuna D, the away one Tribuna B. The best seats are in Tribuna A.

Transport

The stadium stands beside two metro stations: the Soviet-style **Dinamo** on **green line 2** and **Petrovskiy Park** on new **line 11** and **8A**, one stop from CSKA.

Tickets

The club distributes **online** (fcdynamo.ru/shop/tickets, Russian-only) and from the *kassa* on

Leningradsky prospekt in the run-up to the game and on match day itself. You'll pay around 900r/€11.50 for a seat in upper sectors 303-310 behind the home end in Tribuna D, 1,500r-2,000r/€19-€26 for the similarly numbered upper sectors in Tribuna A or C on the sidelines.

Shop

The **Klubnyi Magazin** just inside the Arena Plaza shopping complex between Dinamo metro station and the stadium sells all things blue and white. Retro shirts cover almost every decade from 1945 up

and Lev Yashin's not-very-likeness is featured on everything from frilly pennants to fridge magnets. Note the shot glasses with the stadium façade on them, and the date of the opening match in May 2019.

Bars

Directly opposite Dinamo metro station across Leningradsky prospekt, the **Pivo Bar** is half-bar, half-beer shop with a decent range of craft and domestic beers. Open until 2am, it's decent for a post-match drink as the crowd thins out – there's a small screen in the corner and football



memorabilia on the walls. Alongside, the **Pizzeria** sells... pizzas, cheaply after 8pm.

The closest beer source to the stadium is the new **Fan Food Café**, in the redeveloped complex around Petrovskiy Park – the green area not the metro station – on the stadium side of the main road. TV screens show sport, beers are varied and tiling with retro football imagery provides the backdrop to the terrace tables. **LB**

DYNAMO MOSCOW



RUSSIA 2019-20 Lokomotiv Moscow

www.libero guide.com/lokomotiv-moscow



Lokomotiv Moscow

The Railwaymen of **Lokomotiv** (fclm.ru/en) are a major force in the modern Russian game, winning nine trophies in the 2000s, including three league titles. All were won under Yuri Sëmin, who returned in 2016 to deliver 'Loko' another in 2018, 16 years after the club's first in 2002.

With a short gap, Sëmin managed Lokomotiv for 20 years in his first stint, straddling the Soviet and Russian eras and making two European semi-finals in the late 1990s.

For the last two decades, 'Loko' have been based at the impressive **RZD** ('Russian Railways') **Arena**, rebuilt and reopened in 2002. Specifically



designed for football, with steeply banked stands close to the touchlines, it has the feel of an English ground and, when the ultras in the South Stand are in full cry, can be intimidating.

The current ground is the third on this site. The first, Stalinets, was built in the 1930s by the Union of Electrical



workers. It was replaced in the 1960s with a typical open concrete bowl, straight from the no-frills school of Soviet functional architecture and similar to hundreds of others across the USSR.

The 21st-century upgrade was funded by Russia's Ministry of Transport. Behind a modern façade, four huge triangular pylons form the shape of a Russian letter 'Л' for Lokomotiv. The ground has hosted several of Russia's international qualifiers and cup finals.

With home fans in the south end, and away in the north, neutrals can usually find a reasonably priced ticket

in the sideline East (Vostochnaya Tribuna) Stand or flanking the VIPs in the West (Zapadnaya Tribuna). Capacity is 27,000.

Transport

Getting to Lokomotiv's stadium is easier now it is served by two adjoining metro stations: **Cherkizovskaya** on **red line 1** and **Lokomotiv** over the road on new **line 14**, with the newest, fastest and most comfortable trains. The stadium stands alongside.

Tickets

Lokomotiv distribute tickets **online** (tickets.fclm.ru/en). With gates

around 15,000, availability isn't a problem, and you can buy on the day from the **kassa** at the main entrance on Bolshaya Cherkizovskaya. The home South Stand (Yuzhnaya Tribuna) is usually full. You'll pay 700r-1,000r (€9-€12.80) in the East Stand, Vostochnaya Tribuna, and in the corner areas of the main West Stand, Zapadnaya Tribuna.

Shop

The **Lokomotiv Magazin** (daily 11am-8pm) sits to the left of the ticket office on Bolshaya Cherkizovskaya. Anything bearing that old-school red-and-green Lokomotiv badge looks cool, not least the all-black goalkeeper's jersey.

Bars

Of the row of outlets across from the metro station, the **Ultra Café** is the most suitable purveyor of beer. Over the road from the club shop, the **Stolichniy Pub** at Bolshaya Cherkizovskaya 30B is the best pre-match choice, a fans' bar decked in scarves and sundry memorabilia, equipped with TVs. The nearby

Amsterdam Bar is a late-night option.

Around the stadium complex, the **Letneye Café** serves the Sapsan Arena for Loko's reserve side, while train-themed **Vagon** behind the North Stand is a long-established eatery for quieter Loko fans. **LB**

LOKOMOTIV MOSCOW



RUSSIA 2019-20 Spartak Moscow

www.libero guide.com/spartak-moscow



Spartak Moscow

Crowned Russian champions in 2017 after a 16-year wait, **Spartak Moscow** (en.spartak.com) are based at the new-build **Otkritie Arena**, stage for the Confederations Cup in 2017 and the 2018 World Cup. Spartak are now looking to re-establish the dominance they enjoyed in the domestic game through the 1990s.

The Red-and-Whites, the Gladiators or, less kindly, 'Meat' (*Myaso*), have traditionally had the broadest fan base in the country. While their rivals were linked to hated apparatus of the State,

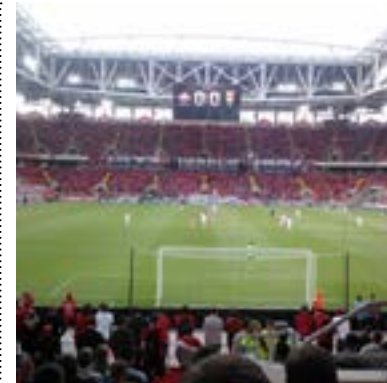
Spartak were sponsored by the food workers' union – hence their nickname and outsider cachet.

For most of their illustrious history, Spartak were, effectively, homeless. Home games were often played at the **Luzhniki**, a testament to the club's status and drawing power. When Russia got the nod to host the 2018 World Cup, plans for a Spartak stadium on the old Tishino Aerodrome site were dusted down as a matter of urgency.

Since opening this 44,000-seater venue in 2014, the club has struggled to fill it. A shame, as it's something of a new departure for Russian football – a

purpose-built, large arena that meets the current requirements of top-level sport. Sightlines are good and the concourse areas are more attractive than most. Above the main entrance, imaginatively displayed within a vintage TV set, is a striking black-and-white image of a classic Spartak line-up, a broad white band proudly spread over players' chests.

The stadium is composed of four stands. Home north end B and south end D are behind the goals, C is along one sideline and, opposite, the main A stand is for press and VIPs. *Only* press and VIPs, in fact, a much-criticised measure.



Transport

The Otkritie Arena is served by a single, purpose-built and suitably decorated metro station, **Spartak**. With no attractions to slow the crowd's mass departure after the game, there's an uncomfortable surge of people squeezing into metro trains after the game. The station is on **purple line 7**, six stops from **Krasnopresnenskaya**, a hub on the main circle line.

Tickets

To buy **online**, first you need to **register** (lk.spartak.com) then purchase (tickets.spartak.com) – all in Russian. Alternatively, ticket agency **Kassir** (msk.kassir.ru) also distributes, again Russian-only.

You can also try the **club shop** in town (see below), near Krasnopresnenskaya metro. With average gates around 30,000, there should be availability on the day.

Behind the goals (B and D), prices start at 700r/€9, rising to 1,000r/€13–2,200r/€28 in stand C on the sideline.

Shops

The **main Red-White Store** (daily 10am–8pm) is at the stadium behind stand A. In town, there's an **outlet** (daily 10am–9pm) at ulitsa Krasnaya Presnya 21.

Bars

There's nothing around the stadium. For a real bar, head to the next metro station up, **Tushinskaya**, where nearby **Beer & Beard** (proyezd Stratonavtov 9) is a real football hangout. Within the arena, all the main food-and-drink outlets in the **Food Court** are behind Stand A and only open to VIPs and press. For the proletariat there are **New Yorker** hot dogs and **Trekhgornoye** beer, alcohol-free. **LG**



RUSSIA 2019-20 Grozny

www.libero guide.com/grozny

Grozny

Once synonymous with ruins, rubble and destruction, **Grozny** has emerged from the devastation of 2000 as a completely new city of soaring towers and gleaming high-rises. One particular construction is the **Akhmat Arena**, home of **Akhmat Grozny**, both named after the Moscow-backed former leader of the Chechnya Republic Akhmad Kadyrov, killed in 2004 by a bomb planted at the VIP podium at the Dynamo Stadium.

Akhmat, the club, were originally called Dynamo, then Neftyanik after the lucrative oil industry based here, then, for several decades, Terek. Disbanded when the Chechen war was raging, Terek won the Russian Cup three weeks after the presidential assassination. Subsequent UEFA Cup games were played in Moscow – until 2008, domestic fixtures took place at the health resort of Pyatigorsk, 300km and several military checkpoints from Grozny.

Returning to Grozny, Terek strode out at the rebuilt Dynamo stadium, now called **Sultan Bilimkhanov Stadium** after another political leader. A top-flight proposition ever since, Terek moved into the Akhmat Arena after Maradona, Figo, Baresi and other stars appeared at its curtain-raising fixture in 2011.



Bearings

Grozny Airport is 7.5km (4.5 miles) north of town. With public transport consisting of a shared-car system and a sketchy network of trolleybuses, cheap taxis are the best way to get into the centre and around it. Agree a price beforehand, but you pay around 400r/€5 from the airport. Some hotels offer transfers. **Zheltoye Taksi** (+7 928 738 777) is based between the city centre and the stadium.

Bed

Right by the stadium, **The Local** offers the kind of opulence you find in the Gulf, with suitably Arabian decorative touches. Visiting teams enjoy its panoramic views, pool, spa and sundeck roof. Everyone else pays around 5,000r/€62 for the cheapest double. Also close, just off main prospekt Mokhammeda Ali, **Hollywood II** has rooms at roughly half that price, in a mini-complex with a gym and restaurant next door.



Also popular with football teams and heavily guarded on match days, similar in price but with a pool, **Gostinitza Sport** stands right by the old Dynamo stadium on Griboyedova. On the opposite riverbank from the main mosque, the towering **Grozny City** symbolises the new capital, sleek and business-oriented. Next door, the newly opened **Dona** has comfortable rooms for around 3,600r/€44.

Beer

Alcohol is only sold at select hotels. Venues around town offer burgers, shashlik kebabs, soft drinks, tea and

coffee. Typical of the genre is the 24hr **American Steakhouse**, across the main square from the Heart of Chechnya Mosque. **Black Star Burger** and **Burger Avenue**, next to each other on showcase prospekt Putina are also popular.

Sports bars operate as games centres, with big screens for broadcasting matches and a modest admission, 100r/€1.25, say, to hit a PlayStation console. One such is basement **Podval** at Lorsonova 2, near the former Dynamo stadium. Right opposite the old ground, **Daar Khaus**



is a cosy, unpretentious eatery with a TV screen on the back wall. With a secluded courtyard just off Putina, the **Café del Mar** is a convivial choice. **LB**

GROZNY



RUSSIA 2019-20 Akhmat Grozny

www.liberoguide.com/akhmat-grozny

Akhmat Grozny

Renamed after the pro-Moscow former president of Chechnya assassinated in 2004, **Akhmat Grozny** (fc-akhmat.ru) are integral to the rebuilding of a federal capital flattened during the conflict of 1999-2000.

Replacing the **Dynamo**, now **Sultan Bilimkhanov Stadium**, where Akhmad Kadyrov was killed, the **Akhmat Arena** was unveiled in 2011 with an exhibition match featuring the likes of Diego Maradona and Luis Figo.

Since then, Grozny, promoted in 2007, have more than held their own in the Russian Premier League, missing out on the Europa League by one point in 2017. Soon afterwards, Terek Grozny became Akhmat, form has dipped, crowds have dropped and former Serie A star Igor Shalimov has been brought in to stop the rot.

As Terek Grozny, the club won the Russian Cup in 2004, the same year as they achieved their first promotion to the top flight. A stoppage-time goal at the Lokomotiv stadium in Moscow decided the game, and sent Terek into Europe for the first and so far only time. Using Lokomotiv as their home ground, the debutants gave a good account of themselves, beating Lech Poznan then losing 2-0 to FC



Basel after a 1-1 draw in Russia. Terek, removed from national league competitions in 1994, had long shifted domestic home games to the health resort of Pyatigorsk, where average crowds of 6,000 for that first top-tier season of 2005 show a solid bedrock of local support.

The Akhmat Arena holds just over 30,000, divided into the main, two-tiered Tribuna A stand and Tribuna B, the horseshoe-shaped stands lining the other three-quarters of the pitch. Gaps at either end of Tribuna A are kept free for emergency services.

Transport

The stadium is on the city outskirts around 4km east of the centre, a 20-30min walk away. Taxis are cheap and more reliable than the infrequent trolleybus service, although there is a stop by the stadium. From town, you'll pay about 100r/€1.25 to the stadium.

Tickets & shop

There's a simple **pricing system** of 300r/€3.75 for a seat in main Tribuna A, 100r/€1.25 for a seat anywhere in Tribuna B, pay on the day. Gates are now around a third of capacity,




so availability is never a problem. Any advance tickets or merchandise will be available at the **club offices** near the old stadium, the Sultan



Bilimkhanov, at Lorsanova 3. The main **club shop** operates at the stadium, behind the main stand. Home shirts are green-and-white stripes with green sleeves, shorts and socks, away ones the reverse.

Bars

With Grozny effectively booze-free except the main hotels, it's coffee, tea or soft drinks pre-match, but come hungry because there's plenty of grilled meat to be had.

Pick of the bunch near the stadium is the **Kovcheg**, at Sadeyeva 24, on the main road running up to the entrance. Shashliks are served on the front terrace and in the cosy interior. Even closer, right by the concourse, **Al-Majlis**, does a fine spread of chicken, pilau rice, soups and desserts. 



RUSSIA 2019-20 Kazan

www.liberoguide.com/kazan

Kazan

Capital of Tatarstan, its skyline studded with onion domes and minarets, **Kazan** is a curiously un-Russian city. In Soviet times it was something of a backwater, though Lenin studied here before his expulsion from the city's university. In the 21st century, its fortunes have revived thanks to the oil wealth of Tatneft.

The gush of petrodollars has also bubbled its way into the city's sporting scene. **Rubin Kazan** are an established force in Russian soccer, winning titles in 2008 and 2009. European campaigns have seen close contests with Chelsea and Liverpool.

The impressive **Ak Bars**, former **Kazan, Arena** co-hosted the 2017 Confederations Cup and staged six matches for the 2018 World Cup, including an epic battle between France and Argentina.

Bearings

Kazan International Airport is 25km (15.5 miles) south-east of the city. A **train** (40r/€0.50) runs infrequently to **Kazan main station** (30min). **Minibus No.197** runs every 20min towards town, stopping at **Prospekt Pobedy** (30r/€0.40), the penultimate stop on the one-line metro system.



Taxi Kazan City (+7 843 233 2 332/+7 987 297 8097) charges around 600r/€7.50 into town, credit cards accepted.

The overnight **train** from Moscow takes around 12 hours and costs from 4,000r/€50 in a four-berth compartment.

A ticket on the **local transport** network of metro, buses, trams and trolleybuses costs 25r/€0.30. Use the ticket office at the metro station or pay the conductor on trams and buses.

Bed

Near the Arena, the **Salma** (+7 843 527 78 31) on Adoratskogo has basic rooms if convenience is a priority over comfort. On the same side of the water, about 3km away, the lower mid-range **AMAKS Safar** on Odnostoronka Grivki has doubles from 2,340r/€29.

Near the station, the **ibis** on Pravo-Bulachnaya ulitsa consists of 155 standard rooms, each with a flat-screen TV. Just behind, where Baumana meets Universitetskaya grandiose **Shalyapin Palace** is a 2009

makeover of a 19th-century landmark, now with a pool, gym and 123 rooms. Further down bar-lined Baumana, **Kazanskoye Podvorye** is basic, affordable and convenient. Close by on Chernyshevskogo, the **Wings Hostel** also offers budget lodgings, both dorm beds and private rooms.

By the theatre at ulitsa Profsoyuznaya 16B, upscale three-star **Hotel Nogai** features a spa, gym and restaurant.

The comfortable **TatarInn** enjoys a lakeside location by a 10-15min walk from the station.



Beer

Pedestrianised **ulitsa Baumana** is where many bars are found. Stand-outs include the **Trinity Irish Pub** at No.44, with flat-screen sport and, over the road, the **Zhiguli** basement bar at No.42/9 has local brews on tap, hearty food and TV football.

Branches of the **SPB** (No.44) and **Coyote Ugly** (No.13) offer sport or dancing as required. Above Coyote Ugly, **Twin Peaks** shows football at every table rather than the Log Lady. Ale aficionados may try the **Belgian Beers Bar** and, alongside, friendly craft-beer specialist **Fomin**, at the corner of ulitsa Profsoyuznaya.

German-style hostelries include **Beerhouse** (ulitsa Astronomicheskaya 10) and, with plentiful TV football, **Maximilians** (Spartakovskaya ulitsa 6) in the Suvar Plaza mall. **LB**



RUSSIA 2019-20 Rubin Kazan

www.liberoguide.com/rubin-kazan



Rubin Kazan

Twice Russian champions and regular European competitors, **Rubin Kazan** (rubin-kazan.ru) have been the main challengers to the Moscow-St Petersburg monopoly of the domestic game.

When the club's chief patron, Kamil Ishakov, became mayor of Kazan, he resolved to lift Rubin ('Ruby') into the top flight. The man who got them there, though, was head coach Kurban Berdiyev. The club celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2008 by winning the league, wrapping up the title after Serbian striker Savo Milošević ended



his playing career with a decisive goal at Saturn. They retained it in 2009, pausing only to deliver a 2-1 win at Barcelona to become the easternmost team to feature in the Champions League group phase.

Four years later, the first of Russia's new stadiums for the 2018 World Cup, was unveiled. Later adapted to host the World Aquatics Championships in 2015, the 45,000-seater, €292-million **Kazan Arena** was inspired by the local surroundings and culture.

A Confederations Cup venue in 2017, it saw dramatic action in the World Cup, Germany, Argentina and Brazil all bidding farewell to the tournament here. The stadium now takes the sponsor's name of the **Ak Bars Arena**.

Four stands comprise two tiers of seating, season-ticket holders in the



home South (юг) Stand B, sectors 115-116 immediately behind the goal. Away fans are allocated the North (север) Stand D opposite. Prime seats are along the sideline East (восток) Stand A and West (запад) Stand C, where you find the Palladium restaurant among the rows of VIP seats.

Transport

The Ak Bars Arena has its **own stop** on **tram Nos.5** (direct from the station in 15min) and **6**. After the game, **trolleybus No.2** rumbles down to central **Svobody ploshchad'** in about 15min.

Tickets

The **windows** on the north side of the stadium, by the tram/bus stops

on Yamasheva, operate 10am-7pm during the week of the match. There's also a Russian-only **online service**, tickets.rubin-kazan.ru. **Prices** are low, around 300r/€3.75 behind the goals, 500r-600r/€6.25-€7.50 along the sidelines. Modest attendances, usually under 10,000, mean that availability is rarely an issue.

Shop

The **club shop** is at **Tsentralny Stadion** (ulitsa Tashayak 2A), one of the grounds Rubin played at before the new arena was built, just over the water into town. On offer are stylish coffee mugs bearing the portrait of long-term Soviet-era manager Nikolai Sentyabryov and footballs with each panel showing the portrait and shirt number of a Rubin player.

Bars

Unless you want to spend serious roubles in the fourth-floor **Palladium restaurant** – stained-glass windows, state-of-the-art karaoke system, European and Japanese cuisine – open for VIPs and business clients anyway, drinking and dining options are limited. By the pool complex close to the stadium, **Beerpoint** (ulitsa Adoratskovo 1A) is an ideal find, all the same, with an encyclopaedic list of brews chalked up behind the bar, fish and grilled meats of every description, accompanied by great chunky chips. Dangling Rubin shirts and TV screens complete the picture. **LB**



RUSSIA 2019-20 Krasnodar

www.liberoguide.com/krasnodar

Krasnodar

Built by Cossacks, the booming southern metropolis of **Krasnodar** was strangely overlooked for the World Cup in 2018 – until recently, it hosted Russia's only top-flight cross-city derby outside Moscow, between venerable **Kuban** and **FC Krasnodar**.

Formed in 1928, Kuban, formerly Dynamo, were established in the early years of the USSR to keep the security services fit. Reliant on local government funding, Kuban ('The Cossacks') hit a purple patch around 2013-14, faced Motherwell and Swansea in the Europa League, made the Russian Cup final, then disbanded in 2018. A phoenix club has since been created by fans and old players.

FC Krasnodar are a product of post-Communism. Founder Sergei Galitsyn made his fortune in supermarkets and, in 2008, funded a football club.

With a focus on an academy and young talent, Galitsyn's vision has worked. The Bulls moved out of Kuban's stadium in 2016 to their own new-build east of town. Regular European campaigns culminated in victories over Liège, Sevilla and Bayer Leverkusen in 2018-19 – and a debut in the Champions League in 2019-20.



Bearings

Krasnodar Airport is 16km (ten miles) east of town. **Bus No.7** and **trolleybus No.7** run every 10-15mins to the city, journey time around 45mins. The trolleybus calls at **Krasnodar-1 train station**. Pass 28r/€0.35 in small change to the driver/conductor. Around town, trams and shared minibuses run on the same ticket system.

Taksi Saturn (+7 861 222 0 222) charge around 500r/€6.15 from the

airport to town. Going to the stadium from town, you'll either need public transport or a taxi.

Bed

With no hotels near the stadium, a room on showcase Krasnaya sounds convenient, but it's pretty upscale. The landmark four-star **Crowne Plaza Krasnodar** (No.109) has rooms from 4,500r/€55, the gleaming **Krasnodar Marriott** (No.120) offers a spa and seafood restaurant, the **Hilton Garden Inn** (No.25/2)

provides global-chain comfort, the sea-themed **Moskva** (No.60) Soviet-style luxury. Nearby mid-range **Ekaterinodar** (ulitsa Chapayeva 82) sits by the main bar area.

Handy for Krasnodar-1 station, the towering **Marton Palace** (ulitsa Mira 70) has standard rooms from around 4,000r/€50. Right by the airport car park, the **Hotel Airport Krasnodar** (ulitsa Yevdokiya Bershanskoy 355) is a convenient cheapie, flight times displayed in the lobby.



Beer

Bars line the parallel main streets of **Krasnaya** and **Krasnoarmeyskaya** in the centre. Football memorabilia fills **McGregor's** (ulitsa Krasnaya 65), with matches on a big screen and the many foreign brews explained by the chatty, tattooed barmaid.

The local branch of nationwide sports pub chain **Harat's** is a couple of houses along, beside a courtyard containing craft-beer focused **Hopkins** and the **Grey Bear Pub**, decked out in scarves and shirts, screens around a large bar space and seats on the summer terrace.

On Krasnoarmeyskaya, **Kulibin** (No.64) appeals to discerning fans of craft beers, **Náměstí** (No.55/2) plays up its Czech credentials, with a few TV screens for football-watching, while the **Amsterdam Bar** (No.64) is a late party spot. Round the corner, **Sgt Pepper's** (ulitsa Chapayeva 94) honours the Битлз in pub form. **LE**



RUSSIA 2019-20 FC Krasnodar

www.libero guide.com/fc-krasnodar

FC Krasnodar

Champions League competitors in 2019-20, **FC Krasnodar** (fckrasnodar.ru/en) are challenging Russia's traditional soccer hierarchy. Founded in 2008 by Magnit supermarket millionaire, Sergei Galitsyn, FC Krasnodar took advantage of clubs collapsing during the financial crisis.

Galitsyn's newcomers rose two divisions to the top without actually winning promotion. Then, under Belarusian coach Oleg Kononov, Krasnodar reached Europe and even looked like title contenders in 2014-15. In each of the last five seasons, The Bulls have competed in the group stages of the Europa League and never finished out of the top four of the RPL.

Meanwhile, Galitsyn built the **Krasnodar Stadium**, designed by Moscow's SPEECH bureau and German architects von Gerkan, Marg und Partner. The arena is set in parkland, with play areas for kids, an outdoor stage and a world-class academy where Spain trained during the World Cup.

The circular arena comprises two tiers of seats. Lower sectors 102-104 and 113-114, 116 are behind the goals, 108-110 either side of the VIP seats on the west side parallel to main



ulitsa Vostochno-Kruglikovskaya for public transport. Sectors numbered 2- are upper-tier. Capacity is 35,000.

Transport

Shared minibus No.45 runs every 20mins along main ulitsa Severnaya in town, via central ulitsa Kommunarov, 12 stops to **Tsentr al'niy stadion**. It's also served by **Nos.47, 48** and **78** but not through town. Infrequent **bus No.46** follows the same route between town and stadium.

Tickets

The **ticket office** (Mon-Fri 9am-7pm, Sat-Sun 10am-6pm) by Gate 14 at the south end of the stadium sells in advance and on the day. You must show your passport to purchase but ask for a free club card to avoid ID procedure next time. The club also sells **online** (fan.fckrasnodar.ru, Russian-only).

Seats in sectors 102-104/114, 116 behind the south and north goals are 250r/€3, admission rising to 600r/€7.30 for reasonable seats in



sideline sectors 107, 111, 119, 123, 208, 210, 220 and 222. Prices double for top games against Zenit and Moscow teams.

Shops

The **main store** is on the south side of the stadium by the ticket office, with a **city-centre outlet** by Sportmaster on the second floor of the Galeriya Krasnodar mall at ulitsa Volodi Golovatovo 313. For 2019-20, FCK have gone for home shirts of

green bleeding into black, covered in Mysteron-type symbols.

Beer

In the row of buildings north of the stadium, up from the bus stop, the underground **Bourbon Bar** is no more than 200 metres from the nearest turnstiles. There's a huge screen for sport and shisha pipes smoked under funky disco-style lighting. Karaoke breaks out later on. Around the corner, the single-room **Sherwood Bar** has a

small terrace where fans mill about with a beer in hand. Next door, the **Vesper Bar** is similar in size and atmosphere. The best choice might be the **Bol'shaya Riba** (ulitsa Zhloby 137), a serious bar/restaurant operation with TV screens and a party feel after dark.

On the south side of the stadium, **Koffeina 1.62** doesn't sell alcohol but packs with coffee-drinking, snacking fans on match days. **LG**



RUSSIA 2019-20 Nizhny Novgorod

www.libero.guide.com/nizhny-novgorod



Nizhny Novgorod

Nizhny Novgorod is where Russian Premier League debutants **FC Tambov** are playing half of their home games in 2019-20. The other half take place in **Saransk**, another 2018 World Cup host.

Of the two, Nizhny is the most fascinating and photogenic. A city closed to outsiders for half a century until 1990, this Volga stronghold had little experience of international football until 2018. Here sport meant ice hockey, athletics and that bizarre winter hybrid of bandy. The leading soccer club in town dates back to 2015. **FC Nizhny Novgorod** play in the second-flight FNL, their stadium built for the World Cup.

With a majestic location overlooking the wide-flowing river, with the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral



alongside, the **Nizhny Novgorod Stadium** would not feel out of place in St Petersburg. Here Croatia achieved historic wins over Argentina and Denmark.

Bearings

Strigino Airport is 14km (8.5 miles) south-west of the city centre. The nearest metro station, **Park Kultury** (Парк культуры), is only 3km away. A taxi there should only be about 175r/€2.20 but drivers may balk at the short distance

– but when coming back to the airport, Park Kultury+taxi is an easy, cheap option. The swift two-line metro (tokens 28r/€0.35) serves the main **train station, Moskovsky vokzal** (Московский вокзал), stadium and city centre.

From the airport, **Taxi 555** (+7 831 2 555 000) should charge about 750r/€9.30 to the stadium/city. **Bus No.11** (pay 28r/€0.35 in small change on board) runs to **ulitsa Druzhayeva** (Улица Дружаева) south-west of the

centre. From there, bus Nos.9 heads into the centre, intersecting with the metro.

Bed

Near the stadium and next to the cathedral, historic **Nikitin** (Strelka 13) was built in the 1890s by a famous architect of the same name, its elegant café aligning with its heritage. Also close, **Titul** (ulitsa Kerchenskaya 14A) opened as a small hotel in 2014, its high-ceilinged rooms coming with their own samovar.

Standard four-star **Marins Park Hotel** is a short walk away, by the river at Sovetskaya 12.

On the city centre side of the water, the 220-room **ibis** at ulitsa Maxima Gorkovo 115 offers reliable mid-range comfort near the metro terminus of Gorkovskaya.

Another major chain, the upper mid-range **Sheraton**, stands right by the Kremlin in the historic centre at Ploshchad' Teatralnaya 1. Also by the Kremlin, the mid-range **Hotel Joy** is a suitably happy find at ulitsa Oktyabrskaya 4.

Beer

Several bars line **Rozhdestvenskaya ulitsa**, parallel to the river. Here at No.8, the **Union Jack** offers TV football, live music, and British and European beers on draught. Round the corner at No.19, the **Black Pearl Pub** is more of a DJ bar but has a TV for games.

At Rozhdestvenskaya 1, **Expeditia** specialises in food from Siberia and the Arctic, with a terrace overlooking the Volga, live music and TV sport.

The other street for dining and drinking is **Bolshaya Pokrovskaya** south of the centre, where **Hell Yeah** (No.27) does loud rock and craft beers. At No.35, Czech-style **Druzhkova Kruzhka** does quality beers and TV football.



RUSSIA 2019-20 FC Tambov/Nizhny Novgorod Stadium

liberoguide.com/nizhny-novgorod-stadium

FC Tambov/ Nizhny Novgorod Stadium

Home of newly promoted **FC Tambov** (fc-tambov.ru) for half the 2019-20 season, the **Nizhny Novgorod Stadium** is hosting top-flight football for the first time in its short history – not that this historic city on the Volga had seen much top-tier action before the World Cup for which it was built. It staged six games in all, including Croatia's 3-0 devastation of Argentina and heroic win over Denmark on penalties.

As for Tambov, the club's rapid rise from formation in 2013 to second tier in 2016 to Russian Premier League in 2019 has caught everyone on the hop. Certainly, their own **Spartak** stadium, built just after the war, fell short of RPL requirements, not least because of its 5,000 capacity. Reconstruction is underway, two steps of a four-stage rebuild, floodlights, heating and drainage, already completed.

Meanwhile, Tambov play home games at Saransk and Nizhny Novgorod. The epic colosseum design of the Nizhny Novgorod Stadium suits the location. On the convergence of the Oka and Volga rivers, across from the historic Kremlin, it is not designed to blend into the background. The enormous outer structure is precise in its angles,



giving the impression of extraordinary size. The roof alone weighs 11,000 tons due to the metalwork supports.

The grandeur of the exterior is offset by the surprisingly compact interior, where 45,000 spectators can sit. Two-tiered stands A/C run along the sidelines, with a row of VIP seats in A and press at the back, stands B/D behind the goals, D109-D111 and B121-B123 nearest the penalty boxes.

Transport

Construction of the **Strelka (Стрелка) metro station** by the stadium was still ongoing when the World Cup started but it was soon completed. It's one stop from the main train station, **Moskovskaya (Московская)**, a 20-minute walk away.

The city centre is not far as the crow flies but separated by Kanavinsky Bridge across the Oka. Take the



metro from downtown **Gorkovskaya (Горьковская)** to Moskovskaya (Московская), then change.

Tickets & shop

Crowds aren't expected for Tambov games at Nizhny Novgorod, some 600km and nine hours' drive away. Admission of around 300r-400r/€3.70-€5 will be available on the day – the club has no online sales. A stall of red-and-blue gear will be set up on the concourse. In Tambov itself, the **Merkury store** at

ulitsa Kommunal'naya 21A stocks merchandise.

Beer

Although there are no out-and-out pubs in the immediate vicinity of the stadium, the **Nikitin hotel** right by the cathedral has a somewhat elegant café.

Bars and restaurants are found on the other side of the Sedmoe Nebo ('Seventh Heaven') shopping mall. At ulitsa Sibirskaya 3, **Solyanaya**

Birzha on the water's edge is also a sports bar, large in size and with live music to follow the match action on the big screen.

For a sit-down meal, nearby **Khachapuri** (ulitsa Volzhskaya Nabarezhnaya 23) does great Georgian food. Note that the somewhat unfortunately named **Hooligans football bar** at Volzhskaya Nabarezhnaya 18 is now the **Veseliy Krolik**, the Happy Rabbit, a place to take the kids for cake and treats. **LE**



RUSSIA 2019-20 Orenburg

www.liberoguide.com/orenburg



Orenburg

Right on the border with Kazakhstan, **Orenburg** has long been a trade, transport and logistical hub on the Ural river where Europe meets Asia – not least for energy giant Gazprom, which backs **FC Orenburg**, twice recent winners of the second-tier Football National League.

Originally called **Gazovik**, the name of the stadium built on the eastern outskirts of town in 2002, the club was formed in 1976. Before then, this city of half a million people was represented by Lokomotiv Orenburg, who played a couple of seasons in the regionalised Soviet second tier in the early 1960s, against the likes of Metallurg Magnitogorsk and Neftyanik Syrzan. Football has never been a major priority in these parts.

Nonetheless, when the Russian Football Union insisted on a



separation between the Gazprom-backed Zenit and Gazovik after their first promotion to the top tier in 2016, a functional name, FC Orenburg, and equally functional logo, were created.

Bearings

Orenburg Airport is 25km (15.5 miles) east of town. With no regular public transport into the city, **Taksi Beloe** (+7 3532 44 000) is one of several local firms and should charge around 500r/€6.25 to the centre. The stadium is on the same side of the city as the airport. Public transport consists

of buses, trolleybuses and shared minibus, fare around 20r/€0.25, give the money in small change to the conductor/driver.

Bed

If you need to stay by the stadium, then the **Rostoshi** is your only choice, five minutes away on ulitsa Tsvetnoi bul'var, rooms basic but adequate, with a pool, bowling alley, gym and sauna. A double is around 3,600r/€45.

At the city end of the main road out towards the stadium, by the Palace

of Sports, the **Hilton Garden Inn Orenburg** provides the upper mid-range comfort of a global chain for under 5,000r/€62.

If you're coming in by train, the **Park Hotel** offers convenience, reasonable lodging and a bar/restaurant for 2,000r/€25 a night. Also close, the **Fakel** is similar in price, with nearly 200 rooms. For budget accommodation, dorm beds and private rooms, the bright **Like Hostel** (Protletarskaya ulitsa 25) is close to Orenburg's bars and restaurants.



Beer

The downtown streets close to Puskin & Dalya Park are dotted with hostelryes, starting with **Polniy Farsh** (Sovetskaya ulitsa 38), pub, grill restaurant and football spot in one, burgers, steaks or sausages the order of the day. In similar vein, **Zavod** (ulitsa Leninskaya 17) is as close to ideal as you can get, a two-floor operation with live music upstairs, own-brewed Gofman beer, a huge screen for sport and a solid menu. Pavement terrace, too.

The other side of Puskin & Dalya Park, the **Dublin Pub** (Krasnoznamennaya ulitsa 24) is the main one of its kind in town, screens and live music providing entertainment. Close by at Sovetskaya ulitsa 46, the **Chukhotka Soviet Pub** is a late-opening drinking option. The local branch of **Harat's**, the Russia-wide Irish-style megachain, stands on the main road to the station, Parkovyy prospekt, by the stop for the No.56 bus out to the stadium. **LE**



RUSSIA 2019-20 FC Orenburg

www.liberoguide.com/fc-orenburg

FC Orenburg

Promoted to the Russian Premier twice in three recent seasons, **FC Orenburg** (fcorenburg.ru) may be backed by energy giant Gazprom but the club hardly screams 'big league'. Their modest stadium of 7,500 capacity, the **Gazovik**, accommodated an average 5,400 crowd for Orenburg's last single season in the top tier, in 2016-17. True, a near capacity squeezed in for the last game – the promotion/relegation play-off won by Khabarovsk by penalty shoot-out.

Distances from Moscow, 1,500km, to this former trading post by the border with Kazakhstan, hardly endear Orenburg to many away supporters either. Until the club's cup run of 2014-15, few intrepid fans needed to traverse huge distances to follow their team to Orenburg, anyway – then named Gazovik had been in the regionalised lower divisions since their formation in 1976, and always dropped out in the early rounds of knock-out competitions. A penalty shoot-out away from the Russian Cup final of 2015, Gazovik lost their nerve against eventual trophy winners Lokomotiv.

A year later, Gazovik won promotion to the RPL, forcing the authorities to have them change their name to FC Orenburg to avoid at least the



semblance of support from Gazprom, who also fund Zenit St Petersburg.

Their stadium, way east of the city centre, remains the Gazovik, comprising four single-tier stands. The main West one, Западная Трибуна, houses press and VIPs, with East, Восточная Трибуна, opposite. North, Северная Трибуна, and South, Южная Трибуна, the liveliest home support, are behind the goals.

Transport

The frequent and faithful **No.56 bus** runs from the train station in the west of town, all the way through the centre, past focal ulitsa Kirova, to **Sportkompleks** by the stadium. Allow 15-20min from town, 30min from the station.

Tickets

Advance tickets are distributed through the outlets **Russian Fireworks** (Русский фейерверк), such as the one near the Space Museum at ulitsa Chelyuskinsev 14. The club also distributes **online**



(tickets.fcorenburg.ru) and at the stadium on match days.

For most games, it's 300r/€3.75 behind the goals and in corner sectors A/G of the East Stand, 500r-700r/€6.25-€8.75 nearer the halfway line, and 1,000r/€12.50 for the best seats in D1/D2. For the visits of Zenit and the big Moscow clubs, prices rise, 500r/€6.25 the cheapest, 2,000r/€25 the dearest.

Shop

The **club shop** is the экипировочный центр ФК Оренбург, with its own separate building behind the south end of the stadium. The club's football logo and Gazprom's are prominent on home shirts of blue and change tops of white.

Bars

The only bar/restaurant near the stadium is the **TORO lounge-café** by the white church on Gazpromovskaya

ulitsa, where hulking burgers and attractive pizzas can be accompanied by chilled bottled beer from the fridge. There's little getting away from the fact that it's part of a supermarket, though, and hardly brimming with atmosphere. The alternative would be a drink in the **Hotel Rostoshi** alongside, though the restaurant there is pretty bland. At the stadium, food stalls are set up around the concourse on match days. **LE**



RUSSIA 2019-20 Rostov-on-Don

www.liberoguide.com/rostov-on-don

Rostov-on-Don

Rostov-on-Don is a city of a million people in Russia's far south, close to Crimea. This port and rail hub, where combine harvesters were made in Stalin's Russia, came to football prominence in 2016 when **FC Rostov** finished league runners-up.

FC Rostov duly walloped Bayern, Ajax and Sparta Prague at their modest ground, the **Olimp-2**, and made it through to the last 16 of the Europa League.

Meanwhile, the **Rostov Arena** was taking shape on the southern bank of the Don, facing the city centre. It took until April 2018 before the new stadium was ready. Rostov continuing to play at the Olimp-2 until mid-April, the season ending without the ignominy of relegation. It is hoped that the new stadium, where Belgium and Japan played out their phenomenal 3-2 thriller that summer, will be key to the redevelopment of this once overlooked area. Inevitably, a mall and multiplex now stand nearby, surrounded by canals and man-made lakes.

Bearings

Platov Airport is at **Grushevskaya**, 28km (17.5 miles) north-east of town. Journey time into town is just over 1hr, by hourly **bus No.700** (100r/€1.30)



to **Privokzalnaya Ploshchad** at the main train station, reasonably close to the stadium over the River Don.

A **taxi** to the city should take 45min. **Maxim** (taximaxim.ru/en) quotes 650r/€8.30 but most services are nearer to 1,000r/€12.80. Many hotels offer a shuttle service.

Around town, for **buses, trams** and **minibuses** (20r/€0.25) pay on board in small change.

Bed

The nearest hotel to the Rostov Arena, **Visoki Bereg** at Levoberezhnaya

ulitsa 27 has rates of 4,000r/€50 for a double, for which you get a large pool and negotiable use of a speedboat.

Re-opened on the opposite bank, smart **Radisson Blu** (Beregovaya ulitsa 25G/4) is a short taxi ride from the stadium. Rooms start at 6,200r/€78. Closer to Voroshilovsky Bridge at Ulyanovskaya ulitsa 52, mid-range **Hermitage** has rooms from 3,000r/€38 up to 8,500r/€107. Next door, **Don Quixote** is equally mid-range but at the budget end.

Comfortable **Marins Park** (Bodonnovskiy prospekt 59) has a spa



and pool. Nearer the river, the **Mercure** (Voroshilovsky prospekt 34/107) is an 89-room four-star with a gym.

Beer

Bars dot leafy **Pushinskaya**, where it crosses with **Voroshilovsky prospekt**.



At the junction, **Dobri El** has plenty of screens and micro-brewed house beer Doroshenko. Alongside, **Sherlok** is more upscale pub, themed after the detective, and offering German and Belgian brews. Just behind, **Cheshka** has its own house beers in four varieties, including seasonal – and table football.

One block down Pushinskaya at the corner with prospekt Sokolova, **Abbey Road** is Beatle-themed and Brit-friendly, with TV sport. A 'billiard club and music pub' officially at Voroshilovsky prospekt 18/18, the **Dublin Club** is, in fact, at Suvorova 20 behind the Solnecheny supermarket – offering beer and pool. At Suvorova 19, **Mojo** does cocktails.

Tornado has four branches, one at Bolshaya Sadovaya 41, about 300 metres down from Pushinskaya. More fast-food chain than pub, with betting thrown in, Tornado is convenient for a quick beer while gawping at match action. **LE**



RUSSIA 2019-20 FC Rostov

www.liberoguide.com/fc-rostov



FC Rostov

One of the surprise packages in recent European competition, conquerors of Bayern, Ajax and Anderlecht, **FC Rostov** (fc-rostov.ru) owe their recent and only real success to Kurban Berdyev.

The manager from Turkmenistan who achieved success at Rubin Kazan came to **Rostov** in Russia's

far south in December 2014. Saving 'Selmashi' from the drop, he then took the team to within two points of a first title, running neck-and-neck with CSKA in 2015-16. Berdyev bowed out just as Rostov's European run was setting off – but his influence remains.

Rostov's arrival on the national and European stage took place at **Olimp-2**, home of the club after its formation in 1930. Set in the east of

the city, this old-school ground was usurped in 2018 by the **Rostov Arena**, on the south bank of the Don.

Almost the last World Cup stadium to be completed, the new arena holds 45,000, a healthy 37,000-plus nearly filling it when 'Selmashi' overcame Ural 1-0 to avoid relegation at the end of the 2017-18 campaign.

Purely from an aesthetic point of view, the stadium may have lost its initial



revolutionary design as a cost-cutting measure, but remains a comfortable yet intimate place to watch a football match. Gates were even higher than Spartak's in 2018-19, over 30,000.

Comprising two rows of blue seating divided by yellow staircases in club colours, stands are indicated A-D. Away end B nearest the river and home end D are behind the goals, A is the main west stand, C the east along the sidelines.

Transport

The main setting-off point is from **Tsentral'ny Rynok**, also on tram line Nos.6 and 7. **Bus No.8** runs every 15min to the MegaMag Mall – the stop before is '**Rostov Arena Stadium**' – while hourly **bus No.39** goes to **Levoberezhnyy Park** right beside the ground. Alternatively, the stadium is a short, affordable taxi hop over Voroshilovsky Bridge from somewhere like the Mercure Hotel. From the station, allow 15-20min by cab.

Tickets

Even with Rostov's healthy home gates, availability isn't a problem and tickets are available from the windows (kassa) at the stadium on match days. **Online sales** (tickets.fc-rostov.ru) are Russian-only.

It's around 500r/€6.30 behind the goals in Stands B/D, 1,000r/€12.60 in Stands A/C along the sidelines.

Shops

The club has no fewer than six outlets around the city, including the **airport**, **train station** and old ground, **Olimp-2** (prospect Sholokhova 31e). You'll also find shops at the **Gorizont Mall** in town, the **Taler Mall** outside the centre and **MegaMag Mall** near the stadium.

Bars

Unveiled in a no-man's-land in 2018, the Rostov Arena now has a number of outlets around it, on the river side, on and off **Levoberezhnaya ulitsa**.

Cube Burger doesn't sell booze but has a large terrace busy on match days while the **Gostiny Dvor** alongside is more formal restaurant, also with a terrace. Right by the water, the **Yuzhny Bar** is probably the best if smartest choice, attracting Rostov's slick set on non-match days. Cocktails and sought-after beers such as Franziskaner are served on the terrace. **LB**



RUSSIA 2019-20 St Petersburg

www.liberoguide.com/st-petersburg

St Petersburg

St Petersburg battles with Moscow for the honour of Russian football capital. While the country's second city took a back seat during the Soviet era and its immediate aftermath, the tables have since been turned.

Flagship club **Zenit**, backed by energy giant Gazprom, won the title again in 2019, the fifth since 2007. They were also the last (and only the second) Russian club to win a European trophy, in 2008.

On Krestovsky Island, a 60,000-plus capacity superdome was unveiled in 2017, staging the Confederations Cup final that July. Designed by Kisho Kurokawa, responsible for innovative airports, galleries and an entire master plan for Astana in Kazakhstan, the **Gazprom Arena** was a World Cup venue in 2018 and a designated one for Euro 2020.

Also referred to as the **Krestovsky**, it stands on the site of the old **Kirov Stadium**, where Zenit and Dynamo St Petersburg played the inaugural match in 1950.

Football was first played at this outward-looking port city in 1897, a game between English and Russian workers on Vasilyevsky Island. In the 1920s, St Petersburg



became **Leningrad**, whose representative XI finished runners-up to Moscow in the City Team Championship in 1924, 1932 and 1935.

Formed in 1922, Dynamo Leningrad competed in the inaugural Soviet championship of 1936. The team played at the **Dynamo Stadium**, built in 1929 on Krestovsky Island, a kilometre from today's Gazprom Arena, by the banks of the Malaya Neva. This was the main football stadium in town in the 1930s – it was

even said to have staged a so-called Siege Game in 1942, while Leningrad remained under blockade.

Another survivor of the pre-war era was the **Lenin Stadium**, opened in 1925. Renovated several times since, it became the home of Dynamo and Zenit's reserve team. Also known as **Central Stadium**, this classic Soviet construction with the signature floodlights like giant waffles was then renamed the **Petrovsky** after its island

location. With a capacity of 21,000, it accommodated Zenit's move out of the vast Kirov in 1994. The modern-day revival of Zenit took place here.

The Kirov had been reconstructed to co-host the football tournament for the 1980 Olympics – it also witnessed Zenit's only Soviet title win in 1984. Despite passionate local support – composer Dimitri Shostakovich was said to be a fan – back then Zenit otherwise rarely finished in the top three.



Once Zenit gained the financial backing of Gazprom in 2005, the rivalry with Moscow was ramped up.

Bearings

Pulkovo Airport is 17km (11 miles) south of the city centre. **Bus Nos.39** and **39Ex** run to **Moskovskaya station** every 15-30mins (journey time 20mins). Pay the conductor on board, about 40r/€0.50. **Minibus K39** also calls at Moskovskaya plus six other metro stations. Pass 40r/€0.50 to the driver.

Arrange a **taxi** from the desk on the first floor of Arrivals, paying by cash or credit card there, around 1,000r/€13 and 1,500rub/€19 to the centre. In town, green-branded **Taxovichkof** (+7 812 330 0002) are as good as any and can be booked online.

Moskovskaya station is on **blue metro line M2**. One journey on the five-line **metro system** is 55r/€0.70 with a



RUSSIA 2019-20 St Petersburg

www.libero guide.com/st-petersburg



token, a ten-trip card (370r/€4.75), available from stations. For **Buses, trams and trolleybuses**, pay the conductor 40r/€0.50.

Bed

Right by the stadium, the **Arena Hotel** has 27 mid-range rooms, pool, gym, sauna and restaurant.

Also close is the **Hotel Park Krestovsky**, a modern three-star with 194 rooms and tennis courts in summer.

On the northern bank of the island by the amusement park, the **Hermes**

Park Hotel is pricier, with rooms in the 7,000r-10,000r/€90-€128 range.

The **Courtyard St Petersburg Vasilevsky** opposite the Petrovsky Stadium delivers four-star comfort and stunning waterside views. Tucked in from Tuchkov Bridge across from Zenit's former home, the three-star **Shelfort** (3-ya liniya Vasilevsky ostrova 26) has doubles for 4,000r-5,000r/€51-€64.

In town, right by St Isaac's Cathedral, the **Astoria** dates back to 1912, palatial enough for the French squad who stayed here in 2018. It's all high-end,



the spa, the restaurant and the rates. Alongside, the **Angletterre** is similarly swanky. Nearby at Malaya Morskaya ulitsa 14, the **Petro Palace** is in the same luxury bracket.

On the other side of the cathedral by the river, the **Nevsky Breeze** at

Galernaya ulitsa 12 is more mid-range but modern. On the same street at No.4, the **Deluxe** is similar in standard, price and availability, although with only eight rooms.

An easy metro hop away near Tekhnologicheskyy Institut (M1/M2), the **Sokos Olympia Garden** at Batayskiy pereulok 3A exudes Scandinavian cool. Another plus here is the **Sports Bar '84**, named after Zenit's title winning season and occupying half the first floor. Sports fans can also watch in a separate movie theatre space with soft chairs.

If you're coming into **Moskovsky train station**, you'll find the modern **Park Inn by Radisson Nevsky St Petersburg**

alongside at Goncharnaya ulitsa 4A, its **Paulaner Bar** doubling up as a handy city-centre pub.

Beer

St Petersburg is full of football-friendly bars. Suitable places to watch the match include **Mollie's Mews** (Bolshaya Konyushennaya ulitsa 5), one of several in a local pub chain. It also includes **Mollie's** at ulitsa Rubinstein 36 and the **Office Pub** at Kazanskaya ulitsa 5.

Also near Kazan Cathedral, right on Nevsky at No.22, you'll find the **Tower Pub**, with TV football – it sits next door to **O'Hooligans**, a pub mini chain with four outlets in town, one a short taxi hop from the Saint Petersburg Stadium.

Liverpool (ulitsa Mayakovskogo 16) lays the Beatles theme on thick but offers Prem action in high definition.

Picturesquely set by the Fontanka at Naberezhnaya reki Fontanki 108, **Dickens** has little to do with London but has a large range of draught beers and whiskies. The **Oliver** pub (ulitsa Belinskogo 3) is in the same family and in similar vein. By the Mariinsky Theatre, the **Shamrock** is probably the most authentic of the football-focused pubs, in business since 1994. Across from the Sokos Olympia Garden hotel (Batayskiy pereulok 3A), which has its own **Sports Bar '84**, **Old Friends** is another pub geared to football-watching. **LO**



RUSSIA 2019-20 Zenit St Petersburg

www.liberoguide.com/zenit-st-petersburg



Zenit St Petersburg

Gazprom-backed **Zenit St Petersburg** (fc-zenit.ru) have been Russia's most successful club in recent years. The last to win a European trophy, and league champions five times between 2004 and 2019, Zenit broke the Moscow stranglehold on domestic football.

Most was achieved at the modest, Soviet-era **Petrovsky Stadium**, before Zenit strode out into the new-build **Gazprom Arena** in 2017. Built over ten years and at an astronomical cost of \$1 billion plus, Zenit's new home quickly saw a doubling of average attendances. The figure of 48,000 for 2018-19 was the highest in the Russian Premier League by nearly 20,000.

The **Gazprom Arena** replaced the former **Kirov Stadium**, the Soviet-era bowl that could once hold 110,000 people. Dominating a fifth of Krestovsky island, from Victory Park to the



waterfront, the new two-tiered stadium of 68,000 capacity features a retractable roof and a retractable pitch for the long, bitter winter.

Distances dictate that only Moscow clubs will bring any significant away following, placed in a corner of the upper tier stretching from the edge of Sektor A to halfway along Sektor B behind one goal, nearest pedestrianised Yachtennyi Bridge. Visiting supporters fill blocks A215-A218, then from B201-B205 or up to B209, depending on demand.

The so-called Fanatskiy Virazh of Zenit fans occupy the lower tier behind the Sektor D goal, blocks D101-D111. The best seats are in 1XBet Sektor A and Rossiya Sektor C along the opposite sideline.

Transport

The nearest metro station, **Novokrestovskaya (Новокрестовская)** on **green line M3**, is linked to central Nevsky Prospekt. **Krestovsky Island (Крестовского остров)** on **purple M5** also serves the stadium but

is 2km/25min away, through Park Pobedy, pleasant on a summer evening, a no-no in winter.

Tickets

Advance tickets are sold by the Petrovsky Stadium, the **Zenit Customer Office** (daily 10am-8pm) at the **Arena Hall business centre** (prospekt Dobrolyubova 16 A/2). The club also distributes **online** (tickets.fc-zenit.ru, Russian-only). On match days, the **ticket windows** at Yuzhnaya doroga 25, the other side

of the Arena Hotel from the stadium, open from 10am.

For league fixtures, 500r/€6.40 is an average price for a seat along the sidelines in sectors A and C. Better ones over the halfway line are 1,100r/€14.

Shops

The main stores are the flagship **Zenit Arena** at central Nevsky prospekt 20 and at the **Petrovsky Stadium**. Triangles of blue shades form the first-team top, away ones white with sky/dark blue piping, both bearing the that retro Zenit logo.

Bars

The stadium is surrounded by parkland and waterfront, which bars and restaurants use to full advantage.

Five minutes away at Yuzhnaya doroga 25, at rustic brewhouse/restaurant **Karl und Friedrich**, pork knuckle, schnitzel and sausages accompany litres of house lager. Alongside, lakeside **Russian Fishing** is a cosy cabin where fish bred in the adjoining waters are served. There's a huge vodka selection to wash it all down.

Across pedestrianised Yachtennyi Bridge in the **Piterland** centre, **Papasha Klaus** is a German-style brewhouse with fabulous views over the stadium and Gulf of Finland beyond. In summer, a beach bar extension operates. **LG**



RUSSIA 2019-20 Samara

www.liberoguide.com/samara



Samara

During World War II, **Samara** was designated as the alternative capital were Moscow to fall, and a bunker was duly built for Stalin outside town. Vostok rockets, of the type that sent Yuri Gagarin into space, were later built here. No wonder, then, that the football team representing this former closed city is **Krylia Sovetov** – ‘Wings of the Soviets’.

Just as the flagship club has retained its titular links to the political past, so the newly built World Cup stadium, initially called the **Cosmos Arena**, harks back to Gagarin. Renamed the **Samara Arena**, this spaceship-like dome hovers off the main road north out of town, a trek from the city centre.

Downtown Samara is pleasant, stretched along the Volga with a beach near the city centre. Further round the

bend is Togliatti, where Lada cars are made.

Bearings

Kurumoch airport is 35km (22 miles) north of town, at least 1hr away by **bus No.652** (125r/€1.50 from the kiosk inside the terminal) or **shared minibus No.392** (pay the driver 50r/€0.60 in small change). An **STC Taxi** (+7 8 937 992 2321) to town should cost around 750r/€9.30, credit cards accepted.



The **station**, where trains arrive from Moscow 16hrs away, is south of the centre. The city's solitary **metro line** (token 32r/€0.40) runs east-west through town, not serving the station or the stadium. To use a **TTU tram** or **trolleybus**, pay the conductor 32r/€0.40 in small change.

Bed

Close to the Samara Arena, **Dubki** (ulitsa Dalnyaya 45A) is affordable but miles from the centre. Handy for trams, Alabinskaya metro and the beach, the **7 Avenue Hotel & Spa** (ulitsa Novo-Sadovaya 3) charges 3,500r–4,000r/€43.50–€50 a double in smart surroundings. Cheaper and nearer the beach, vintage **Volga** (Volzhski prospekt 35) provides a Soviet resort experience. Further along the river, the **Holiday Inn Samara** (ulitsa Alexei Tolstoy 99) has a spa zone. On the same street at No.35, budget-class **Volna** is basic

but reasonable. Near Rossiyskaya metro, still close to the riverbank, **Best City Hotel** (ulitsa Osipenko 3) and **Equator** (ulitsa Sadovaya/Potapova) offer mid-range comfort. Diagonally opposite the station stands **Hampton by Hilton Samara**.

Beer

Samara's best spots are within easy reach of the beach. Parallel on Volzhski prospekt, craft-beer bar **Na Dne** has TV football and occasional personal appearances from Krylia players while **Art&Fact** comprises a large terrace with a huge screen. Facing it from the pier of Ulyanovskiy spusk, the floating **Beluga** terrace restaurant is atmospheric.

Also close to the beach, the other side of Stalin's bunker, **Shannon** (ulitsa Krasnoarmeyskaya 1) is one of several similar hostelryes, along with the **Leprechaun Bar** in the same building as the 7 Avenue Hotel and the sport-focused **Irish Pub** opposite. Named in honour of Mrs Hudson of Sherlock Holmes lore, pub/restaurant **Hadson** (ulitsa Sadovaya 251) plays on its British credentials while screening matches.

Hali Gali (ulitsa Frunze 101) serves up pub grub, decent beer and TV sport while the local branch of nationwide sport-pub chain **Harat's** (ulitsa Dachnaya 2, off Moskovskoye shosse) has a terrace. **LE**



RUSSIA 2019-20 Krylia Sovetov

www.liberoguide.com/krylia-sovetov

Krylia Sovetov

Formed by the Aviation Trade Union when World War II was at its height, **Krylia Sovetov** (eng.kc-camapa.ru, 'Wings of the Soviets') originally comprised players evacuated from Moscow, Minsk and Donetsk to the vital industrial hub of Samara. This closed city on the Volga not only had a galvanised workforce but a football team which later held its own in the Soviet top flight, until the late 1960s at least.

Top-tier again for most of the post-Soviet period, Krylia Sovetov were based at the Stadion Metallurg by Park Kultury right up until mid-April 2018, when the Samara Arena was unveiled. Given Samara's historical links to aviation and space travel, the original name, the **Cosmos Arena**, and its style, are fitting. One side is an enormous structure shaped like a multi-angled star, with each point reaching far out beyond the main stadium's wall to provide cover from the elements. So impressive is the scale of the stadium exterior that its diameter surpasses even Moscow's Luzhniki, whose capacity at 81,000 is nearly twice as much.

Even after the new location had been agreed, 10km (!) north of the city, the roof designs had to be altered. Exterior lighting and atmospheric translucent



roofing materials were ditched, and the roof lowered by 20 metres.

A narrow row of seating is sandwiched between two tiers, stands B and D behind each goal, C and A (press, VIPs) along the sidelines.

Transport

Located way out of the centre, the Samara Arena is now served by the **Stadion tram stop** on weekend-only line Nos.11 and 12, eight from Piramida Mall, 20 from focal Pobeda

Station, on the metro line. **Bus No.50** runs from the train station, past the metro stop of Alabinskaya to **Turbaza 'Dubki'** by the hotel of the same name, close to the stadium. Alternatively, tram **No.22** runs from **Krasnoarmeyskaya** near the train station, through town to **Demokraticeskaya** (journey time 40min), 500m from the stadium.

Tickets & shop

The main outlet in town for tickets is **Sila Sporta** (daily 10am-9pm), an

activity complex at Moskovskoye shosse 17, near Moskovskaya metro station. There's another at the club offices at the old **Metallurg stadium**, ulitsa Stroiteley – the tram stop (**Nos.8 and 9**) is at the opposite end of the ground. A modest selection of **souvenirs** is also on sale here, and at the Samara Arena on match days. **Online ticket sales** (tickets.kc-camapa.ru) are Russian-only.

A seat behind the goal in stands B and D should be



300r-400r/€3.75-€5, in sideline A/C, 500r-1,000r/€6.20-€12.40.

Bars

There is little within walking distance of the stadium for pre-match drinks, unless you include the tiny bar at the **Hotel Dubki** (Demokraticeskaya ulitsa 52), which probably isn't worth including. On **Moskovskoye shosse** by the tram stop of the same name, the **Shauma Sport Bar** at 320A is everyone's favourite pitstop. Offering grilled meat, beer and TV football, it has seats inside and out. Cross the street to jump on tram Nos.11 or 12, one stop to the terminus at **Stadion**. **LB**

KRYLIA SOVETOV



RUSSIA 2019-20 Sochi

www.liberoguide.com/sochi

Sochi

Host of the astronomically expensive Winter Olympics in 2014, the Black Sea resort of **Sochi** was also a venue for the Confederations Cup in 2017 and the World Cup a year later. Witnessing some of the most epic action of 2018 – Spain's 3-3 draw with Portugal, Russia bowing out on penalties to Croatia – the **Fisht Olympic Stadium**, converted for football at an extra cost of \$46 million, only ever hosted prime showcase fixtures.

That situation was soon resolved when **PFC Sochi** were created from the relocated Dynamo St Petersburg, then gained promotion to the Russian Premier League in 2019.

In actual fact, PFC Sochi and the Fisht Stadium aren't in Sochi – they're in **Adler**, close to Sochi airport but a good 20km from the resort hotels of central Sochi.

Bearings

Sochi International Airport is in **Adler**, near the Olympic complex, 35km (22 miles) south-east of central Sochi. A swish hourly **train** takes you from the terminal to **Sochi train station** (165r/€2) in 45min. Outside the terminal, **bus Nos.57** and **135** (22r/€0.25 in small change) run every 20-40mins to the **Fisht-Arena** stop.



Taxi Aeroport Sochi (+7 938 440 32 32/+7 938 442 30 30) quotes 450r/€5.50 to the Olympic Park and 900r/€11 to central Sochi. Within **central Sochi**, the train station, port and main hotels are all walkable from each other.

Bed

Both **Adler** and **central Sochi** are full of hotels – a dozen within 2km of the stadium. Perhaps the most convenient, just off the main road leading from the Olympic Village train station, the **Omega Sirius Park**, the former Tulip Inn, offers a 24-hour gym and free parking. Nearby, and cheaper, the **Hotel Parus** (ulitsa



Starookhotnichya 29, +7 918 000 53 72) sits alongside the Cowboy, a handy pre-match bar/restaurant.

Nearer Olympic Park station, the **Adler Hotel & Spa**, the former Russkiye Sezoni, contains the most unpublike Stratford Pub, as well as the titular spa. If you're coming into Sochi station, the **Park Inn Sochi Centre** is well located, with the **Paulaner restaurant** and airport transfers. Nearer the seafront at ulitsa Ordzhonikidze 11A, the **Mercure Sochi Centre** has its own private beach. In the same complex as the five-star **Pullman Sochi Centre** with sea-facing balconies and pools inside and out.

Beer

Bars and restaurants mostly cater to holidaymakers from Russia and the ex-Soviet states. Right on the promenade, near the Zhemchuzhina Hotel once behind Sochi's top-flight football club in the 1990s, **Harat's Pub** is part of a chain that stretches from St Petersburg to Irkutsk.

Near the port, **Frau Marta** (ulitsa Sovetskaya 2) is Germanic beerhall in feel, with plentiful pub grub. At Kurortnyi 16, on the top floor of the Melodiya shopping centre, **Dobri El'** is the Sochi outlet of this Rostov-based chain of sports bars. Near the station, **Draft** (Navaginskaya 11) offers



convivial soccer-watching, the pub-like outlet of a long-established local beer distribution company. If you've just got in by train, slake your thirst with lashings of Munich's finest at **Paulaner**, attached to the Park Inn. **LB**



RUSSIA 2019-20 PFC Sochi

www.liberoguide.com/pfc-sochi

PFC Sochi

If **PFC Sochi** (pfcsochi.ru) didn't exist, it would have been necessary to invent them. In fact, they *were* invented – in order for the prestigious sporting hub of **Sochi** to have a top-flight football club, Dynamo St Petersburg, formed when Lenin was still alive, were moved 2,000km-plus due south and rebranded.

Host of the Winter Olympics in 2014, Confederations Cup in 2017 and, of course, the World Cup in 2018, this revered resort last had a top-tier team in the 1990s. **Zhemchuzhina** ('Pearl') were dissolved in 2012, by then called **FC Sochi-04**.

Meanwhile, down in Adler, 20km away near the airport, an Olympic Park was being built for the most expensive Games in history. Centrepiecing it, the **Fisht Olympic Stadium** is named after the nearby mountain whose 3,000-metre-high peaks rise off to the distance.

Their outline inspired the form of the signature stadium roof while the nearby Black Sea provided the idea for the half-shell shaped topping of cushions of recyclable translucent thermoplastic. Resistance to earthquakes was another element that British structural engineers BuroHappold had to factor in.

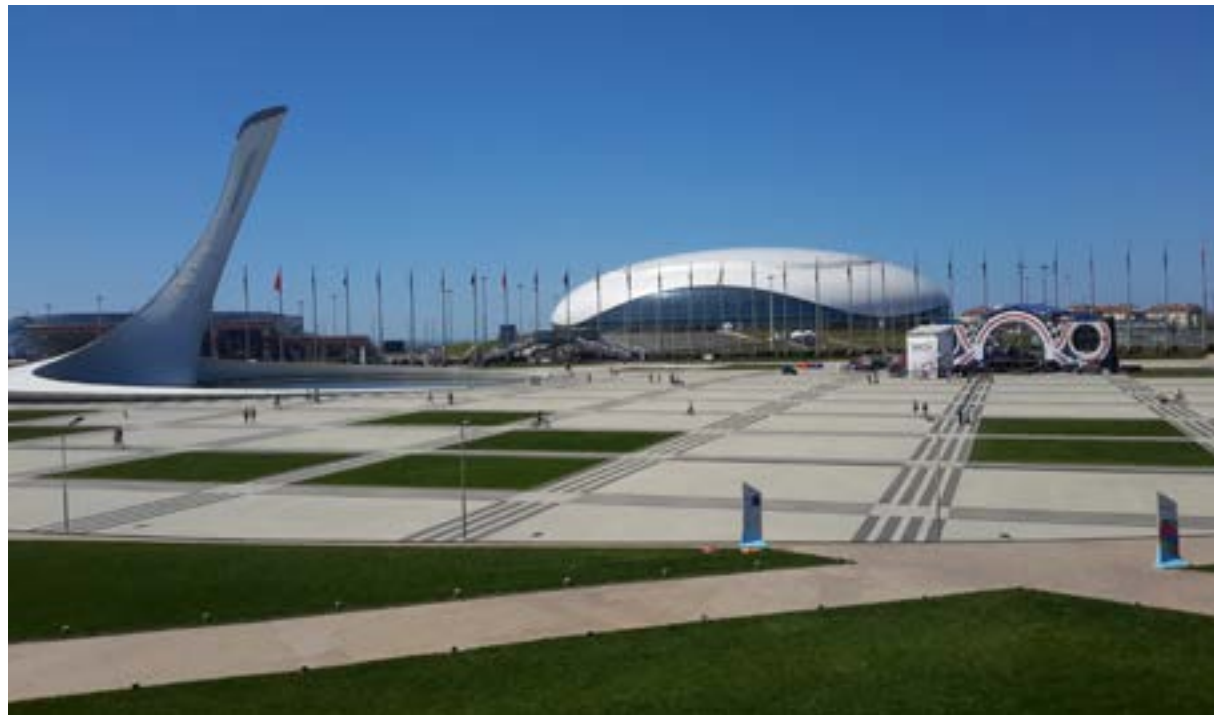


Capacity for the Games was 40,000, gathered for the opening and closing ceremonies, and medal presentations. But for 2017 and 2018, FIFA insisted on an open stadium, with no roof. With a conversion bill of \$46 million, BuroHappold and designers Populous worked on a reconfiguration that not only swept away most of the roof but increased capacity to 47,000.

Part of the brief was also to create a home ground for PFC Sochi, formed days before Portugal and Spain played out their epic 3-3 draw here. Current capacity is 41,000, average gate for Sochi's promotion season in 2018-19, under 4,000.

Transport

The Fisht Olympic Stadium is in **Adler**, near the airport. Outside the terminal, **bus Nos.57** and **135** (22r/€0.25 in



small change) run every 20-40mins to the **Fisht-Arena** stop. The **rail service** to Sochi doesn't stop at the Olympic sports complex. From Sochi station in town to the Olympic complex, the train (170r/€2.10) takes 40min.

Tickets

Kassir ticket outlets provide distribution, such as at ulitsa Roz 48A near Sochi station, and the Avia agency at ulitsa Lenina 1 near Adler station. The club sells **online** through

tickets.pfcsochi.ru (Russian-only) and on **match days** by pavilion 4 at the north end of the stadium, and pavilion 6 at the south end. You'll pay around 300r-400r/€3.70-€5 behind the goals (sector B/D) and 750r-1,000r/€9.30-€12.40 along the sidelines (sector A/C).

Shop

PFC Sochi's white or blue shirts are sold by the Vans store at the **MoreMall** (ulitsa Novaya Zarya 7) in Sochi, the **TRTs City Plaza** in Adler (ulitsa Kirova

58) and by the **Tribuna T2** in the Olympic Park.

Bars

Near Olympic Village station, beside the **Hotel Parus**, the **Cowboy** is a themed bar/restaurant offering reasonably priced beers and burgers. By the Bolshoy Ice Dome, the Olympic-themed **Baikal** is more upscale restaurant but serves half-litres of Slovak Zlaty Bažant. On the stadium concourse, Heineken beer is sunk on the terrace of the **Pasta & Grill** restaurant. **LE**



RUSSIA 2019-20 Tula

www.libero guide.com/tula

Tula

Tula may not be the only city in the world with a football club called **Arsenal**, but its heritage justifies the name tag. Here, 200km south of Moscow, weapons were made that the Tsar's forces launched at Napoleon in 1812. Tolstoy, in fact, wrote his epic novels on his estate just outside the city. As a top-flight force in Russian football, however, Arsenal are a recent phenomenon, their current stint only dating back to 2016.

Tula has had a football team since the 1920s, the first known as Weaponry Factory, Oruzhzavod. As Zenit, the club played games within the historic Kremlin fortress, lower-division matches within the USSR league pyramid. In 1959, the **Tula Luzhniki** opened on prospekt Lenina, the main avenue that runs arrow-straight south-west from town, the stadium hosting a full international 40 years later. By the time Russia and Belarus played out that 1-1 draw, the ground was called the **Arsenal Stadium**. In 2019-20, it stages Tula's first European club games, when Arsenal make their debut in the Europa League, reward for an excellent league campaign in 2018-19.

Bearings

The nearest airports to Tula are the ones in **Moscow** around 170km-



200km away. **Trains** run every 1-2hrs from **Moscow Kurskaya**, journey time to Tula around 2hrs 30mins, standard tickets around 500r-600r/€6.25-€7.50. Trains come into Moskovskiy station in the far west of town, served by the city's transport network of buses, trolleybuses, trams and shared minibuses. Pay the driver/conductor 20r/€0.25 in small change. Local **Edinaya Sluzhba Taksi** (+8 4872 777 777) serve the city and offer transfers with the three main Moscow airports for an average 3,600r/€45.

Bed

Built into the stadium wall, the **Otel Sport** comprises a number of standard rooms, singles at 2,400r/€30, doubles €3,600/€45, with a 50-metre pool at guests' disposal. About a mile from the stadium towards town, the **Sofiya** (ulitsa Kaminskovo 27) houses an elegant billiard hall around standard rooms. At the city end of main prospekt



Lenina leading to the stadium, the four-star **Armenia** offers a pool, spa and comfortable rooms in a quiet location.

Further round the Kremlin wall at ulitsa Sovetskaya 29, the **SK Royal** is the best hotel in town, again with a spa and pool. On the other side of the Armenia at Turgenyevskaya 13, the **ApartHotel Centr** looks more impressive from the outside than the

boxy rooms behind the elegant façade, but you couldn't be more central.

Beer

Pubs are located near the Kremlin, starting with **Saldens Brewery** (ulitsa Sovetskaya 68) with its own-brewed beer and cider, plus steak and burgers. On the nearby corner of Sovetskaya and prospekt Lenina, **Poneslos** is more gastropub, with a TV screen by the bar.

Further round on Krasnoarmeyskiy prospekt, three-floor brew pub **Dzholli Molli** feels sleek and professional while the **Restaurant Beerlin** opposite offers 12 draught options, from Belgium, Germany and Newcastle. The Tula branch of **Harat's**, the Russia-wide chain of sport-focused Irish-style pubs, is down Krasnoarmeyskiy prospekt at No.19, halfway between town and the train station. **LE**



RUSSIA 2019-20 Arsenal Tula

www.lib eroguide.com/arsenal-tula



Arsenal Tula

Arsenal Tula (arsenaltula.ru) echo the industrial heritage of their home city and not their more illustrious namesakes in London. The latest provincial side to challenge for European places in the Russian Premier League, the Gingerbread Men play at the **Arsenal Stadium**, built in 1959 when the then Trud Tula were in the Soviet second flight.

Five name changes later, and Arsenal were fourth-level when the USSR



dissolved. It would take two straight promotions from 2013 onwards before the club joined the big teams from Moscow, whose fans have an easy train journey to get here. It hasn't been an easy ride for visiting players, though, Arsenal coming within one point of a European spot in 2017-18, then gaining it a season later.

Supporters of their Europa League opponents are allocated sectors 1-4 of the South Stand, the Южная трибуна, while liveliest Tula fans at

the home end, Северная трибуна, occupy sectors 7-8. The main stand, Западная трибуна, houses VIPs, the press allocated seats in the opposite sideline East Stand, Восточная трибуна. Capacity is 20,000.

Transport

Several buses run to the **Stadium stop** by the stadium, including **trolley Nos. 1, 2 and 11**, and **bus Nos. 1 and 18** from central ulitsa Kaminskovo. Buses drop you diagonally opposite the Spar supermarket, about a 5min

walk to the stadium, allowing time to cross the main road.

Tickets

Tickets are sold **online** (arsenaltula.ru/tickets, Russian-only) and at the stadium on the day. The cheapest seats (150r/€1.85) are in sectors 3-6 in the home end, Северная трибуна. For some reason, hard-core Arsenal fans pay 500r/€6.20 in sectors 7-8, the same as everyone in the South Stand, Южная трибуна, including away fans. A seat along the sidelines is around

the same price, rising to 550r/€6.80 for the best ones in sectors 3/6 of the West Stand, Западная трибуна, either side of the VIPs. Prices rise by about 100r/€1.25 for the visits of the four Moscow clubs, Zenit and Krasnodar.

Shop

The **Fan Shop** (daily 11am-8pm) is located at prospekt Lenina 87A, at a corner of the stadium nearest to town. Home shirts for 2019-20 are yellow with red markings, away tops grey with yellow markings. All other merchandise is red and yellow. Of the many badges, look out for the ones with a likeness of the Arsenal Stadium alongside the club logo.

Bars

The only out-and-out sports bar on the way to the stadium is **Sovietkiy Sport**, named after the venerable daily, a corner basement filled with TV screens and retro paraphernalia where prospekt Lenina meets ulitsa L'va Tolstovo. Right by the ground, attached to the Spar supermarket, the multi-floor **Symok** is a popular drinking spot before and after matches. Best and nearest option, though, is the **Brasserie Černovar** right opposite, a large, study beerhouse offering Czech and Belgian beers and decent, hearty meals. Further along, by the cycle track, **Rob Roy** is classier than its simple interior and red-brick façade let on, serving cocktails mixed with prime spirits, and superior burgers. **LG**



RUSSIA 2019-20 Ufa

www.liberoguide.com/ufa



Ufa

Capital of energy-rich Bashkortostan, **Ufa** is a busy metropolis of a million citizens, half of them Russian. This is the home of the Bashkirs, an ancient Turkic race whose language is spoken by 1.2 million people.

One of them is Rustem Khamitov, president of Bashkortostan since 2010. Formed the same year, flagship club **FC Ufa** was his initiative. It could be argued that the actual foundation date was February 18, 2009, when two modest amateur outfits, Dinamo PB and Taxis – a football team for taxi drivers – merged to create



Bashinformsvyaz-Dynamo. Their combined trophy cabinet gleamed with recently won plunder such as a silver medal in the Urals & Western Siberia zone Cup.

Renamed FC Ufa in December 2010, the club replaced a Soviet-style sports

ground built in 1967 with a modern-day football arena. The **Neftyanik** opened in 2015, hosting a first campaign in the Europa League in 2018.

Bearings

Ufa Airport is 23km (14.5 miles) south of town. Every 15mins, **suburban bus No.101** runs to Ufa train station, **No.110** heads further into the grid-patterned city centre. Journey time is 45min, pay the driver 50r/€0.60.

The stadium is 10km north of the centre. **Public transport** consists of buses, trams and trolleybuses (pay 20r/€0.25), and communal minibuses (pay 30r/€0.40).

The **taxi service** at the airport is operated by an automated board in the luggage reclaim area. It's about 1,400r/€17 into town. Within town, **Minutochaka Ufa** (+7 347 266 0077) are reliable and affordable.

Bed

The only lodging close to the stadium is the standard **Otel Prichal**, about 500 metres away on Matveya Pinskovo, a good 30 minutes from the centre by public transport. Convenient for **bus No.22**, handy for the stadium, the **Bashkiriya Hotel** where ulitsa Lenina meets Kirova was designed in the 1930s and renovated in 2014-15 as a business-friendly four-star.

A couple of blocks nearer the river opposite TsUM, mid-range **Astoriya** looks equally classy, with a billiard room – it's on a busy road so get a room at the back. Close by, just off Verkhnetorgovaya ploshchad' the **Holiday Inn Ufa** offers airport transfers, a lounge bar and brasserie. The best address in town is the **Crowne Plaza Ufa** on ulitsa Tsyurupy, the former **Sheraton**, with a proper Russian bath panoramically located on the roof.

Beer

Bars are dotted around the **Gostinyy Dvor** exhibition hall in the centre. This is where you'll find the local branch of Russia-wide **Harat's**, an impossibly successful combination of multiscreen sport, pub grub and Western ales. Also here is a branch of cult chain **Darling, I'll Call You Later**.

On the other side of Gostinyy Dvor, the **Jagger Bar** ('Grill & Rock 'n' Roll') provides quality cocktails and sought-after beers until late. Nearby, **The Bar** on Chernyshevskovo keeps equally silly hours for DJs to spin away and cocktails to flow. Across the street, **Sherlock Holmes** serves steaks and international beers while broadcasting sport on eight screens and projectors. Here also is where you'll find **The Highlander** and **Morris** (ulitsa Karla Marksa), one a rustic Scottish place offering craft beers, popular with away fans, the other Irish by rote. **LG**

UFA



RUSSIA 2019-20 FC Ufa

www.liberoguide.com/fc-ufa



FC Ufa

FC Ufa (fcufa.pro) were formed from a merger of two modest local teams in a city with no previous experience of top-flight football. Less than a decade later, FC Ufa were in Europe.

The region of Bashkortostan is more than just a former member of Soviet Russia, east of Kazan. Oil, gas and coal were making the most populous of Russia's 22 republics rich – but not famous. If Kazan could not only

compete against the big clubs, why not Ufa?

Bashkortostan president, Rustem Khamitov, had Bashinformsvyaz-Dynamo renamed FC Ufa. Under Sergei Semak, captain of Rubin Kazan when they won titles in 2008 and 2009, Ufa suffered a narrow defeat at Rangers in front of a near-50,000 crowd at Ibrox – but had arrived on the European stage.

The 15,000-capacity **Neftyanik Stadium** is set by a large park

dedicated to victory in World War II – it even has a T34 on display – on the city's outskirts.

Despite the contemporary construction, the Neftyanik still looks Soviet, an open bowl, a roof covering half the seating and an archway of neo-classical columns, topped by a scoreboard, behind one goal.

Alongside at this north end (Северная трибуна) is the section for visiting supporters. Home fans gather in the south end (Южная трибуна), sectors



C9-C14. Neutrals may be wise to choose the West Stand (Западная трибуна), C15-C19, which is covered, handy in the blistering Russian summer or rainy spring.

Transport

The **Neftyanik Stadium** has its **own stop** on **trolleybus Nos. 1 and 22 routes**.

From the **Ufa Arena** for ice hockey in town, the No.22 (every 10min) is direct, journey time 25min. The No.1 (every 12min) sets off from the **Friendship Monument**, through the city centre, 16km from the starting point. The whole journey is 40min. Each service runs until at least 10.30pm. A **taxi** from town should cost at least 1,000r/€12.50.

Tickets

The **ticket offices** at the stadium (ulitsa Komarova 9) open during the week.

Usually there's little problem with availability on a match day, and the cashier projects a plan of the stadium onto the glass in front of you so you can pick your seat. Russian speakers can also order **online** (tickets.fcufa.pro).

The cheapest seats are behind the goals, 200r/€2.50. Along the uncovered sideline, the East Stand (Восточная трибуна), it's 300r-500r/€3.75-€6.20. The dearest seats are those in the covered West Stand (Западная трибуна), 500r-600r/€6.20-€7.50. For major European games, prices at least double, so it's 500r/€6.20 behind the goals and towards the halfway line 1,200r-1,500r/€15-€18.60.

Shop

FC Ufa merchandise is sold at the **club offices** (ulitsa 50 let Oktyabrya 28) near the BGAU bus stop outside the city centre. Red-and-green souvenirs are also sold around the ground on match days.

Bars

The main spot is the **Café Bar Arabella** (ulitsa Komarova/Maksima Gorkogo), a homely pub/restaurant with TV screens. Nearer the park on Komarova, the **Sport-Bar** is more a darker drinking hole, with a TV for matches.

Within the stadium, **stalls** are set up for grilled meats, snacks and soft drinks – there's no beer. **LG**



RUSSIA 2019-20 Yekaterinburg

www.liberoguide.com/yekaterinburg

Yekaterinburg

Straddling Europe and Asia, the industrial city of **Yekaterinburg** was the easternmost host of the 2018 World Cup. The actual border with Europe is some 30km outside town, as is the burial place of the Romanovs, murdered where there now stands a stunning Orthodox church in town.

The city is otherwise busy and modern, with nearly 1.5 million inhabitants. Just west of the centre, the remodelled **Centralniy Stadium (Yekaterinburg Arena)** for the World Cup has maintained its Neo-Classical Soviet-era façade, but added two extraordinary stands outside the stadium itself. These will be removed to accommodate league team **Ural Yekaterinburg**. In recent seasons, these distant underachievers have flirted with European qualification thanks to two appearances in Russian Cup finals, losing to Lokomotiv Moscow both times.

Bearings

Koltsovo Airport lies 16km (ten miles) south-east of the city centre, a 1hr ride by **bus No.1** (28r/€0.35 pay on board) every 15-20min to **Yekaterinburg Passazhirskiy** train station, the hub for most city transport. Alternatively, **shared**



minibus No.1 is quicker but dearer, 45min, 100r/€1.25 plus 20r/€0.25. **Taxi NonStop** (+7 343 270 0000) quotes 520r/€6.50 for the same journey and accepts credit cards.

Around town, the **one-line metro**, trams, buses and trolleybuses carry the same a flat fare of 25r/€0.30, either pay on board or with a token for the metro.

Bed

The nearest lodging to the stadium is the **Champion Hostel** (ulitsa Krylova 26), about 400 metres away behind Gordon's bar, with dorm beds and private rooms. Towards the stadium, the **Green Park Hotel** (ulitsa Narodnoy Voli 24) has standard rooms at 2,700r/€34 while the plusher, dearer **Renomme Hotel** nearby at ulitsa 8 Marta 50 offers airport transfers.



Upscale, central and a straight run to the stadium, the **Visotsky** (ulitsa Malysheva 51) fills the city's tallest skyscraper with luxury lodgings, a spa, a bar on the 37th floor and, bizarrely, a museum dedicated to the namesake Soviet-era troubadour. It towers over the once grand, now cheap **Tsentralny**, which offers tours of its Soviet past. Back over the road, the **Park Inn by Radisson** combines style with global chain uniformity. Just north, overlooking the Park Usad'by gardens, mid-range **Voznesensky** has a 24-hour bar.

Near the train station at ulitsa Chelyuskintsev 106, **Marins Park Hotel** offers upper three-star rooms with a pool for around 2,500r/€30.

Beer

The best bar hub is around **Plushchad' 1905 Goda** metro station, where the riverside **Dr Scotch pub** by the Beatles monument on ulitsa Malysheva is under the same umbrella and with a similar offering as Gordon's by the stadium. On the metro side of the river, **Lavcraft** (Malysheva 31A) has

12 Russian ales on draught and TV football.

In the same vicinity, **Killfish** (ulitsa Vaynera 9A) offers discount beers while friendly basement spot **Televizor**, by the main tram hub of ulitsa Radishcheva, screens as many games as possible.

Back over the river near Soviet Army Square, **James** is more sleek restaurant than bar despite its pub-like appearance – think thick steaks and oysters rather than darts and pints. **LO**



RUSSIA 2019-20 Ural Yekaterinburg

www.liberoguide.com/ural-yekaterinburg



Ural Yekaterinburg

Named after the region and mountains that divide Europe from Asia, **Ural Yekaterinburg** (en.fc-ural.ru) are enjoying modest success thanks to an inventive scouting system. Goalscoring midfielder, Romanian international Eric Bicfalvi, leads a feisty side that has twice made the Russian Cup final in recent years, losing both times to Lokomotiv. Few clubs relish the trip to Yekaterinburg,

for many, the longest one of the season.

The easternmost stadium to host the 2018 World Cup the **Centralniy Stadium** (aka **Yekaterinburg Arena**) was only partially redeveloped for the tournament, blending a listed building by melding Neo-Classical façade with two extraordinary stands that extend outside the stadium perimeter. Construction was carried out by local firm Sinara, who bankroll the city's successful futsal team.

A beautiful stadium dating back to 1957 has been preserved and improved, the acoustics brilliantly designed for atmosphere. Capacity, 36,000 for the World Cup, remains around the same.

The home end, Stand B, contains the Ural Fan Sector (фансектор Урала) В303. The away end (фансектор гостей) is Stand D opposite. The best seats are in C104-C106 in sideline Stand C, and the business ones in A104-A106 in Stand A opposite.



Transport

The stadium is close to the city centre. From the train station, where buses from the airport arrive, take the metro from Ural'skaya two stops to **Ploshchad' 1905**, and then walk the remaining 15 minutes along nearby prospekt Lenina to the ground, or hop on **trams Nos.2 and 18** to **Vechniy Ogon'**, two stops away.

The stadium also has its own trolleybus stop for several routes, most notably the **No.3** from the Sverdlovsk Hotel stop near the train station.

Tickets & shop

The main outlet for advance tickets is the **club shop** (daily 10am-10pm) in the **Grinivich mall** near Geologicheskaya metro, in the far corner of the first floor closest to ulitsa Radischcheva. On match days, the **ticket windows** (касса) at the stadium open from 10am. Russian

speakers can also buy tickets **online** at ticket.fc-ural.ru.

You'll pay around 300-400r/€3.75-€5 behind the goals in Stands B/D, 500r-1,500r/€6.25-€18.75 along the sidelines in Stands A/C. Average gates hover around 15,000 so availability is rarely an issue.

First-team tops are bright orange with black markings, hence the club nickname of шмели or Bumblebees. Away shirts are white with orange/black trim, the third kit all black.

Bars

Behind the stadium near entrance 4 is a number of small but decent drinking and dining options. Right next door, **Gordon's** (ulitsa Krylova 27) is a traditional pub serving its own beer, with plenty of screens continually showing games. Steak features prominently on the menu, as do sausages and several kinds of beer snacks.

Further up Krylova at No.5, tucked away amid residential blocks, **Tri Tolstyaka** is one of several branches of the same chain offering reasonable fare.

Diagonally behind Gordon's, the **Black Fox Lounge Bar** (aka Chornyi Lis) at ulitsa Mel'nikova 27 is more upscale, with matches screened and DJs occasionally booked. **LE**