

ROMANIA

2019-20 →

VOLUNTARI
CLINCENI
BOTOȘANI
STEAUĂ
SEPSI
IASI
CLUJ
MEDIAȘ
BUCHAREST
CHINDIA
VIITORUL
CRAIOVA
DINAMO
GIURGIU
PLOIEȘTI

HERMANNSTADT



ROMANIA 2019-20

www.liberoguide.com

The last time a club from **Bucharest** won the Romanian league was 2015. Their 26 titles dating back to 1951, **Steaua** remain the record champions but the new force in the game, **CFR Cluj**, look increasingly difficult to shift. Forced to change their name to **FCSB** as more inconvenient truths emerged from the shady deals that wrested ownership from the Romanian Army, the European Cup winners of 1986, still known by all as Steaua, have finished runners-up every season since that 2015 win.

Romania's huge distances and poor public transport – the train takes nearly ten hours to cover the 500km between Bucharest and **Cluj** – mean that away support is meagre and gates low. The one exception is **Craiova**, where the revived **Universitatea** attract 17,000-plus, five times the league average, to the sleek, new **Stadionul Ion Oblemenco**. Steaua are hiring the **National Arena** for home games as costs mount for the rebuild of their ground in a shabby outpost of south-west Bucharest.

Across town, the Arena Națională illustrates Romania's move away from its totalitarian past. First named Stadionul August 23 after the takeover of Romania from the Nazis in 1944, the stadium has staged a European final and is earmarked to co-host the next Euros. All this would have been unthinkable even 20 years ago.

During that time, Transylvania has gained prominence, politically, economically and, for the first time since before the war, on the football

Welcome to liberoguide.com!

The digital travel guide for football fans, **liberoguide.com** is the most up-to-date resource, city-by-city, club-by-club, to the game across Europe and North America. Using only original photos and first-hand research, taken and undertaken over seven seasons, **liberoguide.com** has been put together to enhance every football weekend and Euro night experience. From airport to arena, downtown sports bar to hotel, **liberoguide.com** helps you get the best out of your visit to football's furthest corners and showcase stadiums.

pitch. Along with de facto capital Cluj, **Sibiu** is now represented in Liga I thanks to the rise of **Hermannstadt**, only formed in 2015 and based at a new stadium. Local rivals **Gaz Metan Mediaș** are back in contention while **Sepsi**, founded in 2011 and partly financed by the Hungarian



National Arena

government, finished a record sixth in 2018-19.

The last major league upset took place in 2017 when academy side, **Viitorul Constanța**, formed by Romania's best-ever player and global superstar Gheorghe Hagi, pipped his former club Steaua to the title by the narrowest of margins. Hagi and former Romanian teammate Gheorghe Popescu remain in charge, establishing a small football empire on the Black Sea. ➔

ROMANIA 2019-20

CONTENTS

1-3 **INTRO**

4-6 **Bucharest**

7 **National Arena**

8 **Dinamo Bucharest**

9 **FCSB/Steaua**

10 **Clinceni**

11 **Voluntari**

12 **Botoșani**

13 **FC Botoșani**

14 **Cluj**

15 **CFR Cluj**

16 **Constanța**

17 **Viitorul Constanța**

18 **Craiova**

19 **Universitatea**

Craiova

20 **Giurgiu**

21 **Astra Giurgiu**

22 **Iași**

23 **Politehnica Iași**

24 **Mediaș**

25 **Gaz Metan Mediaș**

26 **Ploiești**

27 **Chindia/Stadionul**

Ilie Oană

28 **Sfântu Gheorghe**

29 **Sepsi OSK**

30 **Sibiu**

31 **Hermannstadt**



ROMANIA 2019-20

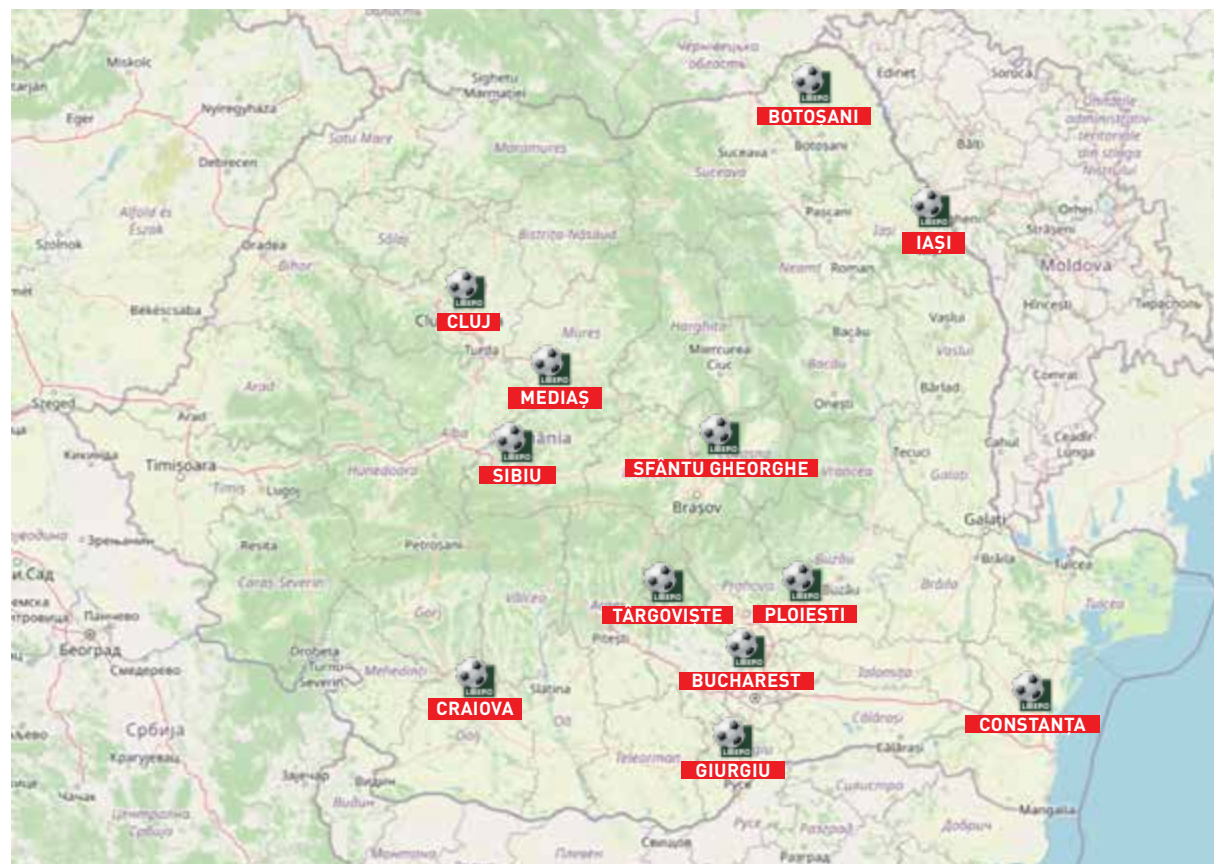
www.liberoguide.com



Station to stadium

Old-school national carrier **TAROM** (tarom.ro/en) has been surpassed in the domestic and European markets by local low-cost **Blue Air** (flyblueair.com/en/gb). Both are based at Romania's main hub, **Henri Coandă**, now the only airport serving Bucharest. Such are the distances and poor infrastructure that destinations such as **Iasi** by the border with Moldova and Cluj towards Hungary are best accessed by plane. **Ryanair** (ryanair.com) and Hungarian budget carrier **Wizz Air** (wizzair.com) also cover much of Romania from the UK and main European cities.

Transfers into town from most airports is by bus according to unreliable timetables or by taxi at equally unpredictable prices. Urban transport is cheap. Bucharest's has improved considerably – trams in **Botoșani** have barely changed since Ceaușescu.



Romanian state railways **CFR** (cfrcalatori.ro/en) have a user-friendly website with ticket sales. Reservations are essential as trains have few carriages and journeys are long. Beware of stray dogs at stations. The main hub is Bucharest's once notorious **Gara de Nord**, a little tidier these days. The journey to **Craiova**, for

example, is 57 lei/€11.70 by InterCity and almost half that price by regional train, the former relatively comfortable and 3hrs 40mins, the latter 4hrs 30mins.

Given the infrequent service, and with great swathes of Romania inaccessible by train, the resource autogari.ro/

?lang=en is a blessing, providing timetables and ticket sales for the myriad bus companies across the country. Iași to Botoșani, for example, is 2hrs and 35 lei/€7.20 by bus, and a tricky prospect by rail. Note, though, that buses may arrive at seemingly random locations outside the centre – don't expect a gleaming station in town.

Much of Romania's network of motorways (*autostrăzi*) and expressways is still under construction. Access is by **electronic vignette** (roviniete.ro/en/vignette), seven days costing 14.62 lei/€3. Horse-drawn carts are still a feature of rural roads and snow clearance is haphazard.

Tables & trophies

Romania's top flight, **Liga I**, contains 14 clubs who play each other home and away. After 26 games, the top six contest the championship round, the bottom eight, the relegation round. Points from the regular season are halved, rounded up if need be and carried over. Teams play each other home and away again, ten games in the championship round, 14 below.

The title-winners enter the Champions League at the first qualifying round stage. The **Romanian Cup** winners gain entry to the second qualifying round of the Europa League, the league runners-up and third-placed finishers (or fourth, depending on the cup) join the first qualifying round.

The bottom two of Liga I go straight down to the 20-team **Liga II**, changing places with the champions and runners-up. The side finishing 12th plays off over two legs with the third-placed team from the second flight. Decided over a straight 38-game season, five teams from Liga II go →



ROMANIA 2019-20

www.liberoguide.com

down to **Liga III** – often at least one will have lost their licence for some reason and be forcibly demoted anyway, so it's not always the bottom five.

Liga III is regionalised, **Seria I-V** of 16 teams each, with reserve sides of the big clubs included. Only champions go up, the bottom four of each go down, with a relegation play-off table created between the five 12th-placed finishers, comparing their records discounting matches against the relegated clubs below them. Twenty-one teams go down to **Liga IV**, which has seven regional divisions (NE, NW, Centre, W, SW, S, SE), each comprised of teams from six counties. The champions of each county league go into three two-leg play-offs to select the three promotees per division.

Each county also stages a knock-out tournament to send one team each into the Romanian Cup, the **Cupa României**. These 42 meet 34 Liga III teams in the First Round in July, the winners joined by 22 more from Liga III for the Second Round. Winners and all remaining Liga III clubs (minus reserve sides) then do battle later in August in the Third Round, along with half Liga II who cede home advantage. These 27 winners are joined by the rest of Liga II for Round Four – note that it's the positions the previous season that dictate which are the higher teams from Liga II and III. The 14 Liga I sides, again ceding home advantage,



enter at the Round of 32 stage in late September. There's a Round of 16 in October, and quarter-finals in March. All ties are settled on the day, after extra-time and on penalties where needed. The semi-finals are over two legs. The final in May is at a neutral ground, shifted from the National Arena to Ploiești in 2019.



Season's dealings

The Liga I season starts in mid-July, runs until just before Christmas and restarts in late January. The 26-game regular season is over a month later, with championship and relegation rounds picking up a week later until mid-May. Matches stretch over four days around the weekend, with one or two on Friday, two on Saturday, two on Sunday and one or two on Monday, kick-off times 5pm and 8pm, occasionally 7.30pm. Note that Romania is 1hr ahead of CET, 2hrs ahead of the UK. The classic kick-off time for Liga II fixtures

is 10am on Saturday, with a scattering of games around noon and 5pm. Sunday will usually have one at 10am and another around noon, with a game or two at 5pm-6.30pm on the Friday and Monday or Tuesday. The season runs from early August to early December, then mid/late February to late May.

Entry level

Crowds are low and pay on the day is the norm, cash-only. Carrying ID is probably wise. Most clubs offer Romanian-only online sales. *Peluza* means behind the goal, *tribuna* along

the sideline, usually indicated I/II or A/B. You can pay as little as 5 lei/€1 to enter the *peluza*, though 10-15 lei/€2-€3 is the norm, and 20-25 lei/€4-€5 in the *tribuna*. *Locuri* are places, *acoperite* covered, *neacoperite* open. *Oaspeti* are away fans. For international games at bigger stadia, *poartă* indicates the gate number, *sector* the sector, *rând* the row, *loc* the seat. *Preț* is the price.

Some stadiums have bars or there's usually a stall selling beer (*bere*). Sunflower seeds have totemic value and are nibbled nervously for 90 minutes. **LD**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Bucharest

www.liberoguide.com/bucharest

Bucharest

Awarded hosting rights for Euro 2020, stage for the Europa League Final in 2012, **Bucharest** has gained an international profile thanks to the **National Arena**, opened in 2011. This is the new face of the Romanian capital: a modern, EU metropolis still emerging from a dark past.

Since 2015, the stadium has also been the home ground of the country's most decorated club, **Steaua Bucharest**, officially known as **FCSB** since 2017. Behind the scenes, controversy, dark deeds and corruption still haunt football here. Gigi Becali, notorious owner of Steaua, received a jail sentence for his underhand land deals, illustrating the murky relationships between state bodies and the football clubs who once fronted them.

Steaua represented the army, bitter rivals **Dinamo Bucharest** the interior ministry. Such is the cloak-and-dagger nature of Romanian society, little may have changed behind the scenes even after the overthrow of brutal Communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu in 1989.

European Cup winners in 1986, finalists three years later, Steaua were the first club from the Eastern bloc to attain such heights. Able to attract the best Romanian talent,



most notably Gheorghe Hagi, Steaua were the dominant domestic force but relinquished the role after Hagi left for Real Madrid and the Communist system that held them in place collapsed. Dinamo then regained the title they had lost to Steaua earlier in the 1980s.

Under Communism, a victory for Steaua or Dinamo reflected the

internal power struggle between army and ministry of the interior, ie the secret police, the omnipotent Securitate. Steaua were favoured by Valentin Ceaușescu, son of dictator Nicolae. Matters came to a head at the notorious, unfinished cup final of 1988, a scandal of bizarre refereeing decisions, mass protests and ugly scenes in front of the VIP balcony – the trophy was never officially awarded.

For nearly three decades, in fact, the Romanian title stayed in the capital every year but one, invariably held by Steaua or Dinamo – the Eternul or Marele ('Great') Derby between them took on increased significance. Both clubs had been created with the post-war Communist reconstruction of sport. Before then, Bucharest was a little-known footballing outpost in the Balkans.



At domestic level, Bucharest teams with romantic names such as Venus and Juventus challenged pre-war football powerhouse, Timișoara. Even today, only Steaua and Dinamo have won more titles than Venus, whose ground close to the opera was knocked down after the war.

The last team that Venus pipped for the title, who beat them in the Romanian Cup final that same year of 1940, were **Rapid**. The capital's third team in modern times, railway team Rapid emerged from near disappearance to gain promotion back to the top flight in 2014. Sadly, despite finishing in a promotion spot again in 2016, populist Rapid were dissolved in 2016. A fan base, though, remained in place, and a phoenix club based on the original rose through the ranks. On the down side, their revered ground, the Giulești, squeezed



ROMANIA 2019-20 Bucharest

www.liberoguide.com/bucharest

between the Comic Opera and the railway tracks, was torn down in 2019. While the Rapid Arena is being built in its place, Rapid play Liga II games at the **Stadionul Regie**, former home of the **defunct Sportul Studențesc**, who finished runners-up the year Steaua won the European Cup. Top league scorer that year was Sportul's Gheorghe Hagi. By the time the army side won the European Super Cup, it was ex-Sportul's Hagi who scored the only goal.

The ground he graced is, like the former Giulești, in north Bucharest near Gara de Nord station. From there, the **Stadionul Dinamo** is two metro stops away by Ștefan cel Mare station but Steaua's eternal rivals play bigger matches at the National Arena. Dinamo, too, also plan a new stadium but at €100 million, it may be some time before that happens. Steaua's traditional stomping ground, before they moved into the National Arena, was down in Ghencea, a pretty grim part of south-west Bucharest studiously ignored by the city's metro network until line M5 is unveiled in 2020 after a decade of delays. From Ghencea, a local bus runs to **Clinceni**, whose local side is one of two from Ilfov County currently in Liga I. Surrounding Bucharest, this ring of burgeoning suburban communities benefits from the presence of Otopeni, location of Bucharest's Henri Coandă airport.

Rapid Bucharest



Alongside, **Voluntari**, the Ilfoveni, represent another county team backed by their local council in Liga I.

Bearings

Henri Coandă airport, aka Otopeni, is 17km (11 miles) north-west of town. A signposted door from the Arrivals terminal leads out to the bus stops for town, with a ticket office to the right as you exit. A magnetic card for two trips is 8.60 lei/€1.80 (cash-only), touch in when you board. The **No.780** runs to the main train station of **Gara de Nord**, the **No.783** to Piața Victoriei/Piața Unirii, the **No.784** to **Piața Unirii**, roughly every 30min-1hr, timetables unreliable. Journey time

is around 30-45mins. From Gara de Nord, the bus stop to the airport is across from the west side, nearest the Hotels Sir and Andy. For a **taxi**, there are touch screens in Arrivals – press for the next vehicle, you'll receive a number, a waiting time and a ticket you give to the driver. Expect to pay around 40-50 lei/€8-€10 into town. For the **four-line metro network**, it's 5 lei/€1 for 2 rides, 20 lei/€4 for 10 – and 8 lei/€1.65 for a day pass on bus, trams and trolleybuses as well. For non-metro journeys, buy a **Aktiv card** (3.70 lei/€0.75) and charge it at €1.30 lei/€2.70 per trip for 2-10 uses. Touch in when you board. Bucharest is chaotic so keep your wits about you



when crossing the road – and watch out for stray dogs. **Taxis in Bucharest** are a law unto themselves – make sure the meter is switched on. A journey across town should be around 10-15 lei/€2-€3. **Taxi Mondial** (+40 21 9423) are as good as any and based near the National Arena.

Bed

The only hotel within striking distance of the the National Arena is the chain **Holiday Inn-Times**, formerly Golden Tulip Times, behind Piața Muncii





ROMANIA 2019-20 Bucharest

www.liberoguide.com/bucharest



BUCHAREST

metro station on Bulevardul Decebal. Near Dinamo's stadium, and thus Ștefan cel Mare metro station on the same line as Piața Muncii, the **Graffiti Hotel** on Strada Albac comprises lower three-star rooms and a restaurant. Also close, the more business-like **Capital Plaza** on main Bulevardul Iancu de Hunedoara feels like a four-star, with its own brasserie.

Around the Gara de Nord, handy for the airport and most stadiums, **Hello** on Calea Griviței serves the budget traveller perfectly, comfortable yet standard, with friendly staff and cheap online rates. The Continental Group that owns it has just taken over the large **ibis** next door, to be revamped and rebranded in 2020. Opposite, the **Euro Hotels Gara de Nord** is more downbeat. The **Tania Hotel** on Strada

Șelari provides clean, affordable, convenient comfort deep in the bar quarter.

The main global chains have long set up in the city centre, in landmark buildings such as the **InterContinental**, with its panoramic gym and pool by Universitate metro station, the palatial **Marriott** with its high-end spa just behind the vast

Parliament building, and the four-star **Novotel** with its gleaming façade on Calea Victoriei. Opposite, the **Grand Hotel Continental** echoes the Belle Époque. Further up the same showcase boulevard, the **Athenee Palace**, now a Hilton, was the ornate haunt of spies and newspaper correspondents either side of the war.

Beer

A Bermuda Triangle of streets in the historic centre – Strada Șelari, Covaci and Gabroveni – is where you find three dozen drinking spots at least. The most football-focused are **Halftime**, framed Liverpool shirts displayed around a host of plasma screens, and **Mojo**, another LFC haunt next door, with equal emphasis on

live music. Note the signed Hagi shirt when you walk in. Also on Gabroveni, **Beer O'Clock** lines its counter and huge fridge with craft options. The **Boulevard Pub** and **Fire Club** on Covaci tick most boxes, offering live TV sports. **The Drunken Lords** on Șelari knows how to party.

Across main Bulevardul Brătianu, **Légère** on Piața Rosetti is more café/restaurant-like but would walk the Best Bar in Town award, attracting a mainly Romanian crowd of twenty-to-fiftysomethings out for a good time, with TV football (and retro posters) prominent, great beer, decent food and 24hr opening hours. Plus a nice courtyard in warmer weather. Every city should have one. **LE**



ROMANIA 2019-20 National Arena

www.liberoguide.com/national-arena

National Arena

Selected to co-host Euro 2020, venue for the Europa League Final of 2012, the **National Arena** was opened in 2011 in place of the old National Stadium. Built in 1953 and first named in honour of the Romanian uprising against Nazi rule on August 23, 1944, this classic Communist arena was where Ceaușescu and the party bosses would speak to the masses on May Day – and, of course, on August 23.

Crowds of 80,000 and 90,000 witnessed major internationals here, such as Romania's 2-1 defeat of England in 1980. The stadium was later renamed after Romanian discus thrower Lia Manoliu, actually from Chișinău, Moldova, later President of the Romanian Olympic Committee. No longer fit for modern purpose, the old stadium last saw the national team play here in 2007.

Over three years, and at a cost of €230 million-plus, a five-star, 55,600-capacity arena was built, for football matches and concerts. The retractable roof was an expensive afterthought. Bizarrely, since opening for a Euro qualifier against France in September 2011, the National Arena hasn't yet been filled to capacity – not even for the visit of Eastern European royalty, Depeche Mode, in 2013. Steaua Bucharest's decision to play



European fixtures here in 2013-14 changed the stadium's status from events arena to home ground – a role extended when Steaua moved all their games here from 2015. Dinamo should follow suit in 2020.

The two-tiered arena is divided into two Peluzele (Nord I and Sud II) behind each goal, Tribuna I (Vest) and II (Est) on the sidelines. Tram-lined Bulevardul Besarabia gives access to Peluza II Sud, Bulevardul Pierre de Coubertin to Peluza I Nord. For international fixtures, away fans are allocated sectors 124, 126, 355, 356, 357 and 358, through Gate H.

Transport

The stadium is a 15min walk up Bulevardul Besarabia from **Piața Muncii** on yellow metro line M1. Arriving directly from Gara de Nord, turn right out of the carriage and up



the stairs. Exit left towards the tall white building if you're taking **tram Nos.40 and 56**, two stops from **Arena Națională**.

Tickets

See individual websites for details of Steaua, Dinamo and Romania tickets, and of the visiting team for international fixtures. The **kiosk** on Bulevardul Pierre de Coubertin usually operates on match days.

For international games, it's 30-40 lei/€6-€8 in the Peluzele behind the goals, 50 lei/€10 for the best seats there, and 50 lei/€10 in each Tribuna. Prime seats are 80 lei/€16 in Tribuna I.

Bars

Options line Bulevardul Besarabia, the best being **Burgarescu** (No.80), where Carlsberg, Staropramen and local Bucur beers are served on

a sun-catching terrace with a TV, and, on the Arena side, the **Berăria Park** (No.37-39), a large beer garden done out in Tuborg green. Signature beer cocktails (21 lei/€4.30) come with white rum and grilled platters (99/179 lei/€20/€37) can be shared between several hungry people. Just past the stadium, **Champions** serves its purpose perfectly, TV screens inside and out, and a pictorial history of Romanian sport on the walls. **LB**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Dinamo Bucharest

www.liberoguide.com/dinamo-bucharest



Dinamo Bucharest

The capital's second club, **Dinamo Bucharest** (fcdinamo.ro) have been top dogs in Romania at certain times. Now is not one of them – though Dinamo invariably finish top six. At their height in the early 1980s, however, the Red Dogs monopolised the championship and reached the semi-final of the European Cup.

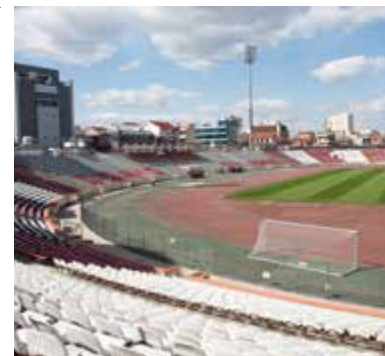
As representatives of the state police, the Securitate, Dinamo were favoured

under the Ceaușescu regime. With eternal rivals Steaua the football branch of the army, derby day under Communism had connotations that it didn't have in the West. Steaua though, won more titles and, most of all, brought home the European Cup. Post- Ceaușescu, old boys Cornel Dinu and Ioan Andone coached the team to domestic success but star players, most notably Adrian Mutu, haven't stayed.

Today Dinamo stand at a crossroads. Their Communist-era **Dinamo**



Stadium requires modernisation – quite often, the club moves its home games to the **National Arena**. Still owned by the Ministry of Internal



Affairs, the stadium's fate may be a political decision as well as an economic one. The figure of €100 million has been bandied about.

For the time being at least, the 15,000-capacity Stadionul Dinamo looks pretty much as it did when it opened in 1952 – except that the stadium bar has WiFi.

Conveniently located by Ștefan cel Mare metro station a short hop from Gara de Nord, Dinamo's stadium has a central location and excellent transport connections.

Whatever happens to the classic colonnaded entrance, the statue of Cătălin George Hîldan in front of it will also certainly remain in place. The Dinamo star and Romanian international died on the pitch here in 2000 at the age of 24. The north, home end, the Peluza Nord, was also named after him.

Transport & tickets

Arriving at **Ștefan cel Mare metro station**, head for the exit Str Tunari/Barbu Văcărescu, then left. The Dinamo Stadium is just ahead. Ticket windows by the main entrance will not be in operation – use the kiosks behind the Peluza Nord at the National Arena. There, the cheapest seats in the Peluza Sud or Nord cost around 10 lei/€2, around 20-30 lei/€4-€6 charged in the sideline Tribuna Est/Vest. Transactions are cash-only and it's probably wise to bring ID. For details of the National Arena, *see p7*.

Shop

While the **Dinamo Fan Shop** by the main entrance of the Dinamo Stadium is closed, the club has hired an outlet at the **Rin Grand Hotel**, Șos Vitan-Bârzești 7D, by the Complex Comercial Vitan-Bârzești with its own bus stop on route No.102. Red merchandise will also be sold at stalls on match days at the National Arena.

Bars

At the entrance to the Dinamo Stadium, sadly the **Red Dogs** bar is closed. The best option is the red-fronted **Ursus mini market**, a shop-cum-bar on the corner of Barbu Văcărescu/Șos Ștefan cel Mare. Across Barbu Văcărescu on the stadium side, **la mama** is a homely Romanian restaurant specialising in soups and fish, also serving Bucur blonda and Corona beers. For details of the National Arena, *see p7*. **LE**



ROMANIA 2019-20 FCSB/Steaua

www.liberoguide.com/steaua-bucharest

FCSB/Steaua

Champions 26 times but not since 2015, **Steaua Bucharest** are Romania's most successful club, winning the European Cup, in 1986. Now called **FCSB** (fcsb.ro/en) and carrying over that illustrious heritage despite claims from the actual side owned by the Ministry of Defence, CSA Steaua, the club has been in legal entanglements while finishing league runners-up four years running.

At the centre of the dispute is FCSB's notorious owner Gigi Becali, whose personal connections with the military allowed him to accumulate wealth he was then able to spend on his team. Shortly after Steaua won the title in 2013, Becali received a jail sentence for his dealings.

Royal military officers founded Steaua in 1947, when the country was still a constitutional monarchy with a mainly Communist government. The club changed acronyms – ASA, CSCA, CCA – as it pushed to win regular league titles. Renamed Steaua in 1961, the club attracted Romania's top young talent to its base in Ghencea, south-west Bucharest, with the promise of foreign travel and no national service.

Steaua began to dominate once manager Emerich Jenei arrived. In Seville in 1986, they went one



stage further, goalkeeper Helmuth Duckadam saving all four Barcelona penalties to bring the European Cup this side of the Iron Curtain for the first and only time.

Soon the new free-market economy changed the structure of the domestic game. Top players left for the West while clubs no longer received total, tacit support from powerful state bodies. Land deals with the

Army allowed Gigi Becali to create his fortune and take over Steaua, renamed FCSB in 2017.

By then, the club had moved out of Ghencea and into the **National Arena**. For information about transport and nearby bars, *see p7*. Home fans gather at both the Peluza Sud and Nord ends, the scant away supporters allocated a corner of the north end through Gate H. Attendances rarely break into

five figures. A new Steaua stadium is expected to be ready on the site of the old one in spring 2021.

Tickets

With gates relatively low, buying on the day from the kiosks behind the Peluza Nord, at the opposite end to tram-lined Bulevardul Besarabia. The cheapest seats in the Peluza Sud or Nord cost around 15 lei/€3, with around 40-50 lei/€8.20-€10.20



charged in the sideline Tribuna Est/Vest. Priciest admission is 100 lei/€20.50 for lower-row seats over the halfway line in sectors 134-136-138. Transactions are cash-only and it's probably wise to bring ID.

Shop

The **Magazin Oficial Steaua București** (Mon-Fri 9am-7pm, Sat 9am-4pm) is at the Cladirea centre, 1st floor, sector 6, Bulevardul Drumul Taberei 44, on the same No.41 tram line as the club's old Ghencea Stadium a couple of stops away.

There's a nice line in retro '86 tops, including a Duckadem goalkeeping jersey. Various combinations of red and blue are used on replica shirts and T-shirts, with yellow the away choice. For a cheap, easy-to-carry yet impressive souvenir, the sticker kit (15 lei/€3) showing Steaua badges down the ages is a handy find. **LG**

FCSB/STEUA



ROMANIA 2019-20 Clinceni

www.libero guide.com/clinceni



Clinceni

Just over the border between the city of Bucharest and Ilfov County that surrounds it, **Clinceni** is not a typical satellite community – it's far too sleepy even for that. The bus from Ghencea, near the old Steaua stadium, drops you by the main road, the only restaurant, the Pizzeria Clinceni, and the modest home of **FC Academica Clinceni** (academica-clinceni.ro).

Promoted to Liga I in 2019, the Academicienii carry the foundation date of 2015 on their black-and-blue badge but the club's convoluted history dates back a decade before then. First, there were two small teams from the main commuter belt north of the capital, Buftea and Fieni.



Based in Buftea, Ilfov County, the club was bought, eventually, by the community of Clinceni and, in a further twist by way of Pitești, took the name Academica. At some point, the colours blue and black were adopted, probably when the outfit was called Inter Clinceni.



In 2018-19, a team of mainly young prospects lured from other clubs around Bucharest gained promotion to Liga I. The population of Clinceni is only a few hundred more than the current capacity of the **Stadionul Clinceni**, 4,500. Surrounded by training pitches, this is the hub of the academy, a long-term project with perhaps more secure prospects than interminable relocations and re-selling of league licences.

Consisting of one main roofed stand nearest the clubhouse, and two narrow open rows of seating behind the opposite sideline and north goal, the Stadionul Clinceni is modest but adequate for its purposes. Average gates hover around 1,000, with Steaua the nearest rivals as the crowd flies or, in actual fact, as the bus from Ghencea runs. Young academy players and their families make up the numbers.

Transport

Alongside the old Steaua stadium and complex, by the Ghencea tram terminus, is a cluster of bus stops. The furthest one from the ground, by the transport controller's office, is for the **Nos.424** and **425** for Clinceni. These run every 40mins-1hr and take 40mins to reach **Primăria Clinceni** 26 stops away. Note the No.425 goes onto Ordoreanu towards Bulgaria, so make sure you get off in time. You arrive opposite the pizzeria, the ground is round the corner on Șoseaua Ordoreanu past the big sign for, bizarrely, the English Village, a local property development. A **taxi** from Ghencea should take 15mins and cost around 20-25 lei/€4-€5.

Tickets

Admission is a basic 10-15 lei/€2-€3 on the day – if the sky's overcast over Clinceni, the main stand is *acoperite*, covered.

Bars

Apart from the little **shop** by the bus stop as you arrive, selling beer and providing a table to lean on outside, the only option is the **Pizzeria Clinceni** diagonally opposite. Find a seat at one of the sturdy wooden tables on the rustic, enclosed terrace – the interior is clean but feature-free. Bottled beers include Tuborg, Heineken and Ursus, while oven-fired pizzas run in the 20-25 lei/€4-€5 range. There's nothing at the ground itself, though the clubhouse is crying out for a supporters' bar. **LG**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Voluntari

www.liberoguide.com/voluntari



Voluntari

Romanian Cup winners in 2017, **Voluntari** (facebook.com/VoluntariFC) represent the burgeoning suburb of the same name just north of Bucharest city limits, towards the airport. With a strong sense of community – 'Voluntari' refers to the volunteers of World War I promised plots of land here if they came back alive – this city of 40,000-plus inhabitants has seen money flood in with companies

offered cheaper rates than a couple of kilometres away in the capital.

This led to the municipality setting up a professional football team in 2010, which rose up from the local league to the top flight in four straight seasons. For their first campaign in Liga I, Voluntari moved home games to the Dinamo Stadium while their own **Anghel Iordănescu** was being rebuilt and reconfigured for top-tier football. Named after the former Steaua player who coached the club and the

Romanian national team to untold heights in the 1980s and 1990s, and was later a member of the Romanian Senate for surrounding Ilfov County, the ground now holds 4,600. A couple of stands with seats in the colours of the Romanian flag surround a simple pitch – this could easily be Liga II.

With Dinamo legend Ioan Andone as general manager, Voluntari avoided the relegation play-offs in 2019, having narrowly salvaged top-tier status the season before on penalties. The



Voluntărenii also won the Romanian Cup on penalties in 2017, overcoming Astra Giurgiu. Sadly, European football didn't come to Ilfov County as Voluntari were then refused a UEFA licence, and Craiova took the berth.

Average crowds are in three figures, a number bumped up by the visits of Steaua and Dinamo. For all the progress the club has made – 2019-20 is Voluntari's fifth consecutive season in Liga I – it's not easy to create a fan base with the Bucharest giants so close. There's no club shop, no supporters' bar and, obviously, no

tradition – but this is not the only club in Romania operating under these circumstances.

Transport

Bus No.135 (direction Tunari) runs via **Aurel Vlaicu** metro station, about 15mins from Bulevardul Pipera, the main road that cuts through Voluntari. Alight at either **Drumul Bisericii** or, further up and the stop closer to the only real pub, **Biserica Adormirea Maicii Domnului**. In between these two stops, Strada Niță Pinteia leads to Regina Ana park, with the stadium alongside. A **taxi** from Aurel Vlaicu metro station should take 10mins and cost around 12-15 lei/€2.50-€3.

Tickets

The few hundred who show up at Voluntari pay around 10-15 lei/€2-€3 for admission. The stand behind one goal is partly covered.

Bars

There's nothing at or around the ground. If you're coming by the No.135 bus, 250 metres ahead of the Biserica Adormirea Maicii Domnului stop, the **Ginger Horse Irish Pub** (Bulevardul Pipera 40B) offers wall-to-wall TV sport, including a huge screen filling one wall, Guinness and Kilkenney on draught, and a full menu. From there, you're a good 20min walk to the stadium, back down Bulevardul Pipera and left along Strada Niță Pinteia – or 5min in a taxi. **LB**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Botoșani

www.lib eroguide.com/botosani

Botoșani

Way up in Romania's north-east corner by the borders with Moldova and Ukraine, **Botoșani** ('Botoshan') is a seat of learning and literature. Plentiful greenery and pleasant street life typify the city. There's even free public open-air opera in summer.

True, a rust-bucket tram serves the **Municipal Stadium** near town, where **FC Botoșani** have staged consecutive top-flight campaigns since 2013. 'Graceful' would be a stretch but, compared to others across Romania, the Stadionul Municipal is by no means grim, and has hosted U-21 international fixtures. Later England stars Daniel Sturridge and Jordan Henderson played here in 2010.

With its running track, this was the main sports ground in town under Ceaușescu. FCB's predecessors, CS Botoșani, were based here for two decades from 1973. Unirea moved in afterwards but committed the cardinal sin of merging with Poli from local rivals Iași. Formed in 2001, likeable **FC Botoșani** have since built an infrastructure that has helped take them into Europe.

Bearings

Iași Airport is 129km (80 miles) south-east of Botoșani. From the terminus, the **No.50 bus** (2.50



lei/€0.50, journey time 20mins) runs every 1-2hrs to Iași train station. A **taxi** is around 20 lei/€4. The **train** to **Botoșani** (40 lei/€8) involves a change at **Verești**, a bleak dusty outpost of local drunks and stray dogs. Overall journey time is 3-4hrs. From **Botoșani station**, it's a 10min walk to the stadium or 20min to town, both connected by rust-bucket **tram No.101** (tickets 2.50 lei/€0.50) along main Calea Națională.

Alternatively, an **RVG bus** (35 lei/€7.20, journey time 2hrs) runs from Șoseaua Moara de Foc 15, 1.5km west of Iași train station, to **Bulevardul George Enescu 30**, on the outskirts of **Botoșani**. Taxi stands line the train station and stadium. To call one, **Taxi Minu** are on +40 231 585 850.

Bed

On Strada Vânători by the stadium, the **Pensiunea Olimp** is a pleasantly



rustic three-star whose main business is its homely terrace restaurant. Also convenient but right in town, the comfortable **Hotel Rapsodia**, at the junction of Calea Națională and main Strada Unirii, is everything an upper mid-range hotel should be, at two-star prices. At the other end of Unirii, the **Hotel Maria** justifies its four-star status with a kidney-shaped pool, loungers and waterside bar – plus decent rooms. Further down Mihai Eminescu, the mid-range **Belvedere** features a popular terrace restaurant and a paid-for spa, open from 4pm.

Beer

Terraces line main, pedestrianised **Strada Unirii**, where locals convene over drinks at Heineken-branded, smart **La Strada**, with screens inside, rocking **La Roca**, with screens and DJ decks, and the **Terrasa Unirii**, where dauntingly cheap Suceava beers are served beneath blue Neumarkt umbrellas on a raised terrace, with big screens inside and out. The **Grand Irish Pub** (Strada Marchian 5, near Cuza Vodă) looks more like a garden centre but allows you to sip your Carlsberg beneath a covered terrace. Save time for the **United Arena**, a quality football bar dedicated



to MUFC, its interior decorated with photos and painted likenesses, its terrace overlooking prominent Piața 1 Decembrie 1918. **LE**



ROMANIA 2019-20 FC Botoșani

www.liberoguide.com/fc-botosani

FC Botoșani

Only in existence since 2001, **FC Botoșani** (fcbotosani.ro) have done their city proud, gaining access to Liga I and staying there, qualifying for Europe and nurturing local youth teams. In a domestic game typified by chancers, swindlers and ridiculous mergers, owner Valeriu Iftime, who made his money in electronics, stands out as relatively honest. If ever there was a community club in Romania, it's FC Botoșani.

Reliably mid-table since promotion in 2013, the Botoșănenii entered Europe through the back door two years later when the three clubs above them were refused UEFA licences – indicative, perhaps, of more solid foundations here. True, European journeymen Legia Warsaw brushed FCB aside, coming to this north-eastern corner of Romania to protect a 1-0 home lead, but Botoșani should be back before too long.

With a capacity of nearly 8,000, while still mainly open to the elements, the **Municipal Stadium** is both a comfortable and lively place to watch a football match. Renovation and conversion to an all-seater in 2013 did little to diminish its retro authenticity. It still feels like the great Nicolae Dobrin is about to stride onto the pitch, dandering down from room



101 of the Hotel Rapsodia in the twilight of his career. Home fans still gather in the Peluza Nord nearest main Calea Națională linking station, stadium and town. The few visiting supporters – Botoșani is a long way from anywhere apart from local rivals Iași – are allocated sector F of the Peluza Sud nearest Tribuna II. The only covered (*acoperit*) sector is B in Tribuna I, considerably pricier than the rest.

Transport

Shabby tram No.101 runs frequently along Calea Națională but you're only a ten-minute walk from town or, in the opposite direction, the train station. If you do take the tram, alight at the Electrocasnice store apparently selling only fire extinguishers. There are **taxi stands** on facing sides of the road by the stadium – it's about 6 lei/€1.20 to the station or town.

Tickets & shop

A couple of white kiosks behind the stadium on main Calea Națională, usually operate a couple of days before the game and certainly for a couple of hours in the run-up to kick-off. You pay around 10 lei/€2 for a seat behind the goal in the Peluza Nord or Sud, 15 lei/€3 in Tribuna II and 20-25 lei/€4-€5 for the best places in Tribuna I. A few red-and-blue souvenirs are sold by the main entrance on match days.



Bars

Across the main road from the stadium, the basic **Bar Stadion** has a large covered terrace and a TV inside. On the stadium side, **Jocuri** is no less basic but offers a tree-shaded terrace. Right by the main entrance, **Magic Gustului** is, indeed, magic. Beneath white umbrellas across a wide terrace, lovely staff serve Ciuc, Silva, Timișoreana and Amstel beers, burgers and pizzas. It's officially a pizzeria but the chef promises quality fish on Fridays. Jazzy music and colourful murals feature inside. Probably the best pre-match option in all Romania. **LG**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Cluj

www.liberoguide.com/cluj



Cluj

Romania's second city of **Cluj-Napoca**, de facto capital of Transylvania, is home to 2019 champions **CFR** and local rivals **Universitatea**, or 'U'. Until recent financial upheavals saw 'U' lose their top-flight status, their long-term pedigree overshadowed the railwaymen of CFR. That all changed when entrepreneur Árpád Pászákny took over the Feroviarii in 2002.

The CFR owner invested over €100 million in the club, almost a third of it in their modestly sized stadium, the **Dr Constantin Rădulescu**, visible from trains pulling into Cluj-Napoca station. An ethnic Hungarian in this region of shifting borders, Pászákny took on the big boys of Bucharest and won, picking up three titles in six seasons.

'U' play at the gleaming **Cluj Arena**, financed by the regional and national



governments. Local derbies are fierce affairs, most notably the on-field fisticuffs that caused the clash of May 2012 to be abandoned.

Bearings

Cluj-Napoca Airport is 9km (6 miles) east of town, connected by frequent **bus No.5** to the **train station**. Make sure that the bus is heading for Piața Garii Sud and not in the opposite direction. **Bus No.8** (Mon-Fri only) goes to Piața Mihai Viteazul in town. Journey time for each is about 30min. Tickets

(5 lei/€1 return) are sold at kiosks and validated in the punchers on board. City transport of buses, trams and trolleybuses also runs on the same ticket system. A one-day pass is 14 lei/€2.70. A **taxi** (+40 264 946) from the airport should cost about 30 lei/€6.35.

Bed

Near the CFR ground, the **Casa Raul** on Strada Migdalului is cheap, simple, friendly and has its own little bar. Also close, on Strada Magaziei, the **Hotel Ary** is a pleasant, mid-range



lodging with a spa and restaurant. The old-school hilltop three-star **Belvedere** (Str Câlâșilor 1) stands

halfway between CFR and town, a climb up from the narrow river that crosses Cluj.

Across the water, the **DoubleTree by Hilton Cluj** on Strada Sindicatelor is the best lodging in town, with a heated pool, sauna and gym. Near the Cluj Arena, the **Hotel Sport** on Aleea Stadionului echoes its Socialist heritage. Dead central at Regele Ferdinand 20, the three-star **Hotel Transilvania** is where *Dracula* character Jonathan Harker stays in Bram Stoker's novel.

Beer

The bar hub sits between main square Piața Unirii and the river. The family-owned **Old Shepherd** at Strada Matei Corvin 2 shows games and offers a decent range of beers. Close by on Strada Vasile Goldis, **O'Peter's** also screens matches, particularly when Liverpool are playing – it's the home of the Cluj Reds. Across the way, **Shadow** attracts a party crowd. Nearby on Strada Roosevelt, **The Soviet** has themed décor which inspires the cocktails. A few houses along, the **Klausen Pub** remains old-school. In the same building, the **Vintage Bistro** is burger heaven. Towards the river on Strada Émile Zola, the **Londoner Pub** does a roaring trade on match – and quiz – nights. Just over the river, the **Irish & Music Pub** at Strada Horea 5 hosts live music and serves hearty food. **L9**



ROMANIA 2019-20 CFR Cluj

www.liberoguide.com/cfr-cluj



CFR Cluj

Romanian champions **CFR Cluj** (cfr1907.ro) have enjoyed significant success this century, with five titles coming under two different owners. First, Árpád Pászkány broke the Bucharest duopoly on the league championship in 2008, his side going on to be crowned three times. In 2017,

Marian Băgăcean ended the threat of insolvency by buying a majority share in the club. CFR ('cheff-fair-rey') duly won Liga I in 2018 and 2019. Three Champions League campaigns have seen wins over Manchester United and Roma.

Their stadium stands in the hilly district of Gruia, close to Cluj station, where this railway club has its roots. Opened



in 1973, **Dr Constantin Rădulescu** saw major improvements after the arrival of the Transylvanian Abramovich Árpád Pászkány – yet still only contains three stands. An all-seater of 23,500 capacity, it is open on its north side, allowing a view of the pleasingly undeveloped outskirts of town.

Tribuna I (sectors 1-23), with VIP seats, and Tribuna II (sectors 37-53) along the

sidelines, and home end Peluza 1 and 2 (sectors 24-36) behind the south goal are arranged in two tiers. Depending on the opposition, away fans are usually allocated sector 28 at the far end of lower Peluza I, at the corner with Tribuna II. The main entrance is on Str 11 Octombrie – note the mural depicting CFR history in the Tribuna I stand.

Transport

From town, **bus No.37** runs from central Piața Mihai Viteazul to the Arena CFR stop, journey time about 10-15mins. The walking from the train station, via Strada Fericiirii and Strada Kovári László, would be steep and strenuous – take a taxi.

Tickets & shop

For league games, a seat behind the goal in Peluza I is 15 lei/€3, 25 lei/€5 lei for higher up in Peluza II, the same

price as the lower tier in Tribuna II. The best seats usually available are around 35 lei/€7.40 in sectors 41 and 49-50 in Tribuna II. The **ticket office** (Mon-Tue 11am-5pm, Wed, Fri-Sat 11am-6pm, Thur 11am-7.55pm) is near the main entrance on Str 11 Octombrie, with plenty of availability on the day.

Tickets are also sold at the **FanShop CFR** (Mon, Wed, Fri 10am-3pm, Tue, Thur 1pm-6pm, match days 2hrs before kick-off, 1hr after final whistle) in Tribuna II, where merchandise is emblazoned with railroad iconography. First-team tops are burgundy, second-choice white.

Bars

With the dearth of decent bars – almost any bars, in fact – around the stadium, CFR fans tend to meet in town. Key place is the **Domino Sport Pub** just over the river on the corner of Strada Brasaï Samuel and Dávid Ferenc. Inside is done out head-to-toe in football scarves, with just about enough room for a TV.

The only real option near the ground is found behind the Peluza I/II South Stand, at **Str Gruia 37**. An **enclosed front terrace** with blue Timișoreana beer logo'd chairs is complemented by a modest smoky interior that features an incongruous image of the Eiffel Tower. On any given afternoon, stotious regulars will be caning the fruit machine.



ROMANIA 2019-20 Constanța

www.libero guide.com/constanta

Constanța

The biggest port on the Black Sea, **Constanța** produced Romania's greatest footballer, locally born Gheorghe Hagi. The later Real Madrid, Barcelona and World Cup star started his career at Farul Constanța, a traditional club dating back to 1920, before returning home to put his pesetas into an academy project that has reaped considerable rewards.

Formed in 2009, **Viitorul Constanța** reached Liga I in 2012, moved into their own stadium in 2015 and won a shock first title in 2017. Having bought a league licence from CSO Ovidiu, Hagi has based his operations 12km north of Constanța, 8km north of the ground where he played his first top-flight football.

Hemmed in by narrow streets, the crumbling Stadionul Farul also became a lucky ground for the national team, hard to imagine now. Here Romania beat the Czech Republic and Holland, and drew with France, in vital qualifying games, from 2005 to 2008.

Surrounded by wind-blown fields, the box-fresh **Stadionul Viitorul** isn't even in Ovidiu itself, the community named after the exiled Roman poet Ovid. Here in 2017, Hagi's son and academy graduate Ianis helped Romania U-21 hold a decent Portugal side to 1-1.



Linked to Bucharest by motorway, with its own airport near Ovidiu and plentiful hotels, Constanța is better facilitated for international fixtures than most in Romania – a fact not lost on Gheorghe Hagi.

Bearings

Mihail Kogălniceanu Airport is 26km (18 miles) north-west of Constanța. An hourly **Transevren bus** runs to **Constanța station** (6 lei/€1.25, 50min

journey time). A **taxi** should cost around 90 lei/€18 but if you're going straight to **Ovidiu** 13km (8 miles) away, it's 50 lei/€10. For details of transport between Constanța and Ovidiu, see p17 **Viitorul Constanța**.

From **Bucharest**, a **train** (55-60 lei/€11-€12) takes 2hrs-2hrs 20mins. Constanța station is south-west of town, served by a network of **RATC buses**. Sold at a kiosk outside the

station, **tickets** are 3 lei/€0.60 for 2 journeys. For a **Romarix taxi**, call +40 241 699 299.

Bed

By Farul's ground on Strada Primăverii, within easier reach of Ovidiu, mid-range **New Derby** is smarter than its olive-green exterior suggests. On main Strada Mircea cel Bătrân, stylish, fin-de-siècle, four-star **Chérica** is handy for the



beach and Irish Pub opposite. Also near the pub, the **Hotel Sport** offers frills-free lodgings for athletes and budget-conscious travellers. Nearer the Old Town, the 154 rooms of the cut-price **ibis Constanța** are closest to the shore. On Geamia Hunchiar, near the historic centre and bar hub, chic boutique **Peninsula** has its own bistro.

Beer

In a little bar hub before Piața Ovidiu and the Old Town, funky **Zig Zag** is great for football-watching, with two big screens over the bar, quality European beers and decent burgers. Next door, the **Racing Pub** sports bar puts out multi-coloured chairs for terrace drinking. Near the bar hub on Mircea cel Bătrân, **La Taclale** ('Chatter') is cosy while further along, by Ștefan cel Mare, the smart, savvy **Irish Pub** offers TV football, draught Peroni, Ursus and Guinness, fine food and sea views. **LB**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Viitorul Constanța

www.liberoguide.com/viitorul-constanta

Viitorul Constanța

Perhaps the only case of an academy side ever winning a national title in Europe, **Viitorul Constanța** (fcviitorul.ro) were created by Romania's greatest-ever player, locally born Gheorghe Hagi. Perhaps taking Barcelona's La Masia as his model – a large board at the new-build **Stadionul Viitorul** prominently displays the figure of 57.7%, the percentage of club-trained players who played for Barça in 2012 and won the Romanian league here in 2017 – the ex-La Liga star has worked miracles for a modest initial outlay of €11 million.

True, this is also a business venture, Hagi wise to contractual clauses after playing in four European leagues. Shortly after Viitorul edged a 1-0 win over CFR Cluj to prevent Steaua from stealing that title, he sold winger Florinel Coman, right-back Romario Benzar and centre-back Dragoș Nedelcu to the runners-up in lucrative sell-on deals.

There's a lot to cover, after all. Hagi's Viitorul took shape in 2009 when he bought the league licence from CSO Ovidiu and moved into their Stadionul Orășenesc. After promotion to Liga I in 2012, Viitorul shifted to Farul Constanța, where Hagi first played.



After their new stadium was unveiled in 2015, a compact ground of 4,500 surrounded by supplementary pitches about 2km south of Ovidiu, Viitorul started to go places. While the first team qualified for Europe that season, 'Hagi's Kids' won the Romanian U17 and U19 titles. A season later, the seniors won Liga I. After an extra-time defeat in Nicosia in the Champions League, Viitorul bid farewell to key players but very much remain in contention at home. Captained by Hagi's 20-year-old son and academy graduate Ianis, Viitorul won the Romanian Cup in 2019. Within a few weeks, this former Romanian



Young Player of the Year was at Genk in Belgium.

By definition, talented players are always coming through at Viitorul, the ground half-full for most league fixtures. Narrow rows of open blue seating surround a manicured grass pitch, the covered central Tribuna 0 of the main stand providing shelter for VIPs and scouts. The press sit opposite in Tribuna II. Away fans are allocated Sector C of Peluza II nearest the main stand.

Transport

Tricky. Despite evidence elsewhere to the contrary, there is no bus service from Constanța. The office at the city's run-down bus station, 200 metres from the train station, speaks only Romanian and Turkish. The **Transevren bus driver** may – may – drop you off en route somewhere north but not on this slip road preferred by farm vehicles. Forget schedules. Walking would be impossible. From the Farul stadium, a **taxi** should cost around 40 lei/€8,

from the centre of town, nearer 55-60 lei/€11-€12. And back, of course.

Tickets, shop & bar

Behind the main stand are ticket windows, the **Viitorul Magazin** for blue-and-black merchandise and, underneath the sign for Loje, a simple **café** not unlike a motorway service station. **Admission** is 10 lei/€2 in the Peluze behind the goals, 15 lei/€3 in the sideline Tribune. The club can be contacted at marketing@fcviitorul.ro to confirm ticket details. **L9**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Craiova

www.libero.guide.com/craiova



Craiova

While Steaua and Dinamo Bucharest, and regular Champions League competitors CFR Cluj, might be considered Romania's most popular clubs. In 2017-18 and 2018-19, **Universitatea Craiova** bettered their average home gates, combined. And this a club whose current iteration only dates back to 2013, and whose reclaimed identity saw disaffected followers create the breakaway U Craiova 1948, currently third-tier.

Divisions have since split **Craiova**, the largest city of the south-west, between Bucharest and the Danube. Meanwhile, unveiled in 2017, the sleek **Stadionul Ion Oblemenco** where Liga I side Universitatea are based, is the spaceship-like arena where these 15,000+ fans gather. Built at a cost of €52 million, it is named after the locally born goalscorer who led to the club to league titles both as a player



and manager. The legendary 'Craiova Maxima' played Bayern Munich, Benfica and Internazionale. In 2017, Universitatea returned to Milan after three decades without European competition, the club and industrial city failing to adjust to life after 1989.

The casual visitor could wander around Iași, Cluj or Sibiu and not know

they had a Liga I team. Here, a mobile Universitatea outlet operates on the main square and a huge lion logo covers a downtown façade above the club shop. Unity, however, may be a long time coming. In 2018, ultras from the former Peluza Sud, now aligned with U Craiova, broke up chairs at that sleek new home of Universitatea during a Romania-Sweden game.

Bearings

Craiova Airport is 7km (4 miles) east of town, connected by **bus No.9** every 30mins to the main square, **Piața Centrala**, journey time 15mins. **Tickets** for the **RAT bus network** are 2 lei/€0.40 from kiosks, 2.50 lei/€0.50 on board. A **Taxi Favorit** (+40 251 411 500) from the airport should cost 25 lei/€5.

The **train** from Bucharest (60 lei/€12) takes 3hrs 30mins. **Craiova station** is north of town a 15min walk or three bus stops away. The stadium is the same distance again, south-west.

Bed

The nearest hotel to the stadium, the **Prestige** at Strada Matei Basarab 15 offers comfortable rooms in somewhat antiseptic surroundings. By contrast, just behind on Strada Madona Dudu, **La Favorita** feels cosy and homely. In town, by the National Theatre, the **Splendid** is, in fact, splendid, 24 elegant rooms, restaurant, gym and sauna, while the **Helin Central** alongside is only a slight notch below and offers the stylish Erik's Pub. Nearby the other side of Calea București, the **Ramada Plaza** is the best hotel in town, pool, gym, sauna and all.

Beer

The bar hub on **Strada Panait Moșolu** is where you find the excellent **Steam Punk**, with its TV screen, varied drinks and terrace facing the smarter **Planter's Pub**, also decent. Nearby, chic **Soho** and the **Cover Pub**, with its TV football on the terrace, merit a drink, as does lounge bar **Scena**, showing big-screen sport round the corner on main Strada Alexandru Ioan Cuza. Liverpool-themed **Wave 84** is all liver birds and live music, tucked away in a courtyard at Strada Horia 16. **LE9**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Universitatea Craiova

www.libero guide.com/universitatea-craiova



Universitatea Craiova

Romania's most popular club, **Universitatea Craiova** (ucv1948.ro) gained their legendary status in the 20 years up to the fall of Communism and just after it. The following two decades in the free-market economy saw a gradual descent into insolvency in 2011.

Revived in 2013, the Studenții became CS Universitatea while the old club's significant fan base was split, some breaking off to follow FC U Craiova 1948, considered by them to be the true heirs of the team's considerable legacy.



And what a legacy... in an international era when the Bucharest giants, Dinamo and Steaua, made the last four then won the European Cup, Craiova beat Monaco, a very good Bordeaux side, Betis and Galatasaray. Between 1974 and 1991, four league titles and five cups came to south-west Romania, Universitatea the only one of two clubs to break Bucharest's



domestic duopoly between 1971 and 1991, when they did the double.

The key figure, the leading goalscorer and later winning coach, Ion Oblemenco, is now honoured with having the club's award-winning new stadium named after him, with his statue outside. Created by Cluj-based Dico și Țigănaș, also responsible for the Cluj Arena, the futuristic **Stadionul Ion Oblemenco** cost the City of Craiova €52 million to build. Opened in 2017, it has since held a full international – allowing U Craiova

1948 to break up the seats usually occupied by their cross-city club rivals – and, in 2018, hosted Universitatea's return to Europe.

Holding 30,000, the largest club ground in Romania, the stadium is divided into Tribuna 1/Vest and 2/Est along the sidelines and, behind the goals, Peluza 2/Nord and 1/Sud – which is where the divisions really start. While Universitatea fans filled both ends in the old Ion Oblemenco, since demolished, the ultras behind the north goal stayed loyal to the later

Liga I club, many in the south, to the disaffected breakaways. The location of the visitors' sector has also been contentious – in 2019, it moved to 18-19, where Tribuna 1 meets Peluza 1/Sud.

Transport

It's a pleasant 10min stroll from the Universitatea shop in town at Strada Sfântu Dumitru 1, down Calea Unirii to the post office and right at Bulevardul Știrbei Vodă. From the station, take circular bus **Nos.E1R** or **E1T** to **Stadion**, allow 15-20mins.

Tickets & shops

Tickets are sold from three days in advance from the club's **two outlets** in town – at Strada Sfântu Dumitru 1/corner Calea Unirii and a mobile store on the main square, Piața Mihai Viteazul, nearest the Dolj County Offices – and the **white kiosks** behind Peluza Sud and Tribuna 2/Est at the stadium. It's 15 lei/€3 in the Peluza behind the goals, 30 lei/€6 in Tribuna 2, 40 lei/€8 in Tribuna 1.

Bars

On the nearby roundabout towards town, the **Tribuna Stadion** provides bottled Timișoreana and a sunny, enclosed terrace to enjoy it. The tiny interior is dominated by a fridge full of other domestic options. Upstairs, the **Restaurant Stadion** serves standard dishes in smart but bland surroundings. **LB**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Giurgiu

www.liberoguide.com/giurgiu



Giurgiu

The quiet Danubian town of **Giurgiu**, a bridge-length from Bulgaria, has only really figured on the football map since former local player Ioan Niculae moved his **Astra** club here from Ploiești in 2012. Before then, if you wanted to see a top-flight game in the area, you had to cross the border to Ruse in Bulgaria's A league. On this side of the Danube, little Dunărea Giurgiu, founded in 1963, flitted between Romania's Liga II and III. Young centre-back Gino Iorgulescu, later to star with Gheorghe Hagi at Sportul Studențesc, started his career here in the mid 1970s. He later rose to become chairman of the Romanian League. In the summer of 2010, with Dunărea in Liga II, Niculae took them over, renaming them Astra II. Two



years later, the club was dissolved entirely. At the same time, Niculae's main Astra club arrived from Ploiești, where they had been based for nine decades. FC Astra Ploiești moved into Dunărea's old **Marin Anastasovici Stadium**, south-east of town and within sight of the Friendship Bridge that links Romania with Bulgaria.

A league runners-up spot in 2014 was followed by a historic first title in 2016,

all accompanied by the expansion and modernisation of the Marin Anastasovici.

Bearings

The nearest airport is **Bucharest** 90km (55 miles) away.

There's only one direct **train** a day, late at night, from Bucharest Gara de Nord to **Giurgiu Nord** 2hrs away. For most services, change at **Videle**, an

overall journey time of 3-4hrs. Prices range from 16-23 lei/€3.30-€4.70, 32 lei/€6.60 for direct.

Faster and more frequent are minibuses operated by **Omerta**, from a parking lot near **Bucharest's Eroii Revoluției metro station**. Journey time to Giurgiu is 70min, tickets around 16 lei/€3.30. From the metro, head for Strada Mitropolit Dosoftei across main Șoseaua Viilor.

The **Autogara** is by Domino's pizza, opposite an Orthodox church at Calea Șerban Vodă 296-298. Giurgiu Nord and the bus terminus opposite are close to town and 1.5km west of the stadium. **Taxi Giurgiu 365** (+40 72 300 0017) are based nearby. Local buses are infrequent and unreliable.

Bed

Giurgiu has few hotels. The one by the stadium, **Steaua Dunării**, hasn't recovered from a fire in 2012. Less than 1km north are the only two decent lodgings in town, the cosy **Pensiune Perla Dunării** (Strada 1 Decembrie 1918 67) with rooms at 100 lei/€20 and, a little further away, the bright three-star **Hotel Sud** (Strada Tineretului 3), with its own restaurant and rooms at €60/double. The very basic **Hotel Vlașca** (Strada Parcului 12) is located towards the river.

Beer

Upstairs in the **Clock Tower** on Strada Mircea cel Bătrân, the **café** offers views and convivial drinks. Nearby, the **No One Pub, Coffee Lounge and Possesso Café** all have TVs showing match action. Alongside, **La Trattoria** is more pub-like than its name suggests, with Romanian dishes and TV football on the terrace. Across the canal,

La Perla (Șoseaua Portului 1) provides fish dishes, plentiful beers and a perfect panorama of the Danube. **LB**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Astra Giurgiu

www.liberoguide.com/astra-giurgiu

Astra Giurgiu

Romanian champions in 2016, **Astra Giurgiu** (afcastragiurgiu.ro) do not originate from **Giurgiu**, a grain-producing town lapped by the Danube on Romania's southern border with Bulgaria. For most of their 90-year history, the club was Astra Ploiești, from the oil-rich town of the same name north of Bucharest.

Then in 2012, Romania's richest man and club owner, Ioan Niculae, moved Astra, lock, stock and barrels, from Ploiești to Giurgiu. In fact, the billionaire had made his lei both in grain and in oil but grew up in Giurgiu County, first working at the state-owned cereal company in the Communist era. He had bought the club in 1996. Promoted to the top flight in 1998, after a few twists and turns, Astra enjoyed their first success in 2013-14, winning the cup and finishing runners-up in the league.

In 2015-16, Astra broke Steaua's monopoly on the title, goals from Romanian international striker Denis Alibec helping the club top the league during the regular season and play-off stage. Coach Marius Sumudică, who had had stints at Astra in the Ploiești days, then achieved results in Europe. Astra beat West Ham on aggregate two seasons running, held Celtic and Roma to draws and pushed Genk close in the



later rounds of the Europa League in 2017.

Set south-east of town, the **Marin Anastasovici Stadium** was the modest ground of the equally modest Dunărea Giurgiu for most of the modern era. After €4 million of improvements to host Astra's European fixtures, current capacity is an all-seated 8,500 but further expansion is expected.

The ground has seats on three sides, with one end open. The other, the peluza, is occupied by Astra's hardcore support on the south side, Strada Alea Fabricii de Zahăr. The few away fans – Giurgiu is 500km from Cluj, for example – are allocated sectors G-H and 7-8 at the far side of Tribuna 2 nearest the open end. Tribuna 1 on the facing sideline contains the skyboxes where Ioan Niculae can entertain his business partners.

Transport

From the train or bus stations, head left along **Bulevardul Mihai Viteazul**,



which veers right to the stadium. Allow 15-20mins or 12-15 lei/€2.50-€3 in a taxi. From town, take **Strada Vlad Tepeș**, a walk of similar length or taxi ride of similar price to the ground. Forget local buses.

Tickets

Tickets go on sale between 11am-7pm three days before the match at the stadium and at an outlet on Giurgiu's main square, **Piața Centrală**. Buying on the day at the ground is easy – with

average gates hovering around 1,000, availability is never an issue.

Cheapest seats are 5 lei/€1 in the peluza behind the goal, with 10 lei/€2 charged for seats in Tribuna 2. It's 15 lei/€3 to sit in outer sectors 1-4/9-12 in Tribuna 1, 20 lei/€4 in inner sectors 5-8.

Bars

The stadium is surrounded by waste ground, stray dogs, disused factories and a cemetery. A couple of shops sell



beer at the junction of Strada Păcii and Strada Alea Fabricii de Zahăr, 200 metres away towards town. **L9**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Iași

www.lib eroguide.com/iasi

Iași

A former national capital, **Iași** ('Yash') still feels grand. Chief city of Moldavia, roughly the north-eastern third of modern-day Romania, it comprises stately squares, palatial façades and expansive parks. The most revered are Copou and the Botanical Gardens, both established in the mid-1800s, a good century before the **Stadionul Emil Alexandrescu** set between them today.

There's little record of football here before 1945, of Maccabi and Hakoah when a third of Iași was Jewish. Teams from Chișinău, today capital of the separate republic of Moldova, dominated the regional league and took part in the national play-offs.

Students in this most university of Romanian towns formed a new club shortly before the end of World War II. Soon renamed Politehnica, then CSMS, they enjoyed a brief spell in the top tier in the 1960s. Emil Alexandrescu himself was a CSMS player, and former mayor. The ground north of town, built on the site of a previous pitch, was first named 23 August when it opened in 1960, similar to the former national stadium in Bucharest.

After Politehnica folded in 2010, a phoenix club arose, took different



acronyms based on the main one of CSM, and became **FC Politehnica Iași** in 2018. The same fans filled the same stadium to see their same favourites in blue and white – just as they had done for the club's brief foray in the Europa League in 2016.

Bearings

Iași Airport is 8km (5 miles) east of town. Across the road from the terminus, the **No.50 bus** (2.50 lei/€0.50, journey time 20mins) runs every 1-2hrs to the **train station** via major stops in town. The extensive **CTP network** of buses and trams uses the same tickets.

A **taxi** from the airport should be around 20 lei/€4 – phone +40 232 222 444 for **Taxi For You**.

Bed

Hotels surround the main square, starting with the towering four-star **Unirea**, panoramic restaurant, spa, conference facilities and all. To one side, the mid-range **Astoria** has a more modest but nonetheless welcome spa while the four-star **Grand Hotel Traian** was built by Eiffel in 1882 and impressively renovated 180 years later. Nearby, 100 metres away, the **Select** is another grandiose four-star, with a popular terrace



café. Near the Palace of Culture and surrounding historic sights, the **Ramada** appeals to business visitors – behind, the **Moldova** combines sturdy tradition with a pool and gym.



Beer

A hub of drinking spots surrounds the bar-like **Radio Gaga English Pub**, with screens, Central-European beers and seats outside on pedestrianised Strada Alexandru Lăpușeanu behind the Hotel Astoria. Opposite, **Beer Zone** chalks its scores of brews on a board and provides a front terrace and back garden to sample them. Nearby, **Corso** extends its half-moon terrace around pretty gardens.

Behind the Palace of Culture, **Legend** is the most pub-like place in town, screening games, serving huge burgers and Grimbergen beers. Its covered terrace overlooks urban greenery. The other side of the Ramada, **The Trumpets** attracts hotel guests with TV sport, quizzes and live music in polished pub-style surroundings. **LE**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Politehnica Iași

www.liberoguide.com/politehnica-iasi



Politehnica Iași

FC Politehnica 'Poli' Iași

[politehnicaiasi.ro] represent one of the biggest cities in Romania outside Bucharest. Yet the former national capital of **Iași** had no representative in the top flight until the 1960s, when Poli's predecessors, student-founded CSMS, had a brief run with the big boys. Later also called Politehnica, the Alb-albaștrii, the Blue and Whites,

spent most of the subsequent decades in Liga I. Also based at the **Stadionul Emil Alexandrescu**, surrounded by abundant greenery north of the city centre, these forerunners collapsed under a pile of debt in 2010.

Out of Politehnica came, eventually, Politehnica. First ACSMU Politehnica rose from the ashes, then CSM Studențesc, who put Iași back into the top flight. This was the team who qualified for the Europa League in

in 2016. The team who played in it, narrowly losing out to two very late goals in each leg against Hajduk Split, was CSM Politehnica. By 2018, history had come full circle, and Politehnica Iași strode out at the Stadionul Emil Alexandrescu.

The one constant amid all these name changes has been the stadium. Opened in 1960, renovated in 2004 then most recently in 2016, the Emil Alexandrescu consists of 11,000 blue-



and-white seats open the elements. Home fans occupy Peluza Nord, also designated 'A', away supporters corner sector P-B8 of Peluza Sud/'B', although P-B1 to B4 are also allocated if demand requires. Tribuna B is accessed through the same main gates as Peluza A, nearest main tram-lined Bulevardul Carol I. Tribuna A contains the press and VIP seats, this middle section roofed.

Transport

The **Stadion stop** on Bulevardul Carol I is served by four **trams, Nos.1, 8, 9 and 13**, all of which run the five stops

from main **Piața Unirii** in town, a journey of 7-8mins. The Stadion stop is just beyond the stadium but handy for the garden bars in the park. The one before, **George Coșbuc**, is closer to the ground. If you're coming from the **train station**, jump on a **No.3** or **7** to Unirii and change. From the airport, alight at **Piața Independenței** for **bus Nos.36** or **42** for Stadion. Walking from town up B-dul Carol I takes 15-20mins.

Tickets & shop

White kiosks at the main entrance and on the other side of the ground by the Tienda Stadion bar sell tickets, 10 lei/€2 for the Peluze behind the goals, 20 lei/€4 for a seat in either Tribuna. Standard **blue-and-white merchandise** is sold near the main gates on match days.

Bars

Behind Tribuna A on the north side of the ground furthest from town, **Tienda Stadion** offers Ursus, Ciuc, Timișoreana beers, best enjoyed at a table outside rather than in the poky interior. Note, though, the celebratory pic of Poli after Europa League qualification in 2016. In the parkland just behind, across Strada General Toma Dimitrescu, a cluster of beer gardens contains the **Hunter's Pub** and **Casa Vânătorului**, ideal in summer when meat sizzles on the barbecue and beers are served beneath a welcome canopy of greenery. **LG**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Mediaș

www.liberoguide.com/medias

Mediaș

A UNESCO World Heritage town so steeped in Transylvanian history it's mentioned in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, **Mediaș** lies on fields of methane gas, whose rewards outstripped long-established local manufacturing industries after the war. Similarly, Karres Mediaș, formed in 1945 as a factory team, became **Gaz Metan Mediaș**.

Probably the only club in the world named after methane gas, Gaz Metan remained unchanged despite energy giants Romgaz and Transgaz, headquartered in Mediaș, taking over the industry. Privatisation raised millions of dollars – Transgaz own the **Stadionul Metan Mediaș**, the home of local football since 1950 and renovated with under-soil heating in 2010. The ground overlooks the twisting Târnava Mare river that divides these green northern outskirts, Stadionului, from town.

The Gaziștii, meanwhile, have been top-flight every season but one since 2008, even making Europe in 2011. Campaigns have taken on an extra edge since the rise of Hermannstadt in Sibiu, an hour's drive away and always the rival city. When the two clashed in a Romanian Cup semi-final in 2018, nearly half the crowd in



Mediaș had come from 60km south. With Liga I so dispersed, a fiery Transylvanian derby is just what Romanian football needs.

Bearings

Târgu-Mureș Airport is 55km (34 miles) north-east, but with few transport links to Mediaș. Given the torturous and inadvisable trek by rail from Târgu-Mureș to Mediaș, ordering a **Taxi Cornisa** (taxicorinisa.ro) for the 55km journey (200 lei/€40) is the only option.

Sibiu Airport 65km (40 miles) south is far better connected, to **Sibiu** itself (see p30), from where a **train** is direct, journey time 1hr 30mins-2hrs, and costs a bargain 7 lei/€1.50. A cab with **Taxi Cornisa** should cost 180 lei/€37.

A direct **train** from **Bucharest** takes 6hrs and costs 70 lei/€14. Mediaș station is south of town, the stadium way north. Local transport is infrequent and unreliable. There's a cab stand outside the station. **KLIM TAXI** (+40 269 965) are based by the stadium.

Bed

Surprisingly few hotels are found in the town centre. On the main square, **Traube** sets its neat three-star around a historic wine cellar and summer garden. **Select** on nearby Strada Petőfi Sándor offers cheaper, pension-style accommodation. Outside town to the north, about 2km from the stadium, the three-star **Denis** on main Strada Baznei is surrounded by hilly greenery. South-east of town, about 2km from the station on Strada Plopuului, **BinderBubi** is the best hotel in the



vicinity, with a spa complex, pool and restaurant, plus cycle hire for the hills nearby. Closer to the station to the south-west on Strada Hermann Oberth, the **Vila Flora** is a simple but comfortable guesthouse.

Beer

Bars and restaurants line the main square, **Piața Regele Ferdinand I**, starting with the **Offside Café** by the Hotel Traube, more smart coffeehouse than pub but with TV sport and a pleasant terrace. Across the square, **Central Park** and the popular **Prohibition Pub** are more music-oriented. By the station, **McGowan's** offers TV football, decent food and a sunny terrace. 



ROMANIA 2019-20 Gaz Metan Mediaș

www.liberoguide.com/gaz-metan-medias



Gaz Metan Mediaș

Representing the gas-rich Transylvanian town of Mediaș since 1945, albeit under different names, **Gaz Metan** (csgazmetan.ro) have risen from a works team to a club with a decade's worth of experience in Liga I. In that time, energy money has allowed the Gaziștii to stage a creditable campaign in Europe and twice reach the semi-finals of the Romanian Cup.

No, Gaz Metan Mediaș are no CFR Cluj, snatching league titles from Steaua and taking on the Bayerns and the Chelseas in the Champions League, but their progress forms part of a general renaissance of football in Transylvania, where German and Hungarian influences and investment reflect its patchwork history.

Gaz Metan were first Karres, after the local leather manufactory, then Flacăra ('Flame'). Soon afterwards,



a star name of pre-war Romanian football, Ștefan Dobay, arrived as player-coach. Born shortly after his



village was founded by Hungarians, Dobay scored at two World Cups for Romania, the team he created here going on to play a first Romanian Cup final in 1951. The side who beat them then won the league and cup under Dobay: Steaua.

Until money arrived with the privatisation of the gas industry in the early 2000s, Gaz Metan remained in the second tier. With goals from Claudiu Boaru, 20 years a Mediaș player and now on the coaching staff, Gaz Metan gained promotion in 2008. And there, with Transgaz funding the renovation of the post-war **Stadionul Metan Mediaș**, they've stayed.

Located over the Târnava Mare river north of town, the stadium gained floodlights, under-soil heating, new turf from Austria and a second stand, bringing capacity to 8,500. Tribuna 1 remains uncovered, opposite roofed, two-tiered Tribuna 2, *jos* the lower-level nearest the pitch. The spaces behind the goals are almost empty, with a modest

Peluza 1 accessed from Strada Pasaj Bran, and Peluza 2 from the south, town, side. While the stadium and pitch have been modernised, the surroundings have changed little for decades – an old public pool is the only feature.

Transport

It's a 15min walk from the north side of the main square, past the Texas restaurant, up **Strada Johannes Honterus** to the river and across to the stadium. From the station, a taxi should cost around 7-8 lei/€1.50.

Tickets & shop

Sold on the day from the yellow building by the car park behind Tribuna 2 – tickets are around 5 lei/€1 in the peluze at each end, €10/€2 lei in open Tribuna 1, and 12-15 lei/€2.50 €3 in covered Tribuna 2, depending on the sector. The best seats are in lower *jos* C-D and upper E-G over the halfway line. Availability is only an issue for the visit of local rivals Hermannstadt from Sibiu. Black-and-white scarves are sold around the car park on match days – despite the yellow-and-blue colour scheme of their stadium, Gaz Metan are the Lupii negri, the Black Wolves.

Beer

In warmer months, outdoor outlets operate around the lido behind Tribuna 1 – otherwise there's nothing around the stadium at all. Drinking needs to be done in town. **LD**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Ploiești

www.liberoguide.com/ploiesti



Ploiești

Promoted to Liga I for the first time in 2019, **Chindia Târgoviște** are a modern construct, although the tower they are named after was built by Vlad the Impaler, Dracula himself, in the 1400s. Symbol of the former capital of Wallachia, this medieval landmark looms over the **Stadionul Eugen Popescu**. The revered CS Târgoviște team of the late 1970s was called the Club by Chindia Tower.

Formed in 2010 as an academy side on similar lines to Gheorghe Hagi's Viitorul Constanța, Chindia's success has caught their municipal owners on the hop. For 2019-20, while their own stadium gets a revamp, Chindia



play home games in **Ploiești** an hour's drive away

Both towns are major stops between Bucharest and Transylvania, but there the similarities end. A booming oil town in the mid-1800s – **Petrolul** are the local club – Ploiești saw money pour in after the régime change of 1989 and an air of impropriety still hangs over the city. By contrast, the bright **Ilie Oană**, a short walk from the main

square, is a UEFA Category 4 stadium. It replaced the ground of the same name – a Ploiești legend on and off the pitch – where the Găzarii beat Shankly's Liverpool in 1966. Today, it hosts full and U-21 internationals, the bid by a revived Petrolul to regain the top flight and, for 2019-20 at least, all home games of Chindia Târgoviște.

Bearings

Ploiești is 47km (29 miles) north of Bucharest's Henri Coandă Airport.

Buses run directly to Gara de Nord (see p4 **Bucharest**), where surprisingly frequent direct **trains** to **Ploiești Sud** (slow 8 lei/€1.65, fast 18 lei/€3.70) take 45min-1hr. A **taxi** from Bucharest airport to Ploiești should cost around 150 lei/€30 – agree a price.

South of town a 15min walk away, Ploiești Sud is connected by local **TCE buses and trams** (tickets 2.50 lei/€0.50 on board). The stadium is

just east of the main square. Call **Euro Taxi Ploiești** on +40 244 922. Stands dot prominent locations, including the station.

Bed

The nearest hotel to the stadium is also the glitziest, although the five-star **Prahova Plaza** still feels slightly Soviet despite its modern makeover. A spa and pool await at this main junction where Strada Nicolae Bălcescu meets Strada Stadionului. Nearby, overlooking the main square, a spa and pool are also found at the stately **Hotel Central**, which looks grander than its 1982 opening might suggest. Behind, the **Tiara** is comfortable and mid-range. On the broad avenue from the station, the **Vigo** fills a Belle-Époque building with 24 tasteful rooms.

Beer

The main bar hub is around the Vigo Hotel on grandiose **Bulevardul Independenței**, where places such as the **KS Pub** ('Football, Beer, I'm Here!'), **Bistro 29** (also a lodging) and the excellent **Pub OK** can stretch out across their own courtyards. On the main square, by the Prahova Plaza Hotel, the German-style **Curtea Berarilor** serves towering beers and grilled meats behind a faux historic façade and outside in the large courtyard. Across the main square, the **Dublin Pub** attempts authenticity. **LE**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Chindia/Stadionul Ilie Oană

www.liberoguide.com/chindia-targoviste



Chindia Târgoviște/ Stadionul Ilie Oană

Few clubs are named after historic towers but then few towers are like the **Chindia** in **Târgoviște**. Not only a historic attraction harking back to Dracula's day but interwoven in the football history of this former regional capital 90 minutes from Bucharest, the Chindia Tower stands

over the **Stadionul Eugen Popescu**. Here generations of Târgoviște clubs have played out mainly second-flight campaigns, from Metalul of the pre-Ceaușescu era to CS of the golden late 1970s, to FCM of recent memory.

Between 1996 and 2003, there was even a Chindia Târgoviște, though the club founded in 2010 are different in concept. Nicknamed Little Ajax, Chindia 2.0 were created by ex-World Cup hero Gheorghe Popescu based

on the lines of Viitorul Constanța, set up by his former Romania and Galatasaray teammate – and brother-in-law – Gheorghe Hagi.

While Hagi also built a new stadium complex on cheap farmland in the middle of nowhere, Gică Popescu was stuck with a shabby ground done out in Romanian colours in the shadow of Dracula's tower. As progress proved slow, **Chindia** (afcchindiatargoviste.ro) dropping back to the third tier



in 2013, Popescu fell out with the management, and took his services elsewhere – to Viitorul Constanța, in fact.

Meanwhile, Chindia came within a penalty shoot-out of winning a promotion play-off to Liga I in 2018, then won Liga II a year later, one-club man Cristian Cherchez the main goalscorer. That still left the crumbling stadium. Deciding to rebuild, with completion due for the summer of 2020, Chindia are currently playing at the **Stadionul Ilie Oană**, an hour away in **Ploiești**. Oană was the coach who brought home three trophies, after playing for Petrolul either side of the war. Opened in 1937 when this Indiana-born inside-forward began his career, the original ground was knocked down in 2010. This 15,000-capacity stadium replaced it, a gala match with Hagi and Popescu the curtain-raiser.

Four neat stands of yellow-and-blue seats, Peluza 1/East and Peluza 2/West behind the goals, Tribuna 2/South along one sideline, main Tribuna 0 opposite, surround a grass pitch. Visiting supporters are allocated end sectors 305-309 in Peluza 2.

Transport

From the Prahova Plaza Hotel, it's a 10min walk, either along Strada Stadionului, otherwise one stop on the **No.5 bus** from **Poștei** to **Tabacarie** – or along Strada Armoniei/Strada Mihai Bravu, otherwise one stop on **bus No.104** from **Armoniei** to **Maternitate**.

Tickets & shop

From the **ticket windows** behind the Peluza Est, it's 10 lei/€2 behind the goals and 15-20 lei/€3-€4 in the Tribune. On the north side of the stadium, Petrolul Ploiești operate an excellent club shop, run by a friendly old fan happy to wax lyrical about the players depicted in the archive photos on the wall.

Bars

By the club shop, the **Doroftei Pub & Lounge**, run by a famous boxer, and the **Yell' Wolf supporters' bar** both await renovation. With the sad closure of the traditional **Hanul Găzarilor** restaurant on Strada Mihai Bravu, pre-match beers are best enjoyed at the German-style **Curtea Berarilor** tavern by the Prahova Plaza Hotel. **LB**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Sfântu Gheorghe

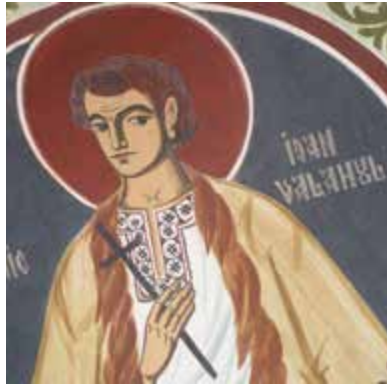
www.liberoguide.com/sfantu-gheorghe

Sfântu Gheorghe

Sfântu Gheorghe, Sepsiszentgyörgy to the Hungarians who comprise three-quarters of the population, lies in the very centre of Romania. More significantly, it was the capital of the Háromszék, the historic Three Seats, part of the Hungarian Kingdom awarded to Romania after World War I. Here live the Székelys, a Hungarian people who once guarded this far eastern border. Their blue-and-yellow flag flies here and, indeed, atop town halls across Hungary. They even have their own football team.

Against this background, award-winning baker László Diószegi and fellow Hungarian entrepreneur Dávid Kertész created **Sepsi OSK** in 2011, the acronym honouring the local team they supported, Olt Sport Klub, before its demise. With backing from the Hungarian government, which funds other clubs in towns once part of the pre-1918 Kingdom, Sepsi scaled the rungs of the Romanian league ladder, reaching Liga I in 2017.

In the pipeline is a new stadium created in ethnic Hungarian style, alongside the Sepsi Aréna sports hall north of town. For now Sepsi, who made the Championship play-offs in 2019, are based at the old **Stadionul Municipal**, dating back to 1930 and renovated in 2017.



Bearings

Sfântu Gheorghe is 183km (114 miles) north of **Bucharest's Henri Coandă Airport**. Buses run directly to **Gara de Nord** (see p4 **Bucharest**), from where a **train** here (50 lei/€10) takes 3hrs 30mins. **Sfântu Gheorghe station** is on the eastern outskirts of town, the **Stadionul Municipal** on the western side. The five **Multi-Trans Sepsi bus lines** call at the station, where a kiosk



sells **tickets** (2 lei/€0.40). Machines dispense from other stops. **Day Taxi** (+40 740 848 034) are based on the main road through town, Strada 1 Decembrie 1918.

Bed

Near the stadium up Strada Berzei, neat **Fidelitas** offers functional doubles and rooms with three bunk beds, and a paid-for spa. Set in greenery near the main square, also walkable from the ground, the **Hotel Park** provides mid-range comfort on Strada Gábor Áron. Alongside, the **Green Hostel** comprises six rooms,

24 beds and three shared bathrooms. Across the square, at the town end of main Strada 1 Decembrie 1918, two further mid-range options, the **Ferdinánd** and the **Sugás**, show individuality, in atmospheric buildings alongside each other.

Beer

Terrace cafés overlook the main square, including the **Korzó Irish Pub**, with a TV in a wooden interior with the appropriate decorative trappings. For something less mainstream, at the city end of main Strada 1 Decembrie 1918, **Szimpla Szentgyörgy** is the local

branch of the pioneering ruin bar of the same name in Budapest, with the same bohemian feel, open courtyard and mismatching furniture. Plenty of quality craft beers, too. Across the street, smart café/restaurant **Big Mama** is done out in archive pictures of town, with sport on TV. Further along towards the station, by the Amigo supermarket, long-term Stuttgart resident Sziszi has filled all four walls and ceiling with red-and-white souvenirs to create the **Bayern Söröző** – and the best football bar in town. Look out for the blue-and-white beer awnings covering the front terrace. **LG**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Sepsî OSK

www.liberoguide.com/sepsi-osk



Sepsî OSK

Created by two local entrepreneurs in 2011, **Sepsî OSK** (sepsiosk.ro) have brought top-flight football to this far corner of the former Hungarian Kingdom for the first time. The reference to pre-1918 Europe is still very much relevant a century later, as three-quarters of **Sfântu Gheorghe** remains ethnic Magyar, as is surrounding Covasna County. Today,

though, it sits in the very centre of Romania.

Sepsiszentgyörgy to most locals, this textile hub is also within the historic territory of the Székelys, a Hungarian people whose blue-and-yellow flag is flown whenever Sepsî OSK play. There's more to this story than shifting borders and old wounds. The owners, fans of the former Olt Sport Klub, the OSK in question, have needed business, sporting and diplomatic

savvy to negotiate the tricky waters of lower-league Romanian football in order to lift Sepsî from fourth tier to first in four successive seasons.

True, successful baker László Diószegi and fellow Hungarian Dávid Kertész also received substantial funding from the Hungarian government, keen on promoting football among Magyar communities in areas no longer within Hungary after World War I. Rebranding and renovating



the old **Stadionul Municipal** where OSK played from 1932, the ambitious ownership is looking beyond the club's current modest surroundings to a new stadium, located next to the Sepsî Aréna sports hall, being built through 2020. For the time being, the Székelyek play at the 5,200-capacity municipal ground, uncovered green-and-white around a running track that separates spectators from the action. Prime seats are below the VIP boxes along the sideline nearest to the main entrance, sectors B-E. Behind the south goal, a horseshoe of seats in sectors G-K is the home of the Sepsî ultras.

Transport

All five buses, Nos.1-5, run from the train station, through town, to the stop by the stadium, **Spitalul Judeţean**. Heading back, the stop on the stadium side is **Szabó Kati**

Sportcsarnok. Services run every 30min Mon-Fri, every 1hr Sat-Sun. Walking from town takes 10min, down **Strada Spitalului** from central Piaţa Libertăţii.

Tickets

Tickets are distributed from the wooden kiosks behind the main stand on **Strada Stadionului** from about two hours before kick-off. Demand can be high for games against Cluj and the main Bucharest clubs so sell-outs are not unknown. Expect to pay around 10 lei/€2 with the ultras behind the goal and 15 lei/€3 in the main stand. All is open to the elements.

Shop

Across the road from the stadium, beside **Bertis Pub**, the **club shop** has a modest selection of red-and-white shirts and scarves, as well as player photos for those post-match autograph opportunities.

Bars

Bertis Pub is, in fact, two places in one – a large glassed-in sports bar with three big TV screens and a solitary tap of Ciuc and, facing it, a restaurant decked out in contemporary art. Food is served in both. Round the corner on Strada Presei/Sajtó utca, **Camp Nou** is a small betting bar themed around FC Barcelona, where beer is sipped beneath white Ciuc umbrellas on the raised terrace. **LB**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Sibiu

www.liberoguide.com/sibiu

Sibiu

The youngest club in Liga I, **Hermannstadt** rose from the fourth tier to the first after three straight promotions between 2015 and 2018. The town they represent is the atmospheric Saxon one of **Sibiu** in the historic heart of Transylvania – Hermannstadt is the German rendition, commonly used pre-war.

Sibiu's lively local football scene reflected the ethnic mix back then. Both Șoimii (The Falcons) and Hermannstädter Turnverein, the Sibiu Gymnastic Club, operating like many other sports societies across German-speaking Europe, played in the top Romanian league between the wars. SGS even made the national final in 1931.

After 1945, Șoimii became a railway team, CFR, then Lokomotiva, winning Divizia B in 1950. When another side from Sibiu, Inter, gained promotion in 1988, it was thanks to the machinations of owner Nicu Ceaușescu, son of Communist dictator Nicolae.

Since then, FC Sibiu came within a point of promotion in 2005, while Voința gained a Liga I place in 2011, overspent and disappeared a year later. Similarly establishing a rivalry with local rivals Gaz Metan Medias,



Hermannstadt inherited none of these clubs' historic records, only the **Stadionul Municipal** south of town. In operation since 1927, this communal sports ground would have welcomed further top-flight football in 2018 had Hermannstadt not decided to knock it down and stage home games in Târgu Mureș and Pitești while a new one was being rebuilt. Completion is due for later in 2019-20.

Bearings

Sibiu Airport 3km (2 miles) west of town, connected by frequent **bus No.11** to central **A Saguna** near the Hotel Continental Forum, journey time 10-15mins. Tickets for the **tursib bus network** are 2 lei/€0.40. The **train** from Bucharest (75 lei/€15) takes

6hrs, arriving at **Sibiu station** north-east of town – the historic centre is walkable and pedestrianised. A **Taxi 924** (+40 269 924) from the airport should cost around 20 lei/€4.

Bed

Sibiu City (sibiucity.ro) has a hotel database. Facing the stadium, its terrace café handy pre-match, the **Best Western Silva** comprises 50 neat, mid-range rooms and suites. Even closer, by the parking area for regional buses, the three-star **Hotel Parc Sibiu** also has its own restaurant. A short walk down Strada Școala de Înot, the **Golden Tulip Ana Tower** provides a touch of luxury with a gym thrown in. On the main square, the traditional **Vila Weidner** blends in



with the historic surroundings. Round the corner, the **Pan Geea Hostel** has doubles, dorms and the best bar in town, Geea.

Beer

Off the main square on Strada Avram Iancu, **St Andrew's** is indeed pub-like, with two bars, one later-opening. Among the many draught options, B13 is a new craft brew from Sibiu. Down a

passage diagonally opposite, **Geea** is quite simply superb, arty, bohemian, with an electronica soundtrack, football on TV and a constant, friendly buzz. Across the historic centre on Strada Nicolae Bălcescu, the **Oldies Pub** is more a live venue, with TV screens on each pillar. The nearby **Imperium Pub** also stages concerts, with regular match screenings, a shirt signed by Gheorghe Hagi by the entrance. **LG**



ROMANIA 2019-20 Hermannstadt

www.liberoguide.com/hermannstadt



Hermannstadt

In 2015, a group of local football fans convened, pooled resources and created **FC Hermannstadt** (fchermannstadt.ro). In modern times, previous attempts to launch and maintain a football team in **Sibiu**, an attractive Saxon town in Transylvania, had crashed and burned, the Ceaușescu-backed Inter, short-lived FC Sibiu and Voința Sibiu.

Sibiu, though, was on the up, its Saxon heritage in focus. It had not long been European Capital of Culture, its former mayor, Klaus Johannis, had just been elected president of Romania, and foreign investment was pouring in. The members decided to adopt the German name of the city for their new club.



Moving into the **Stadionul Municipal**, the communal sports ground that served Sibiu clubs pre- and post-war, Hermannstadt started at the bottom and moved up – rapidly. Three swift, consecutive promotions swept The Roș-negrii, the Red-and-Blacks, to Liga I. The Municipal Stadium, however, may have suited a club with a fly-by-night owner and short-term ambitions – but not Hermannstadt. The city council had the old ground demolished and built

a new one in its place. Cost? Over €30 million.

While construction went ahead, Hermannstadt moved home games to Târgu Mureș and Pitești, but struggled in the top flight. The defeat of Transylvanian rivals Universitatea Cluj in the play-offs assured Liga I status for 2019-20. The year before, the Sibiu side had beaten local rivals Gaz Metan Mediaș in both legs of the Romanian Cup semi-final, 2,000

Hermannstadt fans making the trek. A crowd of 30,000 filled the National Arena for the final with Craiova, the first time that Sibiu had been represented since 1951. Though defeat followed, Hermannstadt have their eyes on Europe. When that day comes, the Stadionul Municipal should be ready. The main two-tiered stand, Tribuna 1, already is, with Tribuna 2 opposite, and the peluze, Est and Vest, earmarked for spring 2020.

Transport

The stadium is a 15min walk from the **Ramada Hotel/Piața Unirii**, straight down **Strada Zaharia Boiu**, turning left before the Best Western. Alternatively, take **bus Nos.1** from **Casa Armatei** or **12** and **13** from **Parcul Tineretului** to nearby **Lomonosov**. From the station, **Gara**, the **No.15** goes to the nearest stop of **Sala Transilvania** a 20min journey skirting the city centre.

Tickets

When the new stadium is ready, you'll pay around 10 lei/€2 for a seat in the peluze, 15 lei/€3 in Tribuna 2, 20 lei/€4 in the covered middle section of Tribuna 1.

Bars

With the previous Municipal Stadium long in place, there are several drinking options. Most suitable, tailor-made, in fact, is **Play-Off**, a relaxed modern sports lounge behind the Peluza Est, with TVs everywhere. On the opposite corner nearer the main stand, the **Best Western Silva** and **Parc hotels** offer a **terrace café** and **pizzeria** respectively, while the superstylish **Terasa Arini** restaurant is all about contemporary dining. The other side of the main stand, the **Birtul Radului** is all about retro drinking, a single tap of Neumarkt and bottles of Ciuc and Bucegi partaken by an older, chain-smoking clientele on the covered terrace. **LG**