

**LIB
ERO**

**HUN
EURO U-17
RYGAN**



**BUDAPEST
MTK
BUDAÖRS
BALMAZÚJVÁROS
DEBRECEN
DEAC
NAGYERDEI
FELCSÚT
PANCHO ARÉNA
TELKI**



The **European Under-17 Championship**, played across Hungary over nine days from May 17 to June 2, involves the best young footballing talent from 16 nations. Current holders France and record winners Holland join England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland in a tournament to be played out in the classic format of four groups of four, then two knock-out rounds to the final.

Stadiums include **MTK's** in **Budapest**, venue for that showdown on June 2, both main grounds in Hungary's second city of **Debrecen**, and the Hungarian FA's football centres at **Telki** and **Felcsút**. Apart from the **Nagyerdei Stadion** in Debrecen, all of these grounds have a capacity in the low thousands, including those in **Budaörs** just outside Budapest and **Balmazújváros** near Debrecen.

Celebrating its 20th anniversary in Hungary, the Euro U-17s also coincides with the phase in the country's stadium building boom that allows it to put on showcase events of this kind. In May, Budapest also stages the Europa League final, in the same Puskás Aréna that witnessed four games at Euro 2020, and welcomed a handful of key European club games played in special conditions during the pandemic.

The last time that Hungary hosted an event of this kind, however, was in 1985. By chance, the final won by the USSR (*that's* how long ago it was!) was also played at MTK, although

HUNGARY EURO U-17

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both stadium and tournament were different back then. The new **Hidegkuti Nándor Stadion**, named after the club's most famous player, replaced the revered old ground where cult football feature *Escape to Victory* was filmed, five years before the Soviets lifted the youth trophy.



DEAC Stadion

The tournament was then the European Under-16 Championship, which switched to Under-17s in 2002. Counting both iterations, Spain have won it the most times overall, Holland the later version. Current eligibility means that players have to turn 17 after January 1 of the tournament year.

Before the Euro Under-16s started in 1982, there was a FIFA Youth Tournament, first staged in (and won

by) England in 1948, for under-18s. Although Argentina were invited in 1954, this was for teams from Europe.

It was replaced by the UEFA Youth Tournament, that ran from 1955 to 1980, which begat the European Under-18 Championship (1981-2001). This became the European Under-19s the same year that Under-17s started in 2002, in a streamlining of the age categories.

Karim Benzema was in the French side that won it in 2004, the same year that Cesc Fàbregas was voted Player of the Tournament. João Moutinho lifted the trophy in 2003, Mario Götze in 2009 and Memphis Depay in 2011. All these players went on to win World Cups, Champions Leagues and other major trophies, but perhaps what stands out most when looking at successful teams since 2002 is just how few names stand out. Yes, Dominik Solanke and Lewis Cook went on to bag a →



Teniszke/DEAC

solitary senior cap each (both now play for Bournemouth), but how many of England's winning squad of 2014 would anyone, apart from their family and former classmates, actually recognise?

Yes, Portugal's Renato Sanches and later Ajax star Donny van de Beek also played in Malta that summer, but squad names suggest a litany of promising careers that went wayward for whatever reason or, in many cases,

simply settled at the level they were always meant to be. The England coach needed left-back cover to take to Malta, say, or his Scottish counterpart had a tip-off from the Celtic scout.

The Euro Under-17s, then, is not only the chance for a couple of thousand spectators to pick out a Benzema or a Fàbregas – which really do come along once every 20 tournaments. For surprisingly many on the pitch, the 90

minutes at Budaörs or Balmaújváros will be the peak of their careers. An earnest if uneventful 0-0 draw with their counterparts from Switzerland, hidden somewhere in the record books, will be what they look back on 50 years from now.

For parents, the unfamiliar surroundings of Telki or Felcsút will be the backdrop to one of their proudest moments, their minds



drifting back to kickabouts in the back garden barely ten years before, washing his kit after another muddy afternoon banging in three for the school team.

The Euro Under-17s is also the perfect excuse for a holiday – the season's over, the sun's out, flights are cheaper than in high season and tourist hordes haven't yet filled every spa and ruin bar in Budapest. There'll be a modicum of patriotism – hey, it's Wales v Ireland on May 20 – but no annoying communal renditions of the theme tune from *The Great Escape*.

And in Hungary, the event has its perfect setting, accessible, affordable, hospitable and with a football heritage it's only now managing to live up to.

Station to stadium

Hungary has no national airline. Budapest-based, low-cost carrier **Wizz Air** (wizzair.com) serves many short-haul routes around Europe, while Polish **LOT** (lot.com) deals with long-haul. The main budgets have long been established in **Budapest** (bud.hu) while Wizz also use **Debrecen** (debrecenairport.com).

City transport in **Budapest** (bkk.hu) and other main towns is excellent and cheap. Cross-country, state rail **MÁV** (mavcsoport.hu/en) is reliable and affordable, with main routes also forming part of the international train network around Central Europe. Few journeys within Hungary more than 3-4hrs. Rural areas are served **Volánbusz** (volanbusz.hu/en) bus services. →



For the **motorway** (*autópálya*), you need a vignette (hungary-vignette.eu) or *matrica*, minimum period ten days (Ft3,500).

The Hungarian currency is the forint (Ft), although major hotels and some motorway services accept euros. €1 is currently 370 forints.

Timings & tickets

The Euro Under-17 Championship takes place over nine days from May 17 to June 2, in seven stadiums and four destinations, if you include suburban Budaörs as part of Budapest. Telki and Felcsút are tiny communities a short drive or bus journey from Budapest. Balmazújváros is equally close to Debrecen, Hungary's second city and university centre near the Romanian

border. Games either take place mid to late afternoon or at 8pm.

The 16 teams play in the classic format of four groups of four, with the top two qualifying for the quarter-finals. If teams are level on points, then matches between them decide who goes through, including goal difference and goals scored if need be. In the knock-out stage, it's extra-time then good old penalties. There's no third-place play-off.

The four semi-finalists automatically qualify for the Under-17 World Cup in a host country as yet unknown in November-December. For Europe's fifth berth, the two beaten quarter-finalists with the best record in the group stage here play off on the same day as the semi-finals on May 30.



Nagyerdei Stadion

A full **schedule** can be found on p4 and on the UEFA site (uefa.com/under17), where scouts and club representatives can apply for tickets. The general public should be able to buy on the day. Hungary's main ticket agency jegy.hu is currently offering online sales (<https://u17eb.jegy.hu/>) via its Hungarian-only site – just click on the orange 'Jegyvásárlás' button and a stadium map appears with a seating plan.

Group-stage tickets are priced at Ft1,000/€2.70 each, cheaper seats in Category II Ft500/€1.35. For the knock-out rounds, it's Ft1,500/Ft1,000 (€4/€2.70), the final Ft2,000/Ft1,500 (€5.25/€4). A fee of Ft330/€0.90 is then added to the final bill. *Szektor* is the sector, *sor* the row, *szék* your seat.

A ticket is a *jegy*, a ticket office a *pénztár* – credit cards are usually accepted. Beer (*sör*) should be available

at grounds, probably priced around Ft600/€1.60 – if not, there will be a bar close by, as detailed in the seven stadium guides here (p8-p17). If you're lucky, standard snacks might include a breaded-meat sandwich, *rántott hús*. If Hungary are playing, and possibly when not, a vendor will be scooping up helpings of sunflower seeds (*szotyil*) and pumpkin seeds (*tökmag*) into little paper bags for locals to nibble on nervously during the game. **LD**

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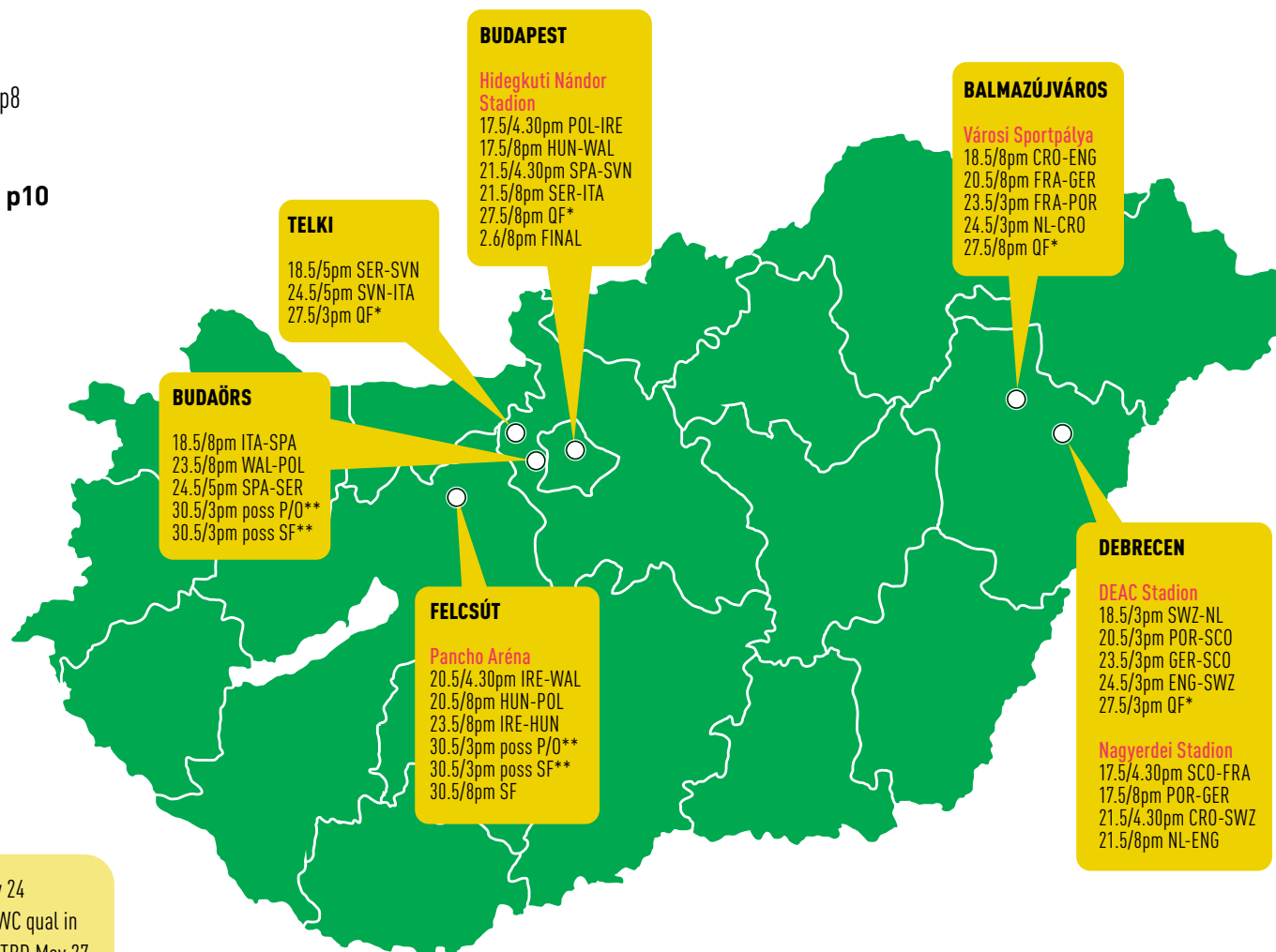
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Group A

- A1 Hungary (HUN)
- A2 Ireland (IRE)
- A3 Poland (POL)
- A4 Wales (WAL)

Group B

- B1 Serbia (SER)
- B2 Spain (SPA)
- B3 Italy (ITA)
- B4 Slovenia (SVN)

Group C

- C1 Portugal (POR)
- C2 France (FRA)
- C3 Scotland (SCO)
- C4 Germany (GER)

Group D

- D1 Croatia (CRO)
- D2 Holland (NL)
- D3 Switzerland (SWZ)
- D4 England (ENG)

*QF teams/venues TBD May 24

**2 QF losers P/O for U-17 WC qual in
Nov-Dec. SF teams/venues TBD May 27

Budapest

One of Europe's traditional football capitals, **Budapest** is regaining its old pomp thanks to new stadiums replacing famous old ones, including the national **Puskás Aréna** and the **Új Hidegkuti Stadion**, the former Népstadion and recently built home of MTK, due to co-host the Euro U-17s.

Ferencváros, Vasas and, most recently, **Honvéd**, the dominant side during the golden era of the 1950s, have also unveiled new stadiums over the last decade. Even suburban **Budaörs**, a community so close to Budapest you can walk the 3km to the city limits from the football ground, has a new home for its lower-division team. It, too, will co-host the Euro U-17s.

Hungary's credible showing at Euro 2016 led to the squad being given a heroes' welcome on showcase Heroes Square, alongside the site for a fan zone five years later when the Puskás Aréna staged two of Hungary's matches at Euro 2020. The national stadium will also stage the Europa League final in May 2023 while the Euro U-17s are still taking place.

There's no doubt that Budapest has become an otherwise popular and successful stage for major sporting events. Easily accessed by air in two or three hours from almost anywhere



in Europe, with a superb hotel stock and transport infrastructure – around the city, at least, the airport still needs a swift transfer link – Hungary's capital has also staged two world swimming finals in five years and the European handball finals in 2022.

In 2023, another (!) new stadium hosts the World Athletics Championships. Many in Budapest, with its green mayor and liberal outlook, begrudge huge sums being spent on sport with hospitals in such poor condition. Most visitors, however, treated to

a beautiful, affordable metropolis with a buzzing nightlife, don't need to think too much beyond fun and entertainment.

With a third of the top-flight NB I division based in the capital, there are always a couple of domestic fixtures to see every weekend. Transport is swift and easy, admission is cheap and beer is plentiful.

Bearings

Budapest Airport is 16km (ten miles) south-east of town. **Terminal 2**

comprises adjoining buildings A and B. Terminal 1 closer to town is not open to the public, although the rail terminal opposite still functions.

The **100E bus** leaves from outside Arrivals at Terminal 2 every 8-10mins, then every 30-45mins through the night. Journey time to three central points, Kálvin tér, Astoria and focal Deák Ferenc tér, is around 45mins. From town, airport-bound buses set off from Deák Ferenc tér beside cobbled Városháza park.



The service requires a special airport shuttle ticket (Ft1,500/€4), available from the machine by the airport stop or from metro stations in town.

By the 100E stop at the airport, the **200E bus** (every 10mins) runs to **Kőbánya-Kispest** at the end of blue metro line M3 for the price of a regular ticket, (Ft350/€0.90). You'll need another for your onward journey by metro. Further up the line, some sections served by replacement buses at weekends, the **Népliget** stop serves the Ferencváros stadium →

and Budapest's main international bus station. From here, tram 1 goes to **MTK** and the **Puskás Aréna**. Each main train terminus has its own metro station, **Keleti**, **Nyugati** and **Déli**.

The **BKK public transport network** consists of four metro lines, buses, trams, trolleybuses, electric trains and boats. Night buses also run, along with the 24hr tram 6 down the city's busiest boulevard, the **Nagykörút**.

A book of ten tickets is Ft3,000/€8, a 24hr pass Ft2,500/€6.70, available from machines at major stops including the airport, and at metro stations. Foreign credit cards are accepted. Stamp single tickets by putting the grid-patterned end into the orange machine, either on board the vehicle or at the top of metro escalators.

When you come out of airport Arrivals, you'll see a kiosk – this is for the **Főtaxi** (+36 1 222 2 222) service into town. Give your destination to the dispatcher and your car will pull up. The standard fare into town is around Ft10,000/€27. Be careful of taxis waiting outside major hotels and nightlife hubs, particularly **Gozsdu udvar**.

Bed

The city's impressive hotel stock is a key factor in Budapest hosting



so many major international sports events. Several lodgings are convenient for the **Puskás Aréna** and nearby **Keleti station** – and therefore also for tram 1 to MTK's **Hidgkuti Nándor Stadion**. On the **Kerepesi út** side of the national stadium, the **Danubius Arena** is a four-star with a pool, gym and spa. Alongside **Keleti**, the **Intercity** is part of the well-known German chain of station hotels. Nearby, on main **Rákóczi út**, the **Danubius Hungaria** is Hungary's largest hotel, dating back to the golden age of rail and thoroughly modernised since.

Of historic interest and at a main transport hub convenient for **Keleti** and the **Puskás Aréna**, the **Astoria**



is also right in the city centre. Slap opposite MTK, the **ACHAT** is an upscale German chain four-star. For the grounds on the northern section of blue metro line 3, **Újpest** and **Vasas**, **Nyugati station** is a handy crossing point. Built into the adjoining mall, the business-friendly **Crowne**



Plaza ambitiously opened during the pandemic, anticipating a new age of rail. Round the corner on the **Nagykörút**, long-established upscale chains such as the **Radisson Blu Béke** and **Corinthia**, original built for the 1896 Olympics and Hungarian millennial celebrations, are steeped in history. Further along the boulevard, the **New York** plays up its golden heritage.

In the city centre, Grand Prix drivers stay at the **Kempinski Hotel**

Corvinus – just ask to look at the guest book while top football teams also sleep at **The Ritz-Carlton** next door. Near Pest's bar vortex, the **Soho Boutique** adds flair amid many apartment rentals.

Budapest also specialises in rooftop hotel bars, such as at the music-themed **Aria** the **Hilton Garden Inn** behind the Opera House and the **Hotel Clark** over the river in Buda, named after the Scots engineer who completed the **Chain Bridge** below. ➔



Bars

Budapest is a great bar city, the scene extensive enough for the many stag parties not to become too overbearing. District VII, between the Great Synagogue and Klauzál tér, is the hub. Within it, the **Gozsdu udvar** passageway is flooded with revellers. The themed **Puskás Gozsdu** is the main sport-focused hostelry.

The most football-friendly of Budapest's now overly famous

ruin bars, **UdvarROM** and the adjoining **Füge Udvar**, fill with young foreigners until the early morning.

The **Stifler** chain comprises a couple of burger-and-soccer joints on and off the Nagykörút, the busy tram-lined street dotted with football-friendly drinkeries along its Erzsébet körút section. Others include **Ziccer!**, the outlet for the TrollFoci platform for Hungarian football discourse, nearby Winners and Score. **Pointer**

pubs can also be found at prominent Pest locations.

For a little more individuality, **Champs** on Dohány utca is tastefully decorated, with painted likenesses of Hungarian Olympic heroes since 1896. It usually runs a **summer terrace sports bar** on Margaret Island.

Right in the centre, Irish-run **Jack Doyle's** is the best of the city's pubs, big on sport, food, live music and



Jack Doyle's



Aria Hotel

atmosphere. It sits beside what was the Pilvax Café, where the 1848 revolutionaries gathered before taking on the Austrians.

Nearby local bar, the **Staropramen Söröző**, provides a quiet space to watch the match a minute's walk from the airport bus stop. The other main pubs in town, **Davy Byrne's** is equally Irish-run and sits in lively District VI, while long-established **Becketts** is located on tourist-friendly Liszt Ferenc tér.

Where Lonyáy utca meets the Nagykörút, near the Boráros tér stop on main tram lines 2, 4 and 6,

the **6:3** takes its name from the famous scoreline when Hungary beat England at Wembley in 1953. Its former owner, Nándor Hidegkuti, scored a hat-trick that day.

On the Buda side of the river, named after the Chain Bridge it stands near, the **Lánchíd Söröző** at Fő utca 4 is a homely, retro-themed bar/restaurant comprising two rooms, old Who videos shown in one, TV football in another.

Shops

A tiny emporium tucked away at the back of a courtyard on Budapest's main shopping thoroughfare, Váci utca, **Hungarian Football-Sport Shop**, signposted at No.23, is a treasure trove of Khrushchëv-era badges, scarves, shirts and pennants.

Hungary, Ferencváros and Újpest tops are among the international football merchandise on offer at **Lion's Sport** on Rákóczi út towards Keleti station. **Football Factor** at Andrássy út 81 deals more in kits of top European sides, and the latest multi-coloured boots. Another branch operates at the Allee shopping mall in Buda.

Tourist souvenir chain **Memories of Hungary** stocks a number of Puskás-related items, mugs, T-shirts and replica shirts. You'll find branches near the Basilica, at Parliament, by the Fishermen's Bastion and at the airport. **LG**

Hidegkuti Nándor Stadion

The Új ('New') **Hidegkuti Nándor Stadion** is the home of Magyar Testgyakorlók Köre. **MTK** ('Em-Tay-Kah') were founded in 1888, comprised of Budapest's mercantile and Jewish community, with whom the club has always been associated.

Successful between the wars, MTK are based on the other side of Népliget park from eternal rivals Ferencváros, with whom they play the eternal derby, or *örökrangadó*. While FTC have Hungary's biggest fan base, MTK traditionally attract the smallest gates in the capital.

Numbers dwindled even lower when the MTK's dilapidated ground – named after their most famous player, Nándor Hidegkuti, the deep-lying forward of the glorious 1950s – was being rebuilt.

Their new stadium is not without its critics. Opened in 2016 with a curtain-raiser against Sporting Lisbon – MTK's opponents in their only European final to date, in 1964 – the ground comprises two sideline stands and concrete walls behind each goal, eliciting comparisons with a municipal five-a-side pitch.

It certainly doesn't look like the kind of stadium that Pelé would grace – unlike



the old ground, where cult film *Escape to Victory* was made in 1980. While Bobby Moore and Michael Caine were also playing in this war-time drama, the irony of MTK doubling for the Colombes in Paris wasn't lost on locals – not only was the ground an antique, its role model was where Hungary lost the World Cup final in 1938.

Outside the new stadium stands a statue of Károly 'Csikar' Sándor, scorer of two goals in that Cup Winners' Cup Final of 1964.

Capacity is 5,000, including an ambitious 500 seats in skyboxes and 260 places for VIPs. Spectators in sectors A1-A5 and A6-A9 sit either side of them along one stand, facing those in B1-B9 opposite. For domestic fixtures, visiting supporters are allocated four sectors, V1-V4, beside B9. Entrance is through Gate 3 at the corner of Hungária körút and Sport utca.



Transport

The stadium has its **own stop** on the **tramline 1** that also calls at the Puskás Aréna and Ferencváros. **Trams 28** and **37** run here from Blaha Lujza tér (red M2 metro) six stops away. You'll find the stop at the Nagykörút end of Népszínház utca, near McDonald's, trams arriving on Salgótarjáni út, with the stadium to your left, at right angles to main Hungária körút.

Bars

Either side of the tram stop on Hungária körút stand two modest drinking spots. By the supermarket, the **Netovább** ('Go No Further!') is a betting bar where a revered landlady pours Czech Krušovice, a better bet than local Soproni. Terrace tables appear in summer. On the stadium side, the basement **Satyó** attracts the boxing fraternity.

Round the corner on Sport utca, if the bar at the **BKV Előre** stadium is open, you're in luck – it's retro heaven with bells on. BKV is the Budapest transport company and various visiting Lokomotivs and Dynamos in Socialist times left a wealth of pennants. It's eleven paces between BKV and MTK, the world's shortest groundhop. On match days, a featureless **stadium bar** operates behind the seats in Stand A. **LG**



Budaörs

Budaörs is one of several booming suburban communities west of Budapest, whose population has doubled in 50 years. For centuries, Danube Swabians worked the land here, only to be deported immediately after World War II, leaving behind their lucrative peach orchards.

Celebrating their centenary in 2024, local club **Budaörsi SC** date back to more innocent times. This was a solid agrarian community that managed to revive its football team in exile, following the post-war expulsion of Germanic settlers. In 1950, an emotional reunion involved a friendly match in Haßmersheim, some players returning from Soviet imprisonment.

On the Hungarian side of the Iron Curtain, Budaörs continued to



compete under ever-changing acronyms at their basic ground of modest capacity on **Árok utca**.

With money coming into the town from the 1990s onwards, Budaörs took advantage of its proximity to Budapest – close enough to be on the city's bus network – to offer attractive rates to international companies to set up here. IKEA, Auchan and German car dealers all

operate in the shadow of the town's scenic vantage point, Törökugrató.

Over 30 years, this development has been overseen by popular liberal, then independent, mayor, Tamás Wittinghoff. Despite bitter run-offs with national ruling party Fidesz in local elections, Wittinghoff has been happy to see the football ground completely rebuilt at Árok utca,

where a single, arched stand contains 1,300 seats in the signature green of Budaörsi SC. Floodlights and a video screen surround a grass pitch.

In the early 2000s, the club soared from the fifth tier to the second in four seasons, without ever really knocking on the door of top-flight NBI. Relegation in 2022 has sadly not been followed by an immediate return in 2023.

Transport

From **Kelenföld** (green metro line 4) in Budapest, **buses 88, 88A and 188** each leave hourly for **Lejtő utca** in Budaörs, meaning there's one around every 20mins. At Kelenfold station, take exit B, turn left at the top of the escalators, you'll find the bus stop further to your left. Journey time is around 20mins. Note that Budaörs is beyond the city limits so regular tickets and passes should require a supplement to be valid, but in practice, few checks take place.

At Lejtő utca, walk back a few metres in the direction you came, then cross the main road towards the bowling alley on the corner of Árok utca. On the same side, walk down the street to find the ground to your right, where a ticket office will be set up. You then have to walk through the complex to get to the main stand.

Coming back, the 88 and 88A run into Budapest until 10.45pm from the stop on the main road by the bowling alley.

Bars

The **ABS Sportcentrum Budaörs** runs a pub/restaurant as well as a bowling alley, open until 10pm every day, offering standard dishes and drinks, plus lunchtime deals. At the ground, behind the main stand, a **match-day bar** dispenses beer at Ft500/€1.35 a time, queues forming at half-time. **LE**

Balmazújváros

Of all the many, many new football stadiums to have been built or completely rebuilt in Hungary in the last ten years, one of the least justified must be the **Városi Sportpálya** in **Balmazújváros**.

This town of 17,000 souls in Hajdú-Bihar County, north-east Hungary currently has no professional, or even semi-professional, football team.

Balmazújváros didn't even have a grass football pitch until 1968. Until then, the local team had played their local and lower-league counterparts on clay, similar to the surface used for tennis courts.

Soon afterwards, the attendance record for the modest municipal Városi Sportpálya was set as 3,500 squeezed in for a Hungarian Cup quarter-final with Vasas in 1974-75.

In 2011, with football bringing unprecedented attention and revenue to nearby Debrecen, the good folk of Balmazújváros decided to buy the licence of struggling Bőcs nearly 100km away. Thus was born **Balmazújváros FC**, who started life in Hungary's second tier, NBII.

The following year, they hooked up with the local spa, Kamilla – thermal waters attract thousands to this part



of Hungary every year – to become Balmaz Kamilla Gyógyfürdő. One year later, the modest municipal Városi Sportpálya, of the pre-'68 clay pitch, was knocked down.

In its place was built the new Városi Sportpálya, its seats in the bright orange of the club whose identity was just being forged.

Balmazújváros FC eventually made it to Hungary's top flight for one

season only, 2017-18, and blipped out of existence after the following campaign. Today's **Balmazújváros FC** currently lie mid-table in their local county division and play most games at the Balmazújvárosi Utánpótlás Sporttelep, the junior sport complex, on the outskirts of town.

Bearings

The train from **Budapest Keleti** station takes 3hrs 10mins, from **Budapest Nyugati** 3hrs 45mins. Both are hourly

and cost around Ft4,000/€10.50. From Keleti, you usually have to change at **Füzesabony**, from Nyugati, **Debrecen**. InterCity services require reservations. Debrecen is also the location of the nearest **airport** – for details, *see p12*.

The stadium is almost next door to **Balmazújváros station**, veer left as you exit, the pretty little town centre straight ahead, via a passageway beside the Kamilla Hotel.



Bed

There are two main lodgings in town, the most impressive being the **Kamilla** spa hotel, the first thing you see as you exit the station, and therefore close to the ground. Year-round pools and saunas are not the only activity here – guests also have access to cycling and horse-riding.

On main Veres Péter utca, the affordable **Kerekes Panzió** comprises six mid-range rooms with an easy walk of the station and stadium.

Beer

With the sad closures of the **Múzeum Kávéház**, **Délibab Presszó** and **Corner Café**, around the main hub of Kossuth tér, the only real option is the **Papucsos Presszó** on the square itself. As comfortable as its name suggests, the 'Slippers Café offers TV football on big-match nights. Alternatively, there's the unpretentious **Kastélykert Söröző**, near the station at Kastélykert utca 6, with its handy front terrace. **LG**



Városi Sportpálya

The **Balmazújvárosi Városi Sportpálya** has enjoyed little time in the spotlight since its opening in 2016. The host club reached the top-flight NBI at the end of that same season, bravely attempting to stay up with a 3-3 draw against Ferencváros on the last day. Fellow relegation candidates Diósgyőr pipped them on goal difference.

After one season in the second tier, the club failed to gain an FA licence to continue. Today's **Balmazújváros FC** won their county division in 2022, but did not go up to the third-tier NBIII, preferring to take on the likes of Hajdúböszörmény and Hajdúsámson in the same fourth tier as before.

While these games against local rivals are played out at the Városi Sportpálya,



most home fixtures are staged at the Balmazújvárosi Utánpótlás Sporttelep on the outskirts of town. The Junior Sport Complex is an apt setting, since much of the squad is of that age category or slightly older.

The previous Sportpálya in Balmazújváros was an extremely modest local ground whose record attendance



of 3,500 looked to stand for all time. Then the Kamilla spa baths stepped in from 2012 onwards, Balmazújváros used political clout, and before too long, the old Sportpálya was replaced by a new one, whose 2,300 seats included 1,750 bright orange ones.

It also had floodlights, an electronic scoreboard and covering for 600 spectators. Before the 2016-17 season, Palermo sent their second team to play Balmaz Kamilla Gyógyfürdő ('Thermal

Baths'), for the curtain-raising fixture. A crowd of 2,000 watched later Hungarian international Kevin Varga, on loan from Debrecen, put two goals past Croatia U-21 international keeper Josip Posavec.

With Balmazújváros soon bound for NBI, all the stars seemed aligned above this small, sleepy agrarian community on the edge of the Hortobágy National Park, but you can't create a team on the Great Hungarian Plain overnight.

Since 2021, **Nyíregyháza Spartacus** have played home matches at the Balmazújvárosi Városi Sportpálya while their own Városi Stadion is being rebuilt. While Szpari, as they are known to all, have hardly set the world alight in a near century of existence, the Red and Blues have long been a regular presence in the top or second divisions. Their solid fan base is at least putting the stadium to good use.

What will happen to the Balmazújvárosi Városi Sportpálya after a handful of Euro U-17 games are played here, and Nyíregyháza leave town, isn't clear. With Balmazújváros currently reluctant to climb any higher than county level, chances are it will remain empty and forlorn.

Transport

The stadium is a short walk from Balmazújváros station – see *p10 Balmazújváros*.

Bars

Halfway from the station to the stadium on Semsey Andor utca, the **Rezervátum Söröző** comprises a big bar with a TV, a large back terrace and a badminton court, imbued with a Native American theme, if Native Americans played badminton. There are two match-day bars at one end of the ground, too, though these may well have fallen by the wayside since the home club's demise. **LG**



Debrecen

Hungary's second city of **Debrecen** was the country's football capital for much of the 21st century, its status assured with a new stadium in 2014 when flagship club **DVSC** also won a seventh title in ten seasons.

Since then, silverware has been rare. After being built at a cost of Ft12.5 billion/€36 million, the **Nagyerdei**

Stadion – in the park of the same name just north of town, dotted with spa hotels, the zoo and the old ground – is barely a fifth full for most games. The only exception has been the packed house of 20,000 who witnessed local hero Balázs Dzsudzsák score Hungary's opener against Denmark in the curtain-raising international here that May of 2014. For the Euro U-17s, the modest **DEAC Stadion** across the park also co-hosts.

Bearings

Debrecen Airport is 5km (three miles) south-west of town. A DKV bus (Ft400/€1.15) connects with flights, terminating at the train station (12min). A **Főnixtaxi** (+36 52 444 444) charges Ft3,000/€8.65 into town.

From **Budapest Nyugati**, a direct **train** (Ft4,500/€13) takes 2hrs 30mins. Debrecen station is just south of the centre. DKV city transport consists of two tramlines, buses and



trolleybuses. A **ticket** is Ft350/€1 from newsstands, Ft450/€1.30 on board.

Bed

Debrecen Tourist Information (debrecen.hu/en) has details of hotels. Quality lodgings surround the new stadium, starting with the nearest, the **Aquaticum** five-star spa hotel lined with pools, alongside the rustic **Villa Hotel** with its Finnish sauna and terrace restaurant, Krúdy. Also at this junction, the Nagyerdő has its own spa and pools while the **Divinus** is the best hotel in town, a five-star spa and conference centre with a cosmopolitan restaurant.

For a taste of pre-gentrified Debrecen, the **Sport** beside the old ground still echoes its Socialist-era roots despite an upgrade.

In town, the mid-range **Centrum** across the main square may be a more comfortable option or, behind

the Great Church, the four-star **Lycium**, with its spa and restaurant. The **Régi Posta** is also well-located on Széchenyi utca, its 300 years of hospitality including a visit by the king of Sweden in 1714.

Beer

Terrace bars line focal **Piac utca** by the main square. **Pince** has a big TV screen set up outdoors, **Belga** comprises Belgian pub, restaurant and boutique hotel, while nearby **Maszek** features cult art. From here, Simonffy utca leads to nightlife hub, Hal köz. Further down, **Sheldon's** specialises in Czech beer and board games.

On Csapó utca, **Roncsbár** was opened by stalwart DVSC defender and seven-time title winner Csaba Bernáth and a local rock group, its huge terrace with a ruin pub feel, ideal for live shows and match screenings.

North towards the university and stadium, the **Péterfia**, **Calico Jack** and **MOB** around Bem tér appeal to local youth by ticking all the right Loki, rock and beer boxes.

Back in town, the excellent **Bakelit Music Café** on Kossuth utca combines electronica, football action, fine drinks and tasteful décor. The nearby **Play Pub** on Szent Anna utca contains a convivial enclosed terrace, and offers comfortable accommodation. **LE**



DEAC Stadion

The home of the **Debrecen University Athletic Club**, second banana to nearby DVSC in Hungary's second city, the **DEAC Stadion** dates back a century, as a football ground at least.

The first grass pitch was laid in 1921 and a stadium built around it five years later. It was designed by Aladár

Mattyók, who had also worked on the Millenáris in Budapest before the World Cycling Championship in 1928. That same year, the Minister of Culture, Kuno Klebelsberg, came to open the stadium.

While Olympic-class athletes continued to run, jump and throw here, the world record for the hammer throw set in 1965, the football team rarely rose above the third tier. Spectators still occupy the sturdy wooden stand in place today.

Opposite, a low, roofed, new stand of seating displays the DEAC colours of

white and black. Visiting supporters are usually placed at the far end, diagonally opposite the stadium bar and DEAC clubhouse, where members gather to watch the game over a beer from their terrace table.

Behind the goals are all the trappings of track and field, along with tennis courts. Stadium capacity is 1,500.

To walk from here to the main Nagyerdei Stadion, across the park, past the stately university building and its fountains, takes about 15 minutes. In 2020-21, promoted DEAC and relegated

DVSC were brought closer together in the second-tier NBII, before the former finished bottom and the latter came top.

Transport

The DEAC sports complex lies at the far western edge of Nagyerdei park, on Dóczy József utca. While it has its own bus stop, **Egyetemi sporttelep**, services there are either infrequent or not convenient. Half-hourly **bus 10** from Debrecen station, **Nagyállomás**, via **Kölcsey Központ**, is the best bet, stopping at **Kartács utca** five minutes from the stadium. Allow 20mins from the station.

Alternatively, frequent **tram 1/ weekend bus 1V** goes straight up from the station, through the city centre, to **Egyetem** 20mins away. From there, the ground is a 10-15min walk, past the university building and keeping in the same direction.

Bars

The **Teniszke** is one of the finest stadium bars you'll find in Hungary, its covered terrace overlooking the action from the angle of the corner flag. Tables closest to the pitch might be reserved by name.

Inside is a cosy mess of football scarves galore, including a match-day one from the Debrecen-Torino game in the Europa League, plus at least one screen beaming TV sport. Attila, your friendly barman, dispenses Pilsner Urquell, Dreher and Arany Ászok as the place fills with buzzy bonhomie.

There are more outside seats just beyond the terrace, dovetailing with others adjoining the **clubhouse**.

On your approach to the ground from Egyetem tér near the tram stop, you'll find the upscale **Next Bistro**, whose terrace overlooks the stately university building and fountains, and whose prime steaks are sizzled on a Jospert grill. Fine wines may accompany. There's TVs inside, too. If you're just after pre-match scran, the **Academy Grill** next door should suffice. No booze, though. **LD**

Nagyerdői Stadion

It's a decade since **DVSC**, the railway workers' team from **Debrecen**, faced Liverpool, Lyon and Fiorentina in the Champions League group stage. For ten years from 2004-05, 'Loki' dominated the Hungarian game, winning seven titles, the last coming just as their new stadium, the **Nagyerdői Stadion**, was preparing for its grand opening on May Day, 2014.

After Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán declared it open, the first of many new stadiums across Hungary, Loki legends lined up for a gala match. Rather than another landmark in the making of a football empire in north-east Hungary, however, it proved the end of an era. Debreceni Vasutas Sport Club have not won the title since.

The stadium remains of course, all 20,000 capacity of it, usually accommodating under 4,000 for most league games. Four stands, each a single tier of bright red seats, surround the grass pitch, west for press and VIPs, south the home end (sectors B4-B8), sectors D3-D4 earmarked for visiting fans in the north end alongside Nagyerdei körút.

Transport

Main **tram 1/bus 1V** (weekends) runs from Debrecen station, up through the city centre to Nagyerdei park,



and **Aquaticum**, 15mins and ten stops away. Trams run every 6-10mins. To walk from town, past the Great Church and up Péterfia utca, takes about 15-20mins.

If you're flying into Debrecen, the **Airport 2** bus calls at the train station and then runs on to the terminus at **Doberdó utca** (20mins), near Nagyerdő park. The previous stop, **Kartács utca**, is slightly closer to the stadium. Coming back after the game, walk down to **Medgyessy sétány** for the city-bound tram service.

Bars

The **Palma Pub**, now more a smart restaurant, surveys a busy junction from its equally busy terrace. Facing it, the **pub** at the upscale **Divinus Hotel** offers refreshing Bitburger.

Further up the tram-lined main road, leafy terraces cluster around the Aquaticum hotel and spa. Attached to the Villa Hotel, the **Krúdy Étterem** offers classic Hungarian dishes in the style of the famous writer it is named after, and lists the kind of wines he would have



appreciated. Beer, too, of course. By the hotel, the **Grande Bosco** ('Great Wood' or 'Nagyerdő') serves



Med favourites on a pretty terrace bookended by a sport-tuned TV.

It prefaces a row of little terrace eateries hugging the tram line, Hungarian dishes at the **Rakpart Bistro**, beer and burger combos at the **Rednekk BBQ & Bar**. In warmer weather the **Nagyerdői Water Tower** spreads deckchairs around the water tower and serves spritzers. By the DVSC Shop, stadium bar **Red & White** operates match days and through the week, the terrace busy, the interior a squeeze but large enough for a TV to show sport. Domestic Soproni, Heineken and Strongbow are the draught options, with Krušovice in bottles, decent Hungarian wines from the Gere and Nyakas stables and superb *pálinka* brandies from Rézangyal also available.

Beer is also sold within the ground at **Büfé** outlets, with TV screens showing the action as you queue for your draught Soproni or bottled Heineken. **LD**



Felcsút

Mention **Felcsút**, **Puskás Akadémia** and the **Pancho Aréna** – hamlet, club and stadium – and Viktor Orbán must come into the conversation. Among the many stadiums Hungary's football-obsessed prime minister has built, a spectacular one stands in this one-road village where he spent much of his childhood.

Here, beside the nearest town of **Bicske**, Orbán played for the village team before helping set up a football academy in the name of Hungary's greatest player. Orbán had the country's greatest architect, Imre Makovecz, organic in approach, design a cathedral-like arena. Its first match was the final of the Puskás Cup for youth teams in 2014, the winners Real Madrid, whose legendary old Hungarian star they nicknamed Pancho.



Running to the Pancho Aréna is a newly built narrow-gauge rail, the Vál-völgyi Kisvasút. It sets off from the village where Orbán's other grandfather lived, **Alcsútdoboz**, site of the Puskás Ferenc Sport Hotel.

A feeder club for Fehérvár FC in nearby Székesfehérvár, the Felcsút nursery side Puskás Akadémia won promotion to NB I in 2013 and came within a penalty shoot-out of cup silverware in 2018.

Bearings

Budapest Airport is 80km (50 miles) from **Bicske**, served by half-hourly trains from **Budapest Déli station** (journey time 35mins, Ft745/€2.15) which arrive at beneath a road bridge. Above, from the **Bicske, vasútállomás bejárati út** stop, **buses** run every 30mins-1hr to **Felcsút** 10mins away. Bicske itself is a 5-10min walk away, turning right on the bridge. The nearest cab firm is **Lővei Family Taxi** in **Páty** (+36 20 286 0668).

Bed

By the arboretum in Alcsútdoboz, at the opposite end of the narrow-gauge rail from the stadium 35mins away, the rustic three-star **Puskás Ferenc Sport Hotel** also runs a popular terrace restaurant. Sixteen rooms, some with balconies, overlook greenery, with horse riding next door. The only hotel in Bicske, the family-friendly **Báder Fogadó** stands at the other end of town from the train station, on Szent László utca,

across the main road from the lake. Another rustic hideaway, it comprises 25 standard rooms with a classic Hungarian restaurant connected by a staircase lined with an extensive collection of football pennants. Wines from nearby Etyek also feature. There's an outdoor pool in summer and a children's playground.

Beer

In Alcsútdoboz, the **Hegedűs Étterem** on main Szabadság utca exudes Hungarian tradition, offering classic Magyar drinks and dishes, with a pool table thrown in and Puskás Akadémia fixtures on the wall. Further along, the **Mészáros** combines a modern bar, pizzas and bowling, with a sunny terrace.

Felcsút itself has few bars – the **Vértes** at main road Fő utca 59, is part shop-part bar.

In Bicske, the colourful **Homály** on Kossuth tér is terrace café, bar, kitchen and nightspot in one, and a very pleasant place to watch the game. Round the corner on main Szent István út, the **Korona** is a prominent, spacious pub/pizzeria by the bus stop for Felcsút.

At Bicske station, the stand-alone **Bakterház** serves standard Hungarian drinks to travellers waiting for their train, gossip shared in the dowdy interior. **LI**



Pancho Aréna

For a club whose home gates average 1,300, in a village of 1,700 people, **Puskás Akadémia** from **Felcsút** attract an awful lot of attention. And it's not just the magnificent stadium, the **Pancho Aréna**, created by Imre Makovecz, known for his stunning

churches. The reason can be found a short walk away, the house where Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán lives, overlooking the whole football realm he has created in the name – and nickname, Pancho – of Ferenc Puskás.

First, on the 80th anniversary of his birthday, Orbán helped set up an



academy here in 2007. Then a nursery club for the nearby main team, Fehérvár, formerly Videoton. Then came the stadium, an architectural wonder completed after its designer died in 2011.

Though only holding 3,500, this is Hungary's football hub, a complex of ten training pitches and 14 dressing rooms. As an academy, its greatest product has probably been László Kleinheisler, the fiery midfielder whose stunning goal against Norway in the Euro 2016 qualifying play-off practically reversed 40 years of Hungarian football hurt in one shot.

Off the pitch, the VIP section gets most focus, not least when Orbán



and his associates are talking shop while the game goes on. These national influencers also convened for the 2018 Hungarian Cup Final in Budapest, Újpest roared on to victory by the crowd, Puskás Akadémia quietly missing out on a first trophy.

From 2020, PAFC began to compete in Europe, beating Inter Turku and holding Vitoria Guimarães to a draw at this idiosyncratic ground, also used by Videoton while their own stadium was being rebuilt, and Hungary's various youth sides from the under-21s down. It shares national duties with nearby Telki, another football complex overseen by the Hungarian FA, and fellow co-host of the European Under-17 Championship.

Note the golden statue of Ferenc Puskás in full flow outside the administrative offices.

At the Pancho Aréna, the scattering of home fans occupies sectors 1C/2D behind the south goal on Puskás Ferenc utca, 1A/B in the stand nearest Fő út, and 2E-G opposite. For domestic fixtures, away fans enter through gate 3 to access sectors 3H/I in the north-east corner.

Transport

Fairly regular buses from **Bicske**, either from the bridge above the station or the Korona pizzeria on main Szent István út take 10min to reach Felcsút. One stop after the entrance to the village is **Felcsút, terményraktár** – the stadium is alongside.

The **Vál-völgyi Kisvasút** narrow-gauge rail is a nice way to travel to a football match – but only makes sense if you're staying/dining at the **Puskás Ferenc Sport Hotel** by the arboretum at **Alcsútdoboz** at the other terminal. The journey takes 35mins.

Bars

The only bar in the vicinity is the **Mediterrán Kávéház**, with a little covered terrace on main Fő utca 161, diagonally opposite the complex. News clippings relating to PAFC have been mounted behind the bar, where standard bottled beer (no draught) is dispensed, plus decent coffee. Décor is otherwise limited to James Dean and the Colosseum in Rome. **L9**

Telki

Thirty minutes west of Budapest, little **Telki** was granted its place on the football map thanks to the then Hungarian FA president István Kisteleki, who sited the national training centre here in 2007. Months after it was unveiled by Sepp Blatter and Michel Platini in May 2009, Telki was also where he and Viktor Orbán held showdown talks.

Re-elected Hungarian Prime Minister in 2010, Orbán then took over the massive overhaul of Hungarian football, and the rebuilding of stadiums across the country.

Ex-Vasas player Kisteleki duly stepped out of the limelight. He was the successful entrepreneur who had raised the three billion forints the project required, around a quarter provided by FIFA. Telki was the first step in Hungary's football revival after 20 years of post-Communist decline. Qualification for two major finals, one co-hosted by Budapest, staging the Euro Under-17s and the Europa League final, all followed this initiative.

Kisteleki had the four-star **Global Hotel**, with a pool and spa, built alongside, allowing teams to stay and train. Here is where Hungary's squad gathers before major games



and its youth sides are drilled. With a restaurant and bar attached, there's no need to leave the complex – in fact, there would be little reason to. With a café/bakery by the main road that brings in the few visitors from Budapest, a restaurant long closed opposite, and shops another two bus stops away, Telki is not the kind of place where young footballers can party. This is the Hungarian countryside, where days start and finish early.

Of Telki's several pitches, the main one features a stand holding 1,000 seated spectators, due to witness three games at Euro U-17.

Bearings

A yellow **Volánbusz** leaves for Telki around every 30mins from transport hub **Szél Kálmán tér** on red metro M2 in Budapest. The stop is between the KFC and the Pingrumba restaurant, with a ticket machine alongside – you can also pay the driver



(Ft370/€1). Journey time is around 30-40mins. Just inside Telki, **Hóvirág utca** is nearest to the stadium – walk across the main road, take the first left around the cemetery and follow the signpost for the Global Hotel. The next stop, **Ófalu**, drops you at the administrative centre of Telki, then **Muskáti utca** is good for the only bar in town, the **Csehülünk Kisvendéglő**. The last bus back is just after 11pm.

Bed & beer

Telki's only hotel, **Global**, forms part of the sport complex. Its 81 rooms and four suites cater to allcomers, as does the expansive **lobby bar** with match action screened on facing walls. The pool, jacuzzis and sauna complex with a salt chamber are for hotel guests only.



By the roundabout close to the Hóvirág utca bus stop, **Telki Kovászda** operates as an artisanal bakery and café, with seats outside for alfresco coffee. Two bus stops or a 15min walk along main Fő utca, the excellent **Csehülünk Kisvendéglő** on Muskáti utca (turn right at the junction) is a decent restaurant and convivial terrace bar, Czech beers a speciality. **LE**