

Great Plain



The nationalist poet Sándor Petőfi, in describing the Great Plain as 'My world and home... The Alföld, the open sea', accurately summed up the nostalgic fervour Hungarians have for their beloved 'Midwest'. Like Australians and their Outback, many Magyars view it romantically: shepherds fight the elements in winter and try not to go stir-crazy in summer when the notorious mirages rise off the baking soil, leading them, their mop-like puli dogs and flocks astray.

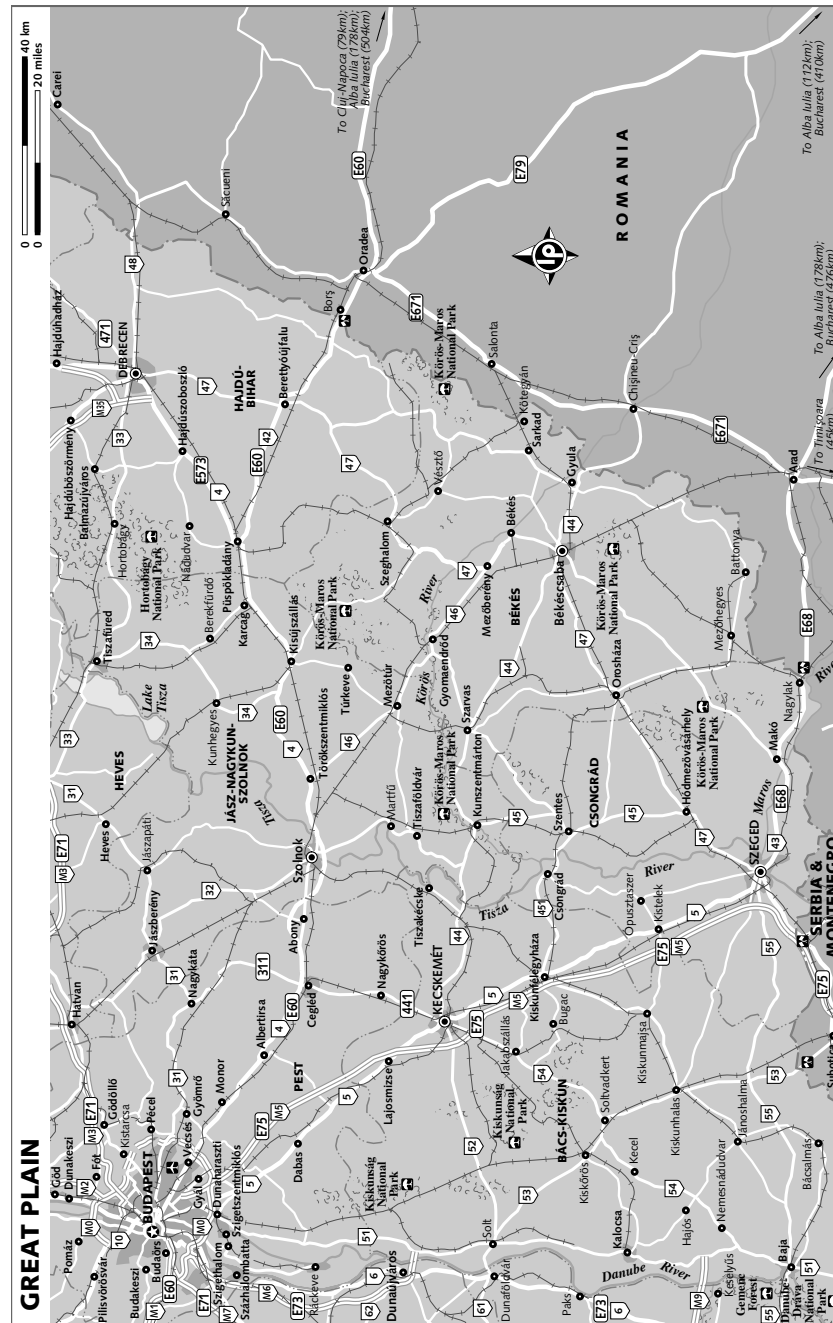
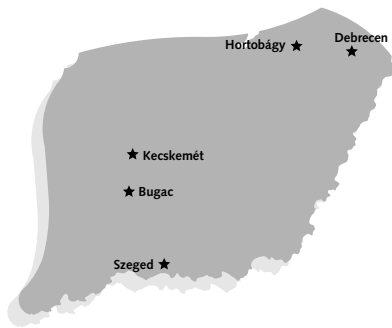
The Great Plain, covering some 45,000 sq km east and southeast of Budapest, makes up half the nation's territory but only about a third of the population lives there. At times numbingly flat and monotonous, at others captivating and enthralling, there's no arguing that it has a spell-binding quality that only comes from big skies and endless, uninterrupted prairies.

But the Plain is not a one-dimensional attraction; it is also home to cities of graceful architecture and easy-going recreational areas. Szeged, the unofficial capital of the Plain, is a centre for art and contains Art-Nouveau gems, while its neighbour Kecskemét is a small city packing a big punch with *fin de siècle* elegance. Debrecen, Hungary's second-largest city, commands the east with a vibrant mix of bars, clubs and engaging museums, while the spas of the Hajdúság region and the resort towns on Lake Tisza ensure your stay can be as lazy as you like.

While Hungarians generally divide the Great Plain into 'between the Danube and the Tisza Rivers' and the land 'beyond the Tisza', this does not really reflect the lie of the land, the routes that travellers usually take or, frankly, what's of interest. Instead, it can be divided into the Central Plain, the Eastern Plain and the Southern Plain.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Applauding the astounding 'five-in-hand' horsemanship at Bugac's **horse show** (p247)
- Enjoying the best Szeged has to offer: **Ferenc Móra Museum** (p263), **Art Nouveau New Synagogue** (p263) and **szegedi halászlé** (spicy fish soup)
- Kicking back with nature in **Hortobágy** (p238), the epitome of the *puszta* ('deserted' or 'uninhabited' lands)
- Wondering how such fine Art-Nouveau and Secessionist architecture ever arrived in **Kecskemét** (p243)
- Taking in the museums and nightlife of **Debrecen** (p233), the capital of the east



History

Five hundred years ago the region was not a steppe but forest land at the constant mercy of the flooding Tisza and Danube Rivers. The Turks felled most of the trees, destroying the protective cover and releasing the topsoil to the winds; villagers fled north or to the market towns and *khas* (towns under the sultan's jurisdiction). The region had become the *puszta*, home to shepherds, fisher folk, runaway serfs and outlaws. The regulation of the rivers in the 19th century dried up the marshes and allowed for methodical irrigation, paving the way for intensive agriculture, particularly on the Southern Plain.

CENTRAL PLAIN

The Central Plain, the smallest of the Great Plain's divisions, stretches eastward from Budapest to the Tisza River and encompasses the likes of Szolnok and Jászberény, towns of little importance to most travellers even though they have a handful of architectural delights and historical gems. The biggest attraction in the region is Lake Tisza, Hungary's second largest and a water-lover's paradise.

SZOLNOK

☎ 56 / pop 77,600

Szolnok is not a pretty city; much of its skyline consists of ugly concrete blocks built for practical, rather than aesthetic, purposes. The centre does, however, have a few old monuments, and the city's thermal spas across the Tisza lend it a calm, almost laid-back feel.

History

A 'deed of gift' issued by King Géza I makes mention of Szolnok, then called Zounok, as early as 1075, and it has remained the most important settlement in the Central Plain ever since.

Szolnok has had its share of troubles: it was laid to waste more than a dozen times over the centuries. The last disaster came in 1944, when Allied bombing all but flattened the city and the retreating German troops blew up the bridge over the Tisza.

Orientation

Szolnok is situated on the confluence of the Tisza and the narrow Zagyva Rivers. Its

main street, Kossuth Lajos út, runs roughly east-west a few blocks north of the Tisza. Across the Tisza Bridge (Tisza híd), rebuilt in 1963, is the city's recreational area Tisza Park (Tisza-liget), which has the majority of the city's accommodation, as well as swimming pools. A backwater of the Tisza, Alcsi-Holt-Tisza, lies southeast of the park.

The city's busy train station (Jubileumi tér) is a couple of kilometres west of the city centre at the end of Baross Gábor út (the continuation of Kossuth Lajos út). The bus station (Ady Endre utca) is a few minutes' walk north of Kossuth Lajos út.

Information

Ibusz (☎ 423 602; Szapáry út 24; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) Travel agent.

Main post office (☎ 341 301; Baross Gábor út 14; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat)

OTP bank (☎ 420 033; Szapáry út 31) Has a 24-hour ATM.

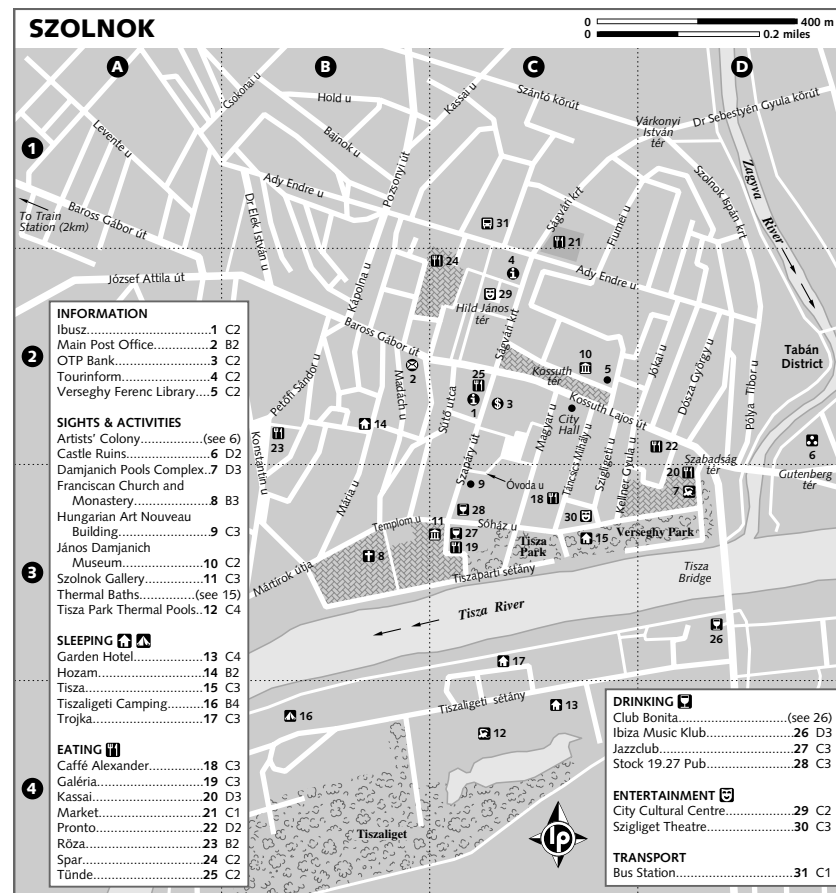
Tourinform (☎ 424 704; szolnok-m@tourinform.hu; Ságvári körút 4; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 8am-4pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep-mid-Jun) Small office just south of the bus station.

Verseghy Ferenc library (☎ 510 110; Kossuth tér 2; per hr 100Ft; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Internet access.

Sights

The **János Damjanich Museum** (☎ 421 602; Kossuth tér 4; one exhibition 200Ft, all exhibitions 700Ft, guided tours 1500Ft, Tue admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), a well-laid out museum devoted to Szolnok's history, is easily the town's highlight. It's divided into three sections: archaeological finds from the Bronze Age and Roman times; an extensive ethnographical collection; and exhibits relating to Szolnok's history, especially the artists' colony. The latter often showcases contemporary local artists.

Like so many fortresses on the Great Plain, Szolnok Castle was blown to bits by the Habsburgs in 1710, and the rubble was later used to rebuild the city centre. What little is left of the **castle ruins** – just a bit of wall – can be seen near Gutenberg tér, across the Zagyva River. Gutenberg tér is also the site of Hungary's most famous **artists' colony** (művésztelep; ☎ 425 549; Gutenberg tér 4), founded in 1902 and once counting among its members the realist painters Adolf Fényes, István Nagy and László Mednyánszky. Fronting the Zagyva northeast of Szabadság tér is the



Tabán district, with the last remaining peasant houses in Szolnok.

The **Szolnok Gallery** (☎ 378 023; Templom utca 2; adult/child 100/50Ft; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Nov-Apr) shows works by contemporary artists from the region. The primary reason for visiting the gallery is to see the building itself – a Romantic-style **synagogue** that was designed by Lipót Baumhorn in 1898. (Baumhorn also did the glorious temples in Szeged and Gyöngyös.) West of the gallery are the baroque **Franciscan church and monastery** (Ferencs templom és kolostor; Templom utca 8) completed in 1757 – the city's oldest buildings.

Architecture buffs should walk up Szapáry út from the Szolnok Gallery for a look

at a fine example of a **Hungarian Art Nouveau building** (Szapáry út 19); today it houses a few small businesses.

Activities

Szolnok is a spa town and has several places where you can 'take the waters'. The **Tisza Park thermal pools** (Tiszaligeti sétány; adult/child 750/550Ft; ☎ 9am-8pm mid-May-Aug), across the river, is the town's largest swimming complex and comes complete with slides.

Closer to town, just before the Tisza Bridge, is the **Damjanich indoor and outdoor thermal pool** (Damjanich utca 3; adult/child 550/400Ft; ☎ 6am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-7pm Sat & Sun May-Sep; 6am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 7am-1pm Sun Oct-Apr) and a large sunbathing area. The more serious **thermal**

baths (adult/child 800/500Ft; ☎ 7.30am-6pm daily May-Sep, 7.30am-4pm Mon-Wed, 7.30am-8pm Thu, 7.30am-10pm Fri & Sat, 7.30am-1pm Sun Oct-Apr), those at the Tisza hotel, are mock Turkish with a bit of Art Deco thrown in and are a great place to laze away an afternoon.

Sleeping

Check with Ibusz regarding private rooms (2500Ft to 4000Ft per person) in the city.

Tisza (☎ 510 850; www.hotelstisza.hu; Verseghy park 2; s/d from 11,300/15,700Ft; (P) 🚿) Tisza is Szolnok's old-world hotel built in 1928 over a thermal spring. Rooms come in two categories – Superior and Standard (which basically means the more money you spend, the more antique the furniture). Add-ons include entrance to the attached spa, and a decent pub and restaurant.

Hozam (☎ 510 530; www.hozamhotel.hu; Mária utca 25; s/d 16,000/22,000Ft; (P) 🚿) Szolnok's most exclusive hotel and one of its smallest. Convenient to the centre, it is on a quiet residential street and comes complete with a sauna, Jacuzzi, solarium and fitness room.

Garden Hotel (☎ 520 530; www.gardenhotel.hu in Hungarian; Tiszaligeti sétány; s/d 16,500/21,500Ft; (P) 🚿) Garden caters mainly to business clients and therefore has all the amenities you would normally expect to find: modern, functional rooms, a sauna and tennis courts for guest use and a quality restaurant.

Trojka (☎ 514 600; www.trojka.hu; Tiszaligeti sétány 5; s/d 4000/8000Ft) This small *pension*, opposite the thermal pools on Tiszaliget, has cosy rooms, with wood floors and the all-important bug mesh on windows.

Tiszaligeti Camping (☎ 424 403; Tiszaligeti sétány 34; camp sites per adult/child/tent 800/600/500Ft, 2-person bungalows 6700Ft; motel dm/s/d 2100/5600/6500Ft; camping ☎ May-Sep; (P)) This large camping site occupies a quiet corner of the Tiszaliget. Its motel complex looks more like an army barracks than anything else, but its small bungalows are cosy in a rustic way.

Eating

Kassai (☎ 426 603; Damjanich utca 5; mains 1000Ft) Kassai is very much a no-frills restaurant that has top-rate food, service and atmosphere. The menu is packed with Hungarian favourites and, with the Tisza so close, plenty of fish dishes.

Galéria (☎ 378 358; Szapáry út 1; mains 1600-2500Ft) With a cool interior, prompt service and

an international menu (including curry!), Galéria rates as one of the best restaurants in Szolnok. Its outdoor seating in summer has views of the synagogue.

Pronto (Kossuth Lajos út 6; pizzas & salads under 600Ft; ☎ Mon-Sat) This clean and simple establishment churns out pizzas and salads by the truckload for hungry locals on the run.

Róza (☎ 426 630; Konstantin utca 36; mains 1000Ft; ☎ 11am-10pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) Róza is a short walk from Kossuth tér, which is perfect for building up an appetite for the better-than-average Hungarian food served here. Its courtyard is peaceful, as long as the nearby petrol station isn't doing a roaring trade.

Tünde (Szapáry út 28; ice cream from 100Ft) Taking up the ground floor of a decorative Art-Nouveau building, this is as good a place as any for ice cream and cake.

Caffé Alexander (Táncsics Mihály utca 15) Alexander is directly opposite the Szigliget Theatre and makes a perfect pit stop before and/or after a show.

There's a food hall and Spar supermarket in the Szolnok Plaza, and the city's large covered market is near the bus station.

Drinking

Szapáry út has a couple of popular pubs and clubs worth checking out, including the strangely named **Stock 19.27 Pub** (Szapáry út 7) and the dark cellar bar **Jazzclub** (cnr Szapáry út & Söház utca).

Szolnok's big clubs, Ibiza Music Klub and Club Bonita, are south of the river. They share the same building at Tiszaligeti sétány 1, and alternate evenings – Ibiza takes Friday night, while Bonita Saturday. Entry is around 500Ft.

Entertainment

For up-to-date entertainment information, check the listings in the freebie biweekly *Szolnoki Est*.

City Cultural Centre (☎ 514 575; Hild János tér 1) This centre near Tourinform can tell you when there are concerts on at the Franciscan church and whether Szolnok's celebrated symphony orchestra or Béla Bartók Chamber Choir are performing.

Szigliget Theatre (Szigligeti színház; ☎ 342 633; Tisza park 1) Across from the Tisza hotel, it is one of the most attractive theatres in provincial Hungary. At the forefront of drama in Hungary in the 1970s and '80s, the

Szigliget was the first theatre in Eastern Europe to stage *Dr Zhivago* (1988) – pretty daring stuff at the time.

Getting There & Away

Buses go to towns around Hungary, including Jászberény (725Ft, 1¼ hours, 55km, eight daily), Kecskemét (846Ft, 1¼ hours, 65km, seven daily), Budapest (1150Ft, 1¼ hours, 95km, two daily), Szeged (1690Ft, three hours, 135km, seven daily) and Tiszafüred (907Ft, two hours, 70km, three daily).

Szolnok has excellent train services; you can travel to/from Budapest (1004Ft, 1¼ hours, 100km), Debrecen (1420Ft, 1¼ hours, 120km), Nyíregyháza (1828Ft, two hours, 170km), Békéscsaba (1004Ft, 1½ hours, 95km) and dozens of points in between without changing. For Miskolc (2030Ft, 3¾ hours, 185km), change at Hatvan; Cegléd is where you transfer for Kecskemét (544Ft, one hour, 60km) and Szeged (1624Ft, 2¾ hours, 145km).

Getting Around

From the train station, buses 7 or 8 will take you to Kossuth tér. If heading for the accommodation in Tisza Park, take bus 15.

You can also take a **taxi** (☎ 444 444).

JÁSZBERÉNY

☎ 57 / pop 28,200

Today Jászberény is a sleepy town of tree-lined streets and quiet squares, but as early as the 13th century it was the main political, administrative and economic centre of the Jazygians, an obscure pastoral people of Persian origin brought in by King Béla IV (r 1235–70) to strengthen his position. Its biggest (if only) drawcard has always been the Lehel Horn, an ancient, almost magical ivory piece, for centuries the Jazygians chief's symbol of power.

Orientation

The main street is a long 'square' (Lehel vezér tér), which runs almost parallel to the narrow 'city branch' of the Zagyva River. The bus station (Petőfi tér) is two blocks to the west across the Zagyva River, while the train station is 1.5km southwest at the end of Rákóczi út.

Information

Ibusz (☎ 412 143; Szövetkezet utca 7/a) To the southwest of Tourinform.

OTP bank (Lehel vezér tér 28) With ATM.

Post office (Lehel vezér tér 8)

Tourinform (☎ 406 439; jaszbereny@tourinform.hu; Lehel vezér tér 33; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep–mid-Jun) In the Déryné Cultural Centre.

Sights & Activities

The **Jász Museum** (☎ 412 753; Táncsics Mihály utca 5; adult/child 200/100Ft; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct), housed in what was once the Jazygian military headquarters, runs the gamut of Jász culture and life – from costumes and woodcarving to language. But all aisles lead to the **Lehel Horn**, an 8th-century Byzantine work. Legend has it that a Magyar leader called Lehel (or Lél) was taken captive in the Battle of Augsburg (AD 955) against the united German armies and, just before he was executed, killed the king by hitting him on the head with the ivory horn. The alleged murder weapon, richly carved with birds, battle scenes and anatomically correct satyrs, doesn't seem to have suffered any serious damage from the blow to the royal noggin.

The museum also spotlights local sons and daughters who made good, including the watercolourist András Sáros and the 19th-century actress Róza Széppataki Déryné. You've seen Mrs Déry before, though you may not know it. She is forever immortalised in that irritating Herend porcelain figurine seen in antique shops everywhere of a woman in a wide organza skirt playing her *lant* (lute) and kissing the air.

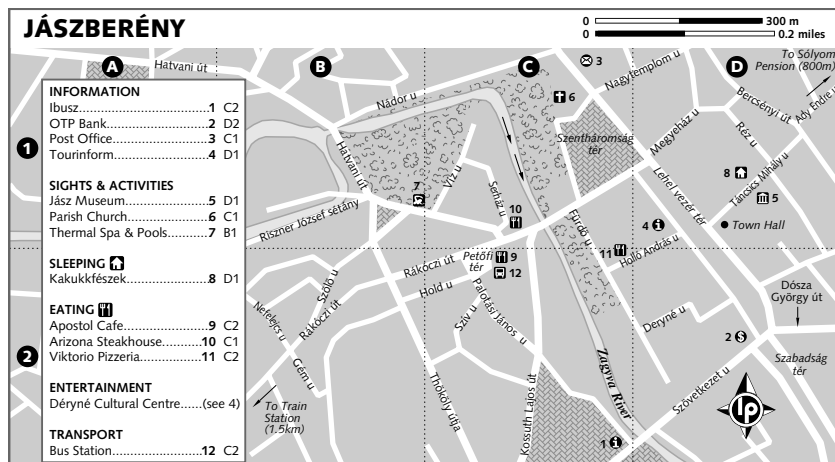
Have a look at the fading ceiling frescoes inside the Roman Catholic **parish church** (plébániatemplom; Szentháromság tér 4; admission free) north of Tourinform; the nave was designed in 1774 by András Mayerhoffer and József Jung, two masters of baroque architecture.

For swimming all year round, there's a **thermal spa & pools** (☎ 412 108; Hatvani út 5; spa adult/child 500/350Ft; ☎ 9am-8pm Tue & Thu, 9am-6pm Wed, Fri & Sat, 9am-5pm Sun, pools adult/child 500/350Ft; ☎ 9am-6pm May-Aug) west of the Zagyva.

Sleeping & Eating

Ibusz can arrange private rooms (2500Ft per person).

Kakukkfészek (Cuckoo's Nest; ☎ 412 345; Táncsics Mihály utca 8; s/d 2000/4000Ft) The owners of Kakukkfészek may be a little cuckoo themselves, but they're supremely friendly and have created a homely atmosphere. Rooms



are filled with mismatching furniture and bedding and there are no *en suite* options.

Sólyom Pension (☎ 401 267; www.hotels.hu/solyom; Sólyom út 8; r from 6000Ft; lunch menu 600Ft, mains 1200Ft; (P)) The facilities at this *pension* may be more modern and comfortable than at Kakukkfészek but its often unfriendly service and location, 800m northeast of the centre, are less appealing. Its restaurant packs in the locals at midday with its hearty Hungarian cuisine.

Arizona Steakhouse (cnr Rákóczi út & Serház utca; mains 1500-2500Ft) A rare breed in these parts, with an international menu and American-style steaks, Arizona Steakhouse is decked out in wild-west gear and has picnic tables in the middle of the square.

Viktorio Pizzeria (☎ 411 053; Holló András utca; pizzas 400-1000Ft, mains 500-1000Ft) On a peaceful street just around the corner from the cultural centre, this simple pizzeria has an incredible selection (40 varieties) of pizza.

Apostol Cafe (Hold utca 4; ice cream 100Ft; ☎ 9am-9pm) Apostol is for those who worship that lovely substance – ice cream. Its large terrace is perfect for watching the comings and goings in the town's bus station.

Entertainment

Déryné Cultural Centre (☎ 406 439; Lehel vezér tér 33) This central cultural centre is your first and best source of information for what's on; otherwise, consult the free bi-weekly *Szolnoki Est* for slim listings on Jászberény.

Getting There & Away

Frequent bus departures include those to Budapest (1030Ft, 1½ hours, 80km, nine daily), Szolnok (725Ft, 1½ hours, 55km, six daily) and Kecskemét (1090Ft, two hours, 85km, seven daily). There are also daily buses to Szeged (2540Ft, 4¼ hours, 200km, three daily) and Tiszafüred (1330Ft, 2½ hours, 105km, one daily).

Jászberény lies approximately halfway between Hatvan and Szolnok on the train line. These two cities are on Hungary's two main trunk lines, and virtually all main cities in the east are accessible from one or the other. Both Hatvan and Szolnok have direct links to Budapest.

Getting Around

Bus 4 connects the train station with the bus terminus, from where you can walk to the centre of town.

TISZAFÜRED

☎ 59 / pop 13,700

Tiszafüred was a rather sleepy town on the Tisza River until the early 1980s when the river was dammed and a reservoir opened up more than 125 sq km of lakes to holiday-makers. While hardly the 'Lake Balaton of the Great Plain' as the tourist brochures say, Lake Tisza (Tisza-tó) and its primary resort Tiszafüred offer swimmers and boating enthusiasts a break before continuing on to the country's attractions to the east.

Orientation

Tiszafüred lies at the northeast end of Lake Tisza. From the bus and train stations, opposite one another on Vasút utca, walk 10 or 15 minutes west and then southwest to the beach and camp sites. To reach the centre of town, follow Baross Gábor utca and then Fő út south for about a kilometre.

Information

E-Punkt (Órvényi út 5; per hr 125Ft; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Thu, 8am-noon Fri) Internet access.

OTP bank (Piac út 3) Behind Fő út.

Post office (Fő út 14) On the main artery running through the centre.

Tourinform (☎ 511 123; tiszafured@tourinform.hu; Földút 21; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 8am-4pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep–mid-Jun) A helpful office between the lake and the town's thermal spa.

Sights

Tiszafüred is essentially a resort town, but there are a couple of sights worth stopping for, including the **Pál Kiss Museum** (☎ 352 106; Tariczky sétány 6; adult/child 200/100Ft; ☎ 9am-noon, 1-5pm Tue-Sun). Housed in a beautiful old manor (1840) south of the city's thermal baths, its collection is given over to the everyday lives of Tisza fisher folk and the work of local potters.

The area east of Szőlősi út is a veritable patchwork of traditional houses, with thatched roofs and orderly little flower and vegetable gardens – a nice respite from the hubbub of the beach. One of them, the **Gáspár Nyüző House** (Nyüző Gáspár Fazekas Tájház; Malom utca 12; adult/child 150/100Ft; ☎ 9am-noon, 2-5pm Tue-Sun May-Oct), is a former potter's residence and contains antique potting wheels, drying racks, furniture and plates in pale primary colours and patterns of stars, and birds and flowers unique to the region. Just southeast of the village house is the working pottery workshop of **Imre Szücs** (☎ 351 483; Belsőkertsor út 4/a). His pottery, with its highly decorative and colourful markings, is in stark contrast to the dark and sombre creations from Mohács or Nádudvar.

Activities

Activities on the lake include fishing, boating, swimming and baking in the sun. **Fortuna Camping** (☎ 511 304; Holt-Tisza part) and **Hableány** (☎ 353 333; Hunyadi utca 2) rent canoes/paddle boats/motorboats for 1000/1000/4000Ft a

day. There's an extra charge of around 2000Ft for fuel with motorboat rentals. If you prefer to let someone else do the driving, contact **Kormoran boat harbour** (☎ 350 350; Tiszaörvényi), **Szabics boat harbour** (☎ 06 30 954 8620; Tiszaörvényi) or **Városi Kikötő** (☎ 06 20 916 2589; www.varosikikoto.hu; Gát sétány 1), all of whom offer fishing and sightseeing packages starting around 7500Ft.

If the lake is too cold for you, Tiszafüred's **thermal spa** (☎ 352 366; Poroszlói út; adult/child 450/350Ft; ☎ pools 7.30am-7pm May-Sep, sauna 8am-7pm mid-Mar–mid-Nov) has four open-air pools, as well as a sauna and a wide range of medical services.

Those looking for exercise away from water can try their hand at horse riding at **Gulyás farm** (☎ 351 814; per hr 2500-3500Ft) in Tiszaörvény near the Hableány hotel, or rent a bicycle (200/1000Ft per hour/day) from **Angler Camping** (☎ 351 220; Holt-Tisza part), **Fortuna Camping** (☎ 511 304; Holt-Tisza part) or **Hableány** (☎ 353 333; Hunyadi utca 2).

Sleeping

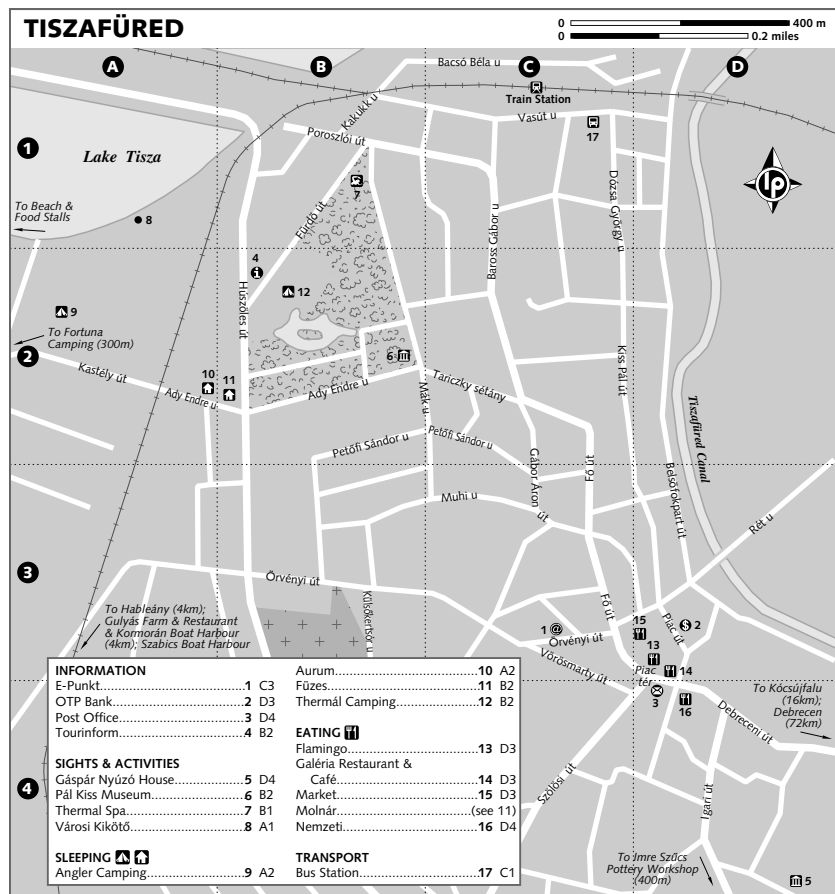
Tourinform can supply you with a long list of private accommodation (rooms from 2500Ft) in and around Tiszafüred.

Füzes (☎ 351 854; Húsözles út 31b; s/d 3500/6600Ft; (P) ☎) Füzes is a friendly 10-room *pension* with cosy and functional rooms, many of which overlook the Molnár restaurant next door. It's also fairly quiet, considering its proximity to busy Húsözles út.

Aurum (☎ 351 338; Ady Endre utca 29; r 7600Ft; (P)) Aurum is for those looking for a more homely feel than Füzes offers; room décor dates from when Kádár still held the country's reins (but bathrooms are modern) and the owners are welcoming.

Thermál Camping (☎ 352 911; Húsözles út 2; camp sites per person/tent 820/670Ft, bungalows 8900-9700Ft; ☎ Apr–mid-Nov; (P)) Of the 11 camp sites in Tiszafüred's immediate vicinity, Thermál is the best organised and laid out. Its tree-lined avenues are generally crammed with holiday makers over the summer, however, it's a bit of a walk to the lake's public beaches.

Angler Camping (☎ 351 220; horg.camp@dpg.hu; Holt-Tisza part; camp sites per adult/child/tent/car 650/400/500/250Ft, d/tr/q 4900/5900/6900Ft, bungalows 6000-9900Ft; ☎ Apr–Oct; (P)) This lakeside place has plenty of amenities, such as snack stalls, a restaurant, recreational facilities (including tennis) and holiday homes accommodating



two/three/four people with shared showers. Bungalows come with or without bathrooms.

Fortuna Camping (☎ 511 304; Holt-Tisza part; camp sites per adult/child/tent 600/450/650Ft, bungalows from 5200Ft; ☞ May-Sep; P) Fortuna occupies its own corner of the town and is surrounded by trees, making it a very secluded camp site. There are sports fields, a volley ball court and bike hire, and the lake is within easy walking distance.

Eating

Galéria Restaurant & Café (☎ 350 512; Fő utca 15; mains under 1000Ft) The terracotta patio on the first floor of this inviting restaurant is by far the best place to enjoy a meal in town. The

menu is loaded with fish dishes and folk art is sprinkled around the interior.

Hableány (☎ 353 333; Hunyadi utca 2; mains 1000-2000Ft) According to the locals, this is the best restaurant for fish in the Tiszafüred area, but you'll need to have your own wheels: it's in the Hotel Tiszaörvény, about 4km to the southwest.

Nemzeti (☎ 352 349; Fő út 8; lunch menu 530Ft, mains 1000Ft) The bright yellow exterior of this restaurant in the centre of town hides a rather plain interior and the occasional band of Gypsy musicians; its midday meal is excellent value, but Galéria is a better deal in the evenings.

Molnár (☎ 352 705; Húszöles út 31/b; mains 1000-2000Ft) This restaurant has a good fish

selection, as well as a handful of game and vegetarian dishes. Its breezy terrace (protected from mosquitos by netting) is a welcome respite on sticky summer days.

Flamingo (Fő út; ice cream 90Ft; ☞ 8am-8pm) This combination of *cukrászda* (cake shop) and *bronzárium* (tanning studio) does some excellent baking and scoops up some fine ice cream.

The town's **market** (Piac tér) is postage-stamp sized but has fresh fruits and vegetables; otherwise, for a quick bite, try the food stalls serving gyros, pizza and *lángos* (deep-fried dough with toppings) at the public beach and the camp sites.

Getting There & Away

Other destinations served daily by bus include Budapest (2300Ft, four hours, 185km, four daily), Szolnok (907Ft, two hours, 70km, three to five daily), Eger (725Ft, 1¼ hours, 55km, 10 daily), Jászberény (1330Ft, 2½ hours, 105km, two daily) and Debrecen (846Ft, 1¼ hours, 70km, six daily).

Tiszafüred is on the train line linking Füzesabony – from where you can carry on to Eger (430Ft, 1¼ hours, 45km) or Miskolc (890Ft, two hours, 85km) – and Debrecen (774Ft, 1½ hours, 75km), which passes through the Hortobágy region.

EASTERN PLAIN

When people imagine the *puszta*, it's the Eastern Plain (Kelet-Alföld) they see. This is where the myth of the lonely *pásztor* (shepherd) in billowy trousers, the wayside *csárdák* (inns) and Gypsy violinists was born – to be kept alive in literature, fine art and the imagination of the Hungarian people.

But it's not all open plain and big-sky country. Debrecen, Hungary's second-largest city, located on the eastern fringes of the plain, brings balance via a healthy restaurant and bar scene.

DEBRECEN

☎ 52 / pop 211,000

Debrecen is a vibrant metropolis rich in history. Its centre is surprisingly pretty, especially after the unsightly mess surrounding the bus and train stations, and is dominated by the country's largest Protestant church. Bars and restaurants are dotted

around its heart, creating a lively scene for night crawlers, while an array of museums keep most visitors busy for a day or two. It also makes a good base for forays into the *puszta* and the northeast.

History

The area around Debrecen has been settled since the earliest times. When the Magyars arrived late in the 9th century, they found a colony of Slovaks here who called the region Dobre Zliem for its 'good soil'. Debrecen's wealth, based on salt, the fur trade and cattle-raising, grew steadily through the Middle Ages and increased during the Turkish occupation; the city kept all sides happy by paying tribute to the Ottomans, the Habsburgs and Transylvanian princes at the same time.

By the mid-16th century much of the population had converted to Protestantism and churches were being erected with gusto, earning the city the nickname 'Calvinist Rome'. Debrecen played a pivotal role in the 1848–49 War of Independence, and it experienced a major building boom in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Orientation

Debrecen is an easy city to negotiate. A ring road, built on the city's original earthen walls, encloses the Belváros, or Inner Town. This is bisected by Piac utca, which runs northward from the train station (Petőfi tér) to Kálvin tér, site of the Great Church and Debrecen's centre. With the exception of Nagyerdei Park, the recreational 'Big Forest Park' some 3km north, almost all of Debrecen's attractions are within easy walking distance of Kálvin tér.

The bus station (Külső-Vásártér) is on the 'outer marketplace' at the western end of Széchenyi utca.

Information

Csokonai Bookshop (☎ 535 786; Piac utca 45) Has good foreign language and map sections.

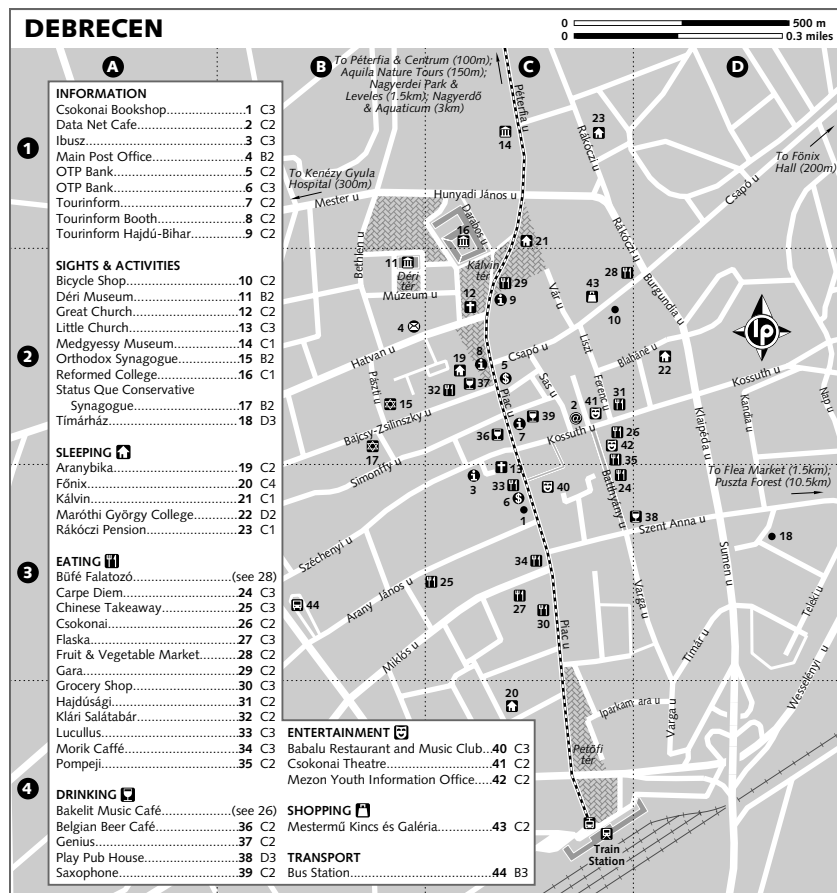
Data Net Cafe (☎ 536 724; Kossuth utca 8; per hr 420Ft; ☞ 8am-midnight) Also has cheap international calls.

Ibusz (☎ 415 555; Révész tér 2) Near the Little Church.

Kenéz Gyula Hospital (☎ 413 555; Bartók Béla út 2-25)

Main post office (Hatvan utca 5-9)

Maróthi György College Library (☎ 502 780; Blaháné utca 15; ☞ 9am-4pm Mon-Thu, 9am-2pm Fri) First hour is free.



OTP bank (Piac utca 16 & 45) Both have 24-hour ATMs.
Tourinform (☎ 412 250; debrecen@tourinform.hu); town hall office (Piac utca 20; ☎ 8am-8pm mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep–mid-Jun); summer booth (Kossuth tér; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri mid-Jun–mid-Sep) The very helpful town hall office has more information than you can carry away; it can also provide contacts for city guides.

Tourinform Hajdú-Bihar (☎ 534 544; hajdu-m@tourinform.hu; Kálvin tér 2/a; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Information on the entire region.

www.debrecen.hu Covers a range of subjects in Hungarian, English and German.

Sights

Many of the town's big sights are at the northern end of Piac utca, including the

yellow neoclassical **Great Church** (Nagytemplom; ☎ 412 694; Kálvin tér; adult/child 200/100Ft; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat, noon-4pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-1pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-1pm Sun Nov-Mar). Built in 1821, it has become so synonymous with Debrecen that mirages of its twin clock towers were reportedly seen on the Great Plain early last century. Accommodating some 3000 people, the Great Church is Hungary's largest Protestant church, and it was here that Lajos Kossuth read the Declaration of Independence from Austria on 14 April 1849. The nave is rather plain and austere aside from the magnificent organ in the loft behind the pulpit. Climb the 210 steps to the top of the west clock tower for grand views over the city.

North of the church stands the **Reformed College** (Református Kollégium; ☎ 414 744; Kálvin tér 16; adult/child 300/150Ft, guided tours 2000Ft; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), built in 1816, the site of a prestigious secondary school and theological college since the Middle Ages. Downstairs, there are exhibits on religious art and sacred objects (including a 17th-century chalice made from a coconut) and on the school's history, where 'early to bed, early to rise' was the motto. Upstairs is the relatively bland 650,000-volume library and the bright, white oratory, where the break-away National Assembly met in 1849 and Hungary's postwar provisional government was declared in 1944.

Folklore exhibits at the **Déri Museum** (☎ 322 207; Déri tér 1; adult/child 650/325Ft; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar), a short walk west of the Reformed College, offer excellent insights into life on the *puszta* and the bourgeois citizens of Debrecen up to the 19th century. Mihály Munkácsy's mythical interpretations of the Hortobágy and his *Christ's Passion* take pride of place in a separate art gallery. The museum's entrance is flanked by four superb bronzes by sculptor Ferenc Medgyessy, a local boy who merits his own **Medgyessy Museum** (☎ 413 572; Péterfia utca 28; adult/child 200/100Ft; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun) in an old burgher house to the northeast.

Just walking along Piac utca and down some of the side streets, with their array of neoclassical, baroque and Art Nouveau buildings, is a treat. Kossuth utca and its continuation Széchenyi utca, where the baroque Calvinist **Little Church** (Kistemplom; ☎ 342 872; Révész tér 2; admission free; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri & Sun), completed in 1726, stands with its bastion-like tower, are especially interesting. The **Status Que Conservative Synagogue** (Kápolnási utca), just south of Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca, dates from 1909 and is once again falling apart, while the façade of the nearby **Orthodox synagogue** (Pászti utca 6) has enjoyed a lick of paint but its interior is still waiting for some much-needed TLC.

Away from the centre, the **Timárház** (☎ 321 260; Nagy Gál István utca 6; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) is a folk-craft centre and workshop, where embroiderers, basket weavers, carvers and so on do their stuff in rotation, while the colourful **flea market** (Vágóhíd utca; ☎ daily) attracts a motley group of Ukrainians, Poles, Romanians, Roma and Hungarians from

Transylvania who hawk everything from socks to live animals. It's served by buses 9, 15, 30 and 30/a from the train station.

Activities

The city's **Nagyerdei Park** offers boating and walks along leafy trails, but the main attraction here is the **Aquaticum** (☎ 514 100; www.aquaticum.hu; adult/child 1799/1299Ft; ☎ 10am-10pm), a complex offering all manner of slides and waterfalls alongside a half-dozen indoor and open-air pools of brownish mineral and fresh water, and every type of therapy imaginable.

If you want to see more of the great outdoors, head for the **Puszta Forest** (Erdőpuszta), a protected area of pine and acacia forests, lakes and trails a few kilometres to the east and southeast of Debrecen. Bánk, the centre, has a splendid **arboretum** (Fancsika utca 93a) and there are **boats for rent** on Vekeri Lake (Vekeri-tó).

Bikes are for rent from the **bicycle shop** (☎ 456 220; Csapó utca 19; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) for 700Ft a day.

Festivals & Events

Annual events to watch out for include the **Masquerade Carnival** in February, the **Spring Festival** of performing arts in March, the famous **Floral Carnival** held in mid-August and **Jazz Days** in September.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Ibusz can arrange private rooms (from 2500Ft per person), while Tourinform can provide a list of dormitory accommodation in summer; most are located 3km north of the centre.

Maróthi György College (☎ 502 780; Blaháné utca 15; s/d 2200/4400Ft; ☎) Right in the heart of town, this is one central place with dormitory accommodation. Rooms are fairly basic, facilities are shared, and there are kitchens, a courtyard and a basketball court for guest use.

Rákóczi Pension (☎ 416 638; Rákóczi utca 39; s/d 6000/84000Ft; ☎) Rákóczi has an excellent location on a peaceful, leafy street within easy striking distance of the centre. Its rooms, which are arranged around an inner courtyard, are big, bright with *en suite* facilities, and the modern furniture rests on cool tiled floors.

Fónix (☎ 413 054; Barna utca 17; s/d 3000/4900Ft; (P)) This communist-style block, with dark corridors and simple rooms, is run by friendly staff and is just off the main drag. Ask for a room with a balcony.

MIDRANGE

Péterfia (☎ 418 246; peterfiapanzio@axelero.hu; Péterfia utca 37/b; s/d 7000/8000Ft; (P)) Péterfia is a 20-room *pension* not far north of the centre, with good-sized *en-suite* rooms filled with natural-wood furniture. Staff are friendly and its back garden is for guest use.

Centrum (☎ 416 193; centrumpanzio@axelero.hu; Péterfia utca 37/a; s/d 6900/7500-8000Ft; (P)) A bit like your grandmother's apartment if she collected tacky paraphernalia; knick-knacks and flowery odds and ends line the reception walls and public areas. Rooms are far less cluttered and the furniture is quite modern. There's a private garden out back.

Nagyerdő (☎ 410 588; reserve@hotelnagyerdő.hunguesthotels.hu; Pallagi út 5; s €46-55, d €62-76; (P) 📺) This well-organised spa hotel is a tall block in the centre of Nagyerdő Park. Rooms are comfy but fairly plain, and there's a restaurant with grilling facilities on site.

Kálvin (☎ 418 522; kalvin@civishotels.hu; Kálvin tér 4; s 9750-12,800Ft, d 10,450-14,650Ft; (P)) A large hotel on top of the Udvarház Shopping Centre, Kálvin offers a range of rooms with either pseudo-antique or bulky dark-wood furniture. Space is no problem here, and lower-priced rooms face busy Kálvin tér.

TOP END

Aranybika (☎ 508 600; aranybika@civishotels.hu; Piac utca 11-15; s €49-79, d €60-96; (P) 📺 📺) This is a landmark Art-Nouveau hotel, with 200 very different rooms, and is still the place to stay in Debrecen. Rates vary depending on whether you stay in the charming old wing or garish new building.

Aquaticum (☎ 514 111; www.aquaticum.hu; Nagyerdő park 1; r 18,500-19,500Ft; (P) 📺 📺) Aquaticum is Debrecen's answer to those wishing to enjoy the town's thermal pleasures without having to wander far. It has everything a good four-star hotel should have, plus wellness features.

Eating RESTAURANTS

Csokonai (☎ 410 802; Kossuth utca 21; mains 1200-1800Ft) This quality cellar-restaurant may be

a pub to some but it's a far better restaurant to most. Medieval décor, sharp service and excellent Hungarian specialities all help to create one of Debrecen's top eating experiences.

Lucullus (☎ 418 513; Piac utca 41; mains 1200-1800Ft) Lucullus is a favourite with locals who enjoy the restaurant's throne-like seating, convivial air and slow but attentive service. The menu is a varied selection of Hungarian dishes, including a couple of vegetarian options.

Flaska (☎ 414 582; Miklós utca 4; mains 1500Ft) Flaska is easily spotted on Miklós utca; the giant terracotta-red flask jutting out from the wall is a dead give-away. This basement restaurant comes locally recommended and serves up a storm of good Hungarian cuisine.

Leveles (☎ 532 982; Medgyessy sétány; mains 1000-2000Ft) This eatery is close to the thermal pools in a quiet park. Its German/Hungarian menu just keeps tallying up local recommendations, as does its large outdoor patio.

Pompeji (☎ 416 988; Batthyány utca 4; pizzas 900Ft) A flashy restaurant with its very own jungle, Pompeji serves fine Italian dishes and is a good spot for a drink on a warm summer evening.

Hajdúsági (cnr Liszt Ferenc utca & Kossuth utca; lunch set menu 400Ft; ☎ 11am-3pm & 4-10pm Mon-Fri, 4-10pm Sat) This is a simple restaurant, but its ever-changing set menu is a magnet to what appears to be half of Debrecen's city workers.

CAFÉS

Carpe Diem (☎ 319 007; Batthyány utca 8; teas & snacks 400Ft) With its hammock seats, greenery and serene atmosphere, this small teahouse is an oasis on a pedestrian street dominated by concrete eyesores. It stocks teas from around the world for instant consumption or later enjoyment.

Morik Caffé (☎ 413 808; Miklós utca 1; coffee 200Ft) This mock-18th-century café has its waitresses running around in blue frocks and frilly white bonnets, which is either quaint or ridiculous depending on your taste. Either way, the coffee is great.

Gara (Kálvin tér 6; ice cream from 100Ft; ☎ 9am-6pm) Gara has some of the best cakes and ice cream (made with real fruit and loads of it) outside Budapest and has lines of eager ice-cream lovers to prove it.

QUICK EATS

Büfé Falatozó (Csapó utca; 100g sausages 200Ft; ☎ 5am-3pm Mon-Sat, 5-11am Sun) In the fruit and vegetable market, this has more sausage varieties than you can shake a long roll of meat at. Try the 'inviting' liver and blood sausage; as they say, 'When in Rome...'

Chinese takeaway (☎ 588 479; Arany János utca 28; mains 550Ft) This hole in the wall is a genuine Chinese takeaway and good for a quick, cheap meal.

Klári Salátabár (☎ 412 203; Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca 3; 100g salad 100-300Ft; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri) Catering to vegetarians only, this simple salad bar is a rare breed indeed in provincial Hungary; salads are served by the 100g.

SELF-CATERING

There's a **grocery shop** (Piac utca 75; ☎ 24hr) within walking distance of the train station and the bustling covered **fruit & vegetable market** (Csapó utca; ☎ 5am-3pm Mon-Sat, 5-11am Sun) has plenty on offer.

Drinking

Bakelit Music Café (Kossuth utca 19; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Thu, 9am-2am Fri, 6pm-2am Sat) A student pub of sorts near the centre, Bakelit attracts a boisterous and friendly crowd with its loud music, dark corners and orange-and-brown booths. This is certainly not a place for a quiet chat over a glass of chilled white wine.

Belgian Beer Café (☎ 536 373; Piac utca 29) Why locals drink Belgian beer when neighbouring Slovakia and Czech Republic make such great beverages is anyone's guess. But there's no denying the popularity of this street-side café with its beer hall atmosphere.

Saxophone (Piac utca 18) Pretty people gravitate to Saxophone, and since Hungary is filled with pretty folk, it's often bursting at the seams. Its fine cocktails may also have something to do with it.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Genius (☎ 508 644; Piac utca 11-15; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon & Thu, 11am-3am Tue & Fri, 11am-11pm Wed, 7pm-5am Sat) Genius, in the Aranybika hotel, is arguably the best bar outside Budapest. Its dark red interior, lounge chairs, sexy sounds and excellent cocktails combine to create a decadent air, all of which is topped off by the occasional live music act.

Play Pub House (Batthyány utca 24-26) On a pedestrian-only street, this place is as close to an English-style pub as you'll find in town, and has outside tables made for warm weather.

Entertainment

Debrecen prides itself on its cultural life but at present has no cultural centre; for information check with the staff at **Tourinform** (☎ 412 250; Piac utca 20), the delightful **Csokonai Theatre** (☎ 455 075; Kossuth utca 10) or the **Mezon youth information office** (☎ 415 498; Batthyány utca 2b; ☎ 10am-6pm). The latter specialises in the popular music scene and has Internet access. Otherwise, pick up a copy of the biweekly entertainment freebie *Debreceni Est* and scan the listings.

Babalu Restaurant and Music Club (☎ 536 414; Piac utca 26a; ☎ noon-midnight) With its cane chairs and tropical plants, Babalu exudes a safari feel and attracts a more mature crowd. It's also one of the better spots to catch some live jazz.

Fónix Hall (☎ 518 400; Kassai utca 28) 'Phoenix' Hall is Debrecen's main venue for large events, whether they be cultural or sporting.

Shopping

You can't leave the city without buying – or at least trying – some of the famous Debrecen sausage available at butcher shops and grocery stores everywhere; the market is also a good place to procure some. While on the way to the market, why not stop in at the lovely antique-cum-curio shop **Mestermű Kincs és Galéria** (Csapó utca 24) nearby.

Getting There & Away BUS

From Debrecen you can catch a direct bus to any of the following destinations:

Destination	Price	Duration	Km	Frequency
Békéscsaba	1690Ft	3hr	135	10 daily
Eger	1690Ft	2½hr	130	8 daily
Hajdúszoboszló	302Ft	30min	20	half-hourly
Miskolc	1210Ft	2½hr	100	hourly
Nádudvar	544Ft	1hr	40	7 daily
Nyíregyháza	907Ft	1½hr	70	4 daily
Szarvas	1930Ft	3¼hr	155	2 daily
Szeged	2910Ft	5hr	230	3 daily
Tokaj	1030Ft	2hr	85	2 daily

Foreign destinations served by bus include Košice (Kassa) in Slovakia at 7am Monday to Thursday and, in Romania, Oradea (Nagyvárad) at 6.30am on Tuesday and Thursday and at 5am on Saturday March to October.

TRAIN

Debrecen is served by around 20 trains daily from Nyugati (and sometimes Keleti) station in Budapest (2360ft, 220km) via Szolnok (1420ft, 1¼ hours, 120km), including nine 2½-hour expresses daily. Cities to the north and northwest – Nyíregyháza (430ft, 45 minutes, 50km), Tokaj (890ft, 1½ hours, 80km) and Miskolc (1420ft, 2½ hours, 135km) – can best be reached by train. For Eger (1212ft, three hours, 120km), take the train to Füzesabony and change. For points south, use the bus or a bus/train combination.

Daily international departures from Debrecen to Valea lui Mihai in Romania leave at 7.15am and 2.40pm.

Getting Around

Tram 1 – the only line in town – is ideal both for transport and sightseeing. From the train station, it runs north along Piac utca to Kálvin tér and then carries on to Nagyerdei Park, where it loops around for the same trip southward.

Most other city transport can be caught at the southern end of Petőfi tér. Trolleybuses 2 and 3 link the train and bus stations.

You can also ring for a local taxi (☎ 444 444, 444 555).

HORTOBÁGY

☎ 52 / pop 1770

This village, some 40km west of Debrecen, is the centre of the Hortobágy region, once celebrated for its sturdy cowboys, inns and Gypsy bands. But you'll want to come here to explore the 810-sq-km Hortobágy National Park and wildlife preserve – home to hundreds of birds, as well as plant species that are usually found only by the sea. Its importance as a cultural landscape has not just been noted in Hungary – in 1999 Unesco promoted the park to world heritage status.

It's true that the Hortobágy has been milked by the Hungarian tourism industry for everything its worth, and the

stage-managed horse shows, costumed *csikósok* (cowboys) and tacky gewgaws on sale are all over the top. Still, dark clouds appearing out of nowhere to cover a blazing sun and the possibility of spotting a mirage may have you dreaming of a different Hortobágy – the mythical one that only ever existed in paintings, poems and active imaginations.

Orientation & Information

Buses – as few as there are – stop on the main road (Rte 33) near the village centre or on Petőfi tér near the shopping centre; the train station is to the northeast at the end of Kossuth utca.

Hortobágy National Park Information Centre

(☎ 529 935; Kossuth utca; www.hnp.hu; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) Housed in the new Visitors Centre.

OTP ATM In the shopping complex.

Post office (Kossuth utca 2; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri)

Tourinform (☎ 589 321; hortobagy@tourinform.hu; Kossuth utca; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) In the new Visitors Centre.

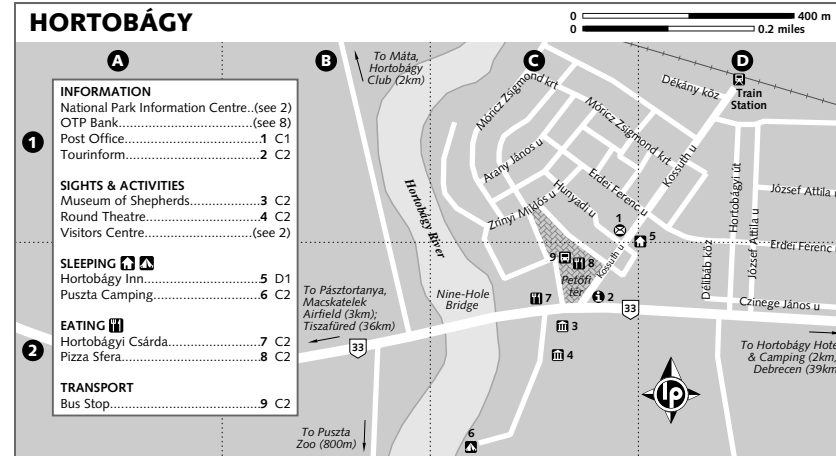
Sights

HORTOBÁGY NATIONAL PARK

With its varied terrain and water sources, the park has some of the best bird-watching in Europe. Indeed, some 344 species (of the continent's estimated 400) have been spotted here in the past 20 years, including many types of grebes, herons, shrikes, egrets, spoonbills, storks, kites, warblers and eagles. The great bustard, one of the world's largest birds, standing a metre high and weighing in at 20kg, has its own reserve with limited access to two-legged mammals.

Visitor passes, available from the **national park's head office** (☎ 529 935; Kossuth utca; admission 900ft), allow entry to four restricted areas of the park. To see the best parts of the park, though – the closed areas north of Rte 33 and the saline swamplands south of it – you must have a guide and travel by horse, carriage or special 4WD; the national park's head office offers infrequent tours of the park. A taster of the park's flora and fauna through interactive displays is available at the new **Visitors Centre** (under construction at the time of research), along with traditional crafts, such as woodcarving, leather work, pottery, and the like.

Aquila Nature Tours (☎ 30-326 3426; Péterfia utca 46, Debrecen), a Debrecen-based travel



agency with specialised bird-watching and nature tours, also offers guiding services.

OTHER SIGHTS

The **Nine-Hole Bridge** (Kilenc-lyukú híd), built in 1833 and spanning the marshy Hortobágy River, is the longest stone bridge (and certainly the most sketched, painted and photographed) in Hungary. Just before it stands the **Hortobágyi Csárda**, one of the original eating houses (1781) used by salt traders on their way from the Tisza River to Debrecen. The inns provided itinerant Roma fiddlers with employment, though they did not originally live in this part of Hungary. Gypsy music and *csárdas* have been synonymous ever since.

The **Puszta Zoo** (☎ 589 110; adult/child 300/150ft, horse show 1000/500ft; ☎ 9am-6pm Mar-Nov), with its weird and wonderful animals of the *puszta*, is a fun place for kids of all ages. You'll find God's acid experimentations here, too; the heavy-set Hungarian grey cattle, the curly-haired *malgalica* pig, the Rasta-like *kuvasz* dog, and the *racka* sheep, whose corkscrew-like horns are particularly devilish.

The **Museum of Shepherds** (Petőfi tér 1), in an 18th-century carriage house across from the *csárda*, was closed at the time of research for restoration. When it reopens expect to find displays on pastoral life at the turn of last century, and web-cams of the *puszta* and other such hi-tech installations.

Like the Museum of Shepherds next door, the **Round Theatre** (Körszín) was having

a change of heart during research (like the entire village it seems) and will reopen primarily as an exhibition space for crafts produced at the workshops housed in the new visitors centre.

Activities

At Mátá, about 2km north of Hortobágy village, is Hungary's largest riding centre, the **Hortobágy Club** (☎ 369 020; www.hortobagyhotel.hu). Here you can take riding lessons for beginners (4800ft per hour) and intermediates (3000ft per hour), or ride off into the sunset across the *puszta* (advanced riders only; 3000ft per hour); two-hour carriage rides (2000ft per person) of the *puszta* are available too. The club also offers bird-watching tours (per person 16,000ft), fishing (gear hire 500ft per day) and boating trips (2000ft per person), and hot-air ballooning (33,000ft per person).

The national park office organises scenic **flights** (☎ 06 30 565 7959) over the region, but they're not cheap – 1500ft per minute for up to three people. Planes take off from the airfield at Macskatelek, about 3km west of the village at the 70km stone.

Bicycles are available for rent from **Puszta Camping** (☎ 369 300; baranyais@freemail.hu) for 1000ft per day and Hortobágy Club for 2000ft per day.

Festivals & Events

The area is busiest in July when Mátá hosts the **International Equestrian Day**, during the

Hortobágy Bridge Fair on 19-20 August, and on Pentecost when the **National Herdsmen Competition & Shepherd's Meeting** is held.

Sleeping

For private rooms, check with Tourinform or scour Arany János utca and Czinege János utca.

Pásztortanya (☎ 369 127; s/d 2500/5000Ft; (P)) This inn is a traditional Hortobágy-style farmhouse of four rooms with shared facilities and attached restaurant. It's a solitary building 3km west of town, next to the Macskatelek airfield.

Hortobágy Inn (☎ 369 137; Kossuth utca 1; s/d 3500/6000Ft; (P)) Without camping, this is the most central place to stay. Its rooms and facilities are basic, but they do come with balcony (perfect for storm watching) and the staff are pleasant and friendly.

Puszta Camping (☎ 369 300; baranyais@freemail.hu; camp sites per adult/child/tent 700/550/650Ft, bungalows per person 1600Ft; ☎ May-Sep; (P)) Occupying a quiet spot away from busy Rte 33 and close to the river, Puszta offers basic facilities and a tiny thermal pool.

Hortobágy Hotel & Camping (☎ 369 071; camp sites per person/tent 500/750Ft, s/d/tr 2900/5800/7800Ft; (P)) Hortobágy is another basic hotel, this time 2km east of the town centre. Rooms have bathrooms and windows are guarded by the all-important insect netting; camping consists of pitching your tent on the front lawn and using the hotel's facilities.

Eating

Hortobágyi Csárda (☎ 589 399; Petőfi tér 2; mains 1000-2000Ft; ☎ 8am-10pm) This is Hungary's

most celebrated roadside inn, which also means it's touristy and a little pricey. Order a duck dish, relax to the Gypsy standards and admire the Hortobágy kitsch taking up every square centimetre of wall space.

Aside from the Csárda, there ain't much else around: **Pizza Sfera** (pizzas 600-1000Ft; ☎ 5am-10pm) is a rough-and-ready pizzeria in the shopping complex and **Hortobágy Inn** (mains 1000Ft) is another basic establishment with Hungarian dishes. Away from town, the restaurant at **Pásztortanya** (mains 1000Ft) enjoys views across the plains from its terrace, but for less rustic dining try either of the **Hortobágy Club's** (☎ 369 020) restaurants; **Magyaros** (mains 1000-2000Ft) serves traditional Hungarian fare in tavern-like surroundings and **Hajdú** (mains 1500-3000Ft) takes the town's top restaurant prize with its fine service and international menu.

Getting There & Away

Up to eight daily buses between Debrecen (via Hajdúszoboszló; 484Ft, 35 minutes, 40km) and Eger (1150Ft, two hours, 95km) stop in Petőfi tér. Hortobágy is on the train line linking Debrecen (430Ft, 50 minutes, 40km) and Füzesabony (658Ft, 1¼ hours, 60km) and is served by up to seven trains daily, with the last train leaving for Debrecen about 8.30pm. Trains headed for Füzesabony (last one at 8.32pm) also stop at Tiszafüred (346Ft, 35 minutes, 30km).

HAJDÚSZOBOSZLÓ

☎ 52 / pop 23,400

Hajdúszoboszló, 20km southwest of Debrecen, is Hungary's largest bathing centre. Thousands flock here to take advantage of the thermal spa's medicinal benefits, or simply to relax in its temperate waters.

Orientation

Almost everything you'll want or need can be found on the broad street (Rte 4) running through town and changing names four times: Debreceni útfél, Szilfákajla út, Hősök tere and Dózsa György utca. The thermal baths and park, lumped together as the Holiday Area (Üdülőterület), occupy the northeastern portion of Hajdúszoboszló. Hősök tere – the town centre – lies to the southwest.

The bus station (Füredi utca) is just north of Debreceni útfél. The train station (Déli

sor) lies about 3km south. Reach Hősök tere by walking northwest along Rákóczi utca.

Information

Main post office (Kálvin tér 1)

OTP bank (Szilfákajla út 10) With an ATM next to the ABC supermarket.

Tourinform (☎ 558 929; hajduszoszoblo@tourinform.hu; Szent István Park 1-3; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat Jun-mid-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat mid-Sep-May) At the main thermal baths entrance.

Sights & Activities

The striking **Forest of Bells Monument**, honouring the dead of wars throughout Hungarian history, stands near the entrance to the **thermal baths** (☎ 558 558; Szent István 1-3; baths adult/child 900/800Ft, after 4pm 700/600Ft, week-pass 5400/4800Ft, including entrance to open-air pools; ☎ baths 7am-7pm, open-air pools 8am-8pm Jul-Aug, 8am-7pm Jun, 8am-6pm May & Sep), a complex comprising a dozen mineral and freshwater pools, a wave pool, saunas, solarium and treatment centre. Rowing boats are available for 1000Ft per hour. Towards the back of the baths is the **Aquapark** (adult/child 2000/1000Ft; ☎ 10am-6pm),

a water park with nine adventurous slides and plenty of hyped kids.

Near the **Calvinist church** (Kálvin tér 9; admission free), built in 1717, is a 20m stretch of wall and a small tower – all that remains of a 15th-century Gothic **fortress** destroyed by the Turks in 1660. Across Hősök tere a **statue of István Bocskai** stands not so proud – a pint-sized prince out of all proportion to his snorting stallion and great deeds.

Down Bocskai utca, past the 18th-century baroque **Catholic church** (Bocskai utca 6) with its invariably locked doors, where Pope John Paul II prayed as Karol Wojtyła, Bishop of Kraków, in the early 1970s, is the **Bocskai Museum** (☎ 362 165; Bocskai utca 12; adult/child 400/200Ft; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-4pm Tue-Sun), a temple to the memory of Prince István and his *hajdúk* (Heyduck) helpers. Among the saddles, pistols and swords hangs Bocskai's banner – the standard of the Heyduck cavalry, picturing the prince doing battle with a leopard (which mysteriously changes into a lion in later versions).

A lovely thatched cottage houses the **István Fazekas Pottery House** (☎ 361 358; Ady Endre



utca 2; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon), featuring the distinctive black pottery produced by the Fazekas family in neighbouring Nádudvar.

Sleeping

The choice of accommodation in this tourist-oriented town is enormous (Mátyás király sétány is particularly loaded down with high-rise hotels), so you shouldn't have trouble tracking something appropriate down. If you're looking for a private room, consult the list provided by Tourinform or hunt around for *szoba kiadó* (room for rent) signs that in the high season sprout like mushrooms after a rain.

Négy Évszak (☎ 273 140; www.hotelnegyevszak.net; Jókai sor 12; s/d €38/45; P) This newly built hotel puts most of Hajdúszoboszló's contemporaries to shame, with spacious rooms and colourful, modern furniture and décor. It's an easy stroll away to the spa.

Muskáti (☎ 363 744; muskatlihajduszoszlo@matavnet.hu; Daru zug 5a; s €40-42, d €55-60; P) This upmarket hotel moonlights as a wellness centre, offering all manner of beauty, spa and medical therapies. Rooms are suitably large, with bare-wood or tiled floors and surprisingly basic furniture.

Déliab (☎ 360 366; deliab@civishotels.hu; József Attila utca 4; s €28-50, d €40-63; P) With a massive 250 rooms, Délibáb is one of the larger spa hotels. It has its own wellness centre and rooms are old fashioned but comfy enough. Rates vary depending on the facilities.

Thermal Camping (☎ 558 552; Böszörményi út 35a; camp sites per person/tent 800/800Ft; P) Thermal Camping is part of the thermal spa but is located on the northern side of the complex. It's a flat, basic site with some tree cover, overlooking farmers' fields and the town's airport.

Eating

Invariably your hotel or *pension* will have an attached restaurant, so you won't have to wander far for food. There are also plenty of sausage, *lángos* and ice-cream stalls along Szilfákajla út and in the park.

Arany Oroszlán (☎ 273 094; Bessenyei utca 14; lunch menu 510Ft, mains 1000Ft) This quiet restaurant offers a relaxed meal away from the kitsch of the main street. The menu is solidly Hungarian, with specialities like grilled trout.

Kemencés (☎ 362 221; Szilfákajla út 40/a; mains 1000Ft; ☎ 8am-9pm) With its pseudo-rustic

trappings and traditionally clad waitresses, Kemencés is cashing in on the *puszta* in a big way but it does have good daily specials and conscientious staff.

Nelson (☎ 270 226; nr Hősök tere & Kossuth utca; mains 1200-2000Ft) With an expansive menu, quality cuisine, attentive staff and street-side seating, Nelson is a popular choice with locals and tourists alike.

Szilfa (József Attila utca 2; mains 800-1500Ft) This pleasant and simple eatery is handy to the thermal baths and has a covered terrace for escaping the summer heat.

The partially covered **market** (Bethlen Gábor utca) deals mainly in fresh produce, flowers and plenty of gossip.

Entertainment

Hajdúszoboszló is a family town so don't expect hip bars and pumping clubs.

City Cultural Centre (☎ 557 693; Szilfákajla út 2) This centre offers tips on what's on in town, including organ and choral concerts in the Calvinist church.

Al Hembra Eastern Bar (Mátyás király sétány 8) A suitable place to rehydrate after a long day soaking in steamy brown mineral water.

Getting There & Away

Buses from Hajdúszoboszló depart for Miskolc five times daily (1450Ft, three hours, 120km) and up to two dozen head to Debrecen daily (302Ft, 30 minutes, 20km). International destinations served by bus include Oradea (6am Tuesday and Thursday) in Romania and Košice (6.20am Monday to Thursday) in Slovakia.

Trains headed for Szolnok (1212Ft, 1½ hours, 100km) and Budapest (2200Ft, 2½ hours, 200km) from Debrecen (182Ft, 15 minutes, 20km) stop at Hajdúszoboszló a couple of times an hour throughout the day.

SOUTHERN PLAIN

The Southern Plain (Dél-Alföld), spanning the lower regions of the Danube and Tisza Rivers, holds the lion's share of the Great Plain's more intriguing towns and cities. Kecskemét and Szeged, for example, are two centres for fine arts and culture, with attractive architecture, absorbing museums and an above-average (for the plain) bar and

restaurant scene. But the *puszta* is not far away; Bugac, one of Hungary's better hubs depicting life on the plain, is easily reached from many of the area's western towns.

KECSKEMÉT

☎ 76 / pop 103,300

Halfway between the Danube and the Tisza Rivers in the heart of the Southern Plain is Kecskemét, a city ringed with vineyards and orchards that don't seem to stop at the limits of this 'garden city'. Colourful architecture, fine museums, apricot groves and the region's excellent *barackpálinka* (apricot brandy) beckon, and the Kiskunság National Park, the *puszta* of the Southern Plain, is right at the back door.

History

Kecskemét's agricultural wealth was used wisely – it was able to redeem all its debts in cash in 1832 – and today the city can boast some of the most spectacular architecture in the country. It was also – and still is – an important cultural centre, home to an artists' colony and the world-famous Institute of Music Education.

Orientation

Kecskemét is a city of multiple squares that run into one another without warning and can be a little confusing at first. The bus and main train stations are opposite one another near József Katona Park. A 10-minute walk southwest along Nagyköroői utca will bring



you to the first of the squares, Szabadság tér. The city's other train station, Kecskemét KK (Halasi út), from where narrow-gauge trains head for Bugac, is on the southern continuation of Batthyány utca.

Information

Ibusz (☎ 486 955; Kossuth tér 3) In Aranyhomok hotel.
Main post office (Kálvin tér 10-12) Near the centre of town.

OTP bank (Szabadság tér 1/a) Has foreign exchange and ATM.

Piramis Internet Café (Csányi utca 1-3; per hr 300Ft; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, noon-8pm Sat & Sun) Upstairs in a small shopping mall.

Tourinform (☎ 481 065; kecskemettourinform.hu; Kossuth Lajos tér 1; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun Jul-Aug, 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat Jun & Sep, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-May) Helpful and informed.
www.kecskemettourinform.hu Also in German and English.

Sights

AROUND KOSSUTH TÉR

The city's main square is dominated by the Catholic **Great Church** (Kossuth tér; admission free) built in 1806. The big tablets on the front honour (from left to right) a mounted regiment of Hussars that served in WWI; citizens who died in the 1848-49 War of Independence; and the Kecskemét victims of WWII. From June to August its **tower** (admission 300Ft; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-6pm Tue-Sun) can be climbed for views of the city's sun-bleached rooftops.

On the eastern side of Kossuth tér is the **Franciscan Church of St Nicholas** (Szent Miklós ferences templom; admission free), dating in part from the late 13th century; the **Zoltán Kodály Institute of Music Education** (Kodály Zoltán Zenepedagógiai Intézet; ☎ 481 518; Kéttemplom köz 1; adult/child 120/60Ft; ☎ 10am-6pm) occupies the baroque monastery behind it to the east. Inside, one of the corridors is devoted to the institute's composer-namesake. The sandy-pink **town hall** (☎ 513 513; ☎ by appointment), a lovely late-19th-century building designed by Ödön Lechner, is a mixture of Art Nouveau/Secessionist and folkloric elements, producing a uniquely Hungarian style. Its carillon chimes out strains of works by Ferenc Erkel, Kodály, Mozart, Handel and Beethoven several times during the day and its floral ceilings and frescoes of Hungarian heroes were painted by Bertalan Székely, who tended to romanticise the past. Another beautiful example of this style is the

restored **Otthon Cinema** (Széchenyi tér 4), on the corner of pedestrian Görögtemplom utca.

SZABADSÁG TÉR

Walking northeast into Szabadság tér, you'll pass the 17th-century **Calvinist church** and the **Calvinist New College** (Református újkolégium) from 1912, a later version of the Hungarian Romantic style that looks like a Transylvanian castle and is now a music school. Two other buildings in the square are among the city's finest. The Art Nouveau **Ornamental Palace** (Cifrapalota), which dates from 1902 and is covered in multicoloured majolica tiles, now contains the **Kecskemét Gallery** (Kecskeméti Képtár; ☎ 480 776; Rákóczi út 1; adult/child 260/130Ft; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun). Don't go in so much for the art; climb the steps to the aptly named Decorative Hall (Diszterem) to see the amazing stucco peacock, bizarre windows and more tiles. The **House of Technology** (Technika Háza; ☎ 487 611; Rákóczi út 2; adult/child 100/50Ft; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri), a Moorish structure dating from 1871, was once a synagogue and is now used for temporary exhibitions.

MUSEUMS

Arguably the city's most interesting museum and one of the few of its kind in Europe, the **Hungarian Museum of Naive Artists** (Magyar Naiv Művészek Múzeuma; ☎ 324 767; Gáspár András utca 11; adult/child 150/50Ft; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-Mar-Oct) is in the Stork House (1730), surrounded by a white wall, just off Petőfi Sándor utca. Lots of predictable themes here, but the warmth and craft of Rozália Albert Juhász's work, the drug-like visions of Dezső Mokry-Mészáros and the paintings of András Süli (Hungary's answer to Henri Rousseau) will hold your attention.

Next door, the **Toy Museum & Workshop** (Szókraténusz Játékmúzeum; ☎ 481 469; adult/child 300/150Ft; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) has a small collection of 19th- and early-20th-century dolls, wooden trains, board games and so on, dumped haphazardly in glass cases. But the museum spends most of its time and money on organising events and classes for kids (workshops adult/child 300/150Ft), which run 10am to noon and 2.30pm to 5pm Thursday and Saturday, and 10am to noon on Sunday. Much is made of Ernő Rubik, the Hungarian inventor of that infuriating Rubik's Cube from the 1970s.

The **Hungarian Folk Craft Museum** (Magyar Népi Iparművészet Múzeuma; ☎ 327 203; Serfőző utca 19a; adult/child 200/100Ft; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat), the granddaddy of all museums in Kecskemét, is further southwest and a block in from Dózsa György út. Some 10 rooms of an old farm complex are crammed with embroidery, woodcarving, furniture, agricultural tools and textiles, so don't try to see everything at once.

The **Leskowsky Musical Instrument Collection** (Leskowsky Hangszergyűjtemény; ☎ 486 616; Zimay László utca 6/a; admission free; ☎ by appointment) traces the development of music-making over the centuries and has a decent collection of instruments from five continents.

MARKET

Kecskemét's lively **flea market** (Külső Szegedi út) is southeast of the city.

Activities

Kecskemét's main summer attraction is its **Aqua and Water-Slide Park** (☎ 481 724; Csabay Géza körút 2; adult/child 1000/800Ft; ☎ 9am-7pm mid-May-Aug) which, as the name suggests, is a swimming complex loaded with fun things for the kids, but it's also equipped with three spas to soothe any aches and pains. Otherwise, join local frolickers at the lake in **Leisure Time Park** (Szabadidőpark) just north of the swimming complex.

Festivals & Events

Special events in Kecskemét's calendar include the cultural **Spring Festival** in March and the **Hirós Week Festival** in late August which pays homage to the richness of Kecskemét agricultural produce, notably the golden **sárgabarack** (apricot). June is a changeable month: every even year sees the **International Children's Festival** hit town, and every odd year accommodates the **Kodály International Music Festival**.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Tourinform has an extensive list of college accommodation in town and Ibusz can arrange private rooms (from 3000Ft).

Teachers' College (☎ 486 977; Piaristák tere 4; s/d 2000/4000Ft; ☎ mid-Jun-Aug; ☎) This is the most central of Kecskemét's college accommodation; rooms are typically basic yet functional, with single beds and shared bathrooms.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Fábián (☎ 477 677; www.hotels.hu/fabian; Kápolna utca 14; r 7500-9500Ft; ☎) With its friendly and knowledgeable staff, spacious and spotless modern rooms, and quiet setting, Fábián is easily the best choice in town. Rooms either face the inner garden or busier street, and only the more expensive ones come with air-con. Bike rental is available for 1500Ft per day.

Autós Camping (☎ 329 398; Csabay Géza körút 5; camp sites per person/tent 750/660Ft, bungalows 4500-7150Ft; ☎ Apr-Oct; ☎) Autós is 3km south-west of the centre, next to the Aqua Park. Its neat rows of tents and bungalows (with kitchen and bath, but no hot water) have minimal shade.

MIDRANGE

Aranyhomok (☎ 503 730; aranyhomok@axelero.hu; Kossuth tér 3; s/d 9200/13,700Ft; ☎) This is the city's ugliest hotel from the outside, but inside it's surprisingly modern. Many rooms overlook the town's pretty main square, and the hotel's wellness centre is included in the price.

Három Gúnár (☎ 483 611; Batthyány utca 1-7; s/d 9,100/11,300Ft; ☎) This charming and friendly small hotel, formed by cobbling four old townhouses together, has 46 smallish rooms (the best are Nos 306 to 308). From here it's an easy walk to the centre.

Apollo Hotel (☎ 412 620; apollo.hotel@matavnet.hu; Tatay András utca 1/b; s/d €30/42; ☎) Rooms (some of which come with a balcony) at the Apollo are big, airy and comfy, even though the furnishings are dated. The staff can be somewhat chaotic but friendly all the same.

Udvarház (☎ 413 912; Csányi utca 1-3; s/d 11,900/14,500Ft; ☎) Tucked away in a courtyard with 17 rooms, this place is small, quiet, central and almost falls in the shadow of the Great Church.

Eating & Drinking

Görög Udvar (☎ 492 513; Széchenyi tér 9; mains 950-1500Ft) Görög Udvar looks grubby from the outside but inside it's another story; excellent Greek food is served either in its quiet inner courtyard or open restaurant rooms.

Labirintus (Kéttemplom köz 2; pizzas from 400Ft) A cellar restaurant with a smattering of

charm close to the centre; its vast array of pizza and pastas is popular with the locals.

Túróczy (☎ 509 175; Szabadság tér 2; set menu 2600Ft) Túróczy is Kecsckemét's silver service restaurant, with set menus of Hungarian and international cuisine, and a terrace overlooking the main square.

Fodor (Szabadság tér 2; ☎ 9am-9pm) This pink ice-cream and cake shop not only serves some of the finest confections in Kecsckemét, but – with its position right on the main square – also has one of the best spots in which to consume them.

Baranyi (Nagykőrösi utca 15; ☎ 9am-9pm) On Kecsckemét's very own yellow brick road, Baranyi is another popular ice-cream shop that produces particularly tasty cakes.

Italia (☎ 484 627; Hornyik János körút 4; pizzas from 500Ft) Italia is a less atmospheric pizzeria than Labirintus but it does a roaring trade with students from the nearby teacher's college, serving sizable pizzas at bargain prices.

Market (Jókai utca) Kecsckemét's large market, with both a covered and an open-air section, is located north of Szabadság tér behind the Piarist church.

Like so many Hungarian towns, Kecsckemét has a plethora of 'Wild West' themed pubs. One convivial example is **Country Pub** (Lestár tér 1), west of the József Katona Theatre.

Entertainment

Kecsckemét is a city of music and theatre.

Ferenc Erdei Cultural Centre (☎ 503 880; Deák Ferenc tér 1) This centre, which sponsors some events, is a good source of information and should be the first place you head to. Otherwise pick up a free copy of biweekly *Kecsckeméti Est* for more information on clubs, films, events and parties.

József Katona Theatre (Katona József tér 5; ticket office ☎ 483 283; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Tue-Fri) A 19th-century theatre that stages dramatic works, as well as operettas and concerts by the Kecsckemét Symphony Orchestra; check with the ticket office for details.

Bols Music Café (Kisfaludy utca 4; ☎ 11am-11pm) is a convenient drinking spot before moving on to the underground **Xtreme Music Club** (☎ 10pm-4am) next door.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Kecsckemét is well served by buses, with frequent departures for the most far-flung

destinations. Buses depart hourly to Budapest (1030Ft, 1½ hours, 85km), every two hours to Szeged (1090Ft, 1¾ hours, 85km) and twice daily to Pécs (2410Ft, 4½ hours, 200km). Other destinations include Baja (2410Ft, 2½ hours, 120km, four daily), Békéscsaba (1570Ft, three hours, 125km, five daily), Debrecen (2910Ft, 5½ hours, 235km, one daily), Eger (1829Ft, four hours, 145km, two daily), Gyula (1690Ft, 3¾ hours, 140km, two daily) and Szolnok (968Ft, 1¾ hours, 75km, seven daily).

TRAIN

Kecsckemét is on the train line linking Nyugati station in Budapest (1212Ft, 1½ hours, 105km) with Szeged (890Ft, 1¼ hours, 85km). To get to Debrecen (2030Ft, three hours, 180km) and other towns on the Eastern Plain, you must change at Cegléd. A very slow narrow-gauge train leaves Kecsckemét KK train station, south of the city centre, up to three times daily for Kiskőrös (544Ft, three hours, 55km). Transfer there for Kalocsa (1420Ft, 2¾ hours, 130km). Kecsckemét KK is also the station from which trains leave for Bugac for Kiskunság National Park.

Getting Around

Buses 1, 5 and 15 link the bus and train stations with the local bus terminus behind the Aranyhomok hotel and buses 2 and 2/a connect Kecsckemét KK station and the centre. For the pools and camping ground bus 22 is the best, while bus 13 serves the flea market.

Taxis (☎ 480 762) can also be ordered.

KISKUNSÁG NATIONAL PARK

☎ 76

Kiskunság National Park (adult/child including museum & horse show 1100/550Ft) consists of half a dozen 'islands' of land totalling more than 760 sq km. Much of the park's alkaline ponds, dunes and grassy 'deserts' are off-limits to casual visitors, but you can get a close look at this environmentally fragile area – and see the famous horse herds go through their paces – at **Bugac** on a sandy steppe 30km southwest of Kecsckemét.

The best source of information on attractions at the park, transport possibilities and the park in general is **Bugac Tours** (☎ 372 827; bugactours.kft@axelero.hu; Szabadság tér 4/a,

Bugac; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri); it also has a small office at the park entrance that can only help with prices. The **House of Nature** (☎ 482 611; www.knp.hu in Hungarian; Liszt Ferenc utca 19, Kecsckemét; ☎ 9am-4pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat), the park's official office in Kecsckemét, is another good source of information.

At the park's entrance you can board a **horse-driven carriage** (adult/child including museum & horse show 2200/1100Ft; ☎ 12.15pm May-Sep, extra carriage 2.15pm Jun-Aug) or walk 1.5km along the sandy track to the **Herder Museum** (☎ 10am-5pm May-Oct), a circular structure designed to look like a horse-driven dry mill. It's filled with stuffed fauna and pressed flora of the Kiskunság, as well as branding irons, carved wooden pipes, embroidered fur coats and a tobacco pouch made from a gnarled old ram's scrotum.

The **horse show** (☎ 1.15pm May-Sep, extra show 3.15pm Jun-Aug) is the park's highlight. Outside, you may come across a couple of noble Nonius steeds being made to perform tricks that most dogs would be disinclined to do, but the real reason for coming is to see the *csikósok* (cowboys) crack their whips, race one another bareback and ride 'five-in-hand'. This is a breathtaking performance in which one *csikós* gallops five horses around the field at full tilt, while standing on the backs of the last two.

Sleeping and eating is centred around **Bugaci Karikás Csárda** (☎ 575 112; Nagybugac 135; mains 1500Ft) at the entrance to the park. It's overly kitsch (and the decaying bulls head inside the door is a little off-putting) but the food is hearty and the accompanying folk-music ensemble will get your foot tapping. Next door, **Bugac Tours** (☎ 575 122; camp sites per person 800Ft, bungalows per person 4500Ft; ☎) has a basic camp site and rustic bungalows.

The bus (423Ft, one hour, 35km) is your best option for getting from Kecsckemét to the park; the 11am departure will plonk you at the entrance around noon. The return journey leaves at 4pm Monday to Friday and 6.25pm on Saturday and Sunday (a change at Jakabszállás is required on weekends), but a better (and more fun) option on weekends is the narrow-gauge train (326Ft) between the two centres. It leaves Bugac-felső station (a 15-minute walk south of the park entrance) at 5.34pm, arriving at Kecsckemét KK train station around 6.50pm. The train from Kecsckemét

to Bugac leaves at 7.30am, so you'll be twiddling your thumbs for quite some time until the horse show starts.

KALOCSA

☎ 78 / pop 18,200

Kalocsa is a quintessential small Hungarian town – rich in history, but as quiet as a cemetery on a weekday. Its past has certainly left its mark though (with Esztergom, Kalocsa was one of the two episcopal seats founded by King Stephen in 1009 from the country's 10 dioceses), and a couple of sights are worthy of a detour.

Orientation & Information

The streets of Kalocsa fan out from Szentháromság tér, site of Kalocsa Cathedral and the Archbishop's Palace. The bus station lies at the southern end of the main avenue, tree-lined Szent István király út. The train station (Mártírok tere) is to the northeast, a 20-minute walk from Szentháromság tér along Kossuth János utca.

Kávészü Net (Városház utca 1; per hr 240Ft; ☎ 10am-10pm) Internet access.

Korona Tours (☎ 561 201; Szentháromság tér 4; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) This office in hotel Kalocsa is the only source of information in town.

OTP bank (Szent István király út 43-45)

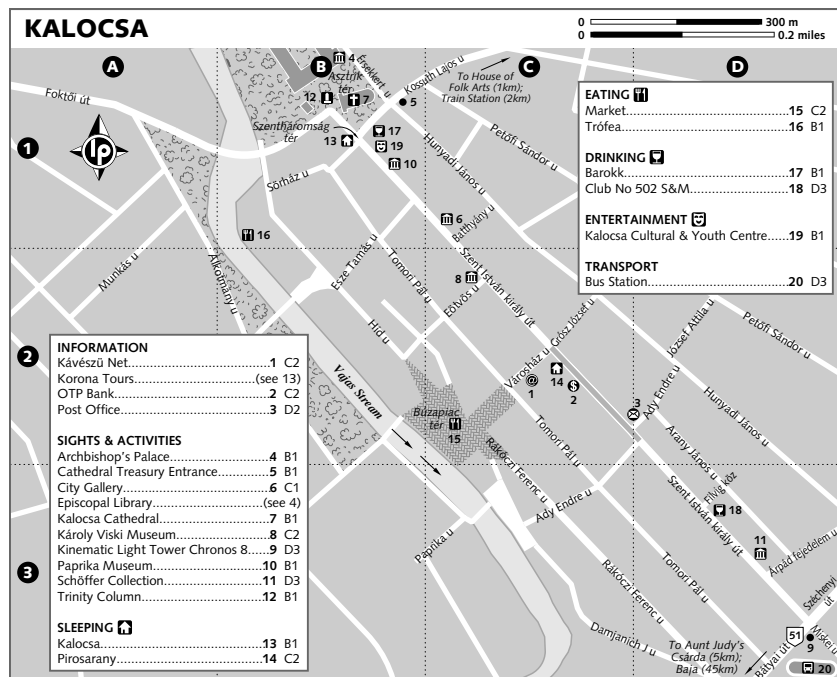
Post office (Szent István király út 44) Along the main street.

Sights

KALOCSA CATHEDRAL

Almost everything of interest in Kalocsa is on or near Szent István király út, beginning at Szentháromság tér, where the **Trinity Column** (1786) is corroding into sand. **Kalocsa Cathedral** (☎ 462 641; admission free), the fourth church to stand on the site, was completed in 1754 by András Mayerhoffer and is a baroque masterpiece, with a dazzling pink-and-gold interior full of stucco, reliefs and tracery. Some believe that the sepulchre in the crypt is that of the first archbishop of Kalocsa, Asztrik, who brought King Stephen the gift of a crown from Pope Sylvester II, thereby legitimising the Christian convert's control over Hungary. A plaque on the south side outside memorialises this event. Franz Liszt was the first to play the cathedral's magnificent 3560-pipe organ.

The **Cathedral Treasury** (Főszékesegyházi kincstár; ☎ 462 641; Hunyadi János utca 2; adult/child 400/200Ft; ☎ 9am-5pm May-Oct), just east of the



cathedral across Kossuth Lajos utca, is a trove of gold and bejewelled objects and vestments. In case you were wondering, the large bust of St Stephen was cast for the Millenary Exhibition in 1896 and contains 48kg of silver and 2kg of gold. Among the other valuable objects is a 16th-century reliquary of St Anne and a gold and crystal baroque monstrosity.

ARCHBISHOP'S PALACE

The Great Hall and the chapel of the **Archbishop's Palace** (Érseki palota; ☎ 462 166; Szentháromság tér 1) (1766) contain magnificent frescoes by Franz Anton Maulbertsch, but you won't get to see these unless there's a concert on. The **Episcopal Library** (Érseki könyvtár; adult/child 500/300ft; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct), however, is open to visitors and is one of the most impressive in Hungary. It contains more than 100,000 volumes, including 13th-century codices, a Bible belonging to Martin Luther that is annotated in the reformer's hand, illuminated manuscripts, and verses cut into palm fronds from Sri Lanka.

MUSEUMS

The **Károly Viski Museum** (☎ 462 351; Szent István király út 25; adult/child 350/200ft; ☎ 9am-5pm Wed-Sun mid-May-mid-Sep, 9am-5pm Tue-Sat mid-Mar-mid-May & mid-Sep-Oct) is rich in folklore and art, and highlights the life and ways of the Swabian (Sváb), Slovak (Tót), Serbian (Rác) and Hungarian peoples of the area. It's surprising to see how colourful interiors of peasant houses became as wealth increased; walls, furniture, doors – virtually nothing was left undecorated by the famous 'painting women' of Kalocsa. The museum also has a large collection of coins dating from Roman times to today. The **City Gallery** (Városi Képtár; Szent István király út 12-14; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct) is diagonally opposite.

Other places to see examples of wall and furniture painting include the **House of Folk Arts** (Népművészeti tájház; ☎ 461 560; Tompa Mihály utca 5-7; adult/child 500/300ft; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-Apr-mid-Oct) and **Aunt Judy's Csárda** (Juca Néni Csárdája; ☎ 461 469), a touristy restaurant near the Danube ferry crossing. Some people find

(Continued on page 257)

(Continued from page 248)

today's flower and paprika motifs twee and even garish; compare the new work with that in the museums and see what you think.

An exhibition of the futuristic work of the Paris-based artist Nicholas Schöffler, who was from Kalocsa, can be seen at the **Schöffler Collection** (☎ 462 253; Szent István király út 76; adult/child 300/150ft; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-5pm Tue-Sun). The collection would be more impressive if it was cleaned more often, but you can see some of his work near the bus station; his **kinematic light tower Chronos 8** (1982) is a Meccano-set creation of steel beams and spinning reflecting mirrors that two decades ago was supposed to portend the art of the new century.

Festivals & Events

The **International Danube Folklore Festival** is held in mid-July, and the **Kalocsa Paprika Days** in September celebrate the harvest of the town's 'red gold'.

Sleeping

Kalocsa is lacking in quality sleeping options, so you might be inclined to visit the town as a day-trip. Private rooms are quite rare; try your luck along Kossuth Lajos utca.

Kalocsa (☎ 561 200; www.hotelkalocsa.hu; Szentháromság tér 4; s/d €40/60; (P)) This hotel, housed in beautifully restored episcopal offices built in 1780, is the best in town. At the time of writing, it was undergoing major renovations.

Pirosarany (☎ 462 220; Szent István király út 37; r from 5400ft) This dusky-pink hotel is an option if Kalocsa is full or too expensive; rooms are spartan but adequate.

RED GOLD

Along with Szeged, Kalocsa is the largest producer of paprika, the *piros arany* ('red gold') so important to Hungarian cuisine. You can learn all about its development (it was first mentioned in documents way back in the 16th century), production and beneficial qualities (it's higher in vitamin C than citrus fruits) at the **Paprika Museum** (☎ 461 819; Szent István király út 6; adult/child 500/300ft; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-Nov). If you happen to be in Kalocsa in September, visit any of the nearby villages to see the green fields transformed into red carpets.

Eating & Drinking

Trófea (☎ 467 604; Sörház utca; mains 1000ft) This traditional Hungarian restaurant, on the banks of the Vajas stream or Vajas-fok, has a peaceful ambience and serves hearty goulash and the like; insect repellent is mandatory for the terrace in summer.

Kalocsa (☎ 561 200; Szentháromság tér 4; mains 1500ft) In the hotel of the same name, Kalocsa is the town's upmarket option, with Hungarian specialties and a fine selection of vegetarian dishes.

Aunt Judy's Csárda (Juca Néni Csárdája; ☎ 461 469; mains 700-1500ft) If you happen to be heading for the Danube ferry crossing over to Gerjen southwest of Kalocsa, call in at this traditional/touristy place for a taste of a rural tavern from early last century.

Kalocsa's **market** (Búzapiac tér) has a lot more than just grain.

This may be a garrison town, but the bar scene is pretty dire. **Barokk** (Kossuth Lajos utca), a café opposite the cathedral, attracts many locals with its location and relaxed atmosphere. **Club No 502 S&M** (Szent István király út 64) is a more boisterous option for those looking to have more than their fair share.

Entertainment

Kalocsa Cultural & Youth Centre (☎ 462 200; Szent István király út 2-4) This centre is housed in an 18th-century baroque seminary; inquire about any concerts scheduled in the Great Hall (Nagy Terem) of the Archbishop's Palace or the cathedral.

Getting There & Away

There are very frequent buses to/from Budapest (1450ft, 2½ hours, 120km), Baja (544ft, one hour, 45km) and Solt (425ft, 45 minutes, 35km), a horse-breeding centre with many riding and carriage-driving opportunities. There are also buses to Szeged (1450ft, three hours, 115km, four daily), Kecskemét (1450ft, 2½ hours, 115km, three daily) and Székesfehérvár (2780ft, 2¾ hours, 120km, two daily).

Kalocsa is at the end of a rail spur to Kiskörös (346ft, 50 minutes, 30km, four daily). From Kiskörös you can make connections to Budapest (1420ft, three hours, 140km). A very slow (2¼-hour) narrow-gauge train links Kiskörös with the smaller of Kecskemét's two train stations, Kecskemét KK (p246).

HAJÓS CELLARS

The village of Hajós, 21km southwest of Kalocsa, is – or should be – a magnet for wine lovers. Around 1300 wine cellars (Europe's largest concentration) are squashed into its winding streets and alleys, creating seemingly endless rows of sharply-pointed *pinccék* (cellars). Centuries ago, a healthy Swabian population settled the region and began fermenting and storing wine; the conditions were seemingly perfect for such activities and the result is what you see today. Full-bodied reds are the mainstay of wine production in the area, and the best odds for tastings are over the summer, when most visitors are expected. Hajós can be reached by four daily buses from Kalocsa.

BAJA

☎ 79 / pop 37,200

About 45km south of Kalocsa on the banks of the Danube is Baja, a town best known as a holiday and sports centre. It's a perfect place to wind down during summer; beaches and flood-bank forests abound, and the city itself strikes a nice balance between repose and activity. It's also famous for its fish soup, a local concoction of carp, pike-perch, catfish and the ubiquitous *pa-prika* spice.

Orientation

Vörösmarty utca and the pedestrian-only Eötvös utca connect Baja's three main squares: Vörösmarty tér, Szent Imre tér and Szentháromság tér. The last one lies on the Kamarás-Duna (or Sugovica as it is known locally), a branch of the Danube River that cuts Petőfi and Nagy Pandúr Islands off from the mainland before emptying into the main river downstream. The bus station (Csermák Mihály tér) is northeast of the centre; the train station is a few minutes to the north across Vonat kert (Train Garden).

Information

Internet Kávézó (Tóth Kálmán tér 7; per hr 500Ft; ☎ noon-1pm & 5-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)
K&H bank (Szentháromság tér 10) With a currency-exchange machine and ATM.
OTP bank (cnr Szentháromság tér & Deák Ferenc utca)

Post office (Oroszlán utca 5)

Tourinform (☎ 420 792; baja@tourinform.hu; Szentháromság tér 5; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Has an office overlooking the main square.

Sights

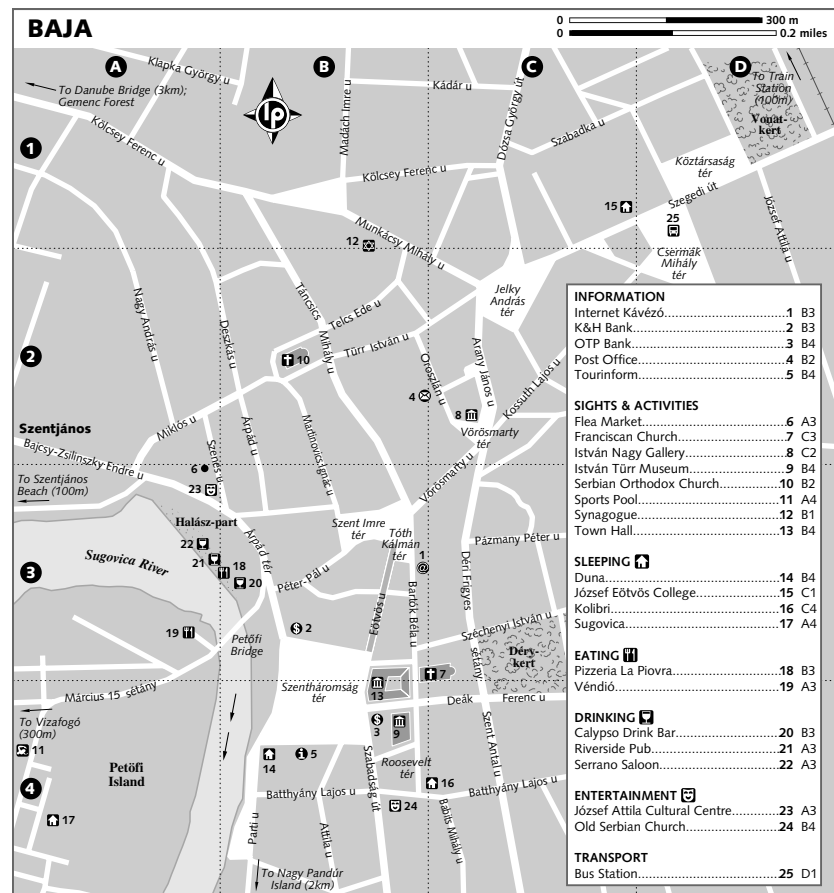
The enormous **Szentháromság tér**, a colourful square of baroque and neoclassical buildings marred only by the multitude of parked cars, is dominated on the east side by the city's **town hall** and its 'widow's walk' looking out towards the Danube.

South of the town hall stands the **István Türr Museum** (☎ 324 173; Deák Ferenc utca 1, enter from Roosevelt tér; adult/child 350/250Ft; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed-Sat mid-Mar-mid-Dec), named after a local hero who fought in the 1848-49 War of Independence and alongside Garibaldi in southern Italy in 1860. The museum's prime exhibit, entitled 'Life on the Danube', covers wildlife, fishing methods and boat building. Another deals with the folk groups of Baja and its surrounds: the Magyars, Germans, South Slavs (Bunyevác, Sokac) and – surprisingly for Hungary – Roma; all have lived together in this region for several centuries. The rarely seen Roma woodcarving is superb, and don't miss the exquisite South Slav black lace, the gold work for which Baja was once nationally famous, or the weavings from Nagybaracska to the south.

The **István Nagy Gallery** (☎ 325 649; Arany János utca 1; adult/child 350/250Ft; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed-Sat mid-Mar-mid-Dec), built in 1820, was once the mansion of the Vojnich family and an artists' colony after WWII. It is named after the leading painter of what is known as the Alföld School. Other members are featured, including Gyula Rudnay, as well as 'outsiders' such as the cubist Béla Kádár and sculptor Ferenc Medgyessy.

Buildings of architectural note include the **Franciscan church** (ferences templom; Bartók Béla utca; admission free) behind the town hall, which was built in 1728 and has a fantastic baroque organ; and the late baroque **Serbian Orthodox church** (☎ 423 199; Táncsics Mihály utca 21; admission free; ☎ 9am-noon Wed & Thu) in a quiet square. The iconostasis is definitely worth a detour.

However, the neoclassical **synagogue** (☎ 322 741; Munkácsy Mihály utca 7-9; admission free; ☎ 1-6pm Mon-Thu, 10am-6pm Fri, 8am-noon Sat), from 1845, beats them both. On the right as you enter the gate, you'll pass a sheltered memorial to



the victims of fascism. Above the columns on the synagogue's tympanum (the façade below the roof) on the west side, the Hebrew inscription reads: 'This is none other than the house of God and the gate to heaven'. The tabernacle inside, with its Corinthian pilasters, is topped with two lions holding a crown while four doves pull back a blue and burgundy curtain. Now a public library, it holds a massive 180,000 volumes, including a first full edition of the 18th-century French *Diderot & D'Alembert's Encyclopaedia*.

One of the liveliest **flea markets** in Hungary, full of Serbs, Romanians and Hungarians from Transylvania, takes place on Wednesdays and Saturdays north of Árpád tér, just beyond the bridge to Petőfi Island.

Activities

The **Sugovica** (☎ 321 755; Petőfi-Sziget 32) resort on Petőfi Island has fishing, boating, mini-golf and tennis for those willing to pay, and there's a covered pool – the **Sports Pool** (☎ 326 773; adult/child 450/300Ft; ☎ 7am-7pm Thu-Tue) – across the walkway on Petőfi Bridge (Petőfi hid).

Avoid the **public beaches** on Petőfi Island in favour of the less crowded ones on the mainland in Szentjános, east of Halászpárt, or on Nagy Pandúr Island. But be prepared to swim to the latter or face a long walk to the southern suburb of Homokváros, across the bridge to Nagy Pandúr Island and then north to the beach.

The **Gemenc Forest**, bordering the west side of the Danube, is a unique reserve famed

for its incredible beauty and narrow-gauge train trips; a good way to see it up close is via a **boat and rail trip** (☎ 425 356; per person 2700-3300Ft; 🚢 9.45am Wed, Sat & Sun Jul-Aug, 9.45am Sat May-Oct) available through **Tourinform** (☎ 420 792; Szentháromság tér 5). For more information on the forest see p283.

Festivals & Events

The big event of the year is the **Baja Folk Festival** held on the second Saturday in July. It's more a celebration of the town's famous fish soup; 2000 stew pots of the stuff (a Guinness record) are served on the day.

Sleeping

Vizafogó (☎ 326 585; vizafog@citromail.hu; Petőfi-Sziget 27; s/d 5000/6000Ft; 📍) Vizafogó occupies a quiet spot on Petőfi Island, across from the popular mainland beaches. Rooms are fitted with modern furnishings and come with balconies overlooking the Sugovica River.

Duna (☎ 323 224; www.hotelduna.hu in Hungarian; Szentháromság tér 6; s/d from 4700/5500Ft; 📍) This is a wonderful old place right by the Danube, where rooms either overlook the Sugovica or Szentháromság tér. It may not look like much from the outside but the hotel has recently undergone some renovations, including the installation of an indoor pool and wellness centre.

Sugovica (☎ 321 755; www.hotelsugovica.hu; Petőfi-Sziget 32; s/d from 6000/7500Ft, camp sites per person/tent/car from 440/590/300Ft, bungalows 3900-16,500Ft; camping 📍 May-Aug; 📍) Sugovica was once Baja's prime hotel, but its standards have fallen somewhat. Rooms are still spotless and spacious, but dated, while its camp site is secluded and shady. Some bungalows can sleep up to five.

Also recommended:

Kolibri (☎ 321 628; Batthyány utca 18; 📍) Undergoing a complete renovation at the time of research, Kolibri should be a thoroughly modern *penzion* at a reasonable price.

József Eötvös College (☎ 321 655; Szegedi út; s/d 2000/4000Ft; 📍 Jul-Aug; 📍) Near the bus station, with basic and clean student accommodation.

Eating & Drinking

Vizafogó (☎ 326 585; Petőfi-Sziget 27; mains 750-1400Ft) At the *penzion* of the same name, this is a fine destination for Baja's famous fish soup while eyeing the river for more delectable morsels.

Véendió (☎ 326 585; Martinovics utca 8/b; mains from 800Ft) Véendió's reputation for consistent quality and an excellent location down by the water keeps diners coming back for more. If the waiters moved faster than sloths, it would be a top-class restaurant all-round.

Pizzeria La Piovra (Halász-part; pizzas from 800Ft) Squeezed in among a line of bars is this simple pizzeria, with unexceptional if not filling pizzas. The view makes up for any shortcomings the pizzas may have

There's a stretch of lively but nondescript pubs and bars facing the water at Halász-part, including the Calypso Drink Bar, the Riverside Pub and the Serrano Saloon.

Entertainment

József Attila Cultural Centre (☎ 326 633; Árpád tér 1) This is your source for information about what's going on in Baja. Ask about concerts in the old Serbian church (now a music school and hall) on Batthyány utca.

Getting There & Away

Buses to Kalocsa (544Ft, one hour, 45km) and Szeged (1330Ft, 2½ hours, 105km) depart at least once an hour; there are five to 10 daily departures to Mohács (605Ft, 1¼ hours, 50km), Szekszárd (544Ft, one hour, 40km), Kecskemét (1330Ft, 2½ hours, 110km) and Budapest (2060Ft, 3¼ hours, 160km) as well.

TRAIN

The train line here links Bátaszék and Kiskunhalas; you must change at the former for Budapest (2030Ft, four hours, 190km), Szekszárd (346Ft, one hour, 40km), Pécs (1624Ft, 2¾ hours, 150km) and other points in Southern Transdanubia. From Kiskunhalas, it's impossible to get anywhere of importance without at least another change (the one exception is the fast train to Budapest).

SZEGED

☎ 62 / pop 156,400

Szeged – a corruption of the Hungarian word *sziget*, or 'island' – is the largest and most important city on the Southern Plain, yet tourist-wise it would rank among Hungary's most under-rated. This is a crying shame, because it has so much to offer the traveller. Theatre, opera and all types of classical and popular music performances

abound year-round, and architectural delights are scattered throughout its surprisingly pretty centre. If this isn't enough then perhaps the city's famed edibles will win you over: Szeged paprika, which combines so well with fish from the Tisza River in *szegedi halászlé* (spicy fish soup), and Pick, Hungary's finest salami.

History

Remnants of the Körös culture suggest that these goddess-worshipping people lived in the Szeged area 4000 or 5000 years ago, and one of the earliest Magyar settlements in Hungary was at Ópusztaszer to the north. By the 13th century, the city was an important trading centre, helped along by the royal monopoly it held on the salt being shipped in via the Maros River from Transylvania. Under the Turks, Szeged was afforded some protection since the sultan's estates lay in the area, and it continued to prosper in the 18th and 19th centuries as a royal free town.

The watery fingers of the Tisza almost wiped Szeged off the map in 1879 (see boxed text, p263) but the town bounced back with a vengeance and an eye for uniform architecture. Since WWII, Szeged has been an important university town – students marched here in 1956 before their classmates in Budapest (see p32) did – and a cultural centre.

Orientation

The Tisza River, joined by the Maros, flows west and then turns abruptly south through the centre of Szeged, splitting the city in two as cleanly as the Danube bisects Budapest. But comparison of the two cities and their rivers stops there. The Tisza is a rather undignified muddy channel here, and the other side of Szeged is not the city's throbbing commercial heart as Pest is to Budapest but a large park given over to sunbathing, swimming and other hedonistic pursuits.

Szeged's many squares and inner and outer ring roads make the city confusing for some, but virtually every square in the city has a large signpost with detailed plans and a legend in several languages. The main train station (Indóház tér) is south of the city centre; tram 1 connects the station with the town. The bus station (Mars tér), to the west of the centre, is within easy

walking distance via pedestrian-only Mikszáth Kálmán utca.

Information

Cyber Arena (Deák Ferenc 26; per hr 360Ft; 📞 24hr) Also has cheap Internet calls.

Libri (☎ 541 126; Jókai utca; 📞 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) Small foreign-language section that's big on Hungarian writers, historians and famous figures.

Main hospital (☎ 484 184; Kossuth Lajos Sugárút 42)

Main post office (Széchenyi tér 1)

Map shop (☎ 424 667; Attila utca 9) An excellent source of maps, not only for Hungary but the world.

Tourinform (☎ 488 699; szeged@tourinform.hu; Dugonics tér 2; 📞 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Tucked away in a quiet courtyard.

Tourinform Booth (Széchenyi tér; 📞 9am-9pm May-Sep) A separate pavilion.

www.szegedportal.hu Not the city's official site, but loaded with useful information and in English.

Sights

CITY CENTRE

Begin an easy walking tour of Szeged in Széchenyi tér, a square so large it's a park. The neobaroque **town hall**, with its graceful tower and colourful tiled roof, dominates the square, while statues of Lajos Tisza, István Széchenyi and the *kubikosok* (navvies) who helped regulate the Tisza River take pride of place under the chestnut trees. Take a quick detour north of the square to the **Gróf Palace** (Arany János utca), a fantastical office building completed in 1913 in Secessionist style.

Pedestrian Kárász utca leads south through Klauzál tér. Turn west on Kölcsey utca and walk for about 100m to the **Reök Palace** (Reök-palota; Tisza Lajos körút), a mind-blowing green and lilac Art Nouveau structure built in 1907 that looks like an aquarium decoration. Sadly, it's been left to the elements and is coming off second-best.

Further south, Kárász utca meets Dugonics tér, site of the **Attila József Science University** (abbreviated JATE in Hungarian), named after its most famous alumnus. József (1905-37), a much loved poet, was actually expelled from here in 1924 for writing the verse 'I have no father and I have no mother/I have no God and I have no country' during the ultraconservative rule of Admiral Miklós Horthy. A **music fountain** in the square plays at irregular intervals throughout the day.

and Faith), appears to float skyward, and the tabernacle of carved acacia wood and metal fittings is a masterpiece. There are a few other buildings of interest in this area, the former Jewish quarter, including the neoclassical **Old Synagogue** (Ózsinagóga; Hajnóczy utca 12), built in 1843, and just south of Széchenyi tér, the remains of another old **synagogue** (Nádor utca 3), now a private house.

OTHER SIGHTS

If you'd like to know more about the making of Szeged's famed salami – from hoof to shrink-wrap – the **Pick & Paprika Museum** (☎ 20-980 8000; Felső Tisza-part 10; adult/child 320/240Ft; ☎ 3-6pm Tue-Sat) can oblige, and if that doesn't satisfy your taste buds, there's plenty of paprika to burn them into submission. Pick salami can be purchased from the Pick shop next to the museum.

Szeged's ramshackle **flea market** is near Vám tér at the start of Szabadkai út south-west of the centre.

Activities

Just north of Széchenyi tér you'll find the newly renovated **public baths** (☎ 487 711; Tisza Lajos körút 24; adult/child 600/450Ft; ☎ 6am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun), with its very own wellness centre. Across the Tisza River, the parkland of New Szeged (Újszeged) has **swimming pools** as well as **beaches** along the river, but at the time of research everything was closed due to flood damage. The nearby **thermal spa** (☎ 431 133; Fürdő utca 1; adult/child 700/550Ft; ☎ 6am-8pm) is still open for business however. About 10km west of town in the suburb of Szikszósfürdő is the thermal **Soda Salt Lake** (adult/child 600/300Ft; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat & Sun May-Sep). Alongside a conventional **strand**, swimming pool and rowing boats, it also has a nudist beach and camp site.

Tourinform (☎ 488 699; Dugonics tér 2) will rent you bicycles for 900/2500/7000Ft per hour/day/week.

Festivals & Events

The **Szeged Open-Air Festival** unfolds on Dóm tér from mid-July to late August, with the two towers of the Votive Church as a backdrop. The outdoor theatre here seats some 6000 people. Main events include an opera, an operetta, a play, folk dancing, classical music, ballet and a rock opera. Festival tickets and information are available from

the **festival ticket office** (☎ 554 713; ticket@szinhaz.szeged.hu; Kelemen utca 7; ☎ 1-5pm Mon, 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-noon Sat). But Szeged isn't all high-brow; others might prefer the annual **Beer Festival** at the beginning of June or the one-week **Wine Festival** at the end of May.

Sleeping BUDGET

Szeged's *pension* situation is surprisingly poor; there are plenty around but none truly stand out. Most are either concentrated northwest of town near the bus station or to the west of the train station. Tourinform can supply you with a comprehensive list, and can also organise private rooms (3000Ft).

István Apáthy College (☎ 545 896; Eötvös utca 4; r 5000Ft) Plenty of student dormitories in Szeged open their doors to travellers in July and August, and this college is a run-down but supremely central option.

Ottó Hermann College (☎ 544 309; Temesvári körút 52; s/d 2500/5000Ft; ☎) On a quiet residential street, Ottó Hermann is the best of the bunch over in New Szeged.

Partfürdő (☎ 430 843, fax 425 559; Közép-kikötő sor; camp sites per adult/child/tent 600/430/600Ft, bungalows from 6000Ft) In New Szeged, it was closed at the time of research due to flood damage. Fortunately its bungalows escaped the worst of it.

Szikszós Camping (☎ 463 029; Szikszói út; camp sites per person/tent 1200/200Ft, bungalows from 3800Ft; ☎) Further out in the suburb of Szikszósfürdő is this friendly camping ground, with cabin-style bungalows and plenty of shade.

Naturista Camping (☎ 463 988; Vereshomok dűlő 1; camp sites per person/tent/car 300/780/400Ft, bungalows from 4500Ft; ☎) A nudist site, with simple bungalows and a small lake to splash about in.

MIDRANGE

Tisza (☎ 478 278; www.tiszahotel.hu; Wesselényi utca 1; s/d from 8900/12,900Ft; ☎) Built in 1885, Tisza is Szeged's old-world hotel, with chandeliers, wrought-iron stair railings, and an air of class. Unfortunately rooms don't match the extravagance of the rest of the hotel but they're bright and airy and quite comfortable.

Forrás (☎ 430 130; www.hotelforras.szeged.hu; Szent-Györgyi Albert utca 16-24; s/d from €36/49; ☎ ☎ ☎) In New Szeged, this spa hotel looks rather ugly from the outside but its

facilities (which include thermal treatments and massages) and large rooms are in good nick and the staff are professional and helpful. Bike rental is available for 200Ft per hour.

TOP END

Dóm Hotel (☎ 423 750; www.domhotel.hu; Bajza utca 6; s/d 12,600/15,200Ft; ☎ ☎ ☎) This small and modern hotel is in the heart of the city. Sizable rooms are contemporarily styled in pastel hues and there's a sauna (800Ft) for guest use.

Novotel Szeged (☎ 562 200; h2996@accor.com; Maros utca 1; s/d €80/90; ☎ ☎ ☎) This is a modern 136-room hotel near a noisy stretch of road but with good views of the river, and rooms with all the trimmings.

Eating

RESTAURANTS

Halászcserda (☎ 555 980; Roosevelt tér 14; mains 1500-2000Ft) Halászcserda is a Szeged institution that knows how to prepare the best fish in town, including *szegedi halászlé*. On hot summer days its large terrace near the Tisza is thankfully tree-shaded.

Régi Hídhöz (☎ 420 910; Oskola utca 4; mains 1000Ft) Some believe Hídhöz serves comparable fish dishes to its neighbour Halászcserda, which is saying something. The atmosphere here is, however, more relaxed and family-orientated.

Kiskőrösy (☎ 495 698; Felső Tisza-part 336; mains 1000-2000Ft) Housed in a traditional fisherman's cottage on the banks of the Tisza a few kilometres east of the centre, this excellent fish restaurant is an atmospheric place to dine. Unfortunately it was affected by the latest flood, so check with Tourinform on its opening times.

Zodiákus (☎ 420 914; Oskola utca 13; mains 1000-2000Ft) Zodiákus wins over diners with its unusual astrological theme and international menu.

Número Uno Pizza (☎ 424 745; Széchenyi tér 5; pizzas from 390Ft) We can't guarantee that this simple pizzeria is number one in the city but it's certainly up there with the best. Its inner-courtyard garden is also fine for a quiet drink.

Botond (☎ 420 435; Széchenyi tér 13; mains 1000-2000Ft) Botond serves better-than-average Hungarian food. Its pleasant outside seating overlooks Széchenyi tér.

CAFÉS

Grand Café (☎ 420 578; Deák Ferenc utca 18; ☎ 3pm-midnight Mon-Fri, 5pm-midnight Sat & Sun) For coffee, cake and a bit of peace and quiet (except when it's hosting film nights), head to this light-hearted café on the 2nd floor of an office block.

Virág (☎ 541 360; Klauzál tér 1; ☎ 8am-10pm) A café since 1922, Virág serves possibly the best ice cream in town, and its cakes aren't bad either. Take a seat in its traditional booths outside on large Klauzál tér, or directly opposite in its modern counterpart, Kis Virág.

SELF-CATERING

Szeged has two big **fruit & vegetable markets**, one on Mars tér, site of the notorious Star Prison for political prisoners early in the 1950s, and the other northwest of Széchenyi tér on Szent István tér. There's also a **non-stop shop** (Zrínyi utca 1).

Drinking

There's a vast array of bars, clubs and other night spots in this student town, especially between Dugonics tér and Dóm tér.

JATE Klub bar (Toldy utca 2; ☎ noon-midnight) A reasonably laid-back spot, attracting students with its cheap drinks and terrace.

Beer stand (Somogyi utca; ☎ May-Sep) A very popular spot further east that appeals more to city workers.

John Bull Pub (☎ 484 217; Oroszlán utca 6) This pub does a grand job of 'English Pub' imitation (minus the 11 o'clock closing!!), with carpets, proper pints and bar stools. Its garden is a welcome respite from the centre.

Both **Número Uno** (☎ 424 745; Széchenyi tér 5) and **Grand Café** (☎ 420 578; Deák Ferenc utca 18) are worth stopping in for a drink even if you're not having a meal.

Entertainment

Your best sources of entertainment information in this culturally active city are Tourinform, the **Bartók Béla Cultural Centre** (☎ 479 566; Vörösmarty utca 3), or the free biweekly entertainment guide *Szegedi Est*.

Szeged National Theatre (Szegedi Nemzeti Színház; ☎ 479 279; Deák Ferenc utca 12-14) Built in 1886, it has always been the centre of cultural life in Szeged, and usually stages operas and ballet.

New Synagogue (Új zsinagóga; ☎ 423 849; Gutenberg utca 13) There are free organ concerts here from late March to mid-September;

it's a good chance to take in the splendour of the building without having to pay.

Sing Sing (☎ 420 314; Mars tér C pavilon; 🕒 10am-5am Wed & Sat) Sing Sing occupies a huge pavilion near the bus station and hosts rave parties twice a week.

JATE Klub (☎ 420 445; Toldy utca 1; 🕒 9.30am-4am Mon-Fri, 10am-5am Sat) and **SZOTE Club** (Dom tér 13; 🕒 10-5am Wed, Fri & Sat) are two student haunts without compare in Szeged; both are fairly grungy, host a mix of DJs and live acts, and are packed to the gunnels with students.

Getting There & Away

BUS

The bus service is good from Szeged, with frequent departures to Kecskemét (1090Ft, 1½ hours, 85km), Békéscsaba (1150Ft, two hours, 95km), Gyula (1820Ft, 3½ hours, 145km), Csongrád (725Ft, 1½ hours, 60km), Ópusztaszer (363Ft, 45 minutes, 30km) and Hódmezővásárhely (363Ft, 35 minutes, 30km).

Other destinations from Szeged:

Destination	Price	Duration	Km	Frequency
Debrecen	2910Ft	5hr	230	2 daily
Mohács	1450Ft	3¼hr	155	6 daily
Népliget station	2170Ft	3hr	175	8 daily
Pécs	2410Ft	4¼hr	195	7 daily
Tiszafüred	2660Ft	5hr	220	2 daily
Veszprém	2910Ft	5hr	235	3 daily

Buses also head for Arad, across the Romanian border, daily at 6.30am Monday to Saturday. Buses run to Novi Sad in Serbia and Montenegro at 4pm daily and to Subotica up to four times daily. A 9.30pm bus on Friday departs for Vienna.

TRAIN

Szeged is on a main train line to Budapest's Nyugati station (2030Ft, 2¼ hours, 190km). Another line connects the city with Hódmezővásárhely (346Ft, 35 minutes, 30km) and Békéscsaba (1004Ft, two hours, 95km), where you can change trains for Gyula (1212Ft, three hours, 115km) or Romania. Southbound local trains leave Szeged for Subotica in Serbia and Montenegro twice daily at 6.20am and 4.25pm.

Getting Around

Tram 1 from the train station will take you north to Széchenyi tér. The tram turns west

on Kossuth Lajos sugárút and goes as far as Izabella Bridge, where it turns around. To get to Szentmihály and the flea market, take bus 76 or tram 4. From the main bus station catch bus 7/f for Szikszófürdő and bus 2 for student accommodation in New Szeged.

Local **taxis** (☎ 444 444, 555 555) can also be ordered.

ÓPUSZTASZER

☎ 62 / pop 2300

About 28km north of Szeged, the **Ópusztaszer National Historical Memorial Park** (Ópusztaszeri Nemzeti Történelmi Emlékpark; ☎ 275 133; www.opusztaszer.hu; admission park only 800Ft, park & panorama painting adult/student or child 1800/1200Ft; 🕒 9am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9am-4pm Nov-Mar) in Ópusztaszer commemorates the single most important event in Hungarian history: the *honfoglalás*, or 'conquest', of the Carpathian Basin by the Magyars in 896 (see p22).

Contrary to what many people think (Hungarians included), the park does not mark the spot where Árpád, mounted on his white charger, first entered 'Hungary'. That was actually the Munkács Valley, Hungarian territory until after WWI and now Ukrainian territory. But according to the 12th-century chronicler known as Anonymus, it was at this place called Szer that Árpád and the six clan chieftains, who had sworn a blood oath of fidelity to him, held their first assembly, and so it was decided that a **Millennium Monument** would be erected here in 1896. (Scholars had actually determined the date of the conquest to be between 893 and 895, but the government was not ready to mark the 1000-year anniversary until 1896.)

Situated on top of a slight rise in the Great Plain about 1km from the Szeged road, the park is an attractive though sombre place. Besides the neoclassical monument with Árpád taking pride of place, there are ruins of an 11th-century **Romanesque church** and **monastery** (still being excavated) and an excellent **open-air museum** (skanzen; 🕒 Apr-Oct), with a farmhouse, windmills, an old post office, a schoolhouse and cottages moved from villages around southeast Hungary. In one, the home of a rather prosperous and smug onion-grower from Makó, a sampler admonishes potential gossips: 'Neighbour lady, away you go/If it's gossip that you want to know' (or words to that effect).

To the west of the park beside the little lake, a museum reminiscent of a Magyar chieftain's tent houses a huge **panorama painting** entitled *The Arrival of the Hungarians*. Completed by Árpád Feszty for the Millenary Exhibition in Budapest in 1896, the enormous work, which measures 15m x 120m, was badly damaged during WWII and was restored by a Polish team in time for the 1100th anniversary of the conquest in 1996. Two **galleries** (1 gallery adult/child 500/300Ft, 2 galleries adult/child 700/600Ft) above the painting are devoted to art and history of the area. Of particular interest are photos of rough-and-ready tribal Magyars dressed in their traditional 19th-century garb.

There are also **horse shows** (adult/child 500/400Ft; 🕒 11.30am & 2.30pm Apr-Oct) celebrating the life of the nomadic Magyars of yesteryear, bows to be shot (150Ft) and horses to be ridden (300Ft).

Ópusztaszer must be done as a day-trip; there is no accommodation within walking distance of the entrance and the only food option is within the park. Up to 12 buses daily travel between Szeged (363Ft,

45 minutes, 30km) and Ópusztaszer, the last leaving for Szeged at 8.30pm.

HÓDMEZŐVÁSÁRHELY

☎ 62 / pop 47,900

Folk art, particularly pottery, has a rich tradition in Hódmezővásárhely (Beaver Meadow Marketplace); some 400 independent artisans working here in the mid-19th century made it the largest pottery centre in Hungary. Today you won't see much more pottery outside the town's museums than you would elsewhere, but the influence of the dynamic artists' colony here is felt well beyond Kohán György utca – from the galleries and **Autumn Weeks** art festival in October to the ceramic and bronze street signs by eminent artists.

Orientation

The bus station (Bocskai utca) is just off Andrassy utca, about a 10-minute walk east from Kossuth tér, the city centre. There are two train stations in town: the main one and Hódmezővásárhelyi-Népkert. The first is east of the city centre at the end of Mérélg

INFORMATION

Main Post Office	1 B2	Folk Art House	8 B2	Oszkóm-Izom	14 B2
OTP Bank	2 B2	János Tornyai Museum	9 B2	DRINKING	
Petőfi Cultural Centre	3 B2	Thermal Spa	10 A3	Fekete Sas	15 A2
Tourinform	4 B2	SLEEPING		Sarokház	16 B2
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Alföld Gallery	5 B2	ENTERTAINMENT	
Artists' Colony	6 A2	Fárma	11 C1	Hordó	17 A2
Entrance to Spa	7 A2	Thermál Camping	12 B3	TRANSPORT	
		Bandula	13 B1	Bus Station	18 C2

utca, the second southwest at the end of Ady Endre utca.

Information

Main post office (Kossuth tér 8) On the south side of Kossuth tér.

OTP bank (Andrássy utca 1) This bank is on the east side of Kossuth tér and has an ATM.

Petőfi Cultural Centre (☎ 241 710; Szántó Kovács János utca 7; per hr 50Ft; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri)

Tourinform (☎ 249 350; hodmezovasarhely@tourinform.hu; Szőnyi utca 1; ☎ 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) Just to the southeast of the main square.

Sights

The **János Tornyai Museum** (☎ 344 424; Szántó Kovács János utca 16-18; adult/child 200/100Ft; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue & Wed, 10am-5pm Thu-Sun), named after a leading member of the Alföld School of fresco painting, displays some early archaeological finds, but its *raison d'être* is to show off the folk art of Hódmezővásárhely – the painted furniture, 'hairy' embroidery done with yarn-like thread, and pottery unique to the region. The collection of jugs, pitchers and plates, most of them made as wedding gifts, is the finest of all and represents the many types once made here and named after city districts, including Csúcs (white and blue), Tabán (brown) and Újváros (yellow and green).

More pottery is on display at the **Csúcs Pottery House** (Csúcsi Fazekasház; ☎ 242 224; Rákóczi utca 101; admission free; ☎ 1-5pm Tue-Sun), once the home of master potter Sándor Vékony, and at the **Folk Art House** (Népművészeti tájház; ☎ 20-444 0560; Árpád utca 21, entry from Kaszap utca; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun), two old thatched farmhouses standing self-consciously in the middle of a housing estate.

Outsiders are not allowed into the **artists' colony** (művésztelep; Kohán György utca 2), founded in the early part of last century, but you can view selected members' work at the **Alföld Gallery** (☎ 242 247; Kossuth tér 8, enter from Szőnyi utca; adult/child 200/100Ft; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue & Wed, 10am-5pm Thu-Sun) housed in a neoclassical former Calvinist school. Naturally the Alföld School dominates; you might go a little crazy looking at horses and *shahoof* (seep wells) and cowboys on the Great Plain in every season through the eyes of Tornyai, István Nagy and József Koszta, but there are other things to enjoy such as the work of Menyhért Tóth and the impressionist János Vaszary.

Activities

The **thermal spa** (☎ 244 238; Ady Endre utca 1; adult/child 650/480Ft; ☎ 8am-8pm) in the Népkert, south of Kossuth tér, has eight hot and cold pools where you can immerse yourself, but Mártély, about 10km to the northwest on a backwater of the Tisza, is the city's real recreational centre, with **boating, fishing and swimming** available.

The **Aranyági Stud Farm** (☎ 30-218 3354; Serházter út 2), 4km northeast of the centre, has horse shows, horse riding and horse tours on request.

Sleeping

Fáma (☎ 222 231; faama@vnet.hu; Szeremlei utca 7; s/d from 6490/7520Ft; ☎ 24) This quiet hotel offers a touch of serenity just behind the city's synagogue. Rooms are spacious yet simple (only those on the 1st floor have air-con), and there's a restaurant and a private grassy courtyard for guest use.

Kenguru (☎ 534 841; kenguru@vasarhely.hu; Szántó Kovács János utca 78; r from 7250Ft; ☎ 24) Even though it isn't centrally located, Kenguru is a fine option. Big, bright rooms with natural wood furniture and floors surround an inner courtyard used for secure parking; guests can use the pool, sauna and solarium.

Vándorsólyom (☎ 535 150; Kutasi út; s/d 6250/7000Ft; ☎ 24) This nine-room inn has a peaceful, rural setting 4km east of town. The entire place could do with a makeover but it's the perfect place to combine accommodation with horse-riding (stables are next door).

Also recommended:

Tisza-part Camping (☎ 228 057; martelycamping@freemail.hu; camp sites per adult/child/tent 650/400/650Ft, bungalows per person 1350Ft; ☎ May-Sep; ☎ 24) Camp site in Mártély near plenty of recreational activities.

Thermál Camping (☎ 245 033; Ady Endre utca 1; camp sites per adult/child/tent 720/360/850Ft, bungalows 6050-6600Ft; ☎ 24) Small site handy to the spa.

Eating & Drinking

Bandula (☎ 244 234; Pálffy utca 2; mains 1000-2000Ft) With an international menu, quick service and cosy surroundings, Bandula is the best option for food in town.

Fekete Sas (☎ 249 326; Kossuth tér 5; drinks 300Ft) On the ground floor of the grand old Fekete Sas Hotel (currently under renovation), Fekete Sas is the town's 'mature' bar, with a more relaxed crowd and colourful interior.

Sarokház (Kossuth tér 7; coffee 100Ft; ☎ 9am-9pm Sun-Thu, 9am-10pm Fri & Sat) The 'Corner House' is a quiet café filled with locals gossiping about the days' events or whiling away the time people-watching and reading.

Őszöm-lszom (☎ 239 341; Szent Antal utca 8; mains 600-1200Ft; ☎ 9am-midnight Sun-Thu, 9am-2am Fri, 9am-3am Sat) That's 'I Eat-I Drink' in Szeged dialect – and it's OK for a quick meal and a pint.

Entertainment

Petőfi (☎ 241 710; Szántó Kovács János utca 7) It can advise you on what's on in town.

Hordó (☎ 20-924 7381; Városház utca; ☎ 5pm-4am Fri & Sat) This cellar bar is a meeting point on Friday and Saturday nights for those wishing to drink and play up large.

Getting There & Away

Buses to Szeged (363Ft, 35 minutes, 30km), Békéscsaba (846Ft, 1½ hours, 70km), Csongrád (544Ft, one hour, 40km) and the resort area of Mártély (182Ft, 20 minutes, 12km) are frequent; there is a minimum of three daily departures to Kecskemét (1210Ft, two hours, 95km) and Budapest (2300Ft, 3½ hours, 185km).

Two train lines pass through Hódmezővásárhely, and all trains serve both train stations, which are 2km apart. The more important of the two lines connects Szeged (346Ft, 35 minutes, 30km) with Békéscsaba (658Ft, 1¼ hours, 65km).

CSONGRÁD

☎ 63 / pop 18,500

Csongrád's sleepy charm lies in its Öregvár (Old Castle) district – a quiet fishing village of thatched cottages and narrow streets on the bank of the Tisza – which hasn't changed much since the 17th century. However, back in the 13th century Csongrád was a place of importance, gaining the title of royal capital of Csongrád County. The invading Mongols put paid to that, all but destroying the town; it wasn't until the 1920s that it once again became known as a town.

Orientation

Csongrád lies on the right bank of the Tisza, close to where it is joined by the Körös River, some 58km north of Szeged. A backwater (Holt-Tisza) south of town is used for

recreation. The bus station (Hunyadi tér) is five minutes from the main street, Fő utca. The train station lies to the southwest at the end of Vasút utca.

Information

Main post office (Dózsa György tér 1) Northeast of the bus station.

OTP bank branch (Szentháromság tér 8) Has an ATM.

Tourinform (☎ 570 325; csongrad@tourinform.hu; Szentháromság tér 8; ☎ 9am-5pm mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 8am-4pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep–mid-Jun) In the cultural centre.

Sights & Activities

The town's big museum, the **László Tari Múzeum** (☎ 481 103; Iskola utca 2; adult/child 200/100Ft; ☎ 1-5pm Tue-Fri, 8am-noon Sat, 8am-noon & 1-5pm Sun), examines the history of Csongrád, starting with tribes that settled the region as far back as the Bronze Age.

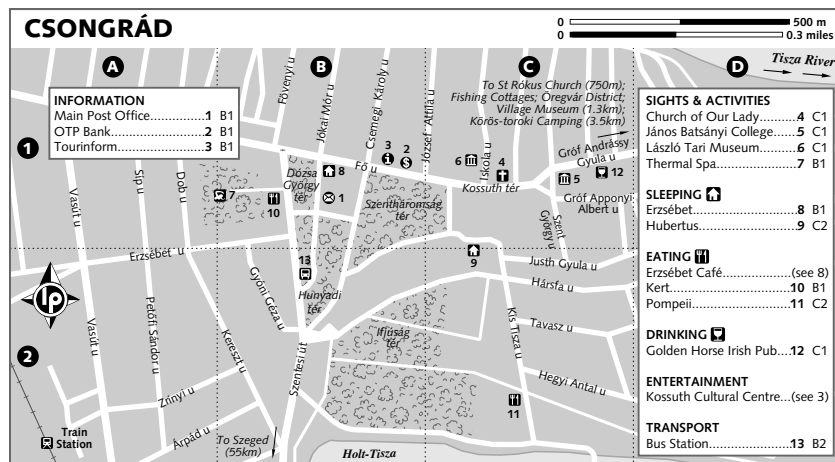
Walking eastward from the museum to the Öregvár district, you'll pass the baroque **Church of Our Lady** (Nagyboldogasszony temploma), built in 1769, and the beautiful Secessionist **János Batsányi College** (Kossuth tér). A bit further on is **St Rókus Church**, built in 1722 on the site of a Turkish mosque.

The cobblestone streets of the protected **Old Castle** district begin at a little roundabout three blocks east of the church. Most of the district is made up of private homes or holiday houses, but the **Village Museum** (Tájház; Gyökér utca 1; admission free; ☎ 1-5pm Tue-Sun May-Oct) gives a good idea of how the simple fisher folk of Csongrád lived until not so long ago. It's housed in two old cottages connected by a long thatched roof and contains period furniture, household items and lots of fish nets and traps.

The town's **thermal spa** (Dob utca 3-5; adult/child 550/430Ft; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Thu, 7am-10pm Fri, 8am-10pm Sat, 8am-8pm Sun), fed by a spring with water that reaches 46°C, is in a large park and there are also **outdoor pools** and a **strand** (☎ 7am-8pm). **Tourinform** (☎ 570 325; Szentháromság tér 8) can point you in the right direction for horse riding and fishing in the area.

Sleeping

Fishing cottages (☎ 483 631; idegenforgalom@csongrad.hu; information Fő utca 3; houses 5000-16,000Ft; ☎ 24) The most atmospheric places to stay in town are these cottages in the Old Castle district. The 200-year-old houses are squat dwellings with thick whitewashed walls, clay



ovens, polished wood floors, and oodles of character. Each comes with a fully equipped kitchen and often two bedrooms.

Hubertus (☎ 484 997; vi-ma@csongrad.hu; Justh Gyula utca 5; r7200Ft; 📍) Csongrád's newest *pen-sion* is a bright yellow collaboration with spotless *en-suite* rooms and a private courtyard for parking and relaxing in.

Erzsébet (☎ 483 960; Fő utca 3; s/d 55007500Ft) This old hotel is minutes from the bus station and has considerably large rooms filled with so-so wood furniture. Rates include entry to the thermal spa.

Körös-toroki Camping (☎ 481 185; 3-person camp sites 3000Ft, bungalows 6000-8000Ft; 📅 mid-May-mid-Sep; 📍) Körös-toroki sits at the confluence of the Tisza and Körös Rivers and has the added bonus of direct access to a beach and bungalows on stilts – the area floods in heavy rain and the mosquitoes can be unbearable.

Eating & Drinking

Kert (☎ 483 199; Dózsa György tér 6; mains 1000-2000Ft) This garden inn, set back in a small park, has an excellent array of Hungarian dishes to whet most appetites and an atmosphere to get most tongues wagging.

Erzsébet Café (☎ 483 106; Fő utca 3; coffee 200Ft) Recently given a complete overhaul, Erzsébet is now the town's finest café, serving inviting cakes and coffee in smart surroundings.

Pompeii (☎ 470 160; Kis Tisza utca 6; mains 1000Ft) Hidden behind drooping willow trees in a

renovated old house, this restaurant serves decent pizza and South Slav specialities.

Golden Horse Irish Pub (Gróf Andrássy Gyula utca 17/a) This is about the only decent place in town for a drink, and is east of the centre on the way to the Öregvár.

Entertainment

Kossuth Cultural Centre (☎ 483 414; Szentháromság tér 8; 📅 noon-8pm Mon-Fri) Information on Csongrád's cultural activities, along with Internet access (100Ft per hour), is available here.

Getting There & Away

From Csongrád buses run to Békéscsaba (1090Ft, two hours, 90km, three daily), Budapest (1690Ft, 2½ hours, 140km, eight daily), Hódmezővásárhely (544Ft, one hour, 40km, nine daily) and Kecskemét (665Ft, one hour, 55km, 13 daily). The 15 daily buses to Szeged (725Ft, 1½ hours, 60km) go via Ópusztaszer.

Csongrád is on the 40km secondary train line linking Szentés (182Ft, 15 minutes, 15km) to the east with Kiskunfélegyháza (264Ft, 35 minutes, 25km) to the west. You can't get very far from Szentés but Kiskunfélegyháza is a stop on the Budapest-Szeged express-train line.

BÉKÉCSABA

☎ 66 / pop 66,500

Békéscsaba is a sprightly town of leafy avenues and church spires, and a handful of sights. Mention the place to most

Hungarians however, and they usually think of two very disparate things: fatty sausage and bloody riots. *Csabai*, a sausage not dissimilar to Portuguese *chorizo*, is manufactured here, and Békéscsaba was the centre of the Vihar Sarok, the 'Stormy Corner' of the Great Plain, where violent riots broke out among day labourers and harvesters in 1890.

History

Békéscsaba was an important fortified settlement as early as the 14th century, but it was razed and its population scattered under Turkish rule. Early in the 18th century, a Habsburg emissary named János György Harruckern invited Rhinelanders and Slovaks to resettle the area, and it soon became a Lutheran stronghold.

Development began to reach Békéscsaba in the 19th century when the railway passed through the city (1858) and by 1950, Békéscsaba had surpassed nearby Gyula in importance and the county seat was moved here – something for which Gyula has yet to forgive her sister city.

Orientation

Békéscsaba's train and bus stations stand side by side at the southwestern end of Andrássy út, the main drag. A long stretch of this street, from Petőfi utca and Jókai utca to Szent István tér, is a pedestrian walkway, and just beyond it lies the Élővíz-csatorna, the 'Living Water Canal' that links Békéscsaba with Békes to the north, Gyula to the east, and the Körös River. To the east of the canal lies the Parkerdő, the city's cool and leafy playground.

Information

Main post office (Irány utca)

OTP bank (Szent István tér 3; Andrássy út 4)

Tourinform (☎ 441 261; bekescsaba@tourinform.hu; Szent István tér 9; 📅 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) Happy to supply truckloads of information on the town and county.

www.bekescsaba.hu The city's website.

Sights & Activities

The splendid **town hall** (városháza; Szent István tér 7) on the main street has a façade (1873) designed by the overworked Budapest architect Miklós Ybl. Walk east on József Attila utca to the canal and Árpád sor, which

is lined with busts of Hungarian literary, artistic and musical greats and some wonderful late-19th-century mansions. Within sight is the **István Mill** (István Malom; Gózmalom tér), a grey-brick colossus from the early 20th century. It closed in 2005, with the unfortunate loss of hundreds of jobs.

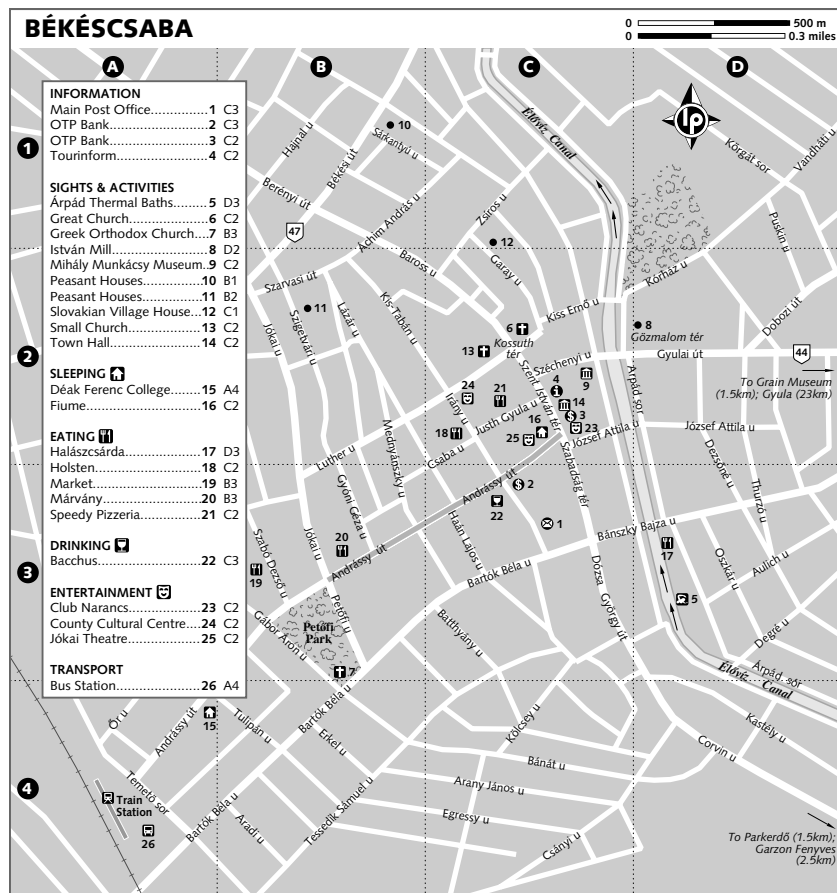
Across the canal from the mill is the **Mihály Munkácsy Museum** (☎ 323 377; Széchenyi utca 9; adult/child 300/150Ft; 📅 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar), which has exhibits devoted to the wildlife and ecology of the Great Plain, as well as to the folk culture of the region. Essentially, though, it's a temple to the painter Munkácsy (1844-1900). Some may find his depictions of the Great Plain and its denizens a little sugar-coated, but as a chronicler of that place and time (real or imagined) he is unsurpassed in Hungarian fine art. An ethnographic exhibit traces the history of the Romanian, Slovak, German and Hungarian ethnic groups of the region.

The Lutheran **Great Church** (Nagytemplom; Kossuth tér; admission free), completed in 1824, and the 18th-century **Small Church** (Kistemplom; Kossuth tér; admission free), facing each other across Kossuth tér, attest to the city's deeply rooted Protestantism. The baroque **Greek Orthodox church** (Bartók Béla utca 51-53; admission free), dating from 1838, could easily be mistaken for yet another Lutheran church from the outside.

Present or future farmers would no doubt be interested in the **Grain Museum** (Gabonamúzeum; ☎ 441 026; Gyulai út 65; adult/child 150/80Ft; 📅 10am-5pm Tue-Sun May-Sep), housed in several old thatched barns and crammed with traditional tools and implements. The bladeless 19th-century windmill nearby is one of the best examples surviving in Hungary.

The **Slovakian Village House** (Szlovák tájház; ☎ 327 038; Garay utca 21; adult/child 100/50Ft; 📅 10am-noon & 2-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-noon & 2-4pm Thu-Sun Oct-Mar), is a wonderful Slovakian farmhouse built in 1865 and full of folk furniture and ornamentation. A lot of other typical peasant houses can be found in the neighbourhood, especially on Szigetvári utca and Sarkantyú utca.

The **Árpád thermal baths** (☎ 549 800; Árpád sor 2; adult/child 900/600Ft; 📅 6am-8pm Nov-Sep) has both indoor and outdoor pools but not a whole lot of fun slides for kids.



Sleeping

Garzon Fenyves (☎ 457 377; www.fenyveshotel.hu; s/d 8300/10,300Ft; P) This retreat-like hotel occupies a cool, leafy oasis in the

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Fiume (☎ 443 243; Szent István tér 2; s/d 8750/11,750Ft; P) Fiume bears the old name of the Adriatic port of Rijeka (now in Croatia) and is Békéscsaba's premier hotel and one of the nicest in Hungary. Rooms are bedecked in period furniture and range from tiny to spacious, and corridors seem to go on forever, much like the Overlook in *The Shining*. But don't let that put you off.

Ifjúsági-tábor and has huge, modern rooms and friendly staff.

Déak Ferenc College (☎ 325 620; e-deak@freeweb.hu; Andrásy út 56; dm 1100Ft, s/d 1200/2400Ft; ☎ Jul-Aug; P) This college accommodation is handy to both the bus and train stations and has simple but comfy rooms with shared facilities.

Eating & Drinking

Fiume (mains around 1200Ft) At the hotel of the same name, this fine diner has a menu weighed down with heavy Hungarian meat dishes; choose from tables under chandeliers or seating with tree-shade.

Halászcárda (☎ 446 625; Árpád sor 1; mains 1500-2000Ft) Halászcárda is the place of choice

for those in the mood for fish. Many of its tables overlook the canal.

Holsten (☎ 441 827; Irányi utca 12; mains 850Ft) This basic eatery has simple Hungarian fare and a lively atmosphere that fills tables quickly on most nights of the week.

Márvány (Andrásy út 21; ice cream from 60Ft; ☎ to 9pm) Those with a sweet tooth can satisfy their urges at this popular café, with outside seating on a pretty square southeast of the main street.

Bacchus (Andrásy út 10; ☎ 7am-10pm) Bacchus is one of the few places on pedestrian Andrásy út where you can procure a late night drink and sit outside.

For those looking for a quick bite to eat, Békéscsaba's big food market (Szabó Dezső utca; ☎ Wed & Sat) has a few food stalls and **Speedy Pizzeria** (Júsh Gyula utca; pizzas 400-1000Ft) churns out tasty morsels.

Entertainment

Club Narancs (☎ 453 032; Szent István tér 3; ☎ 4.30-10pm Mon-Wed, 4.30pm-4am Thu-Sat) A true student haunt with minimal décor, cheap drinks, loud music and a raucous vibe, Narancs is the place to go for a bit of a booze-up. Thursday thru Saturday sees various themed clubbing events.

The **Jókai Theatre** (☎ 441 527; Andrásy út 1), the Great Church and the Town Hall are the main cultural venues in Békéscsaba. Ask at Tourinform or the **County Cultural Centre** (☎ 527 660; Luther utca 6) for dates and times. Check the listings in *Békési Est*, a biweekly entertainment guide distributed free.

Getting There & Away

Buses leave for Gyula (241Ft, 30 minutes, 15km) every half-hour and for Szarvas (605Ft, one hour, 45km) once an hour. Twelve buses daily go to Szeged (1150Ft, two hours, 95km) and two to Budapest (2660Ft, four hours, 210km). Other destinations include Kecskemét (1820Ft, three hours, 145km, five daily) and Vésztő (484Ft, 1¼ hours, 35km, five to nine daily – direct, via Gyula or via Mezőberény).

Up to 10 daily trains – most of them expresses – link Békéscsaba with Szolnok (1004Ft, 1½ hours, 95km) and Budapest's Keleti station (2030Ft, 2½ hours, 195km). Trains are frequent (up to 17 daily) to Gyula (182Ft, 15 minutes, 15km), and six continue on to Vésztő (658Ft, 1½ hours, 65km, a

change at Kötegyán may be required). Up to 11 trains daily depart from Békéscsaba for Szeged (1004Ft, two hours, 95km).

Getting Around

From the bus and train stations you can reach Szent István tér on foot via Andrásy út in about 20 minutes or wait for bus 5 to Szabadság tér. Bus 9 passes through the same square on its way past the stadium and Grain Museum. Board Bus 7 for the college, Fényves hotel and Parkerdő.

You can also order a **taxi** (☎ 444 444).

VÉSZTŐ

☎ 66 / pop 7900

The **Vésztő-Mágor National Historical Monument** (☎ 477 148; adult/child 300/100Ft; ☎ 9am-6pm May-Sep; 10am-4pm Apr & Oct), 4km northwest of Vésztő, contains two burial mounds of a type found throughout Hungary (see, for example, p128) and as far east as Korea. Such mounds are not all that rare on the Great Plain, but these are particularly rich in archaeological finds. The first is a veritable layer cake of cult and everyday objects, shrines and graves dating from the 4th century BC onward. The second contains the 10th-century **Colt monastery** and church which is partially restored, but a lot of imagination is required to piece it all together. It is in the centre of the patchwork 520-sq-km **Körös-Maros National Park**, which is very rich in aquatic vegetation and wildlife. For information contact the **park visitors centre** (☎ 313 855; Anna-liget 1, Szarvas; adult/child 300/200Ft; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct).

The national monument is 4km from Vésztő and is connected by four buses Monday to Saturday; the last leaves at 7.39pm. At least five daily buses run between Vésztő and Gyula (484Ft, 1¼ hours, 35km) and Békéscsaba (484Ft, 1¼ hours, 35km). Up to six daily trains leave Békéscsaba for Vésztő (658Ft, 1½ hours, 65km; a change at Kötegyán may be required) by way of Gyula (430Ft, 1¼ hours, 50km).

SZARVAS

☎ 66 / pop 18,000

Szarvas is a pretty green town 45km northwest of Békéscsaba on a backwater of the Körös River (Holt-Körös). Its biggest drawcard is the arboretum, easily the best in Hungary, but the best thing to ever happen

to Szarvas was the arrival of Sámuel Tessedik, a Lutheran minister and pioneering scientist who established one of Europe's first agricultural institutes here in 1770.

Orientation

Szabadság út, the main street, bisects the town and leads westward to the Holt-Körös and arboretum. On either side of Szabadság út are dozens of small squares organised in chessboard-like fashion by Tessedik, full of flower gardens and even small orchards.

The train station is in the eastern part of town at the end of Vasút utca, while the bus station (Szabadság út) is in the centre at the corner of Bocskai István utca.

Information

K&H bank (Szabadság út)

Main post office (Szabadság út 9)

Panorama (☎ 312 760; Kossuth tér 3/2; per hour 180Ft) In the pizzeria; has Internet access.

Tourinform (☎ 311 140; szarvas@tourinform.hu; Kossuth tér 3; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat mid-Jun-mid-Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri May-mid-Jun, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-Apr) In the cultural centre.

Sights & Activities

The **Szarvas Arboretum** (☎ 312 344; adult/child 500/300Ft; ☎ 8am-6pm mid-Mar-mid-Nov, 8am-3pm mid-Nov-mid-Mar), with some 30,000 individual plants not native to the Great Plain, is Hungary's finest. On 82 hectares it contains around 1600 species of rare trees, bushes and grasses, including mammoth pines, ginkgo

trees, swamp cedars, Spanish pines and pampas grass. The arboretum is about 2km north-west of the centre across the Holt-Körös.

The **Sámuel Tessedik Museum** (☎ 216 608; Vajda Péter utca 1; adult/child 200/100Ft; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar) has some interesting Neolithic exhibits from the goddess-worshipping Körös culture taken from burial mounds on the Great Plain, and while the section devoted to Tessedik is intriguing, it's only in Hungarian. The **birthplace of Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky** (Vajda Péter utca), the resistance leader murdered by Hungarian fascists in 1944, is on the same street four blocks to the north.

The neoclassical **Bolza Mansion** (Bolza-kastély; Szabadság út 2), facing the Holt-Körös, was built in 1819 as the homestead of a land-owning family of that name who also founded the arboretum. Today the mansion is part of the Tessedik Agricultural College but the grounds can be visited. Splitting Holt-Körös' current in two in front of the mansion is the **Millennium Monument**, a statue of St Stephen's Crown flanked by two angels on top of a pole.

Just north of Tourinform in the town's dusty back alleys is Hungary's best-preserved horse-driven **dry mill** (szárazmalom; ☎ 216 609; Ady Endre utca 1; adult/child 300/150Ft; ☎ 1-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct), built in the early 19th century, and a **Slovakian Village House** (Szlovák tájház; ☎ 312 492; Hoffmann utca 1; adult/child 200/100Ft; ☎ 1-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct) filled with hand-woven textiles and articles from everyday life.

Sleeping

Lux (☎ 313 417; lux@szarvas.hu; Szabadság út 35; r from 8500Ft; (P) ♿) Lux is only a stone's throw from the bus station and has large rooms with dated furniture, a restaurant and fitness centre, sauna and solarium.

Halázcserda (☎ 311 164; 1 ker 6; r 8500Ft; (P) ♿) This more rustic option has small attic rooms and is located on the edge of Elizabeth Park, creating a secluded, retreat feel.

Liget (☎ 311 954; www.ligetpanzio.hu; camp sites per adult/child/tent 800/600/650Ft, 4-person bungalows 10,500, r from 9900Ft; (P) ♿) This all-in-one accommodation option is a family-orientated place, with a wellness centre, pool and lake swimming. Camping, bungalows and modern *en-suite* rooms are available.

Eating & Drinking

Halázcserda (mains 1000-2000Ft) In the *pension* of the same name is this fish restaurant, with a relaxed atmosphere and tables on a terrace overlooking the river.

Kiszely (cnr Szabadság út & Béke utca; ice cream from 80Ft; ☎ 9am-9pm) Kiszely is a cute *cukrászda*, small in size but big on ice cream and cake selections.

Green House Irish Pub (Kossuth Lajos utca 25) Next to Belváros is this large pub that's far more green than Irish, and has the potential to get rather rowdy on weekends.

For a quick, cheap pizza, try **Panoráma** (☎ 312 760; Kossuth tér 3/2; pizzas from 500Ft), next to Tourinform, which has the advantage of outdoor seating, or **Belváros** (☎ 312 525; Kossuth Lajos utca 23; pizzas 500-1000Ft), an appealing option on a quiet back street.

Entertainment

Péter Vajda Cultural Centre (☎ 311 181; Kossuth tér 3) This centre should have updates on what might be on in Szarvas.

Granárium Zebra Club (☎ 311 946; Kossuth Lajos utca 2) This is the town's mainstay for loud live acts; otherwise, pick up a free copy of biweekly *Békési Est* for more information.

Getting There & Away

Szarvas can be reached by bus from Békéscsaba (605Ft, one hour, 45km, at least hourly), Debrecen (1930Ft, three to four hours, 155km, two daily), Gyula (786Ft, 1½ hours, 65km, one daily), Kecskemét (968Ft, 1½ hours, 80km, six daily) and Szeged (907Ft, two hours, 75km, six daily).

Szarvas is on the train line linking Mezőhegyes and Orosháza with Mezőtúr and has services six times daily. From Békéscsaba (774Ft, 1½ to two hours, 75km), it's faster to take an express train to Mezőtúr and change for Szarvas there.

GYULA

☎ 66 / pop 32,000

A town of spas with the last remaining medieval brick castle on the Great Plain, Gyula is a wonderful place to recharge your batteries before crossing into Romania, just 4km to the east. It also has a couple of rewarding museums worth poking around in while your skin de-prunes.

History

Gyula refused to allow the Arad-bound railway to cross through the town in 1858 – a development welcomed by Békéscsaba, 20km to the west. As a result, Gyula was stuck at the end of a spur and developed at a much slower pace. In 1950 the county seat was moved from here (after 500 years, Gyulans like to point out) to its sister city, Békéscsaba. Gyula is still seething and a strong rivalry persists between the two: from who should be allocated more county money, to whose football team and sausage is better.

Orientation

Gyula is actually two towns: the commercial centre on Városház utca to the west and the Várfürdő (Castle Bath) in a big park to the east. The areas are within walking distance of each other. The Élővíz Canal runs east-west through the centre of Gyula, from a branch of the Körös River to Békéscsaba and beyond.

Gyula's bus station (Vásárhelyi Pál utca) is south of Kossuth Lajos tér. Walk north through the park to the square and over the canal bridge to reach the town centre. The train station is at the northern end of Béke sugárút.

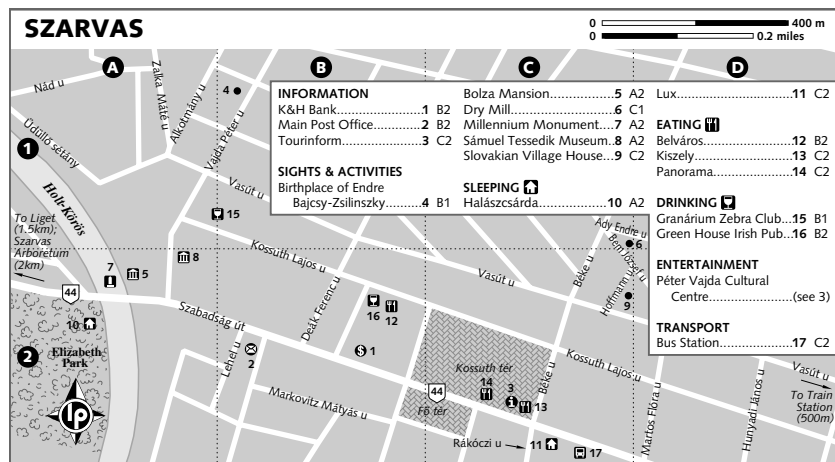
Information

Erste bank (Városház utca) Has ATM.

Post office (Eszperantó tér) South of the canal.

Tourinform (☎ 561 681; bekes-m@tourinform.hu; Kossuth Lajos utca 7; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat & Sun mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep-mid-Jun) Very helpful office located in a gallery.

www.gyula.hu The town's website, in Hungarian and German.



Sights

Gothic **Gyula Castle** (☎ 464 117; Várfürdő utca 1; adult/child 800/400Ft; ☎ 9am-7pm mid-Jun-Aug, 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Sep-mid-Jun), overlooking a picturesque moat near the Castle Baths, was originally built in the mid-15th century but has been expanded and renovated many times over the centuries, most recently in May 2004. Its 24 rooms now showcase the castle's history, focusing in particular on its medieval days when the Ottoman Turks were in town, and the weapons used to finally fend them off. Like any self-respecting castle, there's a thick wall to wander along, a tower to climb and a dungeon to explore, but the latter is only open during breaks in Castle Theatre performances. Close by is the **Ferenc Erkel Museum** (☎ 361 236; Kossuth Lajos utca 17; adult/child 400/200Ft; ☎ 1-5pm Tue, 9am-5pm Wed-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun). It has a **Dürer Room** devoted to archaeological finds – pottery, jewellery and weapons – from the region.

The **György Kohán Museum** (☎ 361 795; Béke sugárút 35; adult/child 400/200Ft; ☎ 1-5pm Tue, 9am-5pm Wed-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), in quiet Göndöcs-Népkert, is Gyula's most important art

museum, with more than 3000 paintings and graphics bequeathed to the city by the artist upon his death in 1966. The large canvases of horses and women in dark blues and greens, and the relentless summer sun of the Great Plain, are quite striking and well worth a look.

The baroque **Inner City Church** (Belvárosi templom; Harruckern tér 1; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm), from 1777, has interesting contemporary ceiling frescoes highlighting events in Hungarian and world history – including an astronaut in space! The **Zopf Romanian Orthodox church** (Gróza Park; admission free), from 1812, has a beautiful iconostasis (you can try and get the key from the house just south of the church entrance), but for contemporary icons at their kitschy best, no place compares with the **Mary Museum** (Apor tér 11; adult/child 400/200Ft; ☎ 9am-noon & 12.30-3pm Tue-Sat, 9am-noon Sun Mar-Nov, 9am-noon Tue-Sun Dec-Feb). You've never seen the Virgin in so many guises. On the same square is the **Ferenc Erkel House** (☎ 463 552; Apor tér 7; adult/child 400/200Ft; ☎ 1-5pm Tue, 9am-5pm Wed-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), birthplace of the man who composed

operas and the music for the Hungarian national anthem. The house contains memorabilia about his life and music.

An interesting – and, for Hungary, very unusual – museum is **Ladics House** (☎ 463 940; Jókai Mór utca 4; adult/child 400/200Ft; ☎ 1-5pm Tue, 9am-5pm Wed-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), the perfectly preserved and beautifully furnished mid-19th century residence of a prosperous bourgeois family. Next door, the **Százéves** (☎ 362 045; Erkel tér 1; ☎ 10am-8pm) cake shop and museum is a visual and culinary delight. Established around 1840 (no doubt Mrs Ladics bought her *petits-fours* here), the Regency-blue interior is filled with Biedermeier furniture and mirrors in gilt frames. It is one of the most beautiful *cukrászdák* in Hungary.

Activities

The **Castle Baths** (Várfürdő; Várkert utca 2; adult/child mid-Jun-Aug 1300/1050Ft, Sep-mid-Jun 950/800Ft; ☎ indoor pools 8am-6pm, outdoor pools 8am-8pm mid-Jun-Aug) are in the 30-hectare Castle Garden (Várkert) east of the city centre and include 19 pools both indoors and out and a thoroughly modern wellness complex of the highest standards.

Festivals & Events

The biggest event of the year is the **Gyula Theatre Festival**, with performances in the castle courtyard from July to mid-August. There's also an **All-Hungarian Folkdance Festival** around the 20th August.

Sleeping BUDGET

There is a plethora of private rooms (from 2500Ft) and *pensions* south of Part utca; Tourinform can provide you with a list for both, and also for student-dorm accommodation over the summer months. All can be found on the town's website.

Márk (☎ 463 380; Vár utca 5; 2-person camp sites 2600Ft; ☎ year-round) Of Gyula's camping grounds, this is the friendliest, most central and charming, but it's very small and only for caravans and tents.

Thermál Camping (☎ 463 704; www.gyulacamp.ing.hu; Szélső utca 16; camp sites per adult/child/tent from €3/2/2.50, s/d €17/24; ☎) Some 700m from the town's action, Thermál Camping is a bit out of the way but it does have good camp facilities, such as a restaurant, café and kitchens.

MIDRANGE

There are plenty of hotels in or around the Várfürdő, most of them sprawling, modern affairs with everything you could possibly need. Room rates vary widely depending on the season, but generally the most expensive times are from June to September and over the Christmas and New Year holidays.

Aranykereszt (☎ 463 194; www.hotels.hu/aranykereszt; Eszperantó tér 2; s/d from 5000/7000Ft; ☎) Away from Várfürdő but alongside the canal, this hotel has simple rooms with old-fashioned furniture but overall has the most charm of any in Gyula. Rooms overlooking the canal exude a rustic yet retreat-like feel.

Aqua (☎ 463 146; aqua-hotel@axelero.hu; Part utca 7/c; s/d from €24/36; ☎) Recently renovated rooms at the Aqua are modern and spacious, and staff are exceedingly friendly. Bicycles are available for guest use and pickups from the bus and train stations can be arranged.

Corvin (☎ 362 044; www.corvin-hotel.hu; Jókai utca 9-11; s/d from €42/51; ☎) Located in the town centre away from any water, Corvin is the odd hotel out in Gyula. Rooms are quite plush, with unusual window designs, an array of pastel shades and solid wooden floors.

Also recommended:

Park (☎ 463 711; parkgyula@civishotels.hu; Part utca 15; s/d from 6000/9500Ft; ☎) Alpine-style hotel on the edge of the baths.

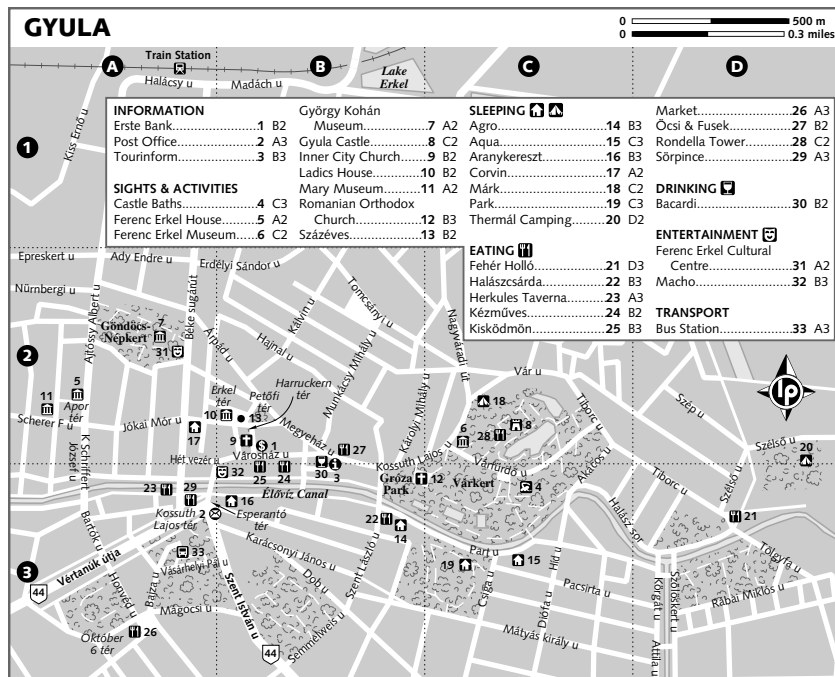
Agro (☎ 463 522; www.hotels.hu/agrogyula; Part utca 5; s/d from €31/44; ☎) Adequate rooms and a bunch of wellness facilities.

Eating & Drinking

Kisködmön (☎ 463 934; Városház utca 15; mains 1200-2000Ft) Hidden away down an uninviting alley is this wonderful restaurant, with décor that looks as though it belongs in the early 1800s. Food is traditionally prepared, with organic products as much as possible.

Herkules Taverna (☎ 30-430 7730; Bodoky utca; mains 1000-1200Ft) This typically blue-and-white Greek restaurant has a secluded spot with tables overlooking the canal.

Halászcárda (☎ 466 303; Part utca 3; mains 900-1500Ft) Facing the canal, this place offers the usual fishy dishes in pleasant surroundings and is only a short walk from most hotels and the centre.



Sörpince (☎ 362 382; Kossuth tér 2; mains 1000Ft) Sörpince is a dark drinker's den with a surprisingly good menu of Hungarian dishes (with a few veggie options thrown in for fun) and comes locally recommended.

Őcsi & Fusek (☎ 468 495; Kossuth Lajos utca 6; mains 800-1600Ft) This is not only popular for its great back courtyard but also for its hearty lunch-time set menu (6000Ft). It's also fashionable with workers needing a drink after work.

Fehér Holló (☎ 457 835; Tiborc utca 49; mains 800-1500Ft) This place has a nice quiet spot near the canal and is a good choice for *csárda*-style Hungarian meals, especially if you're staying at Thermál Camping.

Bacardi (Kossuth Lajos utca 3; 🕒 10am-midnight Sun-Thu, 10am-3am Fri, 10am-4am Sat) A magnet for Gyula's 20- to 30-somethings, who make the most of a night out on the town.

For coffee and cake, Gyula does itself proud; take your pick from the squat 16th-century Rondella tower with a delightful terrace in summer near the castle, the original caféhouse **Százéves** (☎ 362 045; Erkel tér 1) or **Kézműves** (Városház utca 21; ice cream from 85Ft; 🕒 7am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat & Sun), a modern establishment that sates many locals of their ice-cream cravings.

Gyula's main **market** (Október 6 tér) for fruit, vegetables and other produce is southwest of the bus station.

Entertainment

Ferenc Erkel Cultural Centre (☎ 463 806; Béke sugárút 35) This centre in Göndöcs-Népkert has staff that can tell you what cultural events are on offer in Gyula. Organ concerts are sometimes held at the Inner City Church, especially around Christmas.

Macho (Városház utca 1; 🕒 to 4am Sun-Thu, to 6am Fri & Sat) This is the town's badly named main club; check the free biweekly *Békési Est* for more information on bars in Gyula.

Getting There & Away

With Gyula lying on an unimportant rail spur, buses are the preferred mode of transport. There are dozens each day departing for Békéscsaba (241Ft, 30 minutes, 15km) and three go to Debrecen (1690Ft, three hours, 130km). Other destinations include Budapest (2780Ft, four to six hours, 230km, two daily), Kecskemét (1820Ft, 3¼ hours, 145km, two daily), Szeged (1820Ft, 3½ hours, 145km, seven daily), and Vésztő (484Ft, 1¼ hours, 35km, three daily).

Some 17 trains daily run west on line 128, Gyula's link to the Békéscsaba–Szolnok–Budapest train line. Travelling north on this poky line will get you to Vésztő (430Ft, 1¼ hours, 50km), Szeghalom and eventually to Püspökladány, where you can change trains for Debrecen (1624Ft, 3½ hours, 150km).