

Northeast



Some may think the Northeast a cultural void: Hungary's backward corner populated by hicks more capable of shoeing a horse than changing a car tyre. True enough, independent cinema and theatre are thin on the ground – and horse-drawn carts are not uncommon – but the region is by no means a wasteland. Instead it is steeped in folk culture, where women eke out a living embroidering patchwork pillowcases and dresses in patterns handed down over centuries, and men work the land, sharing a drink after a day toiling in the fields.

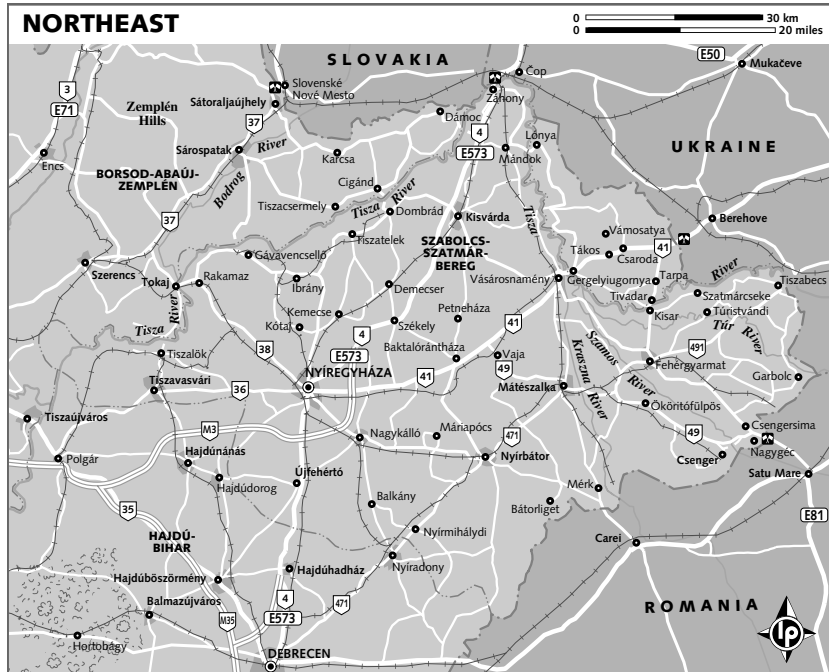
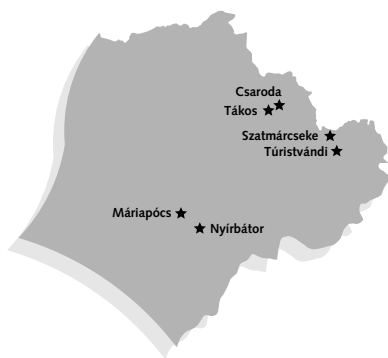
The classic example of folk culture in the Northeast is its rural churches. Small with wood-carvings and distinctive frescoes, these structures have been lovingly preserved for generations; exceptional examples can be seen in Táros and Csaroda. Not to be outdone by such religious devotion is Szatmárceke's cemetery, a 'shipyard' of upturned boat-shaped grave stones.

Not everything in this region of rolling hills and green pastures is related to folk art. Its capital, Nyíregyháza, is at first glance a typical communist architectural cock-up, but stroll through the city centre and you'll find Art-Nouveau and baroque gems. Nyírbátor is but a speck on the map today but its architecture reveals a rich past; two cathedrals, equally magnificent in style, vie for attention in the town centre. In Máriapócs, near Nyírbátor, is another example of religious extravagance, this time in the shape of a sumptuous Greek Catholic cathedral.

So if you want to see real Hungarian village life – replete with dirt roads, horse-drawn carts laden with hay, thatched roofs and ancient churches – this is the place to come.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Gazing at the rich tapestry of the painted wooden ceiling at Táros' **Calvinist church** (p362)
- Picking your favourite place of worship in Nyírbátor; the **Gothic Calvinist church and bell tower** (p360) or the **Minorite church** (p360)
- Walking between the bizarre boat-shaped grave markers in Szatmárceke's peaceful **cemetery** (p363)
- Feeling humble beneath the gorgeous iconostasis at the **Greek Catholic cathedral** (p361) in Máriapócs
- Exploring the nooks and crannies of one of Hungary's least-explored (and often-forgotten) corners, such as **Túristvándi** (p363) and **Csaroda** (p362)



Getting There & Around

Frequent trains link the main towns of the Northeast with Debrecen and, to a lesser extent, Budapest. Smaller villages are generally only accessible by bus, and services can be slow and infrequent. Therefore the best way to see the region is under your own steam, be it by car, motorbike or bicycle.

NYÍRSÉG REGION

The Nyírség (Birch Region) contains the lion's share of the Northeast's large towns, and therefore the majority of museums and city-bound attractions. It's also the largest of three distinct areas that make up the Northeast. Grassy steppes and hills stretch from Nyíregyháza, the region's capital, to Nyírbátor, a town rich in history.

NYÍREGYHÁZA

☎ 42 / pop 118,800
At first glance, Nyíregyháza (roughly 'Birch Church'), the commercial and administrative centre of the Nyírség, looks like a

blotch on the landscape, dotted with ugly high-rises and lacklustre shopping centres. But a second glance is most certainly required; its centre is a checker-board of well-tended squares and gardens, with a handful of wonderfully restored buildings. Nyíregyháza also makes an excellent springboard for visiting other Northeast towns, as well as northern Romania and Ukraine.

History

For centuries Nyíregyháza was the private domain of Transylvanian princes; then, in the 18th century, it was resettled by Slovaks from Szarvas on the southern Great Plain. Under Soviet rule the town prospered due to the establishment of a food-processing industry in the area, but recently Nyíregyháza has fallen on hard times.

Orientation

Nyíregyháza's centre is made up of a handful of interconnecting squares, including Országzászló tér, Kálvin tér, Kossuth tér and Hősök tere, and is surrounded by both

Igrice (☎ 06 30 953 6721; Blaha Lujza sétány 8; camp sites per person/car/tent 600/200/600Ft, bungalows sleeping up to 4 7900Ft, r 2800Ft; 📍) Igrice is a large camping ground right on the edge of the lake, with a rather reedy beach. Bungalows have shared facilities and motel rooms are fairly basic.

Eating & Drinking

Krúdy (☎ 596 187; Sóstói út 75; mains 1500Ft) Krúdy is in an old villa only a stone's throw from the lake and serves fine Hungarian cuisine on its open terrace.

Mozzarella Pizzéria (☎ 424 008; Kiss Ernő utca 10; pizza from 310Ft; 🕒 11am–9pm Mon–Sat, 4–9pm Sun) For simple, quick and hearty pasta and pizza, this is your best bet in town. The only drawback is it's a bit of a walk from the centre.

Tölgyes (☎ 410 590; Sóstói út 40; mains 800–1500Ft) This popular restaurant serving Hungarian food is about halfway between the centre and Sóstófürdő; the smells wafting up from the open grill on its terrace are particularly inviting.

424 Irish Pub (☎ 726 222; Blaha Lujza utca 1; mains 1000Ft) The only thing Irish about this place is the Guinness sign hanging out front, but that takes nothing away from this cute pavilion restaurant with views of the lake.

Colorado Western Pub (Búza tér 15; 🕒 11am–2am Mon–Thu, 11am–4am Fri & Sat) In most European cities you're guaranteed to find an Irish-themed

pub; in Hungary it's the Wild West locals go crazy for. Colorado ticks Nyíregyháza's 'Wild West' box and has plenty of drunken revelry and a terrace for warm summer evenings.

John Bull (Dózsa György utca 1–3; 🕒 11am–midnight Sun–Thu, 11am–2am Fri & Sat) This pub-restaurant in the Korona hotel is a little bit of ersatz England in northeastern Hungary; it has live music most weekends.

Entertainment

Check with staff at the **Zsigmond Móricz Theatre** (☎ 400 375; www.moriczszinhaz.hu; Bessenyei tér 13) or the **Mihály Váci Cultural Centre** (☎ 411 822; Szabadság tér 9) for current listings. If there's a concert on at the Evangelist church on Luther tér, jump at the chance. The **theatre ticket office** (☎ 507 007; Országház utca 6; 🕒 9am–5pm Mon–Fri) is at the main Tourinform office.

For clubs, try the following:

Club Kom Ombo (Rákóczi utca 8; 🕒 4pm–2am Sun–Thu, 4pm–4am Fri & Sat) A trendy club in a shopping centre, with DJs and live bands.

Golden Age (Bethlen Gábor utca 24; 🕒 1pm–2am Sun–Thu, 1pm–4am Fri & Sat) A large club with pool tables.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Generally, buses serve towns near Nyíregyháza or those not on a train line. There are up to four departures an hour to Nagykálló (241Ft, 30 minutes, 16km) and buses run

frequently to Máriapócs (363Ft, 45 minutes, 30km), Mátészalka (725Ft, 1½ hours, 60km) and Nyírbátor (484Ft, one hour, 40km). Destinations further afield include: Debrecen (907Ft, two hours, 72km, four daily), Eger (1690Ft, 2½ hours, 132km, two daily), Kisvárd (605Ft, 1½ hours, 50km, four daily on Monday to Saturday, one on Sunday) and Vásárosnamény (725Ft, 1¼ hours, 58km, seven daily).

TRAIN

Up to 15 daily express trains link Nyíregyháza with Debrecen (560Ft, 30 minutes, 49km) and Budapest's Nyugati or Keleti station (2670Ft, three to four hours, 270km). There is at least one *személyvonat* (passenger train) an hour to Debrecen (430Ft, 45 minutes, 49km) and up to 15 a day to Miskolc (890Ft, 1½ hours, 88km). Up to nine trains depart Nyíregyháza each day for Vásárosnamény (544Ft, two hours, 59km) and eight head for Mátészalka (544Ft, 2¼ hours, 58km), stopping at Nagykálló (182Ft, 27 minutes, 14km), Máriapócs (264Ft, 1¼ hours, 30km) and Nyírbátor (346Ft, 1¼ hours, 38km) en route (a change at Nyírbátor may be required). The Tisza Express train to Lviv, Kyiv and Moscow also stops here every day at 9.50pm; the Latorca, crossing the Ukrainian border to Csop, departs at 6.20pm.

Getting Around

Almost everything in the city – with the exception of Sóstófürdő – can be easily reached on foot. Take buses 7 or 8 from the train or bus station to reach the centre of town; the No 8 carries on to Sóstófürdő. For Nagybani flea market, catch bus 1/a. You can order a taxi on ☎ 555 555.

AROUND NYÍREGYHÁZA

Nagykálló

☎ 42 / pop 10,600

This town, 14km southeast of Nyíregyháza, boasts some listed buildings on its central square (Szabadság tér) – a baroque **Calvinist church** (☎ 263 171; admission free; 🕒 appointment needed), on the south side, with a free-standing Gothic bell tower originally built in the 15th century; and the splendid former **County Hall** (☎ 263 128; Szabadság tér 13; 🕒 appointment needed) to the northeast at No 13, which was built in the Zopf style in 1749 and later turned into a notorious asylum for the insane.

Most visitors to Nagykálló, however, are Orthodox Jewish pilgrims who come to pay their respects at the **tomb of Isaac Taub** (☎ 06 30 248 6379; Nagybalkányi út; 🕒 appointment needed), especially on the anniversary of his death (February/March). Known as the 'Wonder Rabbi of Kálló' (a *zaddik* in Yiddish), Isaac Taub was an 18th-century philosopher who advocated a more humanistic approach to prayer and study. You can visit his small tomb in the old Jewish cemetery, less than 1km due south of Szabadság tér. Note that unless you've arranged a tomb visit, the cemetery gates will be locked.

Öbester restaurant (Kossuth Lajos utca; mains 800–1500Ft), in the centre of Nagykálló, is your best bet for a meal; its outside tables on the main square are popular on summer evenings. If Öbester is full, **Belvárosi Eszpresszó** (Kossuth Lajos utca; snacks 400Ft; 🕒 9am–7pm), to the northeast of the square, should suffice for a quick hunger fix.

In late July, Nagykálló hosts the popular **Téka Tábor**, a week-long folk festival 'camp' held in a bizarre structure designed by Imre Makovecz at Harangodi-tó, some 2km north of town. Contact the **Rákóczi Cultural Centre** (☎ 263 141; Báthory utca 1) for more information.

Up to eight trains a day linking Nyíregyháza (182Ft, 27 minutes, 14km) and Mátészalka stop at Nagykálló. A bus meets each incoming train and goes as far as Szabadság tér. Buses run throughout the day from Nyíregyháza to Nagykálló (241Ft, 30 minutes, 16km) and many of these carry on to Máriapócs and Nyírbátor on weekdays. They drop to four a day at the weekend.

NYÍRBÁTOR

☎ 42 / pop 13,400

Nyírbátor is quite a sleepy town, but for anyone with a love (or even a mild interest) of Gothic churches, it should be on the itinerary. The town's two Gothic churches, built in the latter part of the 15th century by István Báthory, the ruthless Transylvanian prince whose family is synonymous with the town, are some of the best preserved in the country.

Orientation

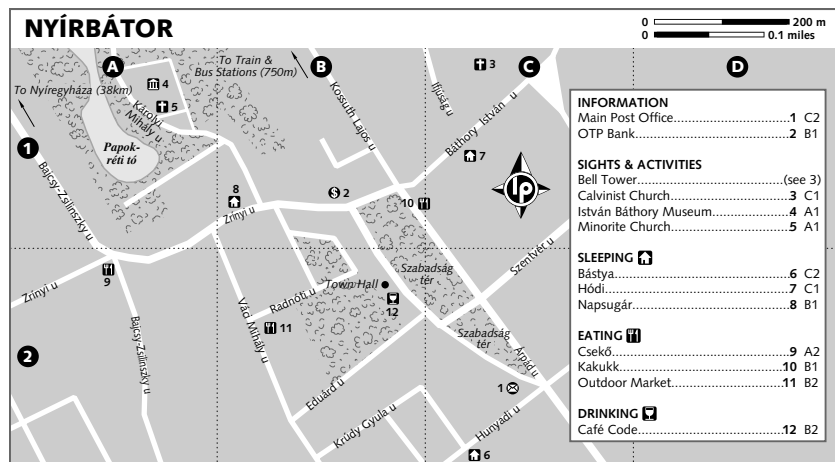
Nyírbátor is compact and everything of interest can be easily reached on foot. The train and bus stations are on Ady Endre

THE ROMA

The origins of the Gypsies (Hungarian: *cigány*), who call themselves the Roma (singular Rom) and speak Romany, a language closely related to several still spoken in northern India, remain a mystery. It is generally accepted, however, that they began migrating to Persia from India sometime in the 10th century and had reached the Balkans by the 14th century. They have been in Hungary for at least 500 years, and they officially number around 190,000, although that figure could easily be higher.

Though traditionally a travelling people, in modern times the Roma have by and large settled down in Hungary and worked as smiths and tinkers, livestock and horse traders, and as musicians (see p42). As a group, however, they are chronically underemployed and have been the hardest hit by economic recession (statistically, Roma families are twice the size of *gadje*, or 'non-Roma' ones).

Unsettled people have always been persecuted in one form or another by those who stay put, and Hungarian Roma are no exception. They are widely despised and remain the scapegoats for everything that goes wrong in certain parts of the country, from the rise in petty theft and prostitution to the loss of jobs. Though their rights are inscribed in the 1989 constitution, along with other ethnic minorities, their housing ranks among the worst in the nation, police are regularly accused of harassing them and, more than any other group, they fear a revival of right-wing nationalism. You will probably be shocked at what even educated, cosmopolitan Hungarians say about Roma and their way of life.



utca which is in the northern part of town, less than 1km from the centre (Szabadság tér) via Kossuth Lajos utca.

Information

Main post office (Szabadság tér) At the south end of the square.

OTP bank (Zrínyi utca 1) Across the road from Szabadság tér, is equipped with an ATM.

Sights

Walking into the **Calvinist church** (☎ 281 749; adult/child 60/30Ft; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 8-10am & 1-5pm Sun), on a small hill just off Báthory István utca, is like drawing a breath of crispy mountain air. Its refreshingly plain interior and long lancet windows, which flood the nave with light, allow the church's masterpiece – the ribbed vault – to gain your undivided attention. István Báthory's remains lie in a marble tomb at the back of the church; the family's coat of arms embellished with wyverns (dragon-like creatures) is on top of the tomb. The 17th-century wooden **bell tower**, standing apart from the church (as was once required of Calvinists in this overwhelmingly Catholic country) has a Gothic roof with four little turrets. You can climb the 20m to the top – its rickety wooden stairs make both the ascent and descent a little hairy, but the views (and experience) are worth it.

The **Minorite church** (☎ 281 770; Károlyi Mihály utca 19; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8am-6pm Sun May-Oct, 9-11am & 4-5pm Mon-Sat, 8-11am Sun Nov-

Apr) was originally late Gothic, but, like so many Hungarian churches, it was ravaged by the Turks in 1587 and rebuilt in the baroque style 130 years later. Five spectacular altars carved in Presov (now eastern Slovakia) in the mid-18th century fill the nave and chancel. The most interesting is the first on the left, the **Krucsay Altar of the Passion** (1737), with its diverse portrayals of fear, longing, devotion and faith.

The **István Báthory Museum** (☎ 510 218; Károlyi Mihály utca 21; adult/child 200/100Ft; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 9-11am Mon-Sat Oct-Mar), in the 18th-century monastery next to the church, focuses on the town's history. It has a very good ethnographic collection, and some medieval pieces connected with the Báthory family and the churches they built.

Early July sees the streets of Nyírbátor come alive during the **Week of the Winged Dragon International Street Theatre Festival**; expect to see actors, puppeteers and musicians trying to out-perform each other.

Sleeping

Bástya (☎ 281 657; www.hotels.hu/bastya_nyirbator; Hunyadi utca 10; s/d 5520/7820Ft; (P) (☎)) The owners of this small hotel seem to have a penchant for garish furniture and clashing colours, but the rooms are clean and comfy and the staff are eager to please.

Napsugár (☎ 283 878; Zrínyi utca 15; s/d 6000/8000Ft; (P)) This *pension* has eight fairly modern rooms, a small fitness centre and an average bar out front. Breakfast costs an extra 800Ft.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hódi (☎ 283 556; evahodi@hotmail.com; Báthory István utca 11; s/d 11,700/12,700Ft; (P) (☎)) It may not look like much from the outside, but inside Hódi is an oasis of luxury in a region not known for five-star accommodation. Set in a small courtyard east of Szabadság tér, this hotel has rooms that exude an old-worldly atmosphere, with high ceilings and antique furniture. You can't get much more secluded than the heated indoor swimming pool and sauna (1000Ft), which are tucked away at the back of the hotel, far from any possible intrusion.

Eating & Drinking

Csekő (☎ 381 289; Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca 62; pizzas 400-900Ft; ☎ 11.30am-9.30pm) This cake shop became so popular that it took over the pizzeria next door and claimed the space for itself. Fortunately it had the sense to keep the pizzas on the menu and add a long list of salads. The cakes remain as heavenly as ever.

Kakukk (☎ 281 050; Szabadság tér 21; mains 800-1500Ft) Kakukk is the only true restaurant in the heart of the town; its daily menu (around 550Ft) of Hungarian dishes packs 'em in at midday.

Café Code (Szabadság tér 7; ☎ 4pm-midnight Mon-Fri, 4pm-late Sat & Sun) In the centre of town, it is a small, dark but cosy place and the only bar open late daily.

Nyírbátor's outdoor market can be found at the junction of Váci Mihály utca and Radnóti utca.

Entertainment

Organ concerts and recitals can be heard throughout the year at the **Calvinist church**. Aside from that, not much raises the roof in Nyírbátor.

Getting There & Away

There are seven buses a day to Nyíregyháza via Nagykálló (484Ft, one hour, 40km) and up to six daily buses go to Máriapócs (182Ft, 15 minutes, 10km).

There are up to eight daily trains from Nyíregyháza (346Ft, 1¼ hours, 38km) that call at Nyírbátor on their way to Mátészalka; as many as 13 trains heading for Mátészalka (182Ft, 30 minutes, 20km) from Debrecen (544Ft, 1¼ hours, 58km) also stop here.

You can catch one of up to six daily trains at Mátészalka heading north for Záhony on the border of Ukraine, or three going south to Carei in Romania.

AROUND NYÍRBÁTOR

Máriapócs

☎ 42 / pop 2,200

Like Nyírbátor, Máriapócs contains one of the country's most beautiful churches. Its **Greek Catholic cathedral** (☎ 385 142; Kossuth tér 25; admission free; ☎ 8am-5pm May-Sep, 8am-6pm Oct-Apr) takes centre stage in the heart of town. The cathedral has been an important pilgrimage site from at least 1696, when the **Black Madonna** icon, which now stands angelically above the altar on the north side of the building, first shed tears (she wept again in 1715 and 1905). Unfortunately, this is not the original icon but a 19th-century copy; the real one is now in St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna. The Madonna is not the only highlight – the ornate gold iconostasis soars some 15m up to the vaulted ceiling. The cathedral, which was built on the site of a small wooden church, dates from the mid-18th century.

If you need to stay overnight, try the nondescript **Fekete Bárány** (Black Sheep; ☎ 385 722; Állomás tér; s/d 3000/6000Ft; (P)), an inn opposite the train station on the road linking Nyírbátor and Nagykálló.

Between two and eight daily buses from Nagykálló (133Ft, 20 minutes, 8km), Nyírbátor (182Ft, 15 minutes, 10km) and Nyíregyháza (363Ft, 45 minutes, 30km) will drop you off by the cathedral. All trains between Nyírbátor and Nyíregyháza stop at Máriapócs train station, which is 4km south of the town centre. Buses run between the centre and the station, but they are not very reliable.

TISZAHÁT & ERDŐHÁT REGIONS

If you're looking for Hungary's most far-flung regions – both geographically and culturally – then your search will bring you here. Tiszahát, which translates as 'Behind the Tisza', and Erdőhát, meaning 'Behind the Woods' (of Transylvania), were for centuries isolated outposts, regularly cut off from the rest of Hungary by the flood waters of the Tisza and Szamos rivers.

Because of these regions' isolation, folk traditions have lived on. Some of the finest examples of Hungarian popular architecture and interior church painting are found here. It is also the site of Hungary's most unusual cemetery.

VÁSÁROSNAMENY

☎ 45 / pop 9075

Vásárosnamény is a sleepy town (although, for the region, quite a live wire), but it was once an important trading post on the lucrative Salt Road, which ran from the forests of Transylvania, via the Tisza River and then across the Great Plain to Debrecen. With handy transport links and good facilities, such as an **OTP bank** (Szabadság tér 28-31; ☎ 7.45am-12.30pm & 1-5pm Mon, 7.45am-12.30pm & 1-3pm Tue-Thu, 7.45am-12.30pm Fri), with ATM, and a **Tourinform** (☎ 570 206; vasarosnameny@tourinform.hu; Szabadság tér 33; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat), Vásárosnamény is an excellent base for exploring the region's scattered villages.

The town's **Bereg Museum** (☎ 470 638; Rákóczi utca 13; adult/child 200/100Ft; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun mid-Mar-Oct, 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri Nov-mid-Mar) has a small, though interesting, collection of local embroidery, weaving, pottery, iron stoves and painted Easter eggs – a popular Central European pastime. Be sure to see the famous Bereg cross-stitching, a blend of many different styles.

Sleeping & Eating

Winkler (☎ 470 945; winklerh@hu.inter.net; Rákóczi utca 5; s/d 6000/8000Ft; ☎ ☎) Near the museum is this *penzion*, which features colourful embroidery from the region and spacious rooms. Added extras include a quality restaurant (mains 1000Ft, lunch menu 550Ft) serving regional specialities, a cute patio laden with pot-plants and a sauna.

Hotel Fehér (☎ 470 854; www.hotels.hu/feherhotel; Bereg-köz 1; r €40; ☎ ☎) Fehér has less character than Winkler, with white-washed walls and '70s décor, but it's a decent option if the latter is full. The hotel also runs a restaurant (pizza from 550Ft, lunch menu 500Ft) across the road.

Diófa Camping (☎ 712 298; Gulácsi út 71; camp sites per person/tent 800/700Ft, bungalows 8000Ft; ☎) This small, open camp site is across the Tisza River from Vásárosnamény in Gergelyugornya. Bungalows sleep up to four people and the local pool is directly opposite.

TÁKOS

☎ 45 / pop 445

A must for anyone interested in folk art is the 18th-century wattle-and-daub **Calvinist church** (☎ 701 718; Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca 25; admission 120Ft; ☎ 7am-7pm) in Tákos, 8km northeast of Vásárosnamény on Rte 41. It has a spectacularly painted coffered ceiling of blue and red flowers, a beaten earth floor and an ornately carved 'folk baroque' pulpit sitting on a large millstone. Outside the church, which villagers call the 'barefoot Notre Dame of Hungary', stands a perfectly preserved **bell tower** (1767). The keeper of the keys, who is almost as old as the church, lives in a house just north of the church at Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca 29.

The town's **provincial house** (tájház; Bajcsy-Zsilinszky utca 53; admission free; ☎ 7am-10pm), opposite the church, sells works by local weavers, which are very colourful and richly patterned. Snacks are also available.

CSARODA

☎ 45 / pop 655

A lovely **Romanesque church** (☎ 484 905; Kossuth utca 2; admission 100Ft; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri Mar-Oct) from the 13th century stands in this village, which is some 3km east of Tákos. The church is thought to have been founded by King Stephen, following his plan to have at least one church for every 10 villages in his domain. The building is a wonderful hybrid of a place with both Western- and Eastern-style frescoes (some from the 14th century), as well as some fairly crude folk murals dated 9 July 1647. On the walk from the car park or bus stop, you'll pass two wooden **bell towers** of a much more recent vintage which still work.

As rural settings go, Csaroda has one of the nicest. Accommodation is limited to **Székely** (☎ 484 830; www.julusi.hu/szekely; József Attila utca 54; s/d 2300/4600Ft; ☎), a traditional peasant house, with thick white-washed walls and rustic appeal. Finding food after 8pm is a problem but you may be able to arrange a meal through the house owners.

TARPA

☎ 45 / pop 2400

Some 6km further east on Rte 41 will take you to the turn-off for Fehérgyarmat. Another 10km south of the turn-off is Tarpa, a town boasting one of Hungary's last examples of a horse-driven **dry mill** (szárazmalom; ☎ 488 331; Árpád utca 36; admission 30Ft; ☎ appointment

needed). The mill, which is still in working order and turns with exceptional ease, went through many incarnations – as a bar, a cinema and dance hall – before its renovation in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Nearby is a decorated **Calvinist church** (Kossuth utca 13; admission free; ☎ 8am-noon Mon-Fri).

Kuruc (☎ 488 121; tarpakurucpanzio@freemail.hu; Kossuth út 25; s/d 3500/6000Ft; ☎) occupies a dark-pink building in the heart of Tarpa and has large rooms. There's a terrace and sauna for guest use and a fine, if loud, restaurant (mains 1000Ft) on the ground floor.

Tivadar, 5km south of Tarpa, is on a quiet bend of the Tisza. It's a more inviting place to stay, with a restaurant or two and a popular beach. Tiny **Katica Camping** (☎ 06 20 926 5803; Petőfi út 11; camp sites per person/car/tent 550/300/300Ft; ☎ mid-Jun-Aug; ☎) is near the river, and has minimal facilities and some shade. Directly opposite is **Kunyhó Vendéglő** (Petőfi út 16; mains under 1000Ft; ☎ 11am-8pm), a pseudo-rustic eatery with an extensive fish selection and far too many stuffed animals lining the walls.

SZATMÁRCSEKE

☎ 44 / pop 1500

To get to this village, site of a cemetery with intriguing boat-shaped **grave markers** (kopjafák; Táncsics utca; admission free), cross the river at Tivadar, turn east then carry on another 7km northeast. The 600 carved wooden markers in the cemetery are unique in Hungary, and the notches and grooves cut into them represent a complicated language all of its own: they detail marital status, social position and so on. One of the few stone markers in the cemetery is that of native son Ferenc

Kölcsy (1790–1838), who wrote the words to *Himnusz*, the Hungarian national anthem. Nearby is a small **museum** (☎ 712 095; Kölcsy utca 44; admission 100Ft; ☎ 10am-5pm) devoted to Kölcsy.

TÚRISTVÁNDI

☎ 44 / pop 772

About 4km due south of Szatmárcseke is the village of Túrístvándi and its pride and joy, a wonderfully restored 18th-century **water mill** (vízimalom; ☎ 434 110; Zrínyi út 4; adult/child 100/70Ft; ☎ 8am-6pm Apr-Sep, 8am-4pm Oct-Mar). After inspecting the mill's mechanics, head next door to **Vízimalon** (☎ 721 082; www.turvizimaln.hu; Malom utca 3; camp sites per person/tent 1000/1000Ft, s/d 4000/8000Ft; camping ☎ Mar-Oct; ☎), which has food and accommodation. There's also a swimming hole on the doorstep, a kids playground and canoe hire for 1000Ft per hour.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The ideal way to see this part of Hungary is by car or bicycle, but you'll have to bring your own. Otherwise you can visit most of the places by bus from Vásárosnamény, Mátészalka or Fehérgyarmat. Departures are infrequent, averaging only two or three daily. Carefully check return schedules from your destination before setting out. For train information, see Nyíregyháza (p359).

GETTING AROUND

If you don't have transport, the best idea is to take the train or bus from Nyíregyháza or Nyírbátor to Vásárosnamény and use that town as your springboard.

ERDŐHÁT'S FORGOTTEN VILLAGE

Nagygyéc, a small village in the far reaches of Erdőhát, is a classic example of the former communist rulers' scant regard for the Hungarian way of life. On 13 May 1970 the village suffered severe flooding and residents were evacuated. Once the waters resided the communist government ruled that the threat of future floods was too great to allow people to rebuild their homes, even though the village had successfully dealt with floods since the Middle Ages (Nagygyéc was first mentioned in a charter dating from 1280). Instead, villagers were dispersed and Nagygyéc left to the elements.

Today, not a whole lot remains; the scattered houses are boarded up and the only visitors are the occasional farmer and a bevy of birds. The former centrepiece, a Protestant church with 13th-century Romanesque and 15th-century Gothic features, lies in ruin, ready to topple over. At its entrance stands a sign with the words: 'National memorial place. A memento for the deliberate destruction of villages, and a symbol of the will to preserve and restore'. Nagygyéc can be found along an unmarked road only a few kilometres from the Satu Mare Romanian border crossing.

RÉTKÖZ REGION

Squeezed between Slovakia, Ukraine and the Tiszahát region is Rétköz, an area most people race through heading to and from Ukraine. It is, however, worth spending a day exploring this remote border region, a place once rich in folk tales and myths. Somewhat lower than the rest of Northeast Hungary, Rétköz was prone to flooding and agriculture was possible only on the larger of the islands in this mosquito-infested swampland. This isolation spurred the development of strong clan ties and a wealth of folk traditions, but aside from the once-celebrated Rétköz homespun cloth, they are not easy to find today.

KISVÁRDA

☎ 45 / pop 17,900

Kisvárdá, 45km northeast of Nyíregyháza and the centre of the Rétköz region, is a good base for exploring the area and a better place to overnight than the town of Záhony if you're continuing on to Ukraine.

Orientation

The bus and train stations are about 2km southwest of Flórián tér, the town centre. Local buses await arriving trains, but it's an easy walk north along Bocskai utca, Rákóczi Ferenc utca and Szent László utca to town. Some buses also go as far as Flórián tér.

Information

Cultural centre (☎ 500 451; Flórián tér 20; ☎ 1-7pm Mon-Fri) Has internet access for 100Ft per hour.

Main post office (Somogyi Rezső utca 4)

OTP bank (nr Mártírok útja & Szent László utca) Has an ATM.

Sights & Activities

Flórián tér has the usual Gothic-cum-baroque **Catholic church** painted yellow, and a late-19th-century dusky pink **Calvinist church** sitting uncomfortably close by. Sadly both churches are only open during mass. Far more interesting is the Zopf-style **town library** (☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 1-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat), which takes pride of place on the square.

A short distance to the east of the square is the **Rétköz Museum** (☎ 405 154; Csillag utca 5; adult/child 100/50Ft; ☎ 10am-noon & 1-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct), the town's only true sight. Housed in a disused synagogue built in 1900, the building itself is as interesting as the exhibits, with its

geometric ceiling patterns, blue and yellow stained glass, and wrought-iron gates in the shape of menorahs. Lots of 'typical' Rétköz village rooms and workshops (a smithy, loom etc) are set up on the ground floor of the museum, and the 1st floor has some interesting art. Just inside the west entrance is a memorial tablet, with the names of more than 1000 Kisvárdá Jews who died in Auschwitz.

The ruins of **Kisvárdá Castle** (☎ 405 239; Várkert; admission free; ☎ appointment needed) are about 10 minutes on foot, at the end of the street northwest of Flórián tér. Though part of one wall dates from the 15th century, most of the castle has been heavily restored.

The **Várfürdő** (Városmajor utca; adult/child 800/500Ft; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sun May-Sep), beside the castle ruins, has freshwater and thermal pools, with sauna and sunbathing areas.

Sleeping & Eating

Bástya (☎ 421 100; Krucsay Márton utca 2; d with/without shower 4500/4000Ft) Rooms at Bástya are minuscule and sparsely furnished, but they're the best the town has to offer. You'll find the *pension* on the 1st floor of a shopping arcade overlooking the main square.

Amadeus (Szent László utca 27; mains 1100Ft) This cellar restaurant has exceedingly friendly staff, a menu loaded with Hungarian specialities and bizarre, throne-like seating.

Poncsák (Mártírok útja 2; ice cream 100Ft; ☎ 8am-8pm) This traditional *cukrászda* (cake shop) has the best cakes and ice cream in town.

Entertainment

Plays are sometimes put on at the **Castle Stage** (Várszínpad) at Kisvárdá castle in summer; check with the staff at the modern **cultural centre** (☎ 500 451; Flórián tér 20; ☎ 1-7pm Mon-Fri).

For a quiet drink try the simple **Belvárosi Kávézó** (Szent László utca 22; ☎ 10am-11pm), which is more a pub than a café and has outdoor tables.

Getting There & Away

Only a few destinations are accessible by bus from Kisvárdá including Nyíregyháza (605Ft, 1½ hours, 50km, three daily) and Vásárosnamény (363Ft, one hour, 29km, seven on weekdays, one on weekends).

The town is on the train line connecting Nyíregyháza (430Ft, 43 minutes, 43km) with Záhony, and there are up to 18 daily trains, 11 of which originate in Budapest.

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