



OFF-TRACK FORGETTING

Need to Leave It All Behind? Veer South and Make Way To Portugal's Golf Roads Less Traveled



WESTERN EUROPE



Portugal

Portugal Tourism Bureau | www.visitportugal.com

Tasty Tour Stop: The world's greatest golfers will travel to Vilamoura to tee it up in the first-ever Portugal Masters October 18-21. The event will take place at Victoria Golf Club, a course designed by the Arnold Palmer and Ed Seay that alternates well-positioned bunkers with lakes and waterfalls. It's shaping up as a sweet challenge for players, and the prize purse is even sweeter at over 3 million Euros. For more on the site visit www.allgarve.pt.

Bear-y Good: Jack Nicklaus has become the world's leading globetrotting golf course designer, and his signature design hallmarks are in full evidence at the muscular Monte Rei Golf Club. Above is a view of holes 17 and 18.

As if Portugal isn't enough of an off-track golf destination in itself, most golfers visiting this gorgeous old-world Atlantic/Mediterranean nation focus on two locales — the capital city of Lisbon and the Miami-like southern Algarve region. But when picking Portugal as a place to unpack your sticks — ignoring more obvious European golf destinations such as Britain and even France — visitors to Portugal will do well to consider going further off the well-trod fairways.

Forty-five minutes from Lisbon, just outside the medieval World Heritage Site village of Obidos and its encircling walls and Moorish castle, its narrow, cobbled streets of whitewashed houses abloom in bougainvillea, handicraft shops, and blend of Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque architecture, lies

the 600-acre Praia D'El Rey Resort. The Marriott on property, with its manor house architecture, balconies and marble baths, and elegant, beachy lobby bar, is surrounded by hiking and biking trails through the pines and out to perfect wind-blown linkslands.

The resort boasts a Cabell Robinson-designed golf course that has been consistently ranked among the top twenty in Europe. Some say that this well conditioned, American-style ryegrass layout — which has hosted the European Cup — is the best in Portugal. The course blends sublime parkland holes with oceanside holes unfurling in salt air. Were it not for over-dense housing Praia D'El Rey would be worth a trip from anywhere just to soak in its golfalicious beauty. As it is there's a tinge of sadness here that eventually dissipates

because the course is so solid. Praia D'El Rey plays to just over 7,000 windy yards, with 87 bunkers that connect players to the sandy dunes that much of the course perambulates through.

The first several holes lead tantalizingly toward the ocean, but then move away from it, eventually ducking into tight pine woods. The back nine opens widely with muscular, inviting fairways sandwiched between housing. Just when you are about to give up hope of ever reaching the blue Atlantic, No. 12 provides the first look that's not marred by construction. The next four holes are perfect links golf with sand blowouts and greens tucked amidst sandhills and a view of what the wild coastline once looked like — distant cliffs, rolling dunes and the rocky escarpments of the Berlenga Islands out to sea. Two abandoned stone houses with collapsing red tiled roofs lend a taste of history to a course that ultimately satisfies with fine holes in a beautiful if over-developed setting.

Close enough to Lisbon to set up convenient urban forays, but also situated to make golf course visits and historic tours equally easy, the town of Cascais is close by to one of the best modern European layouts to come along since before Euros began using the Euro. The town itself, a former fishing village, is blessed with glimmering light and

a romantic tang.

Just a few minutes down the road stands the Oitavos Golf Course, on land developed and managed by the Champalimauds, a local family who've taken an environmentally responsible global view toward development. Currently their Quinta de Marinha estate encompasses villas, a sports and fitness complex, equestrian center, and the golf course. A five-star hotel will follow.

Eminently philosophical golf architect Drew Rogers, of Arthur Hills and Associates, created a masterpiece that plays like a dramatic performance by a trio of talented musicians. But here, the instruments of pleasure are three distinct landforms: forests of umbrella pines planted 80 years ago by the current owner's grandfather to stabilize the dunes; gorgeous, pure rolling dunes soft as a haunting melody; and the low bass rumble of coastal transition areas. All three topographies proffer views of the Sintra Mountains and the Atlantic. In keeping with the owner's environmental vision, Oitavos was the first European golf course to earn Audubon International Gold Signature status, at least in part because no buildings will ever rise up to block the ocean views.

The first foursome of holes present pure golf puzzles that are as clever as they are exquisitely crafted. Players may solve them with a variety of shots. After No. 5 debarks



Portugal/Madeira

The Golf

Oitavos Golf Course
www.quintadamarinha-oitavosgolfe.pt
 Monte Rei Golf and Country Club
www.monte-rei.com
 Santo da Serra Golf Club
www.santodaserragolf.com
 Palheiro Golf Club
www.palheirogolf.com

The Digs

Praia D'El Rey Resort
www.MariottPraiaDelRey.com
 Hotel Albatroz, in Cascais
www.albatrozhotels.com
 The Pousada Convento da Graca
www.portugalvirtual.pt/pousadas/tavira/index.html
 Reid's Palace
www.reidspalace.com

AT A GLANCE

through a chute of trees, the course opens to mountain views and sandy moundings. By No. 7, Oitavos has transitioned into full dunes with greens sitting comfortably in scooped tureens of sand. No. 9 offers



Atlantic Cliffhanger: Palheiro Golf Club on the Portuguese island of Madeira could induce vertigo if your approach shots veer offline — so keep it away from the mega-drop to the sea and enjoy some of the finest views in all of Europe.



A Jack Gem: Another look at Nicklaus' new effort at Monte Rei, this time of No. 18 and the palatial clubhouse. The course is part of a huge housing development in the village of O Miradouro.

the first view of the Cabo da Roca cliffs, the westernmost point in Europe. No. 10 reveals glimpses of a distant castle on one hilltop and a monastery on another. The holes deliver great variation and at different moments elicit nostalgia for Turnberry, the Australian sand belt courses and Oregon's Pacific Dunes.

After golf, visitors will do well to retire to the lovely Hotel Albatroz, in Cascais. Perched on cliffs above the Bay and overlooking the marina, the Albatroz's 60 rooms are spread among three houses, one of which was the Palace of the Dukes of Loule in the 19th century. This intimate hostelry provides hand painted tiles in the bathrooms, soaking tubs, bedside carafes of port and other lovely touches.

While Portugal's western Algarve region is packed with resort hotels boasting fine golf layouts, it's at the other end of this several-hundred-mile-long beach, close to the Spanish border, that golfers can actually find an undisturbed remnant of the ancient culture. Stay in a 500-year-old convent converted to a five-star boutique hotel and enjoy a brand-new Jack Nicklaus golf course that probably won't even blip onto radar screens for at least another year or two.

Nicklaus's powerful Monte Rei Golf and Country Club stretches to 7,205 yards over rolling terrain that brings to mind both California and the African Veldt. The dry

and handsome topography proffers soft lines that the architect used to great advantage. Most holes play through canyons. Bunkering here is particularly strong and manly—many of the huge, sandy hazards are raked in the center and hand-brushed on the edges every day, and feature overhanging but neatly-trimmed perimeters. Swoopy green surrounds and chipping areas add to the curvy aesthetic. Bermuda grass stretches from tees to the green surrounds then gives way to perfect bentgrass putting surfaces that look smaller than they turn out to be.

The fairways are huge and without parallel fairways running beside them, lined with thick rough that you'll be hard pressed to reach beyond the miles of manicured terrain. Rounded pines line many fairways and beckon like a quiet gallery from rounded hills above. Although the canyon routing feels protective, wind can grab shots once they've reached cruising altitude.

The best holes include No. 4, a short-ish four-par with bunkers splashed across the fairway and requiring carrying on the approach. Drives can be engineered



Water Wonder: Praia D'el Rey Resort includes a stellar Cabell Robinson layout some call the best in Portugal. The course moves down toward the Atlantic before diving into thick pine forest, then heads seaward again.

between bunkers or hit over two beaches on the left. The hole climbs the entire way. The finish from No. 13 in ratchets up the fun — and from No. 16 increases in length: 16 itself plays 575 yards from the back tees with a stream ambling across a fairway with bunkers on the second and third shots.

The Nicklaus course will be one of two layouts associated with the village of O Miradouro where 90 deluxe homes will be set amidst umbrella pines, cork and olive trees and landscaped gardens. Nearby, 33 terrace apartments will cascade down a hillside overlooking the golf course and ocean. A clubhouse impersonating a five-star hotel will offer a health club, reception, restau-

island sports a 200 million-year-old rain forest and two of the most dramatic and unlikely golf layouts this side of Nepal, suspended 2,000 feet above the ocean.

The Santo da Serra Golf Club features 27 holes redesigned by Robert Trent Jones, Jr. Each 18-hole combination climbs and free-falls for approximately 6,600 yards across deep ravines, and through thick forests of pine, mimosa and eucalyptus. Generous if slightly shaggy fairways stairstep up and down to tight, undulating greens. No. 4 on the Valley side may offer one of the most dramatic par threes you can play out in the Atlantic — 220 yards over a gaping ravine, with views of volcanic mountains floating in



Religious Experience: The Pousada Convento de Graca is one of dozens of historic Portugues buildings that have been converted to hotels. Located in the city of Tavira, it's a former convent with all the trappings of a much larger hotel.

rants, spa, and more — all a 70-minute drive from Seville, Spain.

After golf at Monte Rei, get thee to a nunnery — in this case a 36-room hotel built in and around a 16th century convent. The Pousada Convento da Graca is one of more than 40 historic buildings throughout Portugal — including palaces, castles and the like — that have been converted to upscale boutique hotels. Located within walking distance of the ancient, narrow streets of Tavira (and a seven-arch Roman bridge spanning the River Gilao), the Convento is one of the most elegant and beautifully architected antiques you'll ever have the chance to eat, drink and sleep in.

Playing golf in Portugal without visiting Madeira is like staying at Pinehurst and skipping Number 2. Located 400 miles off the west coast of Africa, this steep, volcanic

the distant blue sea.

Palheiro Golf Club, designed by Cabell Robinson, also ascends and plummets for 6,600 yards, but features tight fairways, fast, tiny greens, swales, pot bunkers and enough elevation changes to give a mountain goat vertigo. Startling views encompass ocean, mature woodlands and Madeira's capital city of Funchal clinging to the side of the mountains.

Stay at the 19th-century Reid's Palace, the kind of Edwardian hotel you may have last seen in a movie starring Gregory Peck. Reid's offers excellent golf packages with guaranteed starting times, and will arrange for transportation to the golf courses — a great perk on an island where the locals all seem to be training for a NASCAR event on the twisting, out-of-the way roads of yet another magical Portuguese outpost. **FG**

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