

PHILIPPINES

Spotlight on the beautiful islands of the Philippines, what to do, where to stay, play and eat

QATAR

Deserts, beaches, markets, architecture, boats, mosques and the colours from this oasis

PLANET GOLF

REVIEW

ISSUE 15

VIEW.COM

STAY, PLAY & SPA
Weekend or short stay getaways, we bring you reviews from Scotland and Italy

EQUIPMENT & APPAREL REVIEWS
Featuring the Callaway MAVRIK, Cleveland Halo, Mizuno T20 Wedges and Duca del Cosma Golf Shoes

WELCOME

I don't think anyone could have predicted that most of the world would be in lockdown with people needing to self-isolate as we celebrated the birth of a new decade. COVID-19 or as we all now know it Coronavirus has swept the planet and has also illustrated how interconnected we all really are. I know a lot of you will be suffering with the virus right now and some of you may have lost loved ones. If that is the case I am truly sorry for your loss and the thoughts of the whole team at PGR Magazine are with you and your family; and to the others I hope you make a speedy recovery.

This issue is meant to celebrate the start of the golf season with The Masters tournament and the start of spring in all its glorious colourful beauty and finally some warmth from the sun on our faces. The good news is we will get through this pandemic and, no doubt, with a new-found realisation of just how precious life is and wanting to grab hold of our time on

this planet with both hands – and wanderlust will certainly be a big part of that optimism.

With that in mind, sit back and relax while we will whisk you around the world in 45 pages, taking you to the Philippines via Edinburgh in Scotland, Tuscany in Italy and Qatar in the Arabian Gulf. We also bring you equipment and apparel reviews from Callaway, Cleveland, Mizuno and Duca del Cosma.

We not only hope that this issue provides you with some positive vibes during this time, but inspires you to know there is a world out there waiting for you to explore once this is all over. We will get through this current situation and I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the team at PGR Magazine and myself to wish you and your family and friends good health over the coming months.

MEET THE TEAM

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REVIEW



Interactive links

By clicking on the interactive links on the cover headlines, contents headlines or section opening image will take you to the start of each feature and by clicking on the word contents at the bottom of each page this will take you straight back to the contents page.

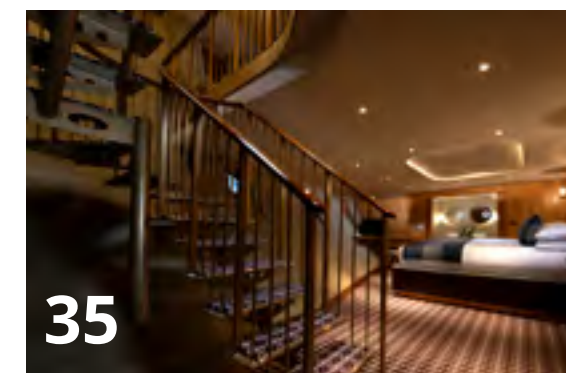
There are also links that will take you to video reviews and links on our adverts that will take you directly to their websites. All this means you don't have to scroll through the magazine – unless you want to – just a click will take you to the feature you are looking for.



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This month Peter takes his Canon camera and captures the colours and mystic of Qatar
- p 7 Philippines Opener**
James and Charmaine bring you information of what you can do, see and where to eat when you visit the magical islands that make up the Philippines
- p 9 Philippines revisited**
Jane Finn takes a trip down memory lane as she visits the island of Boracay 14-years after she took her first steps on White Beach
- p 14 Golf in the Philippines**
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- p 25 Equipment & Apparel Reviews**
Featuring the latest releases from Callaway, Cleveland, Mizuno and Duca del Cosma
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Luxury on the water in Edinburgh and gastronomy and golf in Tuscany

PLANETGOLF

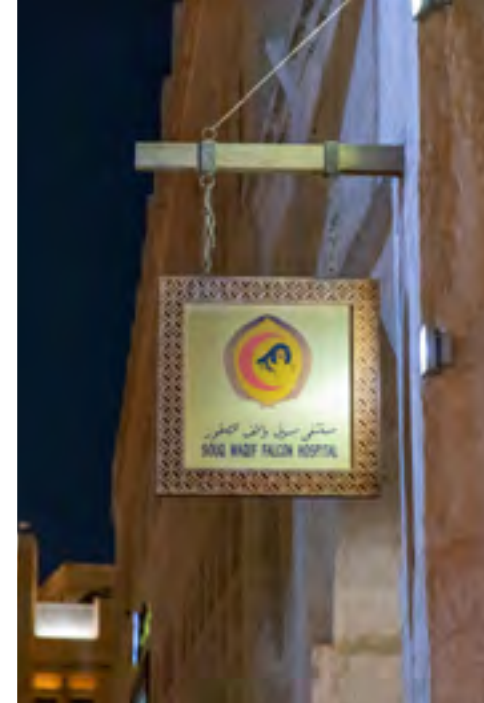
REVIEW



IMPRESSIONS FROM QATAR



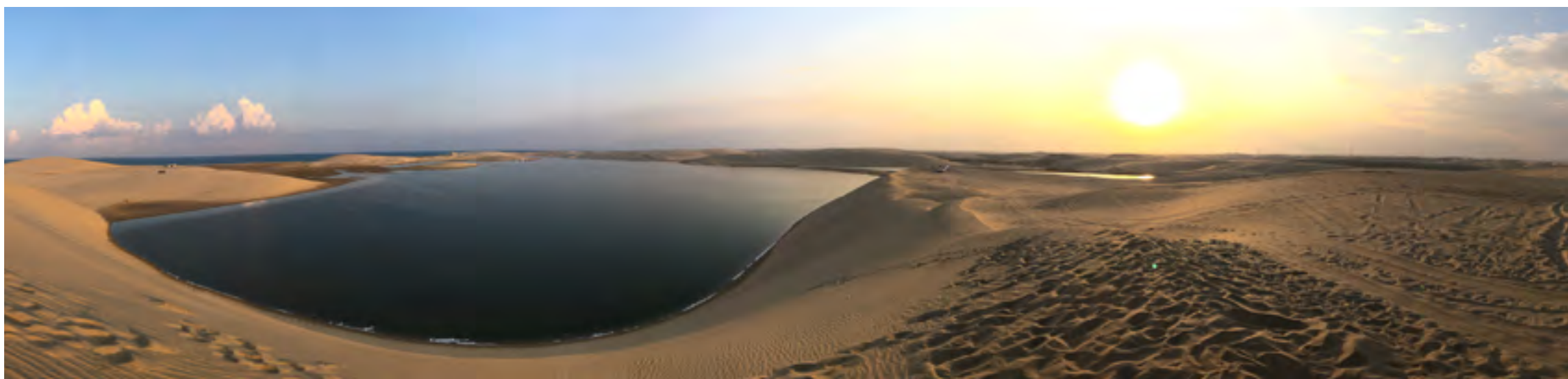
Left: Gold Mosque, Katara Cultural Village, Doha
Below: Hats in Souq Waqif, Doha



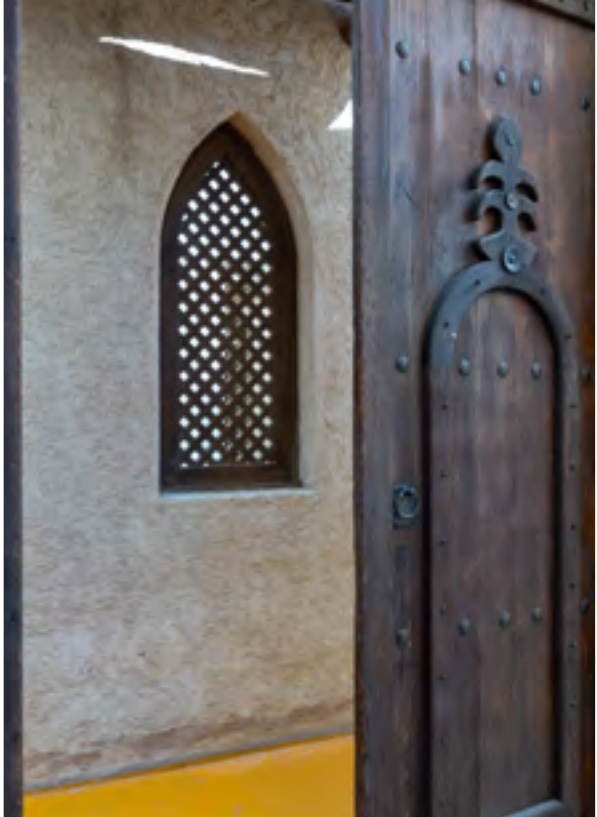
Left: Falcon hospital sign, Souq Waqif, Doha
Below: Dune-bashing in the desert, southern Qatar



Left: Spice shop, Souq Waqif, Doha
Below: Desert scene by the Arabian Peninsula, southern Qatar



Below: Night view from dhow of
Doha's West Bay skyscrapers
Right: Door and window, Sharq
Village & Spa, Doha



Above:
Amphitheatre at
Katara Cultural
Village, Doha
Right: Doorway
in Katara Cultural
Village



Above: Dovecotes at Katara Cultural
Village, Doha



Left: Qatar National
Museum, Doha

IMPRESSIONS FROM QATAR



Left: Desert scene, southern Qatar
Right: Minaret, Katara Cultural Village, Doha

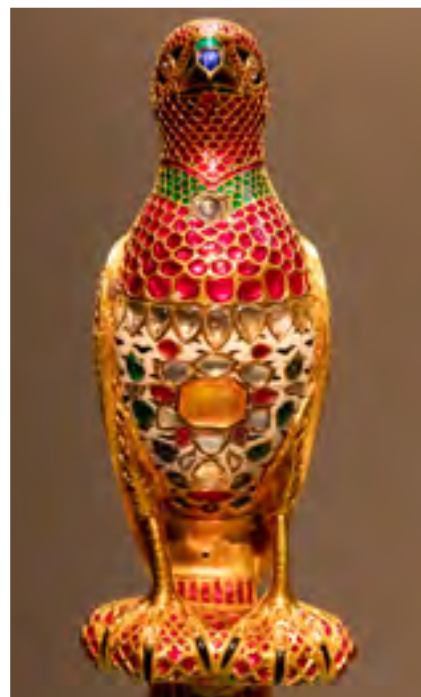


IMPRESSIONS FROM QATAR

Right: Dhow harbour, Doha
Below: Museum of Islamic Art, Doha



Above: Camels in the desert, southern Qatar
Right: Jewel-encrusted falcon, Museum of Islamic Art, Doha



See more of Peter Ellegard's work on Instagram
@peterellegard or peterellegard.co.uk



Above: Sunset over Doha
Right: Abdulla Bin Zaid Al Mahmoud Islamic Cultural Centre, Doha





IT'S MORE FUN IN THE PHILIPPINES

Spring is here, discussions and searches of where to holiday have started, but don't worry, Jane Finn, Charmaine Hibbert and James Mason have your back, bringing you 18-pages of reviews, features, things to do and where to eat in the beautiful Philippines

JOURNEY PLANNER

HOW TO GET THERE

Singapore Airlines

W: singaporeair.com

T: +44 (0) 20 8961 6993

Holiday Extras

Holiday Extras is the market leader in UK airport parking, hotels, lounges and transfers, and in 2018 customers who pre-booked their parking with Holiday Extras saved an average of £59 each vs the price they'd have paid on the day. Booking Meet and Greet Parking and an airport lounge ensures that you can enjoy more holiday without the hassle. To book 9 days Meet & Greet Parking and Plaza Premium Lounge T2 access at Heathrow Airport for £115.90

Price searched on 7th February 2020 for arrival on 8th March 2020.

T: 0800 316 5678

W: HolidayExtras.com

WHERE TO STAY

Manila Hilton

T: +63 2 7239 7788

W: hilton.com

Discovery Shores Boracay

T: +63 2 7720 8888

W: discoveryshoresboracay.com

Mandala Spa and Villas

T: +63 36 288 5858

W: mandalaspaboracay.com

WHERE TO PLAY

Fairways and Bluewater

T: +63 36 288 5587

W: fairwaysandbluewater.com

Villamor Air Base Golf Course

T: +63 2 8853 4978

WHERE TO EAT

Purple Yam restaurant

T: +63 2 8523 3497

W: purpleyamph.com



Far left: Island hopping. Top middle left: Spit roast pigs. Bottom middle left: Motag Living Museum. Above: Bakhawan Eco Park. Middle left: Lillian Borromeo, Heritage Museum. Left: La Herminia Weaving

BY JAMES MASON

Walking through customs I find myself involuntarily smiling as I hear a choir singing “We wish you a Merry Christmas”. Taking in the Ninoy Aquino International Airport terminal I can see fully decorated trees and lots of lights running its entire length, something I wasn’t expecting to see on my first visit to the Philippines and I have to say, after a 16-hour flight with an hour stopover at Singapore, Christmas carols certainly lifted the soul.

Over the next 17 pages you will see reviews of the hotels we stayed in and the golf courses I played, there is also a feature from Jane Finn who has visited the island of Boracay twice.

Must visits would be the **Purple Yam Restaurant** located in the childhood home of Amy Besa, the renowned owner of Purple Yam in Brooklyn, New York who opened her eatery with her chef husband Romy Dorotan before Filipino food became a “thing” along with sister restaurant Cendrillon in Soho, New York.

Kusinang Matua ng Atching Lillian Borromeo – Heritage Museum Mexico, walking into the house is like stepping back to somewhere between the 1930s and 50s in fact I know a few antique dealers would love to just move this place lock stock and barrel to London and clean up. Lillian is known for her biscuit making and we were given a demonstration in how to make her biscuits and there was an opportunity to join in which some of our group did.

Bale Dutung Restaurant, you can watch the spit roast pig being cooked on arrival and the chef serves up six different dishes which you can wash down with several bottles of a local beer called Red Horse that weighs in at a mighty 7°. The chef is a genius and the food is amazing.

Panay Islands Motag Living Museum we team up with a CBS film crew recording a travel show of the Panay Islands, we are shown around the working village which has its own paddy field and also around the various huts which are replicas of how the people on the

islands used to live. There is the chance to plant rice in the fields with some of the workers, ride the bull etc but it is a unique insight into simpler times.

BORACAY ISLAND

Bakhawan Eco Park, this mangrove forest has a young but rich history and with today’s climate emergency it is fantastic to see how the local government and non-government organisations are working together to create this forest to help prevent flooding and storm surges in their community.

La Herminia Weaving, we are shown how they make thread from pineapple leaves, they then take the thread into the weaving department to make clothes. As you can imagine it’s not only a time-honoured tradition but it is also very laborious work and hence why the garments are so expensive, but their order books are full and they closely guard their secrets as no photography is allowed in the weaving rooms.

ROXAS CITY

Panublion Museum, what better way to preserve an old water tower than to turn it into a museum; on entering I feel it is the perfect size, not too daunting that everything overwhelms you and with an exhibition of a local artist on one side and a history of the Philippines, Roxas City and the impressive charismatic President Manuel Roxas on the other.

Palina River Tour, local dancers greet us, lunch will be served as we make our way down the river on two wooden rafts towed behind those iconic narrow boats with an outboard engine. I have to admit the food is tasty as always but it’s all a bit of a blur, because also on board are some masseuses and I have decided to opt for a back and neck massage as we slowly make our way along the river.

There are so many things to do in the Philippines including just chilling out on a deserted beach. The choice is yours, but whatever type of holiday you choose as the locals say, it’s always more fun in the Philippines.

JOURNEY PLANNER

Bale Dutung, restaurant

T: +63 45 625 0169

W: baledutung.com

Subo Restaurant

T: +63 36 288 2849

W: suboboracay.com

Palina River Tour

T: +63 36 6215 918

W: <https://capiztourism.com.ph>

Lampara

T: +63 917 173 5883

W: lampara.business.site/

Wildflour

T: +63 2 8833 9799

W: wildflour.com.ph

Abe’s Restaurant

T: +63 2 8856-0526

W: ljcrestaurants.com.ph

THINGS TO DO

Kusinang Matua ni Atching Lillian Borromeo (biscuit making demonstration)

T: +63 45 8966 0211

F: facebook.com/atchinglillian

Motag Living Museum

T: +63 921 556 3111

F: facebook.com/motag.livingmuseum/

La Herminia Weaving

T: +63 36 262 3797. +63 36 225 3219

F: facebook.com/pages/La-Herminia-Pi%C3%B1a-Weaving-Industry

Bakhawan Eco Park

T: +63 923 568 9904

W: bakhawanmangroveforest.com

Heritage Tour of Roxas City

T: +63 917 772 4389

W: smallvilletravel.com

BORACAY – PARADISE RECLAIMED

They say a day is a long time in politics, find out what Jane Finn discovered 14-years after her first visit to Boracay

White Beach is
Boracay's most
popular attraction



BY JANE FINN

It was almost fourteen years ago when I first laid eyes on Boracay, and it was love at first sight. To this day, the word I use to describe my first experience is idyllic. You see, I had been in Makati for over a month, working day and night in the nascent call centre industry, and desperately needed a break.

At that time, Boracay was virtually unknown and certainly unfamiliar to me, but a poster enticed me to step inside a local travel agency. In the blink of an eye, I booked a flight to the Caticlan airport, passage to Boracay aboard a Paraw, and made a reservation for a modest room at the Orchids Resort, a backpackers’ haven that suited this solo traveller’s limited budget to a tee. What was even more astounding was the fact that within a mere six hours, I was checked into my room and found myself consulting with Lynn, the proprietor, to discover what this small island truly had to offer. For the next few days, based on his sage advice, I sought to explore the nooks and crannies of Boracay and was never disappointed.

Every day, I was up at the crack of dawn to walk the 4-kilometre stretch of powdery sand of White Beach, consistently ranked as one of the top beaches in the world. Most mornings, the beach was virtually deserted except for a couple of locals who started their day, well in advance of the rising sun, sculpting intricate sandcastles. They knew full well that their efforts would be washed asunder when the tide rolled in but they didn’t stop until that day’s creation was perfect. They didn’t do it for money or recognition. They did it to honour the gifts that nature had bestowed upon their island. Still, I dropped a couple of bills in their pail to thank them for their service and continued to return every morning to admire and acknowledge their creativity, tenacity and fearlessness of what a new day would bring.

On my second day, I hired a local guide, Dani, to show me Boracay through his eyes. He was a godsend who picked me up promptly at 8 am with his motorbike and sidecar to take me on a journey that I would have never made on my own. Our first stop was what I

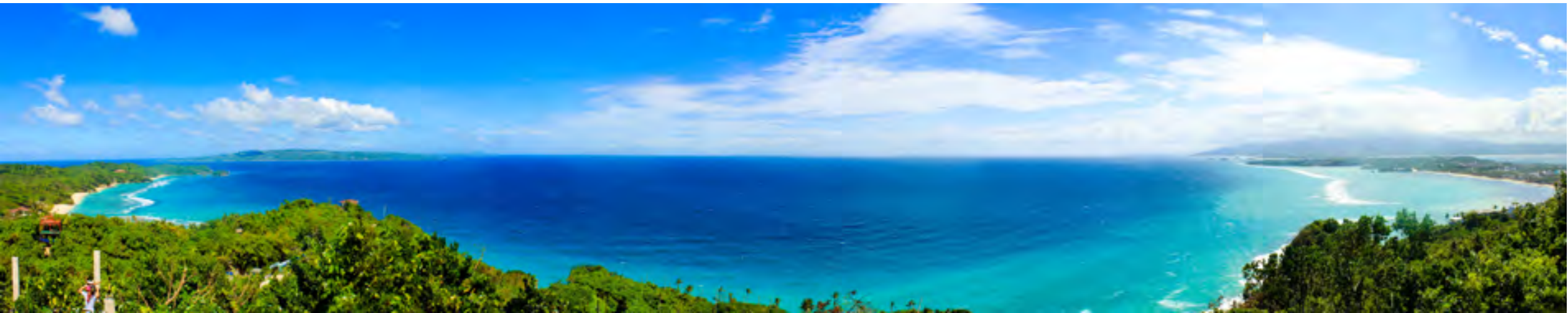
thought was a roadside cantina. He grabbed an unlabelled container of what I thought was a local beverage that I knew I didn’t want to imbibe, only to discover to my chagrin that it was the gasoline we needed to fuel his bike as we travelled inland! Lesson learned, don’t make assumptions!

Shortly after that, we wended our way into the interior, where I saw firsthand how the locals lived, how they farmed, and how they survived on an island where tourism dominates. We traversed Mt. Luho, the highest point of the island at 112 metres, conversed with the monkeys and then emerged from the forest onto Ilig Iligan Beach, a rugged, wild and untouched landscape where I whiled away the hours swimming, walking, reading and writing, comfortable with the solitude that surrounded me. We ended the day at Dani’s mother’s restaurant. Despite being a ‘foreigner,’ I was welcomed like family and enjoyed a simple meal accompanied by smiles and a sense of belonging that I will remember for a lifetime.

Dani had a cousin who captained a Paraw →

Right: Monkeys and other wildlife are easily found on the trails to Mt. Luho

Below: These three-dimensional sand castles were truly works of art



“An island that respects nature and the need to preserve and protect while opening her borders to those who were seeking peace, serenity and a simpler way of life”

and the next day; I found myself aboard with a crew of six. The only person who spoke English was the cook's six-year-old son, but together, we made magic. He translated, and I helped expand his knowledge of my language, which led to a day filled with laughter, fun and tales of the sea that I couldn't wait to share with my friends and family. Refreshed and relaxed, I returned to the mainland with a treasure trove of memories and a sense of well-being that would last long after I made my way back home.

But alas, soon after my initial visit, Boracay was 'discovered,' and sadly, it soon became a victim of its own success. However, as I pen this article, my heart sings that it is possible to reclaim what was lost.

You see, word spread and Boracay 'blossomed' as a party destination. Tourists arrived en masse and left wreckage in their wake. By 2018, Boracay had become a 'cesspool' to quote the Philippine President, who determined drastic measures were necessary to save one of the country's National treasures.

I know that there has been much criticism levelled against Duterte, but I must give him credit for envisioning how the economy and the region's eco-system could co-exist rather than compete. On April 26, 2018, Boracay was closed while the island undertook a massive restoration project, which many people believe may be a blueprint for other popular tourist destinations facing overcrowding and



Above: Island hopping is fun and easy aboard a Paraw

environmental degradation.

For the next six months, a legion of workers, many of them, business owners and residents who had lost their livelihood pitched in to affect a turnaround that would restore Boracay to her former glory – an island that respects nature and the need to preserve and protect while opening her borders to those who were seeking peace, serenity and a simpler way of life. →



Left: Far from the madding crowd Ilig Iligan beach is virtually deserted

Right: Sit back, relax and watch the sun go down





Above: White beach stretching on for miles into the distance

Boracay reopened for business in October 2018, and the transformation has been nothing short of astounding. Illegal structures were bulldozed, the three casinos closed, and buildings were pushed back to restore the shoreline and comply with regulations to eliminate pollution and reduce waste.

Look around, and you will see no, and I mean no, evidence of litter. Today, Boracay is one hundred percent single plastic-free. White Beach is now totally devoid of any clutter, including signs, flags, beach chairs and massage tables providing everyone with full and open access to the cerulean waters. Once again, when you gaze out along the horizon, it is difficult to discern where the ocean ends and the sky begins, but a few new rules have been introduced and are enforced to keep it that way.

Eating, drinking and smoking are not permitted on the beach, and there are no more

nightly raves. Sadly, my beloved sandcastles are no longer allowed, but compared to the sacrifices residents and local businesses made to restore the white sands and crystalline waters, that's a small price to pay.

In planning your vacation to Boracay, you also need to know that the government has capped the number of tourists that can visit on any given day. Now, you must have a confirmed reservation with an accredited establishment before you are allowed on the island. But no worries, there are plenty of options to choose from, including luxury hotels, homestays, inns and hostels.

WHERE TO STAY AND PLAY

White Beach is divided into three areas. At Station 1, where the beach is widest, you'll find the larger, more expensive resorts like the Hennan Prime Beach. At the far end, Station 3

with its 'back alley' sandy paths, is quieter, laid back and favoured by the locals. This is where you'll find the lovely Villa Caemilla Beach Boutique Hotel. Station 2 is the epicentre where people from all walks of life tend to congregate near the shops and strike up conversations in the restaurants and bars of D'Mall. If you want to be near the action, The District Boracay is an excellent choice.

Speaking of choice, when it comes to dining, the possibilities are endless. Wherever I travel, I like to sample regional dishes. I also like to ask the people I meet for their recommendations, and the name that kept popping up was The Ruf Resto Bar, located in the Ferra Hotel. I'd rate them 5-star for the ambience, outstanding service, and the savouriness of their local and Asian fusion dishes.

The Sunny Side Café is alive and well after the restoration, and while it's often crowded, →

“Look around, and you will see no, and I mean no, evidence of litter. Today, Boracay is one hundred percent single plastic-free”



Above: Station 3, White beach.
Above middle: Bulabog Beach
Below: Crystal Cove

it’s worth the wait. If I could offer one piece of advice, go there with a friend. The Sunnyside Café is renowned for its giant pancakes that should give you an insight into the generosity of the portions that are served, not only for breakfast but throughout the day.

The seafood at D’Talipapa is another experience you simply can’t miss! Purchase some of the freshest fish, lobster, or crab from the wet market that you’ll ever taste and take it to one of the restaurants in the complex like Plato D’Boracay Resto who will cook it to your requirements. Categorically, I can say you’ll have a meal made in heaven! And for dessert, nothing beats a mango soft-serve ice cream while you watch the sunset.

YOURS TO EXPLORE

While White Beach is the island’s biggest and most popular attraction, there are 16 other beaches that are worth checking out. I’d suggest

Puka Beach for its chill vibe, Bulabog beach if you’re into watersports like kiteboarding and windsurfing or Tambissan for snorkelling.

Very few people are aware of Lapuz Lapuz Beach located on the east side of the island, and I’m almost reluctant to mention it as it’s the perfect spot to get away from it all. Surrounded by nature, here you can kick back, relax, listen to the waves and pretend you are on your own private beach as it is accessible only by boat or via The Fairways and Bluewater Resort.

As the name implies, The Fairways and Bluewater Resort boasts the only golf course on the island – a 6,524 yard, 18-hole, par 72 designed by Graham Marsh – see James’s review. What also deserves mention is that this 80-hectare, eco-friendly property has partnered with the WWF – the Worldwide Fund for Nature to reduce the human impact on the environment and support sustainable tourism. Handpicked by Condé Nast as one of the top-

rated luxury hotels in the world and 2019’s Best Golf Hotel in the Philippines by World Golf Awards, if you are a golfer and a beach lover, this property will steal your heart away.

With the waters restored, I’d be remiss if I didn’t encourage you to get out and explore what lies below the waves. It’s easy and relatively inexpensive to charter your own boat and island hop based on your whims and how the winds blow.

Crocodile Island is an awesome dive site, but I found the snorkelling there even more spectacular. The coral reefs at Crystal Cove (aka Laurel or Tigwatian) Island are stunning and the caves worthy of exploration. But in the end, Friday’s Rock and Friday’s Reef turned out to be my personal favourite. The dives are shallow, averaging 7 to 18-metres, but the surroundings are anything but! Amazing hard and soft coral formations are home to emperors, triggerfish, nudibranch, parrotfish and sweet

lips. With any luck, you may be graced as we were by the presence of Blue Spotted Stingrays settling in to rest at the bottom of the sea.

Boracay is much more than a beach lover’s destination; it’s a testament to all those people who had the passion, perseverance and vision to make changes to not only improve the present but preserve the future.

Mark Jenkins, an esteemed artist and sculptor, once wrote: “Adventure is a path. Real adventure – self-determined, self-motivated, often risky – forces you to have firsthand encounters with the world. The world the way it is, not the way you imagine it. This will change you.”

I end this article in gratitude that Boracay has reinvented itself as a destination where I will only leave footprints for those who follow.

Above: Puka Beach.
Below middle: Whether you prefer snorkelling or diving take time to explore Boracay’s marine life
Below: The simple, laid back Orchids Resort is a two-minute walk to the beach



CLUBS TROPICANA

Peace and tranquillity to trains, planes and automobiles, James Mason discovers two golf courses that perfectly illustrate the variety of golf on offer in the Philippines, unfortunately the drinks aren't free, but they're very cheap.

FAIRWAYS AND BLUEWATER

Graeme Marsh hasn't designed many golf courses in Europe, but I have heard some very good reports about his work in Asia so I was looking forward to my first taste of teeing it up on one of his designs. Graeme has won tournaments all over the world including 14 on the European Tour and standing on the first tee I had to smile. Boracay is a tourist island with some beautiful white sand beaches and resort courses which usually tend to be designed with wide fairways with not too much trouble. However, Mr Marsh has put in a high-backed bunker some 150-yards off the tee on this 531-yard par 5 opening hole, an opening salvo to any would be tourist in flip-flops and shorts.

There are also two deep bunkers protecting the corner of the dogleg left. There is water short of the very small green that is surrounded by bunkers which also run down the left-hand side of the fairway. Friends, this is no resort course, this is a test – and you need to bring your A-game.

The red sand bunkers are a feature of this course along with the palm trees that line the fairways and gently sway in the wind. The manicuring and shaping of the course are perfect and so far, I have hit both fairways before I manage to put my tee shot in the sand at the 171-yard, par 3, 3rd hole, which has water running down the right.

I am smiling openly as I plot my way around the course. From the risk and reward second shot on the par 5, 502-yard, 6th hole with water running in front of the green that is just in range if you get good drive away, water running down the left of the 8th, the second par 3 on the front nine and the water and bunkering protecting the left and right side of the fairway on the 9th, you get everything you could hope for on the opening nine holes.

I would suggest a buggy as it would be a very long walk between the 9th and 10th holes, but the back nine opens up with another par 5, this one measuring 526-yards played from an elevated tee which has some wonderful sea views behind it. The sea comes back into view on the dogleg left par 4, 12th hole, which again has a deep bunker protecting the corner of the dogleg.

For the big hitters the 13th is driveable at 322-yards but there are two deep bunkers on the



THERE IS WATER SHORT OF THE VERY SMALL GREEN THAT IS SURROUNDED BY BUNKERS WHICH ALSO RUN DOWN THE LEFT-HAND SIDE OF THE FAIRWAY. FRIENDS, THIS IS NO RESORT COURSE, THIS IS A TEST – AND YOU NEED TO BRING YOUR A-GAME.

front right protecting the green that lays across you and has another bunker back left. The last of the par 3s comes at the 16th and is played from an elevated tee that has some stunning views over the course with the ocean as a backdrop and has a green that is surrounded by bunkers.

The 18th is a fitting finale to the course and is played through a valley, but for the longer hitters there are some bunkers waiting to catch any wayward shots. As I chip and putt for a →

Top left: Looking back down the 1st hole. Top right: Fairway approach to the 2nd green. Right: One of the many water hazards on the front nine



final par I look back up the fairway; it's been a tough challenge and I have to say I am more than happy with my 77 playing to my handicap especially as it was my first look at the course. They say first impressions count and I had the

feeling this was going to be a tough challenge. There are four teeing option and each will test your golf game, but I am sure that, like me, you'll enjoy every minute of playing this Graeme Marsh design. →



**I AM SURE LIKE ME
 YOU WILL ENJOY EVERY
 MINUTE OF PLAYING
 THIS GRAEME MARSH
 DESIGNED COURSE AND
 I CERTAINLY WISH I
 WAS STAYING AT THE
 RESORT AS I WOULD
 BE BACK OUT EARLY
 TOMORROW.**



COURSE VIDEO

Top left: 4th Green surrounded by palm trees. Top right: Sea views from the 16th tee. Right: Over view of the front nine looking out to sea



VILLAMOR AIR BASE GC

I can hear the alarm going off but my body is refusing to move, its 5.30 am and I went to bed at 4am after a very heavy night out in Manila – you need to try the Don Papa rum here!!

It's the last day of the press trip and thankfully my brain has overruled my body. I am standing under the shower trying to sober and wake up, a quick breakfast and I am on my way to Villamor Air Base Golf Course, it's only a 5 minute cab drive from the Manila Hilton, but as we pass through the arch and onto the property it may as well be a million miles away.

Now Manila is a Metropolis of tall buildings, shanty towns, shops of all shapes and sizes, 6-lane roads with 20 lanes of traffic and being next to the airport planes taking off every 2 minutes. Throw in the train tracks, buses and Jeepneys and you can sense my surprise at suddenly seeing 18-holes of a green oasis stuck right in the middle, it really is an amazing sight and unless you were looking for it you would never know it was here.

I am playing with the owner Roberto and Alex who runs the golf carts and caddies, there's a wonderful driving range to warm up on but I had to decide between sleep and hitting

I AM ON MY WAY TO VILLAMOR AIR BASE GOLF COURSE, IT'S ONLY A 5-MIN CAB DRIVE FROM THE MANILA HILTON, BUT AS WE PASS THROUGH THE ARCH AND ONTO THE PROPERTY IT MAY AS WELL BE A MILLION MILES AWAY

Right: Flyover behind the 3rd green. Bottom right: Rule of the day, 1st tee. Bottom right top: Approach shot into the 1st green. Bottom right: The very tight 5th fairway from the tee

COURSE VIDEO 



a few balls and even in my inebriated state I knew I needed to grab some sleep.

Fortunately, I managed to connect the club head to the ball and send it down the centre of the fairway. My first impressions apart from the greenery is how tight the fairways are. The holes here are tree lined with narra, mahogany, eucalyptus, and mango trees and the fairways run like slithers of mown emerald carpet between them.

I realise very quickly strategy is the key to playing here; put the ball in the fairway, stay out of the trees and bunkers and you will score well, try and over power the course and you can quickly put a number on the board that an opening batsman would be proud of!

The course is in excellent condition; the fairways are lush, green and manicured, with the greens being beautifully prepared, however, although they look in great condition they were slower than what I expected them to be.

The first of the par 3s arrives at the 176-yard, 3rd hole known as Friendship – all the holes are named after aircraft that made up →





WATER PROTECTS THE FRONT OF THE GREEN WITH A BACKDROP OF A FLY OVER, WHICH I COULD PROBABLY HIT WITH MY 3-WOOD AND DISPLAYED PROUDLY BEHIND THE GREEN IN BIG BOLD WHITE LETTERING IS THE WORDS “HOME OF THE PHILIPPINE MASTERS”

the Philippines Air Force during the time the base was used – water protects the front of the green with a backdrop of a motorway flyover, which I could probably hit with my 3-wood - and displayed proudly behind the green in big bold white lettering are the words “Home of the Philippine Masters”. Having tried to research this I think it could be a local amateur tournament as I cannot find any mention of it,

but Villamor did host the Philippines Open from 1984-86.

It is a great little hole played downhill. The highlight of the front nine came at the 459-yard par 4, 5th hole known as Albatross; it’s another tight driving hole, but for me the uniqueness came from the hotels that ran along the left hand side of the fairway framing the green and towering over the trees. The juxtaposed

positioning of this green oasis surrounded by an urban sprawl is encapsulated in this one hole.

The 10th hole is where you will find the umbrella girls; for those who like to walk but want protection from the sun you can hire the girls to protect you from the sun with their umbrellas.

The 11th is a severe dogleg left which requires just a 6-iron off the tee between trees to a marker post, then you have a long second shot into the green to give you an eagle chance on this 530-yard, par 5. Walking off the 18th green I am greeted by a sign that says “Thank you, golf again” and it is certainly a course I would love to play again. I did find the back nine more interesting and I am reluctant to pick out a favourite hole as I enjoyed them all, but the island green at the par 3, 17th should get a mention.

In conclusion if you like quiet solitude this course isn’t for you. The noise from a busy city and the airport is constant and towering over the trees is a concrete jungle, but if you like a tough test of golf that makes the most of the land with raised small greens with run offs, tight fairways, well-placed bunkers and water hazards you will love playing here. I will certainly be back next time I’m in town.

Above: Hotel overlooking the 5th green. Top left: The umbrella girls. Bottom left: Hole information boards. Middle top: 6th green with hotel backdrop. Middle bottom: Approach shot to the 18th green. Far right: 14th green surrounded by hotels, housing and water



MANILA HILTON HOTEL

Manila, Philippines

By CHARMAINE HIBBERT



THRILLER IN MANILA

5 minutes' walk from the international airport **Charmaine Hibbert** finds the perfect base camp for the start and finish to your Philippines adventure

It's been a long flight over from London to Manila with a stop off in Singapore and no matter how great the service is – I have flown with Singapore Airlines twice now and their customer service from the cabin crew is second to none – you just want a quick check in and get to your room.

Fortunately for me that is exactly what I got and within 10 mins of arriving at the hotel I am undertaking the face down test into the fresh crisp cotton pillows and a mattress that is firm, perfect for me. I know I can't jump into bed just yet as my luggage will be arriving soon so I check out the beautiful walk-in shower that has a rainfall shower head and hand shower with rail and I like the fact you have a choice of a deep soaker bath as well.

The fixtures are nice and modern lots of glass, golds, blacks and wood tones with an open rail for my clothes with plenty of hangers and lots of draws and with a nice deep wide safe. A tea and coffee station for those important liquid breaks between working and of course a mini bar. A →

Above: Chill out or meet friends for drinks - there are some wonderful relaxing furnishings to enjoy.

Left: Outside view of the Manila Hilton hotel



mix of the practical with luxury.

There is a suite section off the main bedroom area with sofa, coffee table and a nice large desk to write which is where I am typing this review. The view isn't much to write home about; basically, I am looking at another hotel but being close to the airport it is what I would expect. On that note I realise the sound proofing is perfect as I have not heard one aircraft engine noise. In a couple of words, spacious and modern would be my conclusion.

KUSINA RESTAURANT

Now one of the most important parts of any day is breakfast and after a fantastic night's sleep I have made full use of that rain head shower, I am heading down to the Kusina restaurant that doubles up as the breakfast room between 6am-10am. After taking my room number one of the staff shows me around. Now as you can imagine I have seen some breakfast set ups in my time, but the Manila Hilton has jumped straight to the very top, to the point of my heart pounding with anticipation of when can I get started.

Of course, there is the egg station, that's a given, but then you have the Filipino Kitchen, the International Kitchen, with meats including bacon and sausage, more egg options and lots of fresh vegetables and when one of the chefs asks me if I want to try the freshly cooked honey roasted ham with a honey mustard dressing, how could I disappoint him? There is every



variety of bread you can think of, lots of fresh fruit which is always my starting point; it seems to make me feel better before starting the full fry up!!

And as she shows me the last section, I am sure she must have picked me and my tongue off the floor! There's a chilling cabinet with a vast variety of juices and more fresh fruit, but then there's chilled deserts, jellies, creams and custards in an array of colours, bread and butter pudding, throw in with all the patisseries and out the corner of my eye I spot dishes of jelly sweets. I now want her to lock the doors and throw away the key leaving me inside.

I think after an hour they must have rolled me out of there. Oh, did I mention the amazing pancakes with maple syrup? Ok, you catch my drift - the room rate is worth it just to get that breakfast choice!!

HOTEL FACILITIES

On the other side of that coin I did manage to get my arse down to the gym – I knew I needed to because it's my last day here tomorrow and I will be hitting that breakfast room HARD!! The gym is well equipped with free weights and weight machines, X Trainer, bikes and treadmill. The outdoor pool has a kids section and plenty of loungers to soak up the sun and is complemented by a pool bar serving a wide variety of drinks and cocktails. The service at the pool bar is as impeccable as I have come to expect with



this hotel – the gym moved down my list of priorities!

We are now heading out on our travels to the Panay Islands but the good news is I will be back next week before heading back to England. The Hilton Manila is happy for us to store some of our baggage here. Your baggage allowance on Singapore Airlines is 30kg, but on the internal flights it goes down to 20kg so being able to store luggage here is a real bonus and being perfectly placed next to the airport the Manila Hilton should be your first and last port of call.

Manila Hilton
1 Newport Blvd, Pasay
1309 Metro Manila
Philippines

T: +63 2 7239 7788

W: hilton.com

Top and bottom left: Different suite options. Middle: Shanghainese Restaurant Top right: Hotel Gym facilities. Right bottom: Hotel outside pool

DISCOVERY SHORES

Boracay Island, Philippines

By CHARMAINE HIBBERT

After a short flight from Manila to the Panay Islands we find ourselves hopping on a boat to take the short 5-minute journey over to Boracay Island. It's a busy little port and as the bright azure sea laps onto the white sandy beach I know we are in for a wonderful time.

After an interesting 25-minute journey we arrive at Discovery Shores Boracay, the hotel shuttle drops us off underneath the hotel and we are taken up to reception. The hotel looks modern, clean and the staff are very friendly, but at this moment in time nothing too special that you wouldn't expect at a luxury hotel. As I open the door to my room my face breaks into a big smile; yes the room is beautifully designed and well appointed, but the smile is reserved for the giant sized teddy bear that has taken up residence in one of the chairs.

I will come back to the room later as I need to hit the beach as the sun is about to set.

As I make my way past the pool to the bar area my eyes light up. The sun is setting in all its orange magnificence, the pure white sandy beach goes on for miles in each direction as the sun slowly sinks below the crystal-clear waters of the Sulu Sea reflecting its amazing light show as it dips below the horizon.

Just after the sun takes its final bow I turn to go back to my room and am hit by how well the architect of this hotel has done to position the bar and restaurant/breakfast area to take full advantage of those views, which brings me back to the design of my room.

Clean crisp lines, under bed lighting which was fantastic during the night when you want to get to the bathroom, which has a frosted door, the walk-in shower has a nice large rainfall shower head. Strangely the →



Above: Sunset over White Beach.

Below: Room with a view at
Discovery Shores

PURE SHORES

Charmaine Hibbert discovers her inner all saint as the sun sets over the pure white sands of Discovery Shores, White Beach





vanity was placed outside of the shower room, but the dark wood, cream walls and frosted glass all work well together and gave the room a very classy modern finish.

SPA AND GYM

Now as many of you know I am not really a gym person, lounging round the pool or face down in a spa treatment room is more my thing. James seemed to be more than happy with the gym facilities, his description of compact but with all the equipment you need to keep your fitness regime on track seemed to keep him occupied.

Unfortunately for me during this visit the spa is going through an updating programme. The good news is a foot massage was available in my room, which I decided to take full advantage of. Emmelue arrived at my room, we move the giant teddy to the bed and I replaced him in the chair where a wooden bowl was awaiting me while Emmelue was filling the jug with warm water; her skillful hands then work in a scrub, which she then rinses off and then uses a moisturiser to finish. The whole process takes about 15 minutes but I am finding it so relaxing I catch myself falling asleep a few times.

INDIGO AND SANDS RESTAURANTS

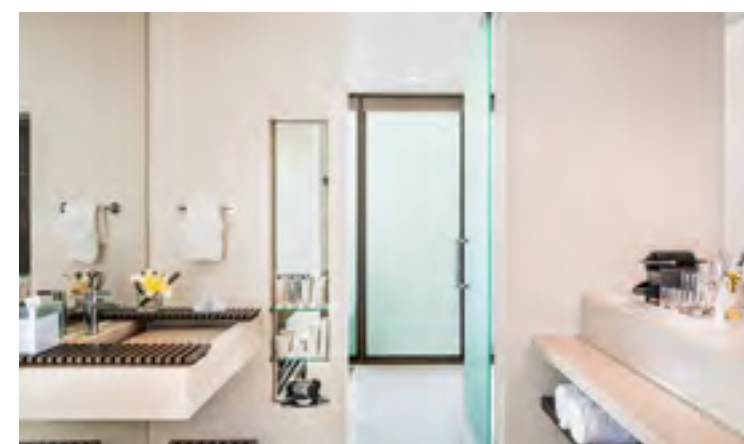
These two restaurants flow into each other and are both used for

breakfast. We didn't have the opportunity to eat there in the evening but I have to say there are not too many better views to eat breakfast. You have a choice of sitting inside or out so you are right on the beach and as you can imagine we sat outside on both occasions. How can you not take full advantage of that pure white crystal beach as it glitters in the sun? Some of our group have gone for early morning runs and others are soaking up the rays where the water laps the shore.

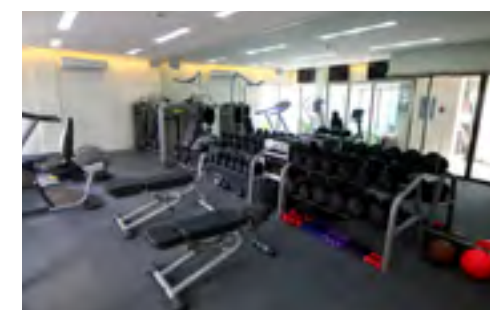
It's a buffet style breakfast with plenty of fresh fruit, Filipino and International options and of course the egg station with the waitresses bringing juices and coffee - in fact everything you need to set you up for a busy day or just laying back in the sun. Why not? It certainly beats Carmarthen in winter!

**Discovery Shores
Station 1
Boracay Island
Malay, 5608 Aklan
Philippines**

**T: +63 2 7720 8888
W: discoveryshoresboracay.com**



Top left: Balcony view looking through the resort. Right top to bottom: Indigo restaurant. Room décor. Breakfast on the beach. Gym facilities





Top: One of the beautifully appointed villas. Right: A deep soaker bath for you to switch off and drift away



MANDALA SPA & RESORT

Bocaray Island, Philippines

By CHARMAINE HIBBERT

NATURAL VITALITY

Walking through the tunnel of arched tree that leads to the reception area **Charmaine Hibbert** knew that this was a resort like no other on Boracay Island

After videoing James playing golf and lunch at Fairways and Bluewater and then a second lunch at the Shangri-La's Boracay Resort & Spa – you will notice eating is a big part of this trip – we are off to the Mandela Spa and Resort which is about a 30-min journey to the South of the Island.

On arriving at the reception, the feelings of tranquillity and oneness with nature are a big part of this resort's mantra. The Gaudi-inspired reception building is round and made from wood and its magnificent high structure captures your eye as soon as you walk in and while there is a roof the building is open to the elements, with large open entrances front and back.

After filling in a form, I am presented with a sarong and escorted along a wonderfully designed stone path through the trees to one of the many small wooden villas which on entering I realise is a treatment room that has a shower and a deep soaker tub behind a curtained off section of the villa. My masseuse/therapist May Malijan asks me to change into the sarong and after a hectic morning I decide to take a shower first.

May Malijan escorts me to a small veranda where a chair and bowl of warm water and rose petals await and as she soaks my feet I already →



know that I am not going to last long once May has me lying face down on the treatment tables.

After a few questions - one of which was how much pressure I would like her to use and, of course, I went for strong and rigorous, thinking that may save me from slowly drifting off to sleep - the next minute, May is asking me to turn over while she protects my dignity with a towel.

Her magic hands worked every inch of my body; although the massage was deep and strong I spent most of the time in a blissful state between awareness and a deep sleep while my body just purred at the perfection of May's Malijan technique to sooth the very depths of my soul without making me wince in pain.

It seemed like only minutes when I was told just to relax a while before getting up to change back into my clothes yet 90 minutes had passed and

I think I must have floated back to the reception. Unfortunately, we didn't have time to see the rest of the resort and its rooms and villas but if the treatment villas are anything to go by then this would certainly be a retreat where I would love to spend some time. If there was a luxurious way to spend time with Mother Nature then I think the Mandala Spa and Resort comes very close to perfection.

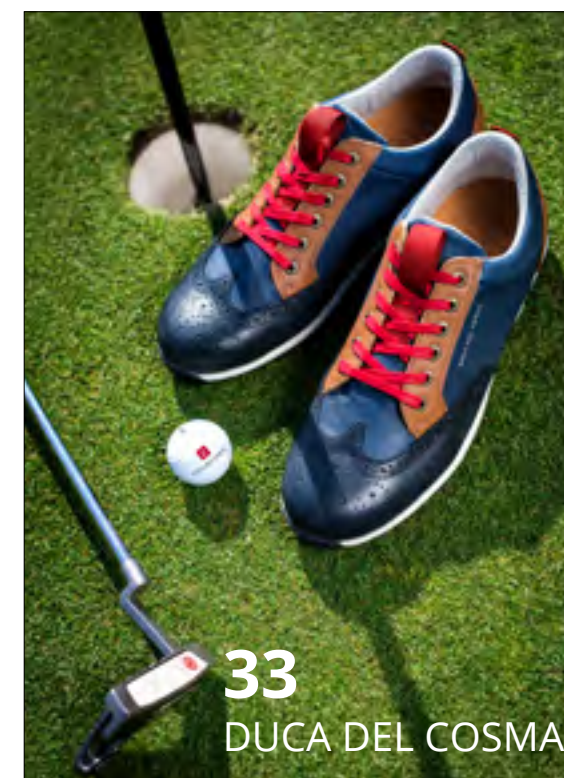
Mandala Spa & Resort
Barangay Manoc-Manoc
Boracay Island, Philippines

T: +63 36 288 5858
W: mandalaspaboracay.com



Left: The wonderfully designed Vessel studio. Top: Choose from a range of spa treatments. Above: The stunning entrance way to Mandala Spa & Resort. Right: Yoga classes in The Vessel. Bottom right: Dinner at Prana restaurant





VIEW

EQUIPMENT & APPAREL

REVIEW

TOUR READY WORLD READY

ST200 with Beta Ti Forged face





TOP GUNS

This is the second generation of Callaway's AI technology drivers. There are three models in the Mavrik range, the Standard, Sub Zero and Max, but all utilise the main technologies

TECHNOLOGY:

As you can imagine computer learning is a non-stop process because the computer will keep on refining. It's at what point the R&D guys decide that there has been enough improvement on the last generation that would show improvements in distance, forgiveness, consistency, feel and of course there is also the improvement in material technology to be equated into these factors.

Callaway have used a new

supercomputer for the MAVRIK driver and state they have seen wider-ranging performance improvements in the face and throughout the clubhead. First is the new Flash Face SS20 architecture that is a thinner design and has a more expansive area, helping deliver "ultra-fast ball speeds". Because of the design, for the new SS20 face Callaway turned to a new stronger, lighter high-end FS2S Titanium material. As you can

imagine how many times a driver is used, this new material is designed to improve ball speeds at impact while keeping its integrity throughout the club's life span.

MAVRIK also uses Callaway's tried and tested Jailbreak technology that uses two internal bars behind the face that connect the sole and crown to promote faster ball speed and the T2C triaxial carbon crown which is lighter than a titanium

crown, allowing the R&D guys to redistribute the weight saved from the crown and the 6gms from the FS2S Titanium face to raise MOI and forgiveness.

With the help of the new supercomputer the AI technology has also helped Callaway improve the sound at impact optimise the internal titanium rib system that has fine-tuned the head to produce a deeper sound

There is also a new Cyclone Aero shape, which is shallower from

front to back, with a flatter crown, and a sole design that sweeps upward dramatically in the rear to create a higher trailing edge; this helps decrease drag as the club moves along its path and helps increase clubhead speed. The driver's internal and external weighting includes a single, fixed 5g weight positioned at the sole's back-centre, to promote mid-level spin and a moderate draw bias.

Available in 9°, 10.5° and 12° lofts.



Left to right:
MAVRIK Standard
driver, toe, crown
and face views

CONCLUSION

Apart from the new orange and black finish and the cell like graphics on the new T2c Triaxial carbon crown and how well the clubs sits behind the ball when teed up, it is the sound at impact as the ball bullets off the face (and I have deliberately used the word bullet) as it really does sound like a deep solid shot gun blast as it echoed through the trees on my

first hit that is most noticeable. I really enjoyed the feel of the club all the way through the swing and the head design certainly helping to eliminate some drag, increasing swing speed. As I stated earlier this is now a process with the AI face design software learning and it's at what point you decide to jump on the ride. If you have the Epic from last year

then I would wait a couple more versions, but if you have had your driver for 4-5 years, I would certainly recommend you get on this ride now. You will notice a lot of difference in distance and forgiveness and you're going to love that sound at impact as your ball shoots down the fairway.

VIDEO REVIEW

MAVRIK Std Driver

LOFT 10.5°

SHAFT Project X Even Flow Riptide 50

FLEX Stiff

SETTING LOFT S

SETTING LIE N

RRP £469.00 / €549 / \$499.99

FEEL YOUR HALO

With Cleveland's underlying R&D philosophy aimed at improving the game of golf for the average golfer and the UK in the middle of a very wet winter, what a better time to test the new Halo hybrid technology



TECHNOLOGY:

The new Cleveland Halo hybrid utilises a gliderail design on the sole of the club; this technology helps provide speed retention during the stroke so the club doesn't get snagged up in the rough. The three glide rails help the clubhead glide through the turf, helping maintain clubhead speed as it comes into the impact area.

Cleveland use an enhanced HiBore Crown that has pushed the centre of gravity (CG) low and deep in the clubhead to help

produce a low spinning, high launch ball flight. Weighting has also been moved to the perimeter of the club increasing the club's MOI which has enhanced the club's forgiveness.

All this combined with the club's new HT1770M steel variable face insert helps the ball release off the face faster for increased COR, ball speeds and distance, while also offering an increased sweet spot for more forgiveness on off-centre strikes.

VIDEO REVIEW

Cleveland Halo Hybrid

LOFT #4 hybrid 22°

SHAFT Miyazaki C.Kua 60

FLEX Regular

RRP £179 / €199 / \$199.99



Top left: Crown.
Top right: HiBORE crown illustration.
Far left: GlideRail illustration.
Left middle: Face view.
Left: Variable face insert illustration.
Bottom left: Toe view.
Bottom right: Halo weighting and GlideRail illustration



CONCLUSION

First up you need to know I tested this club with a regular shaft as there wasn't one with a stiff shaft that I could use at the time I was going on the testing trip, so I couldn't really go after a ball to see how far I could really nudge this baby. On the other side of that coin swinging slower meant I certainly middled a lot more shots out of the sweet spot and I did get plenty of distance - 215 yards slightly downwind and a couple of positional tee shots meant this was the perfect club.

The main test for the Halo and its gliderail design was always going to be from the rough and

I have to say the turf interaction couldn't have been better. It has been an horrendous winter in the UK and the amount of rain has seen many courses closed, but being able to feel the head glide through long wet grass that if I went too deep is just a mud bath certainly put the gliderail design through its paces. The added bonus was how well the club sat behind the ball on the fairway shots.

The theory behind the new Cleveland range of clubs is being able to improve the game of the average golfer and the new Halo hybrid will certainly do that for you.

SMOOTH OPERATORS



From the heat and humidity of the Philippines to the heavy, damp, muddy conditions of a very wet winter in the UK James Mason has a chance to put Mizuno's new T20 wedge technology to the test in very different climate conditions

TECHNOLOGY:

The Mizuno T-20 wedge system has three different finishes, satin chrome, Blue ION and a new RAW and ready-to-rust option. There are also three grind options: STD BEVEL to Subtle M and Aggressive C grinds.

The T-Series wedges has a classic teardrop profile design and uses a Grain Flow Forged HD from 1025E mild carbon steel, for what Mizuno describe as the ultimate blend of looks, feel, control and workability around the green and on shorter approach shots.

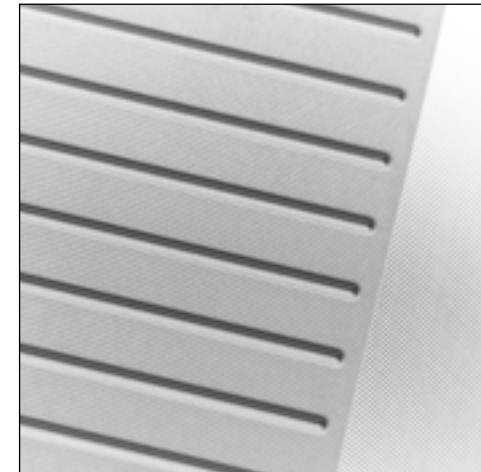
T20 wedges feature a new Hydroflow Micro Grooves, that are vertically etched to help release moisture and maintain spin even in damp conditions. Each wedge is spin-weighted, with weight placed high within a tapered blade for increased spin and vertical stability on off-centre strikes.

To ensure consistency and predictability each head features precise CNC-milled grooves which are mechanically milled to the highest possible tolerances, Grain Flow Forging to ensure a perfectly flat striking face and consistent levels of spin. The 1025E mild carbon steel billets have been infused with an element of Boron to give them more durability for longer-lasting groove performance and reliable spin.

In the higher lofts, T20 wedges feature a wider, shallower groove to grab more of the ball on those partial/finesse shots around the green to help create extra grab and stop, while in the lower lofts the grooves are narrower and deeper, so more of the ball goes deeper into the grooves on full shots giving you extra spin and control.

The classic teardrop profile varies from loft to loft. The lower-lofted 46° pitching wedge retains a defined teardrop profile, but this flows through to a more rounded profile in the 60° degree lob wedge as the need for versatility increases around the green.

“Although our T-Series wedges haven’t been available to the public for over a year, they’ve become even more popular on tour over that time,” says Kyle Hammond, Mizuno’s PGA Tour Technician. “The teardrop shape, forged feel and addition of a ‘tour only’ RAW finish brought the wedge to iconic status. The updated T20 has been a long time in coming but with a few extra design tweaks we learned over the last year it will finally bring all that wedge goodness back to the public.”



Left: Toe and sole view. Top right: Close up of the Hydroflow Micro grooves. Top right: Hero shot. Right bottom: T20 wedges line-up

VIDEO REVIEW

Mizuno T20 Wedge System

WEDGES 52° 56° and 60°

SHAFT Dynamic Gold Tour issue

FLEX Stiff

RRP £140 / €185 / \$149.99

CONCLUSION

When I first saw the Blue ION a few years ago I wasn't too fussed with the finish, but having got used to it I decided to test the new T20 wedges in that finish and I am so glad I did. It really is a beautiful finish and it came into its own when I was testing in the Philippines as I didn't get any glare from the sun bouncing off the face and into my eyes.

As for the performance of the wedges I would just say pick one up and get it in your hands. The feel and balance are perfect

and the teardrop design sits beautifully behind the ball. From bunker play to coming out of the rough the T20s performed brilliantly and the different groove depth certainly come into their own around the green with the higher loft options, giving you more control on those finesse shots. If you are in the market for some new wedges, make sure you test the T20s and I would certainly also recommend the Blue ION finish.



TECHNOLOGY

Italian fashion brand Duca del Cosma has boosted its production in Europe of its latest Spring/Summer collection of premium golf shoes thus giving golfers a bigger choice of styles and size options at the start of the season.

Duca del Cosma have four manufacturing plants in northern Portugal which are set up to produce more of the distinctive hand-made leather golf shoes that come in both soft spike and spikeless versions.

CEO Sjef van Gastel, who recently oversaw the company move to a new HQ outside Amsterdam

stated, "As the start of the golfing season approaches, we can guarantee that every style in our Spring/Summer collection will be delivered within 3-5 days of an order being placed".

The latest Men's collection includes the soft spiked waterproof MASTERS design that comes in two colour options and also features the ARNEFLEX® insert soles for comfort and breathability with the outsoles offering stability during the swing. All footwear comes with a second pair of laces so you can colour coordinate with different outfits. →

MASTER CLASS

It's a big claim to state your golf shoes are 100% waterproof, when you are in the middle of a very wet British winter where most of the county has seen record levels of rainfall. James Mason takes Italy's finest designed golf shoes and introduces them to a rather soggy garden of England





CONCLUSION

As most of you know I am always very wary of testing new golf shoes as I only take one pair with me when I go away on equipment testing trips. Golf shoes can certainly make or break and more to the point shred your heels, making it very painful for the next day's testing.

The good news is no shredded heels, blisters etc; a slight problem under the bottom part of the laces on the first round but I put that right after a couple of holes and all was perfect after that. I loved the modern look and design and being able to swap laces to match different outfits.

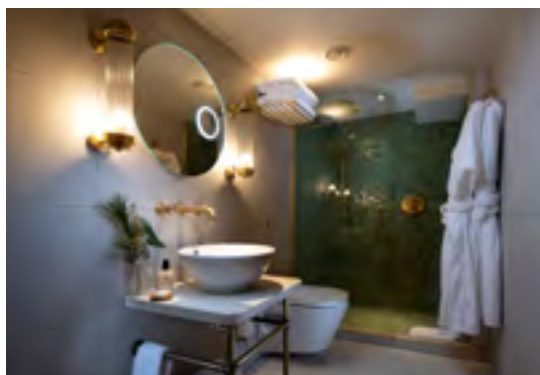
Winter in Kent isn't the greatest time of year to test golf shoes because of the mud, worm casts etc, however it certainly highlights just how waterproof a pair of golf shoes are. You can be in for a very rude awakening if your new golf shoes are not up to the test of a very wet British winter.

The good news is dry feet from start to finish and that is saying something given the deluge we have had this year. Duca del Cosma have some perfectly designed golf shoes and being able to wear them straight from the box, the only decision you need to make is what pair matches your golf apparel the best.





36 FINGAL



STAY, PLAY & SPA

REVIEW



40 IL PELAGONE RESORT



VIEW.COM

FINGAL
Edinburgh, Scotland
By PETER ELLEGARD

SHIPSHAPE

After years of helping lighthouses keep seafarers safe from rocky shores Peter Ellegard finds Fingal is still revitalising weary travellers

Fingal's signature
Lighthouse Martini,
served in a lighthouse-
shaped bottle



There’s something very special about staying on a ship. Even more so when it is more like a luxury superyacht, managed by the trust that runs the Royal Yacht Britannia and is docked a short stroll from it in Edinburgh’s fashionable Leith district.

A former lighthouse tender that retired in 2000 and opened as a boutique floating hotel a year ago in January following a £5 million conversion, Fingal is elegance personified.

For passengers arriving into Edinburgh by train or plane, the ship’s BMW limo can pick you up from Edinburgh station and whisk you to its dedicated Port of Leith berth in style. After golfing around East Lothian and at Edinburgh’s historic Bruntsfield Links I drive there, parking just steps from my overnight home away from home.

I’m given a royal welcome in the elegant reception area then escorted to my cabin, one of 23 built when two accommodation decks were added in the refit. I’m struck by the beautiful wood everywhere and the sheer craftsmanship and incredible attention to detail – hardly surprising as Britannia’s workmen helped with the refit. Fingal’s trident motif I had noticed at the top of the black and red hull’s bow is omnipresent, including in my cabin.

CABINS

Like the other 22 cabins, it is named after one of the Scottish lighthouses Fingal served during 37 years with the Northern Lighthouse Board – all designed by the Stevenson family of famous writer Robert Louis Stevenson. →



Left: Fingal at dusk.
Below left: Classic cabin bathroom.
Below right: Luxury duplex cabin

“Like the other 22 cabins, Lismore is named after one of the Scottish lighthouses Fingal served during 37 years with the Northern Lighthouse Board – all designed by the Stevenson family of famous writer Robert Louis Stevenson.”



Mine is called Lismore after the lighthouse built by his grandfather, Robert Stevenson, on an Inner Hebrides islet.

The name is carved into the floor outside the cabin. Inside are more references to the lighthouse and to Fingal’s past. On the desk beside a tray of complimentary fudge and chocolates, a book on the Stevenson lighthouses is open at the page about Lismore along with a photograph of Fingal during its working life.

The cabin is exquisitely furnished and decorated. Behind the double bed, which sports a locally-made plaid runner and cushions, the grey suede headboard depicts a marine chart of the Lismore lighthouse location. A suede panel in a discreetly-lit ceiling recess above bears a compass and Fingal’s name.

The detail continues throughout the cabin. Fingal’s motif is etched into the desk drawer’s grey lining. A double wardrobe, featuring curved doors covered in grey leather with stitched leather handles again bearing the trident motif, opens to reveal a beautifully-crafted hardwood interior complete with an

iron, ironing board, laptop safe and drawers containing amenity items. A boxed, silk Hunt & Holditch bow tie is thoughtfully included in one drawer for guests should they have forgotten their own – priced at £25.95.

The shower cubicle is tiled in marine green and iridescent squares. Brass bathroom fittings include taps resembling stopcocks and hooks shaped like anchors on which generously-large bathrobes are hung.

Once settled in, I’m given a tour of Fingal. Mine is one of 10 classic cabins. There are eight luxury cabins, two classic duplex cabins and two luxury duplex ones, one of which I explore. I’m blown away by its stunning spiral staircase and the angled wall formed by the curve of the hull, which is tiled in the bathroom behind the free-standing bath.

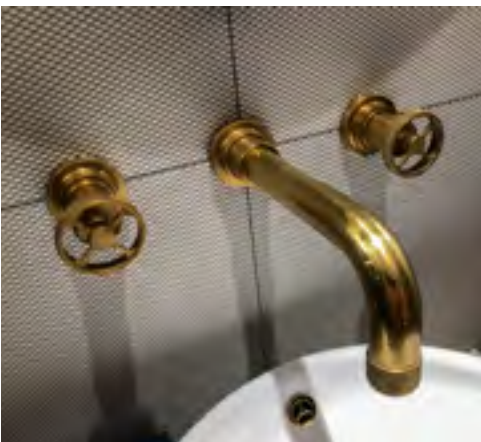
The top cabin, the Skerryvore Suite, is even more luxurious and spacious, its bathroom previously the compact cabin used by Princess Anne when she occasionally took trips on the vessel in her capacity as Northern Lighthouse Board patron.

I also visit the engine room, its machinery →

“The Skerryvore Suite, is even more luxurious and spacious, its bathroom previously the compact cabin used by Princess Anne when she occasionally took trips on the vessel in her capacity as Northern Lighthouse Board patron”



Left: Engine room
Far right top to bottom: afternoon tea desserts, beets and goats curd, dessert, eggs royale. Right top to bottom: Lighthouse Martini, brass taps, anchor-shaped hook



gleaming as new behind a glass-walled corridor, and the ballroom that seats 60 below a removable glazed skylight in what was the ship’s hold.

BAR

Fingal’s heart is its art deco-style Lighthouse Bar, where you sit at tables or at the bar below its reflective, wavy copper ceiling to enjoy fine wines, beers, cocktails or Scottish spirits as well as light meals. The pre-mixed Lighthouse Martinie is served in a lighthouse-shaped bottle. I sample a local Britannia Gin with an Aberdeenshire tonic.

Supper comprises mouth-watering creations cooked from local ingredients and presented with panache. The menu and portions are pared down compared to a full dinner but you can add dishes, or use it as a preamble before dining in one of the many nearby establishments ashore. I enjoy a post-supper drink on the aft deck, taking in the views of Leith and the port at dusk before retiring to my comfy bed.

Breakfast includes a traditional Scottish fry-up, eggs benedict and – my choice – eggs royale.

Before checking out I tour the nearby Royal Yacht Britannia, which guests are invited to do.

CONCLUSION

My short stay has been so enjoyable it’s a wrench to leave. En route to Edinburgh Airport I drive 10 minutes to visit the spot where the five-hole Leith Links once stood. The first official rules of golf were drawn up here in 1744. For golfers wanting a cosseted stay with the chance to pay homage to the home of golf or take an East Lothian golf tour, Fingal truly is shipshape and Bristol – or at least Edinburgh – fashion.

It’s pricey, but you’re treated like royalty.

FINGAL
Alexandra Dock, Historic Port of Leith,
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Right: Leith Links
cairn. Far right:
Fingal’s ballroom.
Right below: History
and treats cabin
presentation



Right: The bridge. Far
right top: Lighthouse
Bar. Far right bottom:
Captain's Negroni
cocktail

IL PELAGONE HOTEL & GOLF RESORT

Tuscany, Italy

By JAMES MASON and CHARMAINE HIBBERT

TUSCAN TALES

Blue skies, rolling green hills with umbrella pines and vineyards, what's not to love about Tuscany. **James Mason** and **Charmaine Hibbert** discover electric bikes, golf, gastronomic delights and the odd bottle of local wine an hour from the historic city of Pisa





Above: The risk and reward par 5, 6th hole. Below: Looking through the beautiful vegetation to the 5th green

GOLF CLUB TOSCANA



After a good night’s rest, a hearty breakfast and a warm up on the wonderful practice facilities, I find myself standing on the 1st tee, the sun is beaming in the sky and there’s hardly a cloud in sight.

Looking down the wide fairway the only real danger is a pond to the right of the green and as I smash my driver I come up slightly and push my ball into the trees just short of that pond, what a great start! Thankfully I manage to have a shot to the green and two putts sees me walking away with a par.

The 2nd slightly doglegs to the left and again there is water down the right, which is definitely in range for the longer hitters, but →

Top: Lunch by the pool. Bottom right: The wonderful villas with their large balconies



IL PELAGONE HOTEL & GOLF RESORT

The journey from Pisa airport to the Il Pelagone Hotel & Golf Resort takes about an hour, and 2 hours if you fly into Rome. Unfortunately, there was a delay on our easyJet flight, I was looking forward to the drive through the beautiful Tuscan countryside but as the sun has already set I decided to catch up on some sleep.

James gives me a nudge as we pull off the motorway which is a short drive from the entrance to the resort. It is hard to make anything out but I do know the road has taken us through the golf course as James has his face stuck up against the window of our minibus!!

A quick check-in and our bags are whisked away to the rooms as we head up a subtly lit path to the restaurant. I am hungry and parched but the waiter couldn’t be more attentive and drinks are soon on their way with some wonderful light dishes consisting of cheese and meats with some delicious bread to munch on while we decide our main courses which of course has to be pasta on our first night in Tuscany. →



this time I manage to put my ball in the fairway and hit a solid iron which gives me nice birdie chance.

The first of the par 3s arrives at the 3rd and at 190 yards with two large bunkers protecting both the left and right of the green and with the wind off the right from the sea it's a tricky hole, it's also a large green so take plenty of club, you can afford to be long here.

Two good par 4s brings you to the 6th hole, which is the first of the par 5s on this nine and at 545 yards, it can give you a birdie chance, but don't be fooled, there is water on the left from the tee where you can cut off as much as you dare and then water again comes into play with the green protected on the right hand side, it's risk and reward for both your tee and fairway shots and a well-designed hole.

The finish to the front nine comes with a 202-yard downhill par 3 and then you have an uphill tee shot at the 565-yard par 5, 9th hole and if you make the ridge the fairway goes downhill before you get to the raised green that is protected by no less than six bunkers, four of which are short to catch anyone trying to go for the green in two.

The back nine opens up with a beautiful par 4 played over a small waterfall feature that sits behind the 15th green. The fairway here gently rises and when you reach your ball you play down to a green that is raised but lies across you and is protected by trees behind it and four bunkers short. The first of the par 3s on the back nine arrives at the 11th and at only 116 yards from the back tee playing steeply downhill, it may only be a flick with a wedge but anything long and you could start dropping shots very quickly; it's certainly better to be short on this hole.

There are actually three par 3s on the back nine with the other two coming at the 13th and 16th holes, bringing the course to a fitting finale. The 17th and 18th are two wonderful driving holes played from elevated tees and offer some stunning views of the surrounding countryside, the 17th weighs in at 429 yards while the 18th measures 524 yards. There is water yet again protecting the green to the right, but it does offer a birdie or even eagle chance for the brave and is a perfect finish. Keith Preston has designed a wonderful course. →

“As I open my door I am surprised how large it is and heading out to check out the balcony I am stunned, it is big enough to play tennis on”

COURSE VIDEO

Below left: The 1st green with pond to the right. Below right: Looking back down the 4th hole. Bottom left: 15th green with rock feature. Bottom right: Vistas from the 18th tee



Above: Ravioli pasta parcels Left: Il Pelagone's private beach

It's been a long day so after dinner we head to our rooms for a good night's rest. It's a strange experience heading to my room after I have eaten. I normally like to freshen up after a flight before eating but we just didn't have time. The rooms turn out to not be rooms but small villas, and as I open my door I am surprised how large it is and heading out to check out the balcony I am stunned - it is big enough to play tennis on.

Unfortunately, the plastic table and chairs are slightly underwhelming but I am told the resort has just come under new ownership and these will soon be upgraded. My bed is a king size and the face dive into the fresh linen pillows tells me all I need to know and with a

firm mattress I know I am going to be in for a good night's rest.

I head to the large bathroom; it has a single vanity and a large plastic corner shower and the wooden wardrobe and cupboards in the hallway give you plenty of storage. After a good night's sleep, I can't wait to get out on to the balcony and take in the views. I am greeted by a clear blue sky, umbrella pine trees and rolling hills and I can't get over how big this balcony is.

Heading back to into my room it is certainly very large plenty of room, there is a sofa to relax on and a desk to work at, but I think I will be spending plenty of time around the pool that I have just spotted.

I meet James and we head to the →

GOLF CLUB PUNTA ALA

About a 30-minute drive from Il Pelagone brings you to the coastal town of Punta Ala and a little way up the hill that protects the bay is the Golf Club Punta Ala. Little did I know what that drive up the hill would enable me to see until I step out of our minibus and walk around to the front of the clubhouse, beyond the several national flags that are gently fluttering in the wind is a magnificent view out to sea and now I am itching to get out and see what the rest of this course has to offer.

After a warm up on the relatively short practice ground, we are starting on the 10th tee but I am going to start this review from the 1st hole and that wonderful view out over the town of Punta Ala and the sea beyond. I have seen some wonderful first tee views in my time, Portstewart and The Judge come to mind and this is definitely up there with those.

As you can imagine we are playing from an elevated tee to the fairway below that doglegs to the left and at only 344 yards with trees on both sides position is more important than length. The 2nd brings up the first of the par 3s and while I was impressed with the opening hole, I am not so impressed with the design of this hole. There is a large tree that is 102 yards to carry and some 58-yards short of the raised green with the hole measuring 170 yards, I do manage to give myself birdie chances but I am a 5-handicapped golfer and most golfers are not going to enjoy this hole.

Thankfully the course gets back on track quickly; the 3rd doglegs right and again being in the right position from the tee will give you a great chance of making a birdie as you will only have a wedge in. The fairway on the 4th slopes from right to left so make sure you start your tee shot up the right-hand side, it's a short par 5 and if you get your drive away you will have a short iron into the green, especially in the summer when the fairways will be hard and running.

The 6th brings up the second par 3 of this nine and it's a vast improvement on the 2nd hole. Played from an elevated tee the green sits in trees, some 191 yards away; you have to carry a ravine and bridge and it is protected →



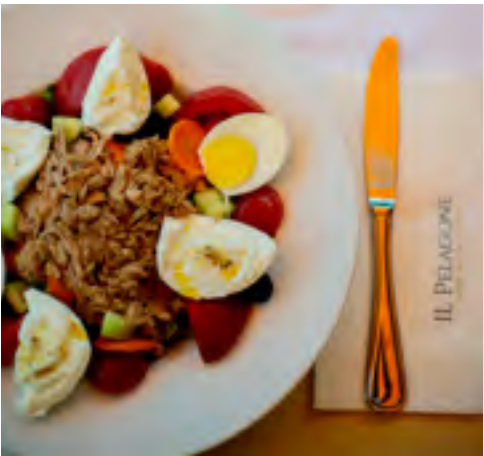
Right and far right:
More taste bud
tingling Tuscan
fare. Right below:
Wonderful views from
my villa balcony

COURSE
VIDEO 

Left: Wonderful views
from looking down
the 7th. Below left:
Sunset at the 14th
with the surrounded
by umbrella pines



***“I am going to start
this review from
the 1st hole and
that wonderful view
out over the town
of Punta Ala and
the sea beyond. I
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wonderful first tee
views in my time
Portstewart and The
Judge come to mind
and this is definitely
up there with those”***



restaurant, which we are told doubles as the breakfast room. Again, the service is wonderful with tea, coffee and fresh juice being offered as we take our seats., It's a buffet style breakfast with the usual hot and cold food, with plenty of fresh fruit and patisseries available. After several courses James is off to play golf and I am off to explore and head to the pool.

If you are looking for activities apart from the golf course at Il Pelagone, on the property they have tennis courts and offer child and adult golf lessons for beginners as well as for more experienced golfers. The resort can also arrange surf and sailing courses in nearby Follonica, day trips to neighbouring islands, hiking tours in the national park “Parco dell' Uccellina”, Cavallo Maremma horse centre in Marina di Grosseto, Cavallino Matto fun

park in Donoratico, Follonica waterpark in Follonica and Tarot garden by Niki de Saint Phalle in Capalbio.

At this moment in time there are no spa facilities; again something that the new owners are working on and I have heard they will be building a dedicated wellness centre, which I will certainly be looking forward to visiting once it is up and running.

The countryside around the resort looks beautiful and – unlike me – I have decided to take a bike and go exploring. Now I can feel your shock and horror at the thought of little old me undertaking some of these hills, but this beauty does have brains and my secret weapon is an electric bike. Within 5 mins I am off the beaten track heading through vineyards and along deserted paths. Fortunately there are no obstacles or small children to manoeuvre round and with my →

by three bunkers, two back left and right and the other protects front right.

The 7th brings you back to that stunning view out to sea. It's a par 5 that is played from an elevated tee but this time not as high as the opening hole, with the tree-lined fairway running straight towards the sea. The back nine comes to a close with another wonderfully designed golf hole, I recommend you play from the elevated back tee as it gives you another chance to see that stunning view on this dogleg right hole.

The back nine opens with a dogleg right par 5, again played from an elevated tee and at 509 yards, it does offer another excellent birdie chance as long as you don't block yourself out, so make sure your ball finishes in the left portion of the fairway.

Like the front nine the 11th brings up the first of the par 3s on this nine, again played from a slightly elevated tee, you play over a ravine to a green that is protected by bunkers which have the front and sides surrounded with a shallow

bunker at the back to catch anything long, it really is a true test of distance control to fly the bunkers and then stop your ball on the putting surface and at 208 yards that is a tough ask.

The 12th is the second hardest hole on the course and it is easy to why. This dogleg right is tree-lined, but if you get a good drive away and manage to make the slope, especially in the summer months with the hard-running fairways, you will have no more than a short iron into this green.

The second par 3 on the back nine comes at the 15th and accuracy is the key here again with four bunkers, two protecting the front and then both left and right sides of the green. Thankfully this time it's 156-yards and for me an eight-iron which I don't hit so well and end up in one of those front bunkers.

The 16th and 17th are great golf holes both tree-lined with your second shot to the 16th having to be played over a ravine. Hit the fairway on the 17th and you will get plenty of run on this very tight hole. As I walk off the

18th I have to shake my head in disbelief. I do like a strategic course but when you have to hit a spot no bigger than 2 yards square to be able to get a shot at the green to me that is more stupidity than strategy. There are two trees on the corner of this dogleg right and you have to be in perfect position to have a gap big enough to have a clear shot at the green, which is completely from front to back left to right surrounded by bunkers, so if you don't hit that spot playing a run shot under the trees is also out of the question.

And here is my problem and why I am adding this paragraph. Fortunately I started on the 10th hole so the 18th arrives in the middle of my round, but I could just imagine my disappointment walking off the course if it had been my last hole. I would suggest starting from the 10th if you can because Golf Club Punta Ala is a very good golf course apart from the 2nd and 18th holes which I feel need a total redesign or some severe pruning to two trees in particular.

Below: The stunning view from the clubhouse



Wind surfing at Il Pelagone's private beach

sturdy cycle helmet and the wind whistling past my ears I feel totally free. It is a wonderful feeling and experience and one I highly recommend.

The Tuscan countryside is truly stunning and surprisingly flat in parts, making my ride along deserted roads that take me past several farms, forgotten old barns that would make wonderful homes if they were ever restored. There is still plenty of charge on my bike but I have to say I am pleased with myself as I have been doing some actual cycling on the flatter parts of my sojourn and as I make my way back to the resort I have to say I have had a wonderful day and now can't wait to have a nap and then eat!

Valentini Vineyard

As most of you will know I do love the nectar from the vine. If it's good enough for the gods then who am I to argue and how can you not visit a vineyard when you're in Tuscany.

Now to be totally honest all vineyards are pretty much the same these days with stainless still tanks and automated bottling. Grape selection is the true secret to a good wine and with the fertile Tuscan land they have an abundant choice.

After the tour around the winery we sit round a large table, plates of cheese,

meats, different breads and olive oil are being passed around and the first bottle appears, we are starting with the only white wine the winery produces named Vermentino, we move onto the rose Rosata and now slowly moving through the red wines Sangiovese, Montereio Rosso, Vivoli, Atunis and Crebesco. I have to say it was a tough call between the Atunis and Crebesco, but I will leave it for you to decide between them.

I have a slightly cheeky question for our guide and ask what happens to the remaining wine and before I know it I am walking out of the tasting room with the Montereio Rosso, Atunis and Crebesco. Well if you don't ask...

As we arrive back at the resort and head down to the pool bar, we are served some wonderful kebabs - the perfect accompaniment for the wines and with the moonlight dancing across the pool. It's the perfect end to a wonderful day and trip.

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