

COSTA BRAVA

David and James bring you history and amazing street art in Girona and stunning views and uncrowded fairways

NEW ZEALAND

Peter takes his camera south of the equator to bring us some inspiring images

THAILAND

Bangkok, Chiang Mai and James Bond Island, but it's a chance encounter that has Jane soul searching

STAY, PLAY & SPA

Toscana Resort
Castelfalfi, Tuscany and
The Sanctuary at Kiawah
Island, South Carolina

PLANET GOLF REVIEW

ISSUE 17

THE MASTERS

Our review and guide to this year's third Major Championship!

EQUIPMENT & APPAREL REVIEWS

Featuring Arccos, Duca del Cosma, Srixon and Sun Mountain

LUXURY LUGGAGE

We show you how you can travel in style

CHRISTMAS GIFT IDEAS

24 different gift ideas for family and friends

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WELCOME

As we head towards Christmas thoughts obviously turn to family and friends. It has certainly been a tough year with all the various lockdown measures and social distancing around the world. We are also aware that a lot of you out there would have lost loved ones during this pandemic and Christmas is only going to highlight their loss even more. I do know how that pain feels having lost my mum several years ago and not a day goes by that I don't feel that, so my heart, prayers and thoughts go out to you at this time and it's a reminder to us all how quickly things in our lives can change.

One of the many reasons we started this digital magazine was to be able to bring you destinations and ideas of places you could visit, enjoy and create life-long memories with the people you care about, because when we do get to the end of our own personal life journeys what we are left with is the love we have felt and the memories we have created.

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So, when you sit down to Christmas lunch celebrate your memories and experiences and look forward to a New Year with all its possibilities. This issue of PGR Magazine takes you to Costa Brava, New Zealand, South Carolina, Thailand and Tuscany and will hopefully give you some inspiration of new destinations to explore and help you create those new memories and experiences.

We also bring you reviews on luxury luggage and the latest apparel, equipment and tech from Arccos, Duca Del Cosma, Srixon and Sun Mountain and three pages of gadgets, golf and furniture Christmas gift ideas and of course our world-renowned betting guide to the last Major Championship of the year.

From the team and myself at PGR we wish you all a wonderful festive season and Christmas and a New Year full of love, laughter, new memories and experiences.

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TRIAL R O T I E D

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.



- p 4 The Masters**
Review and betting guide to this year's final Major Championship
- p 6 Christmas Gift Ideas**
Three pages of amazing gadgets, golf and furniture gift ideas
- p 10 New Zealand In Focus**
This month Peter takes his Canon camera south of the equator and captures the wonderful scenery and history from this beautiful country
- p 14 Luxury luggage**
Debutant Iesha Hinds gives us her guide to the top seven luxury luggage brands so we can hit those destinations in style
- p 17 Thailand**
Jane and David Finn not only discovered James Bond Island, Chiang Mai and Bangkok on their journey to Thailand but a whole new perspective on life
- p 22 Costa Brava**
James Mason and David Cottrell travel to Spain and the Costa Brava where getting lost in Girona is the best way to discover the city, and some amazing golf courses where you may get lost in wonder at some of the vistas on offer
- p 33 Equipment & Apparel Reviews**
Featuring the latest releases from Arccos, Duca Del Cosma, Srixon and Sun Mountain
- p 43 Stay, Play & Spa**
Style and history feature in our two reviews from Tuscany and South Carolina

PLANETGOLF

REVIEW



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MASTERING THE ODDS

Augusta in the spring now becomes Augusta in the autumn and instead of being the opening Major Championship of the year it's now the final Major Championship of the year, 2020 has been a strange year but I have a feeling this year's Masters tournament may prove more than just a November footnote

If you are like me I am sure you can't wait to see what Augusta National looks like in the autumn, all those reds and oranges of the tree lined fairways replacing all the colours of the Azaleas in spring. When Bobby Jones purchased this land to build his dream course, it was originally a tree nursery so I am sure that will come shining through on our TV screens.

The other whispered chat around clubhouses is how will Augusta cope with the new power game of Bryson DeChambeau, maybe it's a blessing that the damper colder air of November will help curtail the distance the ball flies in the air and runs on the fairways, but there is no doubt that the more loft and control you have on your golf ball going into these greens is going to give →

BRYSON DECHAMBEAU

8 | 1



DUSTIN JOHNSON

12 | 1



PATRICK REED

28 | 1



HIDEKI MATSUYAMA

40|1



Srixon

LOUIS OOSTHUIZEN

55|1



PGA of Australia

CAMERON SMITH

100|1



Asian Tour

that player a massive advantage.

The back nine on Masters Sunday always conjures up drama and as Bobby Jones once said “Competitive golf is played mainly on a five-and-a-half-inch course, the space between your ears.” No matter how much muscle or added inches to your 5° driver. There may be no roars of excitement or spectators cheering you on, but there’s still a metal battle that also has to be won.

TIPS TO WIN

After saying all of that how can I not tip **Bryson Dechambeau 8/1 – with Ladbrokes** – who will be announced onto the tee each day as the US Open Champion, which will just feed into Bryson’s confidence especially if he gets off to a fast start with his game plan to attack Augusta.

It was a tough choice between **Dustin Johnson 12/1 – with UniBet** – and Justin Thomas 12/1 – with UniBet – both are in great form. As I write this guide Dustin has just shot back-to-back 66s to move into the Top 5 at the Houston Open and with his better record over the Augusta National track with four Top 10s including a runner-up finish and a Top 5, Johnson edges it for me.

2018 Masters Champion **Patrick Reed 28/1** –

with SportingBet – should arrive at Augusta in buoyant mood. Patrick had a win at the WGC Mexico Championship earlier this year and ended the PGA Tour season with eight Top 10 finishes from twenty starts giving him an eighth-place finish on the FedEx Cup rankings. Reed also had a third-place finish at the BMW PGA Championship on the European Tour last month after his Top 15 finish at the US Open.

EACH-WAY TIPS

Another player who is competing at the Houston Open this week is **Hideki Matsuyama 40/1 – with BetFred** – who had a steady start over the first two rounds and has just shot a third round 66 to move into the Top 10. Last year was the first time Hideki had finished outside the Top 20 at the Masters since 2015, he has three Top 15 finishes including a fifth-place finish in his eight starts at Augusta and I must admit I was surprised to find him this far down the betting odds.

I did tip **Louis Oosthuizen 55/1 – with BetFred** – in 2010 when he was runner-up to Bubba Watson and with his third-place finish at the US Open two months ago, which followed on from his two Top 6 finishes in WGC events

this year, the South Africa will be fancying his chances of adding a green jacket to his claret jug.

MY OUTSIDE TIP

Many of you will know that I have fancied **Cameron Smith 100/1 – with UniBet** – to win on the new wraparound season and his current form of three Top 25 finishes from his last three starts, progressing up the leaderboard with each event reinforces that feeling. Cameron had a Top 5 finish here two years ago firing a final round 66 and I feel these are great odds for the Australian.

LONGER ODDS

Try **Bernd Wiesberger 200/1 – with Ladbrokes**

We would like to emphasise that betting should be for fun and not a way to make a living. We see it as a way of adding excitement to a tournament while you watch and hopefully this guide will help you make an informed choice.

As always good luck and have fun!

Right: All paths lead to a green jacket



LATEST FIRST ROUND BETTING ODDS FOR THE MASTERS

Bryson Dechambeau 8/1
Dustin Johnson 10/1
Rory McIlroy 11/1
Justin Thomas 11/1
Jon Rahm 11/1
Xander Schauffele 12/1
Brooks Koepka 18/1
Patrick Cantlay 25/1
Webb Simpson 25/1
Patrick Reed 25/1
Tyrrell Hatton 25/1
Bubba Watson 28/1
Tony Finau 28/1
Collin Morikawa 33/1
Jason Day 35/1
Tiger Woods 35/1
Matthew Wolff 40/1
Adam Scott 40/1
Hideki Matsuyama 40/1
Jordan Spieth 45/1
Tommy Fleetwood 45/1
Louis Oosthuizen 55/1
Justin Rose 55/1
Scottie Scheffler 55/1
Sergio Garcia 60/1
Rickie Fowler 66/1
Matthew Fitzpatrick 66/1
Paul Casey 66/1
Jason Kokrak 70/1
Phil Mickelson 80/1
Lee Westwood 80/1
Abraham Ancer 80/1
Sung-Jae Im 80/1
Cameron Smith 80/1
Shane Lowry 80/1
Si-Woo Kim 90/1
Gary Woodland 100/1
Brandt Snedeker 100/1
Zach Johnson 100/1
Cameron Champ 110/1
Matt Kuchar 125/1
Corey Connors 125/1
Francesco Molinari 125/1
Brendon Todd 125/1
Billy Horschel 125/1
Ian Poulter 125/1
Kevin Kisner 125/1
Erik Van Rooyen 150/1

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CHRISTMAS

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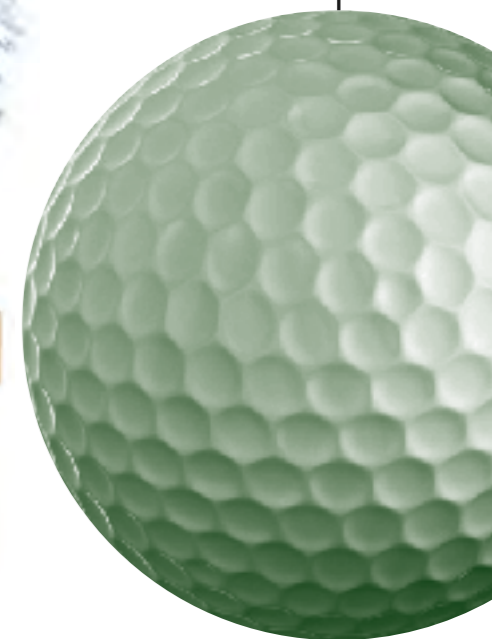
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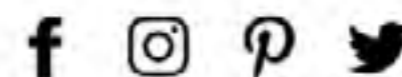
MAPPEMONDE - 2 Print Trunks
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Christmas gift ideas
from our friends at
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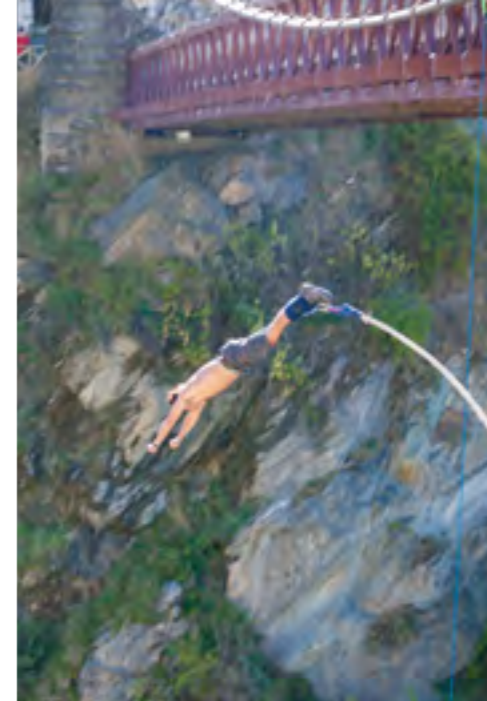


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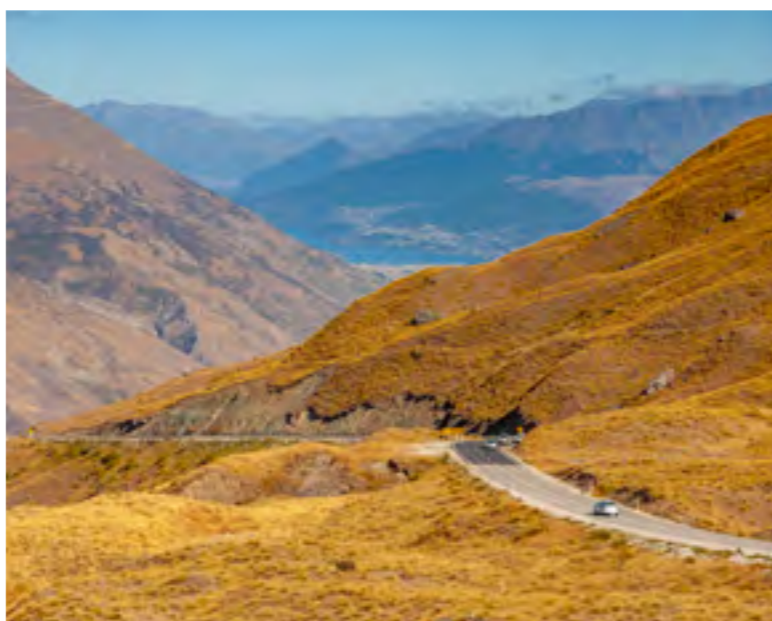
IMPRESSIONS FROM NEW ZEALAND



Left: Whakarewarewa
Thermal Village, Rotorua
Below: Tamaki Maori
Village, Rotorua



Left: Bungee
jumping from
the Kawarau
Bridge,
Queenstown,
South Island



Left: View to
Queenstown from
Crown Range
Summit
Right: Touring
motorbike and
passenger at Crown
Range Summit
lookout



Right: Balancing
sticks and stones
at Bruce Bay, South
Island
Far right:
Rainforest in
Fjordland National
Park, South Island



Below: Thermal pools at Hell's Gate, Rotorua
Right: Kiwi road sign, Rotorua



Above: Sperm whale off Kaikoura, South Island
Right: Maori carving, Whakarewarewa Thermal Village, Rotorua



Above: Full moon over Lake Wakatipu and Queenstown



Left: Hahei Beach, Coromandel Peninsula

IMPRESSIONS FROM NEW ZEALAND



Left: Sunrise at Whangapoua, Coromandel Peninsula
Right: Waterfall in Milford Sound, Fjordland National Park, South Island



Right: Mirror Lakes, Fjordland National Park
Below: Rusting old Austin A40, Greymouth, South Island
Below middle: Collection of old British cars, Greymouth
Below far right: Rainbow Warrior memorial overlooking its final resting place, Matauri Bay

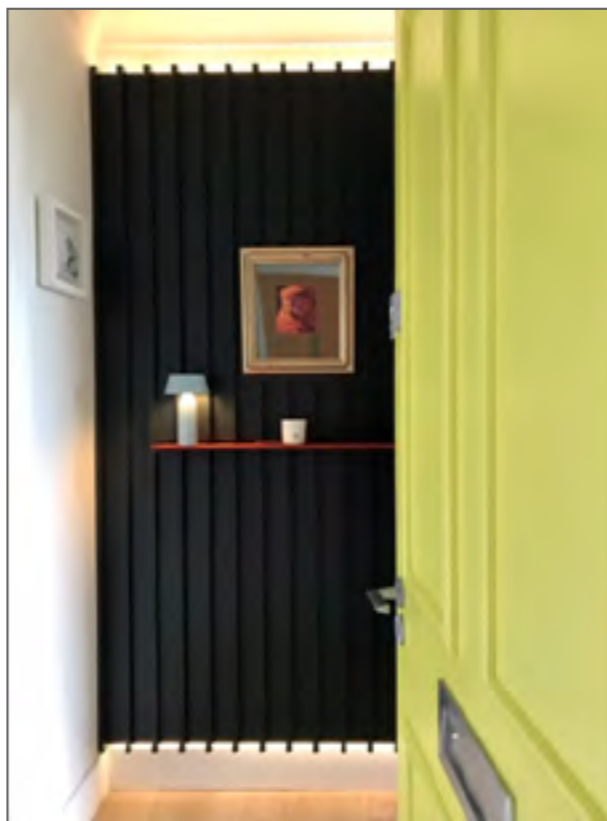


Above: TSS Earnslaw steamship, Lake Wakatipu Right & Below right: Rainbow Warrior memorial lookout sign and Memorial, Matauri Bay



IMPRESSIONS FROM NEW ZEALAND

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



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HAVE BAG, WILL TRAVEL

Choosing your travel luggage can be just as important as picking your destination Isha Hinds from Fashion Digest London brings you her Top 7 Luxury Luggage Brands



1. RIMOWA

Rimowa is a long established luxury luggage brand that has garnered a huge following over the decades. Founded in Cologne, Germany in 1898 Rimowa has in recent years (2016) been acquired by the ultimate luxury goods conglomerate LVMH. In an attempt to cater to a younger audience they collaborated with fellow LVMH House Christian Dior. The Dior x Rimowa collaboration was a PR hit amongst influencers and included great photo ops prospective consumers could enjoy. Harrods held a real helicopter display which showcased the luggage and handbags available from the launch and influencers could take pictures in the display. All the pieces were of course limited edition, giving the consumer the opportunity to own a collectable with amazing re-sale potential. Getting your hands on a Rimowa luggage piece today means you get to straddle the line of owning something that is trendy but would also stand the test of time.

[Click here to shop for Dior x Rimowa Cabin](#)



2. LOUIS VUITTON

In 1837 16 year old Louis Vuitton arrived in Paris to apprentice at Monsieur Maréchal's atelier. Baggage was handled carelessly on various modes of transport at the time and it was craftsmen like Vuitton's duty to develop innovative travel items to keep belongings secure and protected in the form of custom design boxes and later, trunks according to the clients' specification. Louis Vuitton stayed on for almost two decades, honing his skills before he'd go it alone and opened his workshop at 4 Rue Neuve-des-Capucines near the Place Vendome.

Having had a signature lock by 1886 and a loyal following amongst the elite e.g. Empress Eugenie, wife of Emperor Napoleon III, Louis Vuitton trunks are deemed some of the best in the world. Today they are used not only for travel but home decor and coffee tables stylised with a glass top. The suggested travel piece for your general travel needs is the Louis Vuitton Horizon Soft Luggage.

[Click here to shop for Louis Vuitton Horizon Soft Luggage](#)



3. GLOBE-TROTTER

Globe-Trotter's traditional styling and exceptional craftsmanship makes for the perfect travel staple that can be passed down for generations. This brand's understated yet chic approach has made it a firm favourite amongst many including; the Royals (Queen Elizabeth II used the luggage for her honeymoon), Sir Winston Churchill when he was chancellor in 1924 and more notably today it had featured in the movie Spectre as James Bond's luggage brand of choice.

[Click here to shop for 007 Vulcanised Fibreboard Suitcase \(55cm\)](#)

4. MARK CROSS

The Mark Cross brand was founded in Boston, Massachusetts but came about in a similar way to that of Louis Vuitton in that its purpose was to cater to the horse and buggy riders who needed fine leather goods.

These Mark Cross pieces are not only aesthetically pleasing but they've managed to maintain the trunk style with quality hardware accents whilst adapting it to modern requirements norms i.e. wheels etc.

[Click here to shop for Grace Trunk & Trolley](#)



6. KARL LAGERFELD AND CHANEL:

If you're a fan of the late, great Karl Lagerfeld's work but do not want to spend the kind of money required for a Chanel piece, getting a piece from Karl's affordable brand is the next best thing.

[Click here to shop for Rue St-Guillaume Trolley](#)

Chanel Suggestion: Visit store for latest collection



5. MODOBAG

Switching gears, we have chosen to add this smart luggage option to our list of favourites as it is our top pick for those who value tech over heritage brands. The Modobag has the usual electronic charging ports and more importantly acts as a mobile seat that can be driven in and around the airport. This is the perfect choice during this pandemic as owners can significantly reduce the amount of contact they have with surfaces etc, whilst travelling.

[Click here to shop for Modobag](#)



7. HERMÈS:

With regard to the Hermès Kelly bag it was the former Princess of Monaco, Grace Kelly in the late 50's who used the pre-existing Hermès bag in order to cover her baby bump in photos in the early stages of her pregnancy and thus they re-named the bag after her. This bag was originally designed and made in the 30's by Robert Dumas who was the son-in-law of Émile Hermès, whom he succeeded at the head of Hermès (1951-1978).

The ultimate luxury investment piece and carry on is of course the Hermès Birkin 40cm+ or Kelly 40cm+. We feel however that the Birkin is best for travel as it is the more casual style of the two and has unisex options.

You must visit a flagship store in your location and build a rapport with a Sales Associate in order to be in contention for one of these coveted pieces. If you can travel your best bet to acquire the most exclusive bag is on 24 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, 75008 in Paris, France, where they are known to have the widest selection in the back office. Prices start from around €7,500.

[Hermès suggestions: Any Birkin 40+ cm or a Birkin Voyage HAC of your choosing](#)



A dramatic landscape of a tropical bay with towering limestone cliffs and a central rock formation. The water is a vibrant green, and the sky is filled with soft, white clouds. The central rock formation is a tall, narrow column of limestone, covered in lush green vegetation. To the right, a large, steep cliff face rises from the water, also covered in greenery. In the background, more limestone formations are visible, creating a sense of depth and scale. The overall scene is one of natural beauty and tranquility.

LICENCE TO THRILL

Jane Finn heads east to Thailand and not only explores the caves on James Bond Island but discovers an inner peace after a chance conversation with a buddhist monk

Life is full of contrasts, but Westerners are often oblivious to these nuances. In Thailand, you will find cosmopolitan cities and rural villages that dot the landscape, pristine beaches and dirty canals, ancient temples amidst towering skyscrapers, luxury hotels and backpacker's havens and a vibe that is either enervating or enriching.

Like most travellers, we arrive via Bangkok, a city that never sleeps and the most visited city on the planet, eclipsing London and Paris. It's hot, humid, congested and chaotic but teeming with life and an energy that invites you to

dive in with a 'beginners mind' and immerse yourself in the culture. Ninety percent of the population is Buddhist. It wasn't long before we discover how this will influence every aspect of our journey to the other side of the world, a place like no other that invites you to get lost so that you can find yourself again.

It's mid-afternoon, but after thirty-two hours in transit, I'm tempted to close my eyes as we make our way to our hotel, but the sights and sounds have already captured our hearts and our imagination. Horns blare, and we watch in fascination as mopeds wend their way around

snaking lines of cars while colourful tuk-tuks jockey for position. We pass ancient temples, mega malls and streets lined with stalls and carts where the wafting smokiness from the grills have our tummies rumbling, but further exploration will have to wait until tomorrow. Jet lagged and spent, it was all we could do to curl up in our comfy bed at the Sukhothai Bangkok hotel before drifting off into a dreamless sleep.

Sukhothai translates as the "dawn of happiness," which aptly describes how I felt after a twelve-hour 'nap,' but there is no time →

"We pass ancient temples, mega malls and streets lined with stalls and carts where the wafting smokiness from the grills have our tummies rumbling"

Right: Deep within Wat Phra Kaew you'll find the Emerald Buddha
Far right: From unassuming to ornate, there are more than 42,000 temples in Thailand



“Thai people intuitively know that if you rely solely on the mind and don’t engage your other senses, you will never fully experience the joy of being in the moment”

Below left: In the silence of simple neighbourhood temples
Middle: He appears so young, but our teacher was wise beyond his years
Below right: The sparkling spires of Wat Arun tower above the Chao Praya River

to dawdle if we wanted to make the most of our three days in Bangkok.

First on our list is the Grand Palace, the former residence of the royal family. This sprawling 23.5 million square foot complex includes more than one hundred buildings and houses many of the country’s greatest treasures, including Thailand’s most iconic and revered statue, the Emerald Buddha. A ‘must-see’ according to every guidebook I’ve read.

High with anticipation, we arrive at the entrance well before 8:30 in the hopes of avoiding the crowds, but this proves to be ‘Mission Impossible.’ There is no denying that the architecture, the sculptures, the murals and the artifacts are stunning, but after a few hours, we’re left wanting something more, something that would feed our souls.

WISE WORDS

Exiting the grounds, we wander in the opposite direction of the throng of tourists deciding what’s next, and that’s when the magic happens. We stumble across a small neighbourhood temple, and after crossing the threshold, we find ourselves alone before an altar laden with flowers and brightly burning candles - gifts from the community. As we inhale the perfume of frangipani, jasmine and joss sticks, we are suddenly at peace, engulfed in a sea of serenity that had eluded us at the Grand Palace.

After dropping a few coins in the donation box, we emerge and are met by a young monk who greets us in English. With an almost imperceptible movement of his hand, he motions us to sit so we could engage in conversation. For the next half hour, we’re entranced by his earnestness as he quietly tells us how temples are designed to honour the elements of earth, fire, air, water and wisdom. What was even more enlightening is his simple explanation of Atayana, the Buddhist philosophy that encourages you to use all six senses. Thai people intuitively know that if you rely solely on the mind and don’t engage your other senses, you will never fully experience the joy of being in the moment.

His stories spark something deep inside us, and we feel awake, aware and alert. Little did we know how much he would influence the rest of our journey as we set out to discover what lays beneath the surface of the places we would visit and the people we would meet. We barely sleep for the next two days as we explore everything the city has to offer.

The Chao Praya River cuts through the heart of Bangkok. Cruising its banks at night is spellbinding. The city skyline forms a captivating backdrop, and the lit spires of Wat Arun temple and the Golden Palace reflected in the water bring a sense of peace and harmony missing from our onshore excursion. Many locals still live, work and commute along →



the river. If you want to experience the real Bangkok, you must take a longtail boat to the enchanting Amphawa floating market and explore the ‘klongs’ or canals to get an insiders view of life in the riverside communities. Here you can see women engage in conversation across their decks; fishers ply their trade, and children playing who will greet you with their pure and innocent Thai smiles.

Before we leave Bangkok, I’d be remiss if I didn’t share our introduction to Thai food. Not the bland version of Pad Thai that we get at home but the authentic flavours that tantalize your taste buds and leave you wanting more. Thai food is intricate and complex, a unique blend of sweet, savoury and spicy. Contrary to what you may have read, street food in Thailand is safe, affordable and absolutely delicious. While we were privileged to eat at The Paste and Baitoey, two Michelin-rated restaurants, the evening we spent at the Chatuchak Market was a feast in its own right. And, whether you like to shop or not, you’re guaranteed to leave with some items you need, some that you don’t and a treasure trove of memories that will last you a lifetime.

EXCURSIONS

A trip to Thailand would not be complete without some time on an idyllic beach surrounded by sparkling blue seas, so we made our way to Ko Phi Phi and the luxurious Pavilion resort. After our whirlwind tour of Bangkok, I admit that it was hard to tear ourselves away from our spectacular room with its infinity pool. However, I would have been sadly disappointed if we hadn’t opted for a day-long boat tour of Thailand’s most famous archipelago.

We’d seen pictures and read about the area, but nothing could have prepared us for the raw beauty we encountered. As we zip across the emerald green waters, in true James Bond fashion, we’re awestruck by the majestic limestone columns that erupt from the sea and the quiet solitude we experience sea kayaking in the hidden caves below. We’re equally entranced by our stop at Monkey Bay and a tour of Ko Panyee, the floating village in Phang Nga Bay occupied by the descendants of two seafaring families from Java.

More travellers these days are interested →



All photos Dave Finn

Above: Ko Paynee is a village built entirely on stilts
Above right: Discover secret underground caves and serene lagoons in the Phi Phi islands
Middle left and right: The thrill of interacting with these majestic creatures
Bottom: A lone fisherman casts his net close to home

“As we hike the hills, he points out ancient miang trees that are allowed to grow naturally beneath the forest canopy, not only preserving and protecting the delicate eco-system but also providing employment and a steady income for the people that call this place home”

in responsible, sustainable tourism. In Chiang Mai, we learn first-hand how our choices can make a positive impact.

A sea of mist covered the mountain tops as we make our way to the Monsoon Tea Company to meet Ryan for a tour of their ‘plantation,’ unlike any I have seen before. As we hike the hills, he points out ancient miang trees that are allowed to grow naturally beneath the forest canopy, not only preserving and protecting the delicate ecosystem but also providing employment and a steady income for the people that call this place home. Their unique teas have gained international recognition in less than 10 years, and their method of farming is influencing tea cultivation around the world.

Elephants have a historical and cultural significance in Thailand. The people revere them but the wild population is declining, and many were trained as street performers or used for illegal logging purposes and can’t simply be released into the wild. The topic of elephant tourism is a complex one. Much has been written about the pros and cons of animal sanctuaries. Tourists are often left to figure out for themselves if they are making a responsible decision patronising a reserve.

What struck us was the fact that the voice of the locals whose livelihood depends on the work they do is often missing from the dialogue. So, on the advice of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, we head to Patara Elephant Farm to learn more about their approach to rescue, recovery, reproduction and reintroduction. For the entire day, we pair up

with an elephant and their mahout (elephant guardian). We learn about their history, their health and what is a natural behaviour and what is not. We get to bathe, feed and watch the elephants at rest and leave much more discerning and knowledgeable about the ethical way to interact with any animal. Definitely, a day well spent!

WOMEN’S PRISON

Before we head to the airport the next day, we have time to drop by the Chiang Mai’s Women’s Prison restaurant. You can’t make a reservation, but it’s worth the wait. The service is impeccable, and the food is even more delicious, knowing our visit serves a deeper purpose. The restaurant aims to rehabilitate female prisoners and prepare them for their return to everyday life. Participants in the program earn a decent wage and can keep their tips. The money they save goes a long way towards reintegration, so be generous and support someone’s fresh start. More than training, this thriving enterprise provides hope.

All too soon, our time in Thailand is over. From my window seat on the plane, I watch as the Himalayas recede, and I hear the young monk speaking to us once again. Wherever we travel, our choices impact the places we visit. I’m humbled by the many kindnesses we have been shown by the Thai people, who are indeed some of the most caring people I’ve ever met. As I nod off, I’m grateful for all that we’ve seen and done in two weeks, and I whisper Khob Khun Ka – thank you!

“I’m humbled by the many kindnesses we have been shown by the Thai people, who are indeed some of the most caring people”



Dave Finn



Tetsushi Kimura



Dave Finn

Top: Breakfast and lunch for a worthy cause
Middle: Wat Chedi Luang Worawihan is one of the tallest buildings in Chiang Mai
Left: Night market in Chiang Mai

JOURNEY PLANNER

WHERE TO STAY

The Sukhothai Bangkok

Bangkok

T: +66 (0) 2344 8888

W: sukhothai.com

The Pavilions Phuket

Phuket

T: +66 (0) 7631 7600

W: pavilionshotels.com

WHERE TO EAT

Paste Bangkok

Bangkok

T: +66 (2) 656 1003

W: pastebangkok.com

Baitoey

Muang Krabi

T: +66 75 611 509

W: facebook.com/baitoeykrabi

Chiang Mai Women’s Prison Restaurant

Behind The Three Kings Monument

Chiang Mai

T: +66 (0) 53 210 824

THINGS TO DO

Monsoon Tea Company

Chiang Mai 50200

T: +66 052 007758

W: monsoontea.co.th

Patara Elephant Farm

Chiang Mai

T: +66 98 549 3644

W: pataraelephantfarm.com

FAR FROM THE MADDENING CROWD

Girona has all the charm, sophistication and history of big sister Barcelona without the overbearing bustle, as David Cottrell discovers



Standing outside Girona-Costa Brava Airport, watching just about everyone else piling onto the bus to big, brash Barcelona 50 miles down the A7, you'd be forgiven for thinking you're going the wrong way. Do not be deceived – your destination is inspired.

The first time I visited this charming little city, it was a warm October day and there were putative Catalan independence flags ('A NEW EUROPEAN STATE') draped from balconies overlooking the River Onyar and reflected in its clear water. In the gentle breeze castanos de Indias (conkers) the size of cobblestones dropped onto café tabletops and sidewalks.

I'd wandered past a huge surrealist mural of a man with a tree-trunk for a neck and an art installation of exposed steel joists between two orange buildings down a narrow street, then happened upon a flight of old stone steps with a

church at the top and a café terrace strewn with tables and chairs and tourists beneath an arch leading to some private little patio.

The steps were called La Pujada de Sant Domenec and it turned out they were one of the most photographed parts of Girona. There was a plaque nearby that said something about prisoners from the Spanish Civil War being marched down them to an ominous end.

Something rang a bell but it only clicked back home when I dug out a novel called *Soldiers of Salamis* by Javier Cercas, which sold half-a-million copies in Spain and tells the story of a soldier who turns a blind eye to a prisoner escaping through the woods from a firing squad.

The novel, which flits between past and present, is set for the most part in Catalonia with a few scenes in Girona's medieval →

"Something rang a bell but it only clicked back home when I dug out a novel called *Soldiers of Salamis* by Javier Cercas, which sold half-a-million copies in Spain and tells the story of a soldier who turns a blind eye to a prisoner escaping through the woods from a firing squad."



Right: Street-art adds a contemporary edge to the Girona townscape
Top: Steps to the cathedral...
Above: ...and steps through history



quarter...including one at a place called Le Bistrot with, you've guessed it, chairs and tables on a terrace along a flight of old steps with a church at the top.

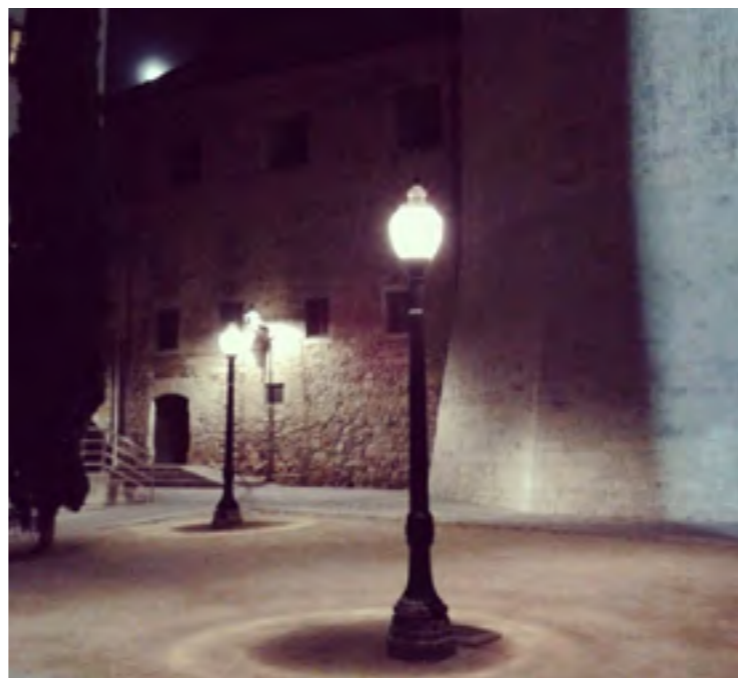
For me, it's those little coincidences which make travel so special. Where-to-go's and what-to-do's are all very well, but exploring a place like Girona is all about the joy of getting lost. So I won't give too precise directions for the following four attractions – just seek them out in your time when the mood takes you.

Number one: the shops and street-café's of the Rambla de la Llibertat running beside the river,

great for a people-watching vermouth or two. Two: the iron-latticed Eiffel Bridge spanning the river, constructed by Gustave Eiffel prior to his iconic tower in Paris.

Number three: Girona Cathedral and in its 'Creation Tapestry' – a stunning, embroidered wall-hanging from the Catalan Middle Ages depicting biblical and astrological scenes. And finally four: the train across the border to the French city of Perpignan, just 40 minutes away and as strongly Catalan as Barcelona, perfect for a day-trip.

"For me, it's those little coincidences which make travel so special. Where-to-go's and what-to-do's are all very well, but exploring a place like Girona is all about the joy of getting lost"



Top left to right: Beer and horse chestnuts? You must be conkers. Eiffel's famous bridge over the river. The Catalan identity runs deep here

Bottom left to right: Traditional meets modern with more urban art. Street lamps straight out of a Carlos Ruiz Zafon book

JOURNEY PLANNER

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Gran Ulltonia

(Gran Via de Jaume I):

a four-star hotel with excellent facilities, a brief stroll from the Cathedral.

T: +34 972 20 38 50

W: hotelsultoniagirona.com

WHERE TO EAT:

El Celler de Can Roca

(Calle Can Sunyer):

three Michelin stars and outdoor seating, treat yourself to Mediterranean, Spanish and Catalan cuisine.

T: +34 972 22 21 57

W: cellercanroca.com

WHERE TO DRINK

River Café

(Barça, 2):

lovely views as you can imagine with a name like that, and more than 60 types of beer and 30 gins.

T: +34 972 22 82 45

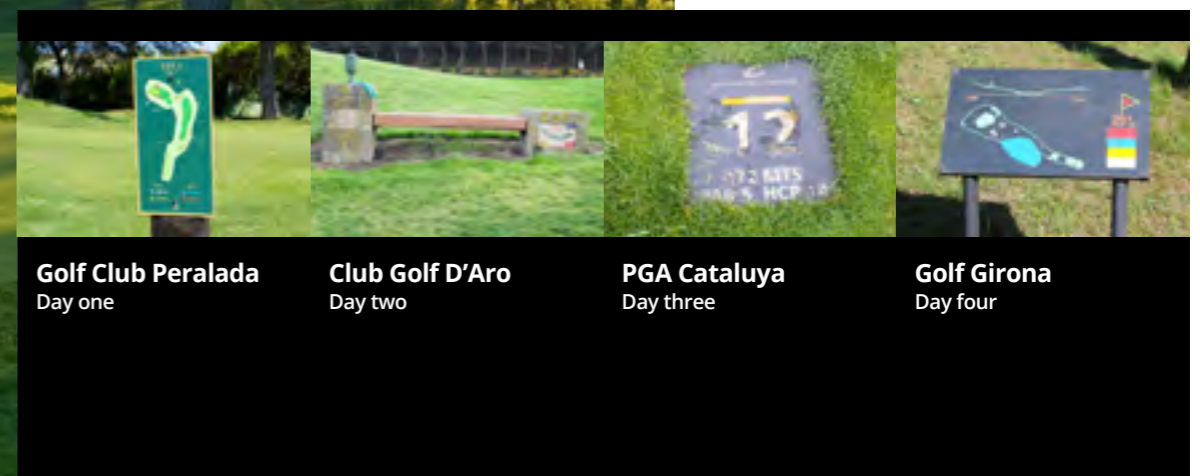
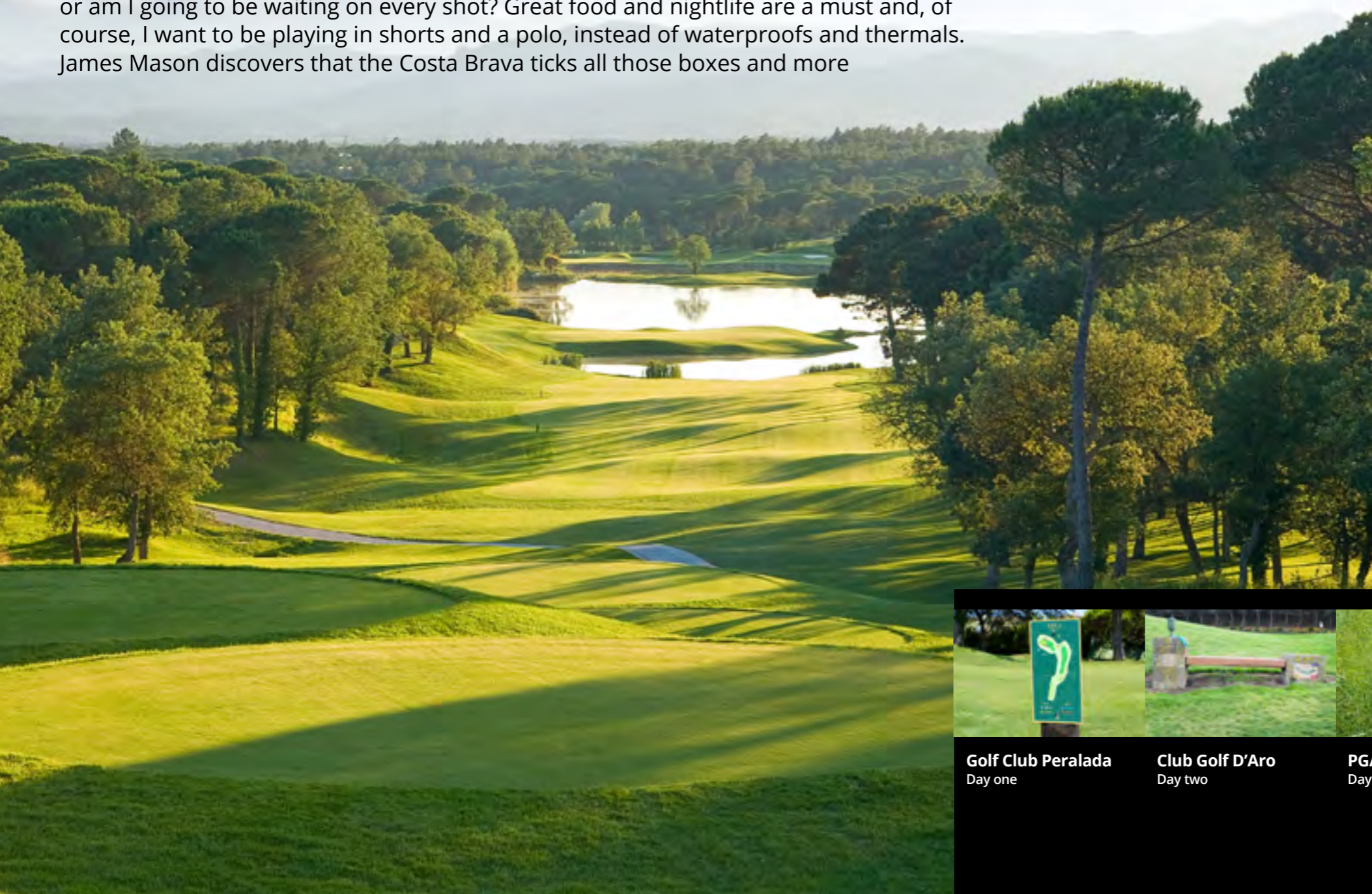
W: rivercafeigirona.com

GOLF ON THE COSTA BRAVA

When I look at golf destinations, be they for groups or couples, apart from wanting wonderfully designed challenging golf courses, can I get round in under four hours or am I going to be waiting on every shot? Great food and nightlife are a must and, of course, I want to be playing in shorts and a polo, instead of waterproofs and thermals. James Mason discovers that the Costa Brava ticks all those boxes and more

‘Brava’ in Spanish or Catalan translates roughly – which is quite appropriate – as ‘rugged’ or ‘wild’. But the only wilderness you’ll find on the four courses I’m playing on this particular tour of Spain’s northeast Catalan region is the rough when you miss the fairways. Even the downpour I experienced on the front nine of PGA Catalunya’s Stadium course was of the warm kind and not, say, the north-east of England type.

And with the tranquil environment that greets you once you arrive at the courses I played, with the backdrop of the Pyrenees to add to the majestic feel of this region of Spain, I’m sure you will agree it’s a wonderful place to play golf – and enjoy mouth-watering food accompanied by some beautiful wines. Throw in the sun-kissed fairways, a rich culture and people who know how to enjoy life, and Costa Brava becomes a perfect golfing destination. →



GOLF CLUB PERALADA

W: golfperalada.com

You can't help but look in awe at the stunning Pyrenees that dominate the horizon. This really is a beautiful place to play golf.

The first is a gentle opener of 314-yards but a skied drive by yours truly leaves me a 9-iron in which I leave just short and make a five. Not the start I wanted, but with these stunning views it's no biggy. After a winter under water in the UK, it's nice just to be playing golf in just a polo shirt again with the sun on my face.

The course gently meanders through olive, cork and pine trees and is the perfect opener for a golf trip to the Costa Brava. You're not going to lose many balls but it's also no push-over. The second turns out to be one of my favourite holes on the front nine. Again, it's not long but you really need to be in the right-hand side of the fairway to have a good look at the green. It sits below the fairway and is played through a narrow gap in the trees and across a dry river that's grassed over and runs in front of the raised putting surface.

The dog-leg left third is another beautifully designed hole and with the old stone buildings sitting behind the green, it all adds to the grace and beauty of the course's surroundings. You'll also enjoy the par-5 4th – another great looking hole but again no piece of cake at 542 yards and played to a twisting fairway that first goes left and then right and finishes with a green below the fairway. There is also a false front on this baby, so not only do you have to smash your ball a long way down a very narrow fairway, it has to carry all the way. At this point I would say: well, you are on holiday but believe me the best shot (unless you are Seve reincarnated) is to knock a 5-iron down there and have a go at the birdie with your wedge.

There are two great par-3s on the front nine which closes with the 183 yard ninth hole with water in front of the green and those Pyrenees as a backdrop. It's a great hole – but beware it could be a card wrecker.

The back nine opens with two gentle par 4s and then you hit the first of the two tough par 3s. The 12th measures 176 yards and is played over or through a narrow gap between two very

tall clusters of oak trees from a raised tee. It's a great hole but with the two bunkers at the front protecting the green, a par here is a great score.

Like the front nine the back nine comes to a close with another par 3, this one weighing in at 235 yards from the back tee over water to a green protected with two bunkers front left and right and out-of-bounds on the right. It's a great finishing hole and with the banking that surrounds the hole makes for the perfect amphitheatre for a touring group of golfers.

The good news is, if you finished badly the patio that sits in front of the bar and looks out to the majestic Pyrenees is just to the left of the 18th tee. It won't be long before you start to reflect on what a great little track Golf Club Peralada is and the perfect start to your Costa Brava golf tour. →



Above: Looking back down the tough, par-3, 12th hole. Middle left: Bunker protecting the 3rd green with stone cottages. Middle right: The 2nd green surrounded by olive and cork trees. Bottom: View from the 18th green looking back over the water.



COURSE
VIDEO

CLUB GOLF D'ARO MAS NOU

W: golfdaro.com

The course was designed by Ramon Espinosa and opened for play in 1992. It nestles in the forest-covered Gavarres Mountains, a range that follows the Catalan coast. If you come to the Costa Brava it's a course you must play. With its mixture of pine, cork and olive trees, not only are the views spectacular but the environment is nature at its best.

The course opens up with a blind dog-leg right of 408 yards and there is a beautiful stone house with a windmill on the 405 yard 2nd hole. The second shot is to a tough green – my advice here is just aim to the right-hand side of the green as all of the trouble – and there is plenty of it – is down the left.

The first par 3 plays from an elevated tee with water protecting the right-hand side of the green and measures 190 yards. It's a tough little hole, but it's the views from the 4th tee that will leave you speechless. As the 526 yard fairway dog-legs to the right, the view over the bunker that protects the far side of the landing area is jaw-dropping. You look out across a forest and the bay below to the Mediterranean Sea. It really does stop you in your tracks and I would suggest you have your iPhone/camera at the ready.

The stunning views and great golf holes just keep coming, and the run of holes from the seventh get even better, finishing on the tough little ninth. It may only measure 407 yards but the landing area, if you decide to take the driver, is only 10 yards wide with a road on the right and 200ft drop on the left. I think you should keep that club in your bag and take a long iron or hybrid. It's a great hole and vied for being my favourite, but there are a couple more that beat it on the back nine.

The back nine doesn't let up and the great views and holes just keep coming. I could go through them all, but after the stunning ninth is the par 3 10th – it measures 207 yards and plays from an elevated tee. You play over a valley of trees to a raised green with trees on the left and no bail-out on the right. It's like a black widow spider, enticing and deadly at the same time, and can easily wreck a card. But you know you can't



"YOU PLAY OVER A VALLEY OF TREES TO A RAISED GREEN WITH TREES ON THE LEFT AND NO BAIL-OUT ON THE RIGHT. IT'S LIKE A BLACK WIDOW SPIDER, ENTICING AND DEADLY AT THE SAME TIME, AND CAN EASILY WRECK A CARD"

resist and it's another hole to get the camera out on!

The 15th takes you to the highest point on the course and there's not much more I can tell you about the vistas you will enjoy, but please play this hole from the back tee. The fairway sits some 50-plus feet below with water on the left, with trees and bunkers down the right. It measures 412 yards and you'll love every yard of it. Pure golfing pleasure.

The back nine is truly a stunning run of holes. I am playing PGA Catalunya tomorrow and it's going to take a lot to beat this course – there's not really a weak hole. Throw in those views and the Spanish sun kissing the fairways and greens, and its bliss. →

Top: Stunning views from the 4th tee Middle: Bunkers protecting the 6th green with stone cottage as a backdrop Right: Looking back down the 18th

COURSE VIDEO



PGA CATALUYA STADIUM COURSE

W: pgacatalunya.com

I was so looking forward to playing PGA Catalunya Resort and as I step on to the 10th tee – we're playing the back nine first – the rain is still tipping it down but there is no way I am going to give this chance up. It's only a month before the Espana Open and the course is looking immaculate. Apart from a few pitch marks on the greens which I'm sure will grow out in the two-week shutdown before the tournament

starts, the greens even through the casual water are looking pretty slick. It's strange because this course could be set in the middle of England as it cuts through a forest of trees and the grass isn't what you would normally expect from a Spanish course – something you'll notice if you play the courses I've played this week.

But like me you will love PGA Catalunya Resort. It's a course which golfers of every ability will be able to play from the four teeing options that are set up. The pros will be playing the better part of 7,174 yards while from the red tees it plays 5,565 yards.

You'll probably start from the first so I will begin from the 435-yard downhill dog-leg left opening hole. What you can't see from the tee

is the water that creeps in on the left-hand side from behind the trees, so make sure you aim for the left part of the fairway to give yourself a good look at the green.

By the time I'd hit the front nine the sun was out, which gave me a chance to put the waterproofs back in the bag, and I duly made my first birdie of the day at the short second. I was slightly lucky as I couldn't see all the green from the left-hand side of the fairway but with only a wedge in I managed to knock it over the trees and hole the putt.

The 3rd is all about risk and reward. This 531 yard par-5 is reachable in two and it's a big green. Your problem is that it's all water down the left-hand side from 60 yards in, and →

Below: The par 3, 11th green with the par 5, 3rd green in the background



“THIS HOLE IS LIKE A BLOWFISH. IT LOOKS STUNNING BUT CUT IT THE WRONG WAY WHEN YOU EAT IT AND IT WILL KILL YOU – AND THIS HOLE COULD DESTROY YOUR CARD. ANYTHING FROM A PAR TO A CRICKET SCORE IS POSSIBLE HERE”



COURSE VIDEO

Left: Fairway bunkers on the 7th hole Below: Looking back down the 15th from behind the green



if that worries you, then to make matters more complicated you have three large bunkers on the right-hand side. But hey, this is holiday golf, so after my penalty drop I wedge up and manage to hole the putt and walk off with a big smile on my face, but a ball down.

The front nine has a couple of great par 3s and the 5th is probably the one that will test you the most with water on the left and bunkers on the right. It rightly has a stroke index of seven!

The front nine comes to a close with the beautiful dog-leg right 478 yard par 4 that is the hardest hole on the course. I hit a great drive and still have a 2 iron in, but it's one of those greens that you look down on from the fairway but is raised once you get down the hill, with three bunkers at the front and one at the back. This hole is like a blowfish. It looks stunning but cut it the wrong way when you eat it and it will kill you – and this hole could destroy your card. Anything from a par to a cricket score is possible here.

The back nine starts with another great par 4 and then probably PGA Catalunya Stadium course's signature hole – the 188 yard par 3 plays downhill to a green that backs onto water with a very large bunker protecting the front and left of the green, and at only 24 yards deep you need to stop the ball quickly.

Even in the rain it looks great and I am sure you will love it when you get here and the sun is high in the sky. There is not a weak hole on the back nine and you will love the run home. Placement is at a premium as I think it should be and I know you will enjoy playing the 18th with its stadium-like green. You can even wave to the imaginary crowd in some of the apartments that look down on to the green on the right hand-side as you hole your final putt, on a course that is worthy of holding the biggest tournaments. →

GOLF GIRONA

W: golfgirona.com

After drying out on the back nine at PGA Catalunya Resort and in the bar of course! We are heading back towards Barcelona airport, but not before we stop off to play the back nine at the FW Hawtree-designed Golf Girona.

I think you will agree, why waste time in an airport terminal when there's a chance to have the sun on your back and a fairway underfoot? And if you're going to trace my footsteps you will be more than happy you decided to stop off to play this stunning track.

A gentle downhill par 3, 162 yard 10th hole gets the back nine underway, but the show really

starts when you hit the back tee at the 390 yard 11th which offers you some stunning views. I am starting to get slight pangs about leaving this beautiful part of Spain.

I think Frederick has produced a great track and as we meander round this tranquil part of the world there is not another soul in sight. The sun is out, the birds are in hearty voice and the flowers are in full bloom displaying a spectrum of colours. I must admit, I am not even worried about winning our little Holland v Great Britain match – well, I am – but I think Golf Girona has instilled a new-found peace. At least until I check in at the airport!!

The 13th has to be one of my favourite holes along with the 18th. From another elevated tee you play to the fairway below and are funnelled through trees down the right-hand side and a bank on the left to a green that has a beautiful

lake as a backdrop with some old stone buildings thrown in to add to the aesthetics.

The 18th is a short par-5 measuring 487 yards and you really need to go and play this from the back tees – it's a spectacular view and fitting as this course's finale. Two good shots will see you home but beware as this is quite a long thin green with trees either side and a bunker front-right protecting it.

I would highly recommend that you take the time on your way back to the airport to take this great course in. I am sure when Frederick Hawtree finished with his work here, he was extremely happy with this masterpiece. And when you are taking in the stunning vistas from the veranda that surrounds the clubhouse, I think you will agree with me it's the perfect crescendo to a great golf tour.

COURSE VIDEO

Top left: Wonderful start to the back nine at the 10th
Top Right: Bunkers at the 12th. Bottom left: Beautiful vistas at the 13th Bottom right: A fitting finale to the back nine, 18th green



JOURNEY PLANNER

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Peralada Wine Spa & Golf

T: +34 972 20 38 50

W: golfperalada.com

Sallés Hotel Mas Tapiolas

T: +34 972 20 38 50

W: hotelmastapiolas.es

WHERE TO PLAY

Golf Club Peralada

T: +34 972 538 287

W: golfperalada.com

Club Golf D'Aro Mas Nou

T: +34 972 816 727

W: golfdaro.com

PGA Catalunya

T: +34 972 472 577

W: pgacatalunya.com

Golf Girona

T: +34 972 171 641

W: golfgirona.com

THINGS TO DO

Dalí Theater – Museum

T: +34 972 67 75 00

W: salvador-dali.org



HOTEL PERALADA WINE SPA & GOLF

Costa Brava, Spain

By CHARMAINE HIBBERT

When an email drops in your inbox that states wine and spa in an exclusive hotel in Spain, versus staying in London, which option would you choose? After a stressful year, everything else now pales in comparison.

Two weeks later I step off our mini bus and into the wonderfully appointed foyer, something I wasn't expecting as the exterior uses red brick and has incorporated stone arches into its design. The stone arches themselves, although new, their design helps give the building an historically mature feel. This hotel was built in 2001 and remodelled and renovated again in 2005 and the large sculpture in the foyer made from wine bottles hints at the hotel's winery connection.

A swift check-in and I am heading to my room with excitement, especially as the corridors that lead me there continue the theme of blending Catalunya farmhouse style beams with contemporary luxury with lots of neutral beige colours.

Opening the door to my room my face breaks into a wide beaming smile. The colour palette continues with its beige and greys – wide plank wooden floors, natural wood side tables, desk, wardrobe doors, bed coverings accented by the grey corner sofa and grey stone coffee table – but it's the pop of orange colour that I can see through my patio window that has me intrigued. I slide open the patio doors to discover the perfect sanctuary: a table and chairs and a sofa here to relax and take in the wonderful views of the greenery beyond the plants that sit in their orange painted planters. There's also a woven trellis to sit under if you want to keep in the shade.

Just when I thought the room couldn't get any better I walk into the bathroom and staring at me is a beautifully designed free-standing →

Left: Indoor pool at
the Wine Spa Below:
Bar and relaxing area

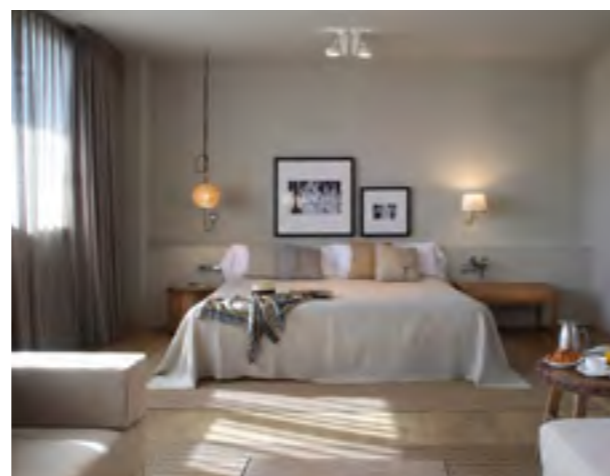
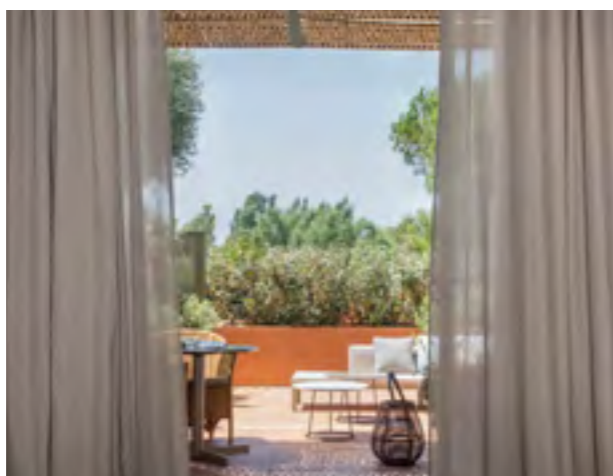
PERFECT BLEND

When a hotel has wine and spa in its title well you can image the stampede of writers volunteering their services to undertake this trip, but it seems **Charmaine Hibbert** has sharper elbows than most!





Left: Reflexion of the hotel in the river as the sunsets. Right: Relax in the wine spa



Far left: private oasis
Left: One of the well appointed rooms
Right: Restaurant Olivera



deep soaker tub that has my name and a glass of wine stamped all over it; oh and there's also a fantastic walk-in shower. Again, the theme of natural colours and wooden features continues but the pure white deep soaker tub does take centre stage.

Last but not least is the nose dive onto the bed just to confirm that the bed is the perfect hardness and that wonderful smell of pure clean cotton linens.

THE WINE SPA

My next stop was of course the spa and on entering I am slightly taken aback as again, like the stone walls on the outside, the design and décor of the spa looks like it could have been here for centuries. Stone arches, wide wooden plank flooring and along one side of the pool is wide reclining beds/chairs that are divided from each other with a towel rack and beige and brown throws that sit on a frame and next to each recliner is a wooden table.

There are also S-shaped loungers which are perfect for your back, an outdoor pool, sauna, hammam, Jacuzzi, sensation showers, a relaxation zone and there are a variety of treatments to choose from for individuals

as well as couples. Today I am just going to relax by the indoor pool with the occasional trip to the sauna and Jacuzzi, in between snoozing!

CONCLUSION:

The hotel is just 5-minutes away from the medieval village of Perelada, in the Alt Emporda area, one of Catalunya's major wine regions, with the hotel being part of the Perelada wine-producing estate. A 10-minute drive will take you to Figueres, another wonderful town that is home to the Dalí Museum – so make sure you take in Dalí's jewellery design work as well; it will have your heart in palpitations! For those of you who want to hit the beach you are only a 30-minute drive from numerous beautiful beaches.

As you would expect breakfast is superb with a choice of hot and cold buffet offering lots of local meats and cheeses along with an abundance of fruit and of course eggs cooked in a variety of ways, there is also a wide choice of cereal. You also have a choice of sitting inside or outside and I have chosen to sit outside to soak up the stunning views of the Pyrenees.

The hotel has two restaurants, L'Olivera is on site and serves

Catalonian culinary tradition reinterpreted creatively with a cuisine based on traditional quality of land and sea sourced locally from the Empordà region. Or you can dine at Castell Paralada which is owned by the hotel and run by chef Xavier Sagristà and the maître and sommelier Toni Gerez, with their own interpretations of the Catalonian culinary tradition in a creative style with recipes based on produce from the Empordà and Mediterranean regions.

If you are looking to relax in luxurious surroundings with vistas to match, gastronomy that tantalises the taste buds and beautiful local wines to accompany the food or a long soak in the bath, then hotel Peralada is the perfect place to kick back and forget the world.

Hotel Peralada Wine Spa & Golf
Carrer de Rocabertí
S/N, 17491
Girona, Spain

T: +34 972 53 88 30
W: hotelperalada.com

35 SRIXON ZX5 DRIVER



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Farleigh 

REBOUND LOVE

Srixon launch their ZX driver range and James Mason puts the Rebound Frame technology in its ZX5 driver to the text



TECHNOLOGY

The philosophy behind the new Srixon ZX drivers is speed and all the technology is aimed to help you generate your maximum speed at impact and the rebound frame used in the new ZX range is the main technology helping you achieve this. The rebound frame is made up of several zones that basically crush and release the power you've generated during your swing and help enhance it and release it back into

the ball at impact, improving your ball speed off the face and launch angle, which in turns equates to increased distance.

There has also been a change in the design of the head shape to a flatter, shallower and straighter look and with this design change Srixon has been able to increase the carbon crown by 15%. The knock-on effect of this is an increase to the clubs MOI helping forgiveness by

repositioning mass low and back in the club, which also helps with launch angle.

Srixon have also added a weight port allowing you to adjust the swing weight of the club based on your shaft selection and feel preference, you can also adjust the clubs loft, lie, and face angle on the hosel. Srixon say the ZX5 is aimed at players who drive the ball straight and want a high launch with increased distance.



Three illustrations showing the rebound frame technology; Below; The different zones in the head Right: View at address showing how the face and crown crumple zones Below: The ball exploding off the face at impact



CONCLUSION

The first thing you will notice when you pick up the new Srixon ZX5 is how light it is, which did take me by surprise, then when you put the clubhead behind the ball and see how compact the head shape is, I think from the offset both really inspired confidence. The club felt easy to swing and the design of the head shape shouted no nonsense I am here to do a job.

The question you're probably all going to want answered is did it give me more distance and in truth I can't really answer that question, what I can say is that I loved the ball flight and the sound at impact, but remember I was testing this club as it's getting colder and damper in the UK and less run on

the ball. What I can say for sure is that it was slightly longer than my normal driver that I play and to be honest you won't know until you get fitted with the correct shaft for your swing.

Please remember there is a weight that needs to be adjusted to match your shaft choice to give you the correct swing weight, you won't know which shaft is best for you until you have that fitting and it is during that fitting that you will see how much distance you will gain with this club. So, the question is do I think you will gain distance if you purchase this club, the answer to that is if you get fitted you certainly will, the joyous ball flight and look at address are added bonuses.

CLUB TESTED ▶

Driver Srixon ZX5

LOFT 10.5°

SHAFT Project X HZRDUS EvenFlow Riptide 50

FLEX 6.0 Stiff

RRP £429 / €499 / \$559

THE ITALIAN JOB

Golf apparel and fashion have always crossed paths and with Italian design being at the forefront of the fashion industry, it was only a matter of time with the Ryder Cup coming to Italy that Italian footwear designers would brighten up the golf shoe market. James Mason takes Duca Del Cosma's, La Spezia shoe on a four-round golf weekend



After testing the Duca del Cosma Masters golf shoe in issue 16 of the magazine, I have to say when I opened the box to reveal the La Spezia shoe I immediately fell in love with the classic design and as soon as you pick up the shoe you can feel the quality of the leather upper.

TECHNOLOGY

The La Spezia shoe uses a Nappa leather upper which gives it that quality feel, they also utilise a waterproof bootie system that has a breathable membrane to help keep your feet comfortable and dry, which I thought was pretty impressive and will come in handy on those rainy days.

The shoe also gives you cushioning and support through its lightweight Airplay VI outsole and this works with the shoe's Arneflex® insole which not only gives you comfort during your round but has anti-bacterial properties.



CONCLUSION

As most of you know testing golf shoes is always a worry for me. My feet are quite sensitive and can easily blister if part of the shoe rubs, which has repercussions not only concentrating on your golf game but playing the other rounds of golf on a testing trip.

I am pleased to report that not only were the La Spezia shoes comfortable and supportive, given that I wore these fresh from the box after inspection I was surprised and pleased I had no blisters or skin irritations. I

played four consecutive rounds on a long weekend of testing and the La Spezia not only performed perfectly they looked great as well matching with a variety of golf apparel.

Of the two Duca del Cosma shoes that I have tested so far I have been more than happy with both shoes and with their waterproof properties, great looks and design these would also make a wonderful Christmas present for that golfer in your life.

DETAILS

Duca Del Cosma
MODEL La Spezia
RRP £179.95 / €199 / \$229
SITE: ducadelcosma.com



Left to right: Colour
options Cadet/
Inferno/Gunmetal and
Rush Green/Green



BAGGING RIGHTS

I am not sure when they come up with the company name Sun Mountain they had helping to save the planet in mind, but their new ECO-LITE bag range is helping golfers do their bit by recycling plastic bottles into golf bags. James Mason takes to the fairways with his new found ECO warrior



Left to right:
Colour options
Black, Black/White/
Gunmetal/Red and
Navy/Red/Cobalt

DETAILS
Sun Mountain
MODEL: ECO-LITE stand bag
RRP £199 / €216.95 / \$219.99
SITE: sunmountain.com

Like most golfers I feel lucky to play a game that gives us the opportunity to see the beauty of nature, surrounded by the abundance of flora fauna and vegetation that golf courses have to offer. It's something I seem to soak up more when I play by myself and gives me an enormous sense of wellbeing as I walk off the 18th green and I know I am not the only golfer who feels this way. So, when I found out about Sun Mountains ECO-LITE carry bag I had to smile, as golf and recycling to save the planet seemed the perfect match.

TECHNOLOGY

The headline technology is that the ECO-LITE stand bag uses around 25 plastic 20-oz sized bottles which are recycled into a highly durable thread to form the fabric of each ECO-LITE stand bag.

The bag weighs in at less than 2kg and features a contoured E-Z Lite Dual Strap System for comfort while carrying and comes with a four-way club divider providing plenty of space and separation for your clubs. There is also a comfort-grip handle to help get the clubs in and out the boot of your car with ease or when you simply want to grab them and move them a few feet without having to put the straps on.

The bag has six pockets, which include a side apparel pocket, a velour-lined valuables pocket, hydration sleeve and comes with a separate rain-hood. The range also includes the ECO-LITE cart bag that incorporates the same technology.

Tony Fletcher, Sales Manager of Brand Fusion International stated "We're thrilled to bring the first bag of its kind to the

market that incorporates material made from recycled plastic bottles, while ensuring golfers can benefit from the premium features associated with top-selling Sun Mountain stand bags,"

The ECO-LITE stand bag is available in five colour combinations: Rush Green/Green, Navy/Red/Cobalt, Cadet/Inferno/Gunmetal, Black/White/Gunmetal/Red and Black

CONCLUSION

I have to confess I only carried the stand bag for one round and used my electric trolley the other five times I was testing the bag for review; the good news is the stand bag can be used on your cart with no issues.

For those who like to carry, I found the E-Z Lite Dual Strap System was really comfortable and that was with 16-clubs in

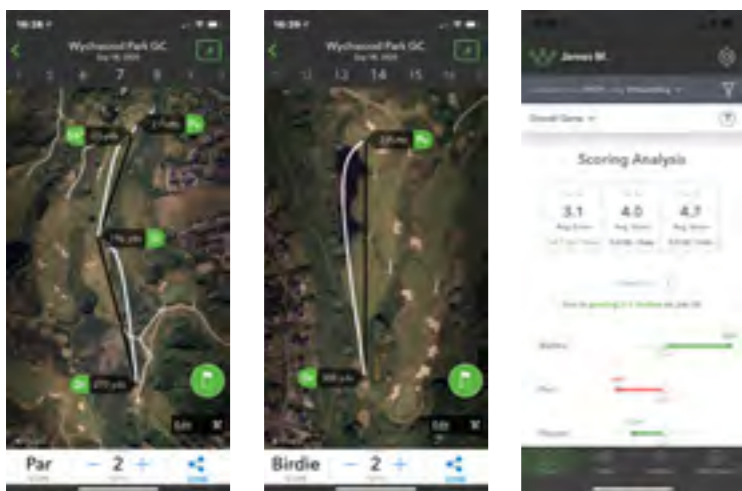
the bag plus all the usual junk, balls, tees, sun cream, hat, rain jacket etc.

As you can imagine, the most satisfying aspect about this bag is the knowledge you are doing that little bit extra for the planet and that 25 plastic bottles are not floating in a river or ocean somewhere causing sea creatures distress. Not only would I like to thank Sun Mountain for utilising this technology, I would ask all golfers everywhere to purchase one of the ECO-LITE range when they are next buying a golf bag. There are 24.2 million golfers in the world, which would be roughly 605 million plastic bottles not going into our landfills and oceans - a number golfers everywhere could certainly be proud of.

MASTER CADDIE

I think we all like the idea of having a caddie that knows your game inside out and being able to give you the correct club for every shot, so it is fair to say that I was looking forward to spending a couple of weeks getting to know Arccos's new Caddie AI app.





Left: Screenshots during my testing.
Middle: Information to help you on the course
Bottom: Analysis from each round and collated rounds helping you target your strengths and weaknesses



**AUTOMATIC
SHOT TRACKING**

**SMART DISTANCE
CLUB AVERAGES**

**STROKES
GAINED
ANALYTICS**

**A.I. POWERED
RANGEFINDER**

**CADDIE
ADVICE**



TECHNOLOGY

The new ground-breaking technology is the Strokes Gained Analytics (SGA) which utilises artificial intelligence (AI). By simply inputting your current handicap, you can select your desired goals from Tour player to a 20 handicap and based on your performances across each round of golf it will give you suggestions on the areas you need to improve to reach your desired goals.

Arccos Caddie SGA shows you your overall game stats, scoring analysis and highlights your top three strengths and weaknesses which then provides tips from

world-class instructors to help you improve in those key areas of your game. Pretty impressive right?

Sal Syed, Arccos Co-Founder and CEO stated "The beauty of our new SGA platform is we take complex data and simplify it. The result is unmatched personalised insights for golfers of all skill levels, as well as their coaches and club fitters. With this information they will be on a clear path to improvement like never before."

The Arccos Caddie app on your phone syncs with the Arccos

Caddie sensors which you put on the end of each club, the app then automatically tracks every shot you play and also gives you yardages to the front centre and back of each green. The system includes an AI-powered GPS rangefinder and caddie advice for every golf hole on earth. Once you have played several rounds the app will then start to suggest smart distance club averages and advanced analytics helping you make smarter decisions, so you improve faster and shoot lower scores.

CONCLUSION

When you watch a golf tournament either live or on TV the discussion between the player and his caddie and the detail they go into before each shot is fascinating. Using the Arccos app over the last month has certainly opened my eyes, I used to get my yardage with the rangefinder add or subtract 10 yards or so depending on wind or slope and then choose my club.

The information at my

fingertips during testing just amazed me and I loved the wind and slope adjustments that I could access by just tapping the screen on my phone and after a few rounds the app would start to give me clubbing options based on my collated stats. If you want to improve the tip section is fantastic; it not only shows you the areas that you can improve on, it gives you tips on how to improve those areas from

qualified professionals.

You can go as deep into your game as you want. It breaks down your handicap into each section of your game; driving, approach play, chipping, putting etc. If you are serious about progressing then you definitely need the information Arccos collects on your game from each round you play to target the areas you need to improve on. This is AI technology at its best.

ARCCOS VIDEO

Arccos Caddie

RRP £169.99 / €199.99 / \$179.99



44 TOSCANA RESORT CASTELFALFI



REVIEW



47 THE SANCTUARY



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STAY, PLAY & SPA

TOSCANA RESORT CASTELFALFI

Tuscany, Italy

By PETER ELLEGARD

GHOST BUSTERS

Among the hills of Tuscany, birthplace of the Renaissance six centuries ago, one-time ghost village Castelfalfi has been reborn as a luxury resort. Renaissance man Peter Ellegard investigates

Better known for its mass-market beach holidays, Anglo-German travel giant TUI has breathed life back into an abandoned medieval village in the heart of Tuscany's hilly countryside, transforming it into a unique resort.

Like many rural communities across Italy, Castelfalfi's population of tenant farmers moved out and headed to cities in search of better opportunities in the decades following World War II.

Occupying a glorious hilltop location close to Pisa, Siena and Florence, Castelfalfi boasts an 8th century castle that was converted into a palatial villa and was a holiday bolthole for Florence's famous Medici family at one point. It also has a Renaissance-era 15th century church, almost 50 village apartments and several farmhouses – all set amidst 2,700 acres of rolling landscape incorporating vineyards, olive groves, lakes, and a wildlife reserve where wild boars run free. I meet two orphaned wild boars that have been adopted by the resort – huge adult male Ghigo and cute little piglet Franca – on a tour of the estate. →

Above: Hotel lobby
Right: Castelfalfi's
barrel room
Far right: Executive
room



Right: Chef in the Il Rosmarino trattoria
Far right: Pool and deck



When TUI bought Castelfalfi in 2007 it was a ghost village that also included a run-down golf course and a three-star hotel from a previous, failed attempt at rejuvenating it as a leisure destination.

Today after a €200 million investment, luxurious elegance prevails, underlined by the five-star Il Castalfalfi hotel, opened in 2017 as the flagship hotel of the top-of-the-range TUI Blue Selection brand and also a member of Preferred Hotels & Resorts’ LVX Collection.

ROOMS

Il Castelfalfi features 120 rooms and suites and was designed with sustainability at the fore, using Tuscan wood and stone throughout.

My room is the standard Classic. It is spacious, light and stylish, with windows looking out over the Tuscan hills. A bottle of one of Castlealfi’s five red wines is set on a table as a welcome gift.

Three other categories – Deluxe, Executive and Suite – each offer increasingly more space.

The 31-room La Tabaccaia hotel, now a four-star property, is housed

in a restored, historic tobacco warehouse.

RESTAURANTS AND BAR

Locally-sourced produce and organic fruit and vegetables are the order of the day at Castelfalfi. La Vie del Sale, in the main hotel, is a fine-dining venue serving up panoramic views with al fresco tables. La Rocca di Castelfalfi, in the restored castle, offers fine dining and a terrace commanding stunning views.

I dine at Il Rosmarino, a traditional, informal trattoria in the village that showcases Tuscany’s cuisine heritage. I’m tempted by the thin-crust pizzas cooked in its wood-fire oven topped with shaved truffles from the estate, but plump for wild boar – and try not to think of Ghigo and Franca as I eat...

Guests can also enjoy a drink and light meal at the ultra-chic and laid-back Ecrú bar, lounging on the grass amidst statues of large, reclining naked ladies while soaking in the vistas, and at the seasonally-open Giglio Blu pool bar. →

Right: La Rocca di Castelfalfi restaurant, in Castelfalfi’s restored castle



SPA AND WELLNESS

The resort’s spa offers treatments made from local, organic ingredients and includes saunas, indoor and outdoor pools and an open-air cabin as well as outdoor yoga, pilates and fitness programmes.

ACTIVITIES

Castelfalfi’s golf offering comprises the challenging 18-hole Mountain Course and nine-hole Lake Course, both set on the hillside below the resort village. The stylish Country Clubhouse opened in summer in a converted farmhouse and features a fine-dining restaurant with terrace and the pro shop.

Among other options are hiking, biking, electric scooter hire and horse riding in the Tuscan hills, tennis, truffle hunting, wildlife spotting, a cookery school and tasting sessions for the estate’s wines and olive oil.

CONCLUSION

Incongruous though it may seem, TUI has succeeded in turning this once-decaying ancient village into a classy, welcoming resort that you just don’t want to leave.

Toscana Resort Castelfalfi
Località Castelfalfi
50050 Montaione FI
Italy

T: +39 0571 892 000
W: castelfalfi.com

Top right: Pizza in Il Rosmarino
Top middle: Horse riding below Castelfalfi
Top far right: Rent a bike to explore the Tuscan hills



Above right: Pici pasta
Above left: Panoramic view at Ecrú
Left: Castelfalfi enjoys a commanding vista from its hilltop position

THE SANCTUARY AT KIAWAH ISLAND GOLF RESORT

South Carolina, USA

By PETER ELLEGARD

AN ECHO FROM THE PAST

The ambience and décor of a hotel that was built centuries ago, but only dates back 20 years - Peter Ellegard discovers a perfect sanctuary in South Carolina



Above: Reserve beach chairs and parasols to laze on the hard-packed, white sands
Left: The Sanctuary's spa solarium



Step inside the grand lobby of The Sanctuary after arriving via an approach drive lined by Spanish moss-festooned live oak trees and you could be forgiven for thinking you had entered a stately antebellum plantation mansion.

Yet despite its lofty ceilings, antique-filled public spaces and irregular, creaking walnut floorboards, the luxury oceanside hotel that is at the heart of the Kiawah Island Golf Resort is less than 20 years old, first opening its doors in 2004.

No effort was spared in its construction or landscaping. The world's largest mechanical digger was used to transplant more than 400 trees, including 160 50-foot-high live oaks, while the site was raised 20 feet to give the four-storey building's ground floor uninterrupted views of the Atlantic.

The Sanctuary's own history might be contrived but there is plenty of historical interest in South Carolina's Lowcountry, including several preserved plantation mansions and gardens. Just 21 miles away,

Charleston celebrated its 350th anniversary earlier this year and is a living museum, its walkable Historic District possessing 2,800 buildings of historical importance.

The first shots of the Civil War were fired at Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbour, and America's first golf course (Harleston Green) and golf club (South Carolina Golf Club) were established in 1786.

ROOMS

The Sanctuary has 255 bright, spacious guest rooms and suites, all with complimentary high-speed Wi-Fi.

Each room features a marble-lined entry, a private ocean-view balcony with a cocktail table and two chairs and either a king bed or two queens. Mine has a king bed, a sofa, armchair and a coffee table and from my balcony I look over the pool area to the beach and ocean beyond.

There is a large desk with two chairs, a flat screen TV and DVD/CD player and a coffee machine. The bathroom features a marble walk-in →

shower, a deep soaking bath, dual vanity units and two Italian bathrobes.

Guests in Club Level rooms enjoy the services of a dedicated concierge and the use of a Club Lounge serving food throughout the day and evening.

RESTAURANTS AND BAR

Of the hotel’s four dining options (the resort’s four golf clubhouses have six more), the Ocean Room is Kiawah Island’s premier steakhouse and offers local produce in a refined setting overlooking the Atlantic. The oyster roast followed by ribeye and lobster tail is to die for.

Authentic Lowcountry cuisine featuring locally-caught seafood and organic ingredients is served from breakfast to dinner at the more informal Jasmine Porch.

The poolside Loggerhead Grill opens seasonally while Beaches and Cream is the place to go for sweet treats, coffee and express take-out food. For pre-dinner cocktails or a nightcap, head to the Lobby Bar. I sink a few there during my stay.

SPA AND WELLNESS

Tone up before or after your round in the hotel’s spa, which features a steam room, sauna, mineral whirlpool and relaxation lounges. A range of massage and beauty treatments is also offered. Outdoors, the hotel has a family pool and children’s pool.

ACTIVITIES

Golfing guests are spoilt for choice with the Kiawah Island resort’s five superb courses, all served by free shuttle bus.

Rent a fat-tyre beach cruiser bike to cycle along the hard-packed sands of Kiawah’s wide beach, riding through natural areas behind the coast where you may well spot an alligator or two lurking in ponds. Nature abounds on the island and offshore. See animal exhibits in the resort’s Nature Centre or take a guided boat tour of the island’s marshy waterways to spot dolphins, pelicans and other wildlife.

If you want to keep active, the resort’s Roy Barth Tennis Centre has 22 courts. Or just reserve a beach chair and parasol to laze in the sun.

The Sanctuary even has its own wedding chapel so couples can honeymoon on site after tying the knot.

CONCLUSION

The Sanctuary is as sophisticated yet unpretentious as golf resort hotels get. Living up to its name it is a real sanctuary far from the madding world, alongside one of the world’s best golf courses and close to my favourite city. I can’t wait to return.

The Sanctuary at Kiawah Island Golf Resort
Kiawah Island
South Carolina 29455
USA

T: +1 843-768-6000
W: kiawahresort.com



Above: Tree-lined entrance to The Sanctuary
Below: The hotel’s stately lobby
Below right: Pool area



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