

## SRI LANKA

Tales of elephants, deserted beaches, emerald fairways, amazing food and a lion fortress

## TIBET

The colours, mystery, landscapes and wonders of this amazing country and its people

## EQUIPMENT & APPAREL REVIEWS

Abacus Sportswear, Cleveland, Duca del Cosma, Srixon, Titleist and Zebra

## BAHAMAS

Discovering the wonders of Abaco by boat, pub, restaurant and beaches

## STAY, PLAY & SPA

Weekend, short stay getaway or spa day? We bring you hotel & spa reviews from England and Scotland

# PLANET GOLF REVIEW

ISSUE 26

## 24 CHRISTMAS GIFT IDEAS

Golf, sustainability and travel gadget gift ideas for those special people in your life

A romantic beach setting at dusk. In the center, a canopy made of bamboo poles and white fabric is set up on the sand. Underneath, there are two wicker lounge chairs and a small round table with a drink and some fruit. Several tiki torches are lit around the canopy, casting a warm glow. The ocean is visible in the background under a twilight sky.

# VIEW.COM

# WELCOME

It always amazes me how quickly the year goes and we are suddenly heading into winter again. The summer months seem to pass rapidly, but the good news is we have Christmas to celebrate with our loved ones once again and then another new year with new hopes and dreams to look forward to.

I hope you have all had a wonderful summer and managed to travel to some of the beautiful destinations we have brought to you over past issues.

In this issue Peter brings you some stunning images from Tibet and a peak into some of the mystique that the country holds. Jane headed to the Bahamas and has some wonderful tales of her time navigating the Caribbean sea and of course the bars and restaurants of the Abacos. James and Charmaine headed east to the island of Sri Lanka encountering fantastic gastronomy, elephants standing at the roadside and of course some well designed golf courses. Bernadette, Iesha and Peter

bring you three play, stay and spa options to choose from, be it a day spa package or long weekend getaway.

We have tips from Paul and Shain to help you prepare and enjoy winter golf and how you can also use that time to practice so you head into next spring having better control over direction and strike of your golf ball. We also bring you reviews of the latest equipment from Cleveland, Srixon, Titleist and Zebra and the ultimate winter golf outfits from Abacus Sportswear and Duca del Cosma.

And as we head into Christmas, we bring you 24 gift ideas to help you choose the right present for those loved ones in your family. Whether it's golf, travel or sustainability gifts, we have got you covered.

That just leaves all of us at PGR raising a glass to wish you all a wonderful, healthy and joyous festive season and a new year full of love, laughter and happiness.

## MEET THE TEAM

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# REVIEW



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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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Whether you are looking for golf, sustainability or travel gadgets for your loved ones, we have got you covered
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Bernadette, Iesha, James and Peter bring you reviews of three perfect places to stay, play & spa in England and Scotland

# STENZCO

# REVIEW





**Duca del Cosma, Fortana golf boot**

£199 / €219 / \$239

[Click here](#)

[Click here for Review](#)



**GolfStream Vision**

£499 / €575 / \$615

[Click here](#)



**Srixon ZX5 driver**

£499 / €499 / \$499.99

[Click here](#)

[Click here for Review](#)



**Ram Golf Tour Spin 3 Piece golf balls**

3 dozen £39.99 / €46.50 / \$49.99

[Click here](#)

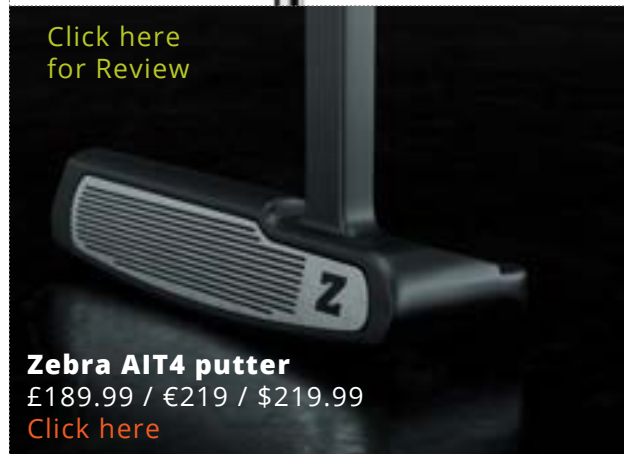


**Titleist T150 irons**

£1,249 / €1,569 / \$1,399

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[Click here for Review](#)



[Click here for Review](#)

**Zebra ALT4 putter**

£189.99 / €219 / \$219.99

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**Abacus Sportswear Grove hybrid jacket**

£89.99 /

€106.95 / \$89

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[Click here for Review](#)

# 24 gift ideas

Searching for the perfect golf, travel or sustainable gift? Don't worry, we've got you covered

**Arccos starter bundle**

£264.98 / €319.99 / \$323.95

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**Apple AirTag**  
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**Etekcity luggage scale**  
£11.99 / €13.99 / \$10.99  
[Click here](#)



**Hypervolt Go 2**  
£129 / €149 / \$129  
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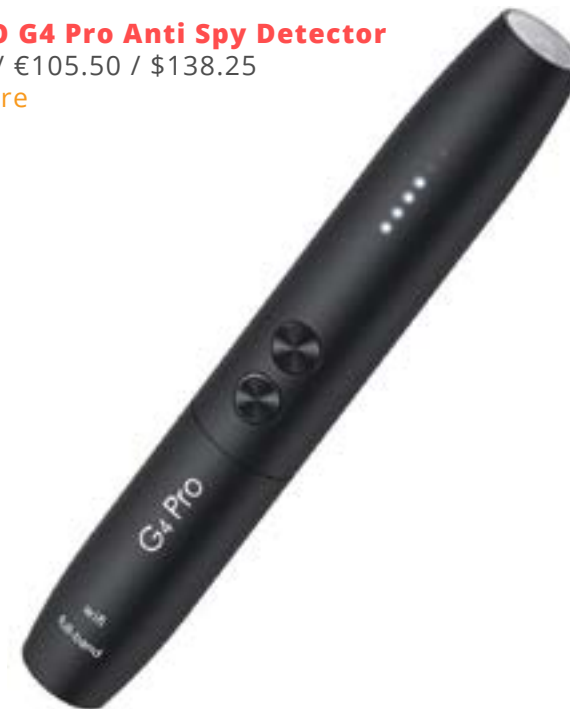
**Manfrotto Pixi mini tripod**  
£28 / €32 / \$42  
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**Beats Fit Pro**  
£219.99 / €254.99 / \$199.99  
[Click here](#)



**JEPWCO G4 Pro Anti Spy Detector**  
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**Sony WH-1000XM5 headphones**  
£319 / €368.99 / \$399.99  
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**Sleeper party shirt  
feather-trimmed  
satin dress**

£292 /  
€336 / \$352

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**Candle holder;  
Calvo**

£51.99 / €59.95 /  
\$62.99

[Click here](#)



**Snake chain necklace**

£175 / €201 / \$211

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**Sai dress**

£228 / €925 / \$332

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**Marloe marloe candle**

£200 / €230 / \$240

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**Two-tone lucky rings**

£133 / €153 / \$160

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**The Falabella mini faux  
brushed-leather shoulder bag**

£540 / €625 / \$665

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**Zero waste year  
planner and journal**

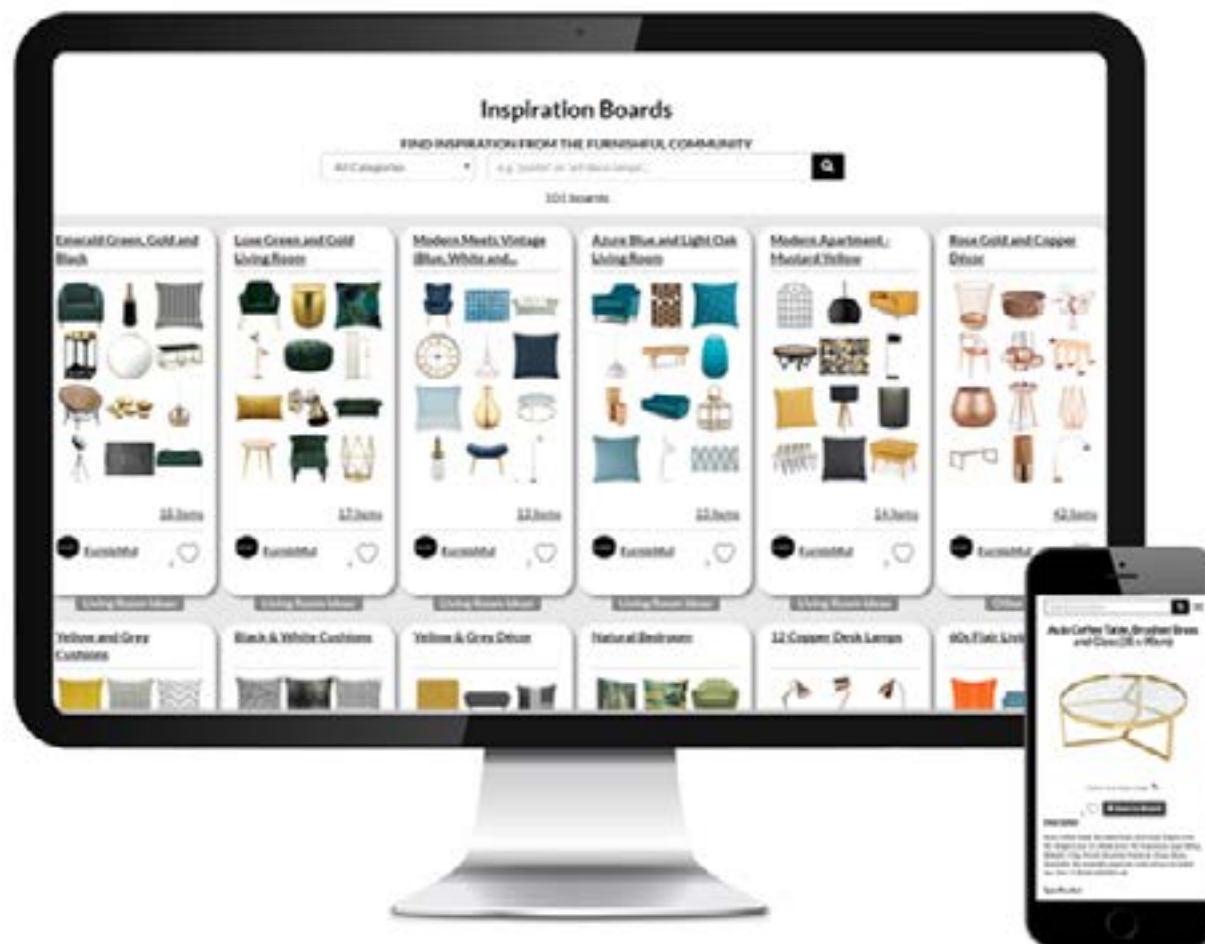
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# IMPRESSIONS FROM TIBET



Left: Yungbulakhang Palace,  
Yarlung Valley  
Below: Palkhor Monastery,  
Gyantse, Tibet



Left:  
Tashilhunpo  
Monastery,  
Shigatse



Left: Mountains,  
lake and prayer  
flags, Yarlung  
Valley  
Right: Gyantse Fort  
at dawn, Gyantse



Left: Lake in  
Yarlung Valley



Below: Jokhang Temple, Lhasa  
Right: Lighting yak butter fat candles  
in Samye Monastery, Yarlung Valley



Above: Chanting monk, Samye Monastery, Yarlung Valley  
Right: Potala Palace, Lhasa



Above: Shrine inside Drepung Monastery, Lhasa



Left: Drepung Monastery, Lhasa

# IMPRESSIONS FROM TIBET



Right: Barkhor  
Street Market,  
Lhasa  
Far right: Pilgrims  
on the the road  
to Lhasa, near  
Changzhug



# IMPRESSIONS FROM TIBET

Right: Playing pool  
by the roadside,  
near Gyantse  
Below: Children  
in rural mountain  
village, near  
Gyantse



Above: Street scene  
in Shigatse  
Right: Boy monks,  
Tashilhunpo  
Monastery, Shigatse



See more of Peter  
Ellegard's work on  
Instagram  
[@peterellegard](#) or  
[peterellegard.co.uk](#)



Above: Rural street scene, near Gyantse  
Right: Street market, Shigatse





# Laying low in Abaco

No cell phones, no Netflix, no WhatsApp, no Mr Google. **Jane Finn** sets sail and drops anchor at beaches, bars and dreams of a barefoot man



By Jane Finn

Photography by David Finn

The Bahama Breeze is a popular drink here in the Outer Islands, but for a sailor yearning to set out on a sea of adventure, it's the wind in your sail, the song in your heart and the skip in your step that gives you the courage and freedom to chart your own course.

## SLOWING DOWN TO THE SPEED OF LIFE

It's late afternoon and a balmy 27° Celsius when we touch down in Marsh Harbour, the nation's third-largest settlement behind Nassau and Freeport. Still, there's plenty of time to pick up groceries at Maxwell's and store our gear aboard our rental boat before heading to Snappas Chill & Grill for dinner. It's Monday, and the place is hopping. William Albury is tinkling the ivory keys, and as we wend our way to the back of the restaurant, the crowd erupts in a passionate, if not precisely harmonious, rendition of Brown Eyed Girl. A local tribute to all the mothers and daughters, sisters, friends, and girlfriends gathered here to celebrate that life is good today!

As we settle in at our table overlooking the

twinkling lights of the harbour, I take a deep breath, willing myself to slow down, relax and enjoy being on 'island time.' Magically, a Hibiscus Kiss appears before me, and the blackened mahi-mahi and grilled shrimp that follow are equally delicious. Gradually, the busyness of the past several weeks starts to fade, and I soon feel like I don't have a worry in the world. Gone is the stress of packing, repacking, answering last-minute emails, plane delays, and then racing to make connections. For the next ten days, we are going to disconnect to reconnect. No cell phones, no Netflix, no What's App, no Mr Google – only our wits, GPS to navigate the waters and a marine radio to communicate with those onshore. I can't wait for the journey to begin!

## COME SAIL AWAY

Having been lulled to sleep by the gentle lapping of the waves, I awake feeling well-rested, but as I poke my head out of the hatch, I'm surprised it's still dark. The last stars are fading from the inky black sky, and no one is astir. I take a few moments to absorb the absolute peace and serenity that engulfs me before quietly retreating below deck to once again study the charts that will guide us around the series of islands, cays, and rock formations that constitute the archipelago known as the Abacos, →



Snappas Chill & Grill



Right: Conky Joe's  
Bottom: Not  
another soul in  
sight on Sandy Cay



Bahama's Crown Jewel when it comes to sailing. A couple of hours later, we're underway, and as we head out into the Sea of Abaco, I literally have one of those moments that takes your breath away. There's no cloud overhead, and the shallow sandy bottom reflects the cerulean blue sky above and the gently swirling, crystalline emerald, turquoise, and aquamarine waters that layer one upon another, creating a kaleidoscope of colours. Framed by sandy beaches and

limestone cliffs, I'm in awe of the tapestry of rich and royal hues that stretches before me. I also feel a pang of regret, knowing that I don't have the words nor the camera skills to capture all I see, so I close my eyes and commit the image to memory to draw upon when the dull, dreary days of winter come

calling. I'm sitting on the bow, following a trail of giant starfish that leads south like a stairway to heaven, when I spy coral heads just ahead, and we quickly slow our pace as we approach Sandy Cay. There's not another soul in sight, and we snag a mooring close to the reef, don our snorkels and fins and spend the next hour leisurely swimming with the fishes, eels, and stingrays. Back on board, we dive into big bowls of fresh ceviche from Conky Joe's accompanied by homemade buns and an artfully displayed platter of tropical fruit. I'd love to linger a bit longer, but we need to reach Little Harbour before nightfall.

**A STEP BACK IN TIME**

Pete's Pub is exactly as I remember it – rustic,

laid-back, and so inviting. I'm tempted to stop and quench my thirst, but first, I must visit the caves where Randall Johnston and his family lived before establishing an artist's colony and the only bronze foundry in the Caribbean. No matter how often I hear the story, I'm always inspired by the man who threw caution to the wind and left a comfortable life in New England to pursue his dreams, unaware of how he and his offspring would play an integral role in Abaco's history and influence its future. When we originally discovered Pete's in the late '80s, the cook, while pouring a stiff rum and coke, had to stifle a snort when I asked for a menu before informing me that he had one steak, two lobster tails and lots of burgers but was running low on beer. We settled for a burger and a cold Sands and were about to turn in for the evening when Pete returned to restock the bar, and that's when the party started in →

*“There's not another soul in sight, and we snag a mooring close to the reef, don our snorkels and fins and spend the next hour leisurely swimming with the fishes, eels, and stingrays”*







*“We swing by Parrot’s Cay, and there it is, looming overhead, the iconic candy-striped lighthouse. Kerosene-burning, manually operated, it’s the last of its kind, still guiding ships home to safety every night of the year”*

earnest. I laughed until I cried, then I laughed some more before gingerly making my way to my berth, where I promptly fell asleep.

Today, Pete focuses on mentoring artisans from around the world in the lost wax process, creating one-of-a-kind bronze sculptures coveted by collectors everywhere. Greg, his son, now manages the bar and restaurant. While the food has gone a little more upscale, featuring items like Mango Grilled Grouper and Ginger Garlic Tuna, there are still burgers on the menu, and the ambience remains warm, casual, and welcoming. Like all our previous visits, we stayed until last call, and I was grateful that once again, I only had to stroll a hundred yards to find my bed!

### I CAN SEE FOR MILES AND MILES AND MILES

No visit to the Abacos would be complete without taking time to explore Hope Town, one of the quaintest colonial villages on the planet. So, despite our late night, we rouse ourselves as the sun pops up and make way for Elbow Cay. The wind is in our favour, and we’re cruising past the white sands of Tahiti Beach in no time, but I’ve got my sights set on another treasure

that lies ahead. We swing by Parrot’s Cay, and there it is, looming overhead, the iconic candy-striped lighthouse. Kerosene-burning, manually operated, it’s the last of its kind, still guiding ships home to safety every night of the year,

Relieved that we can find a place to anchor near the lighthouse, we scramble into the dinghy and head for shore, determined to climb the 101 steps to the top for a bird’s eye view of the island. I’m not as limber as I used to be, but if lighthouse keeper Jeffery Forbes Junior can do it every two hours to crank the fittings precisely 427 times, I can surely do it too, and let me tell you, it’s



worth the effort.

As I push open the narrow iron door, I stumble slightly, whether from a gust of wind or the stunning view that greets me as I emerge on the deck; I can’t be sure, but I couldn’t be more delighted to have made it to ‘the top of the world.’ It’s a clear day, and I can see twenty miles in all directions – the rough Atlantic Ocean, the tranquil Sea of Abaco, sailboats and yachts at rest in various harbours and anchorages around the island and an array of colourful, colonial homes, shops and cottages clustered below. It’s free for all to enjoy, but a small donation goes a long way to ensuring that this piece of history will be here for generations to come.

After two idyllic days exploring Hope Town on foot, as no cars are allowed on Elbow Cay, we’re ready to make the long run to Green Turtle Cay, but not before popping by Vernon’s for a few supplies. The sign on the door embodies the

concept of work-life integration – “Open when we’re here, closed when we’re not” Fortunately, he’s open today, and I purchased a couple of loaves fresh from the oven, along with one of Vernon’s renowned key lime pies.

### FAIR SEAS AND AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER

At 8:15, we tune into the Cruiser’s Net – a group of volunteers that provide daily advice to sailors, landlubbers and residents about the weather, local events, lost and found items and coordinates mail calls. ‘Barometer Bob’ advises there’s a strong, prevailing northwest wind blowing, so we’ll get our exercise today as we head upwind, tacking every few minutes to stay on our course.

Shortly after lunch, the wind shifts, and now we can relax and enjoy the ride. We’re in deep water and with nothing before us, I’m lazily scanning the horizon when two black specks surface on our starboard and then another two appear on our port side. I holler at Dave to let out the sails, and suddenly, we are surrounded by eight dolphins, swimming under and around the boat, playfully calling and chasing each other. At first, we race from one side of the boat to the other, vying to get the perfect photograph until I declare we’re missing the magic, and we lean into the moment.

Time stands still as we watch them leap, turn, and spin, revelling in each other’s company. →



Top left: Pete’s Pub  
Top right: Iconic lighthouse at Hope Town  
Right: Beach at Elbow Cay



Left: Sandy Point,  
South Abaco  
Below: Nippers  
walkway, New  
Plymouth



Eric Lopez

*“I don’t recall the last time I felt this connected to nature and the elements, but I know I feel a lightness I haven’t experienced in months. Then, as quickly as they appeared, they assembled in front of the boat and, with a shrill whistle, beckoning us to follow”*

Splashing, singing, dancing, they don’t have a care in the world, and in this moment of time neither do we. I don’t recall the last time I felt this connected to nature and the elements, but I know I feel a lightness I haven’t experienced in months. Then, as quickly as they appeared, they assemble in front of the boat and, with a shrill whistle, beckoning us to follow. We tighten the sail and reengage, struggling to keep up as they lead us closer and closer to our destination. Just



before we reach New Plymouth, they dive and disappear in the blink of an eye, leaving an indelible imprint in my heart and soul.

Still mesmerised by our encounter, we anchor off the government pier and take the dingy to shore. By now, I’m starving, having forgone my

lunch in favour of frolicking with our newfound friends, and I’m anxious to find Miss Emily’s Blue Bee Bar – home of the original Goombay Smash, a delightful concoction of rum, pineapple, coconut, and love. Often replicated, never duplicated, it pairs exceptionally well with the best fish tacos I’ve ever tasted.

#### LAST CALL – GREAT GUANA CAY

As I walk up the hill, my hips sway to the music drifting down to the pier, mingled with the shouts of people greeting old friends and making new ones. Nipper’s has consistently been voted one of the best beach bars in the Caribbean and with good reason. Perched above a five-mile stretch

of white sand beach, every level of the rainbow-coloured building serves up commanding views of the Atlantic Ocean. Sundays, it’s the place to see and be seen, and Nipper’s pig roasts are legendary as is their unparalleled Bahamian hospitality. But, all too soon, after a night of revelry, it’s time to make for Marsh Harbour for one last evening before heading home.

Lest you think this vacation was all about too much fun and alcohol, I want you to know that we were also accompanied by the spirit of hope and optimism wherever we roamed. You see, I left out a piece of the story that I need to share.

Some of you may know this, but on September 1, 2019, Hurricane Dorian made landfall, the worst natural disaster in the nation’s history. The destruction was devastating. In some parts of the islands, 85 percent of the infrastructure disappeared after being battered by 185 mile per hour winds. Thousands were left homeless, but despite this tragedy, Abaconians continue to welcome visitors with open arms and hearts as they rebuild their communities, confident that each day heralds a brighter tomorrow.

No one lamented what had happened. Instead, they shared their dreams and aspirations. For me, this trip was more than a vacation; it was a voyage of discovery. The friendly, honest, hard-working people of these islands showed me how to live simply, appreciate what I’ve got, and not fret about what I want. They reinforced the value of collaboration and community, something technology can’t provide and allowed me to reconnect with myself and others.

Reluctantly, I pause in my reflection to pull my cell phone from my handbag to check in for our 60-minute flight to Palm Beach, knowing I’ll be deluged with emails and lists of to-dos the second I do. I hesitate for a moment before I hit the on button as I hear George Nowak, the Barefoot Man, singing the refrain to the last song he recorded in the Abacos – “I’m in Paradise, and there ain’t no app for that.” A gentle reminder that will stay with me until I can return to this place that is a piece of heaven on earth.



#### GETTING THERE

##### Bahamas Air

W: bahamasair.com

#### WHAT TO DO:

##### Cruise Abaco

Bareboat or Captained Charters

W: cruiseabaco.com

##### Elbow Cay Lighthouse

W: elbowreeflighthouse society.com

##### Cruisers Net

Weather and Event Information

W: cruisersnet.org

#### WHERE TO EAT

##### Snappas Chill & Grill

Marsh Harbour

W: snappasbar.com

##### Pete’s Pub & Gallery

Little Harbour

W: petespub.com

##### Miss Emily’s Ble Bee Bar

W: facebook.com/people/Miss-Emilys-Blue-Bee-Bar-Restaurant/100063627198894

##### Nipper’s Beach Bar & Grill

Great Guana Cay

W: nippersbar.com





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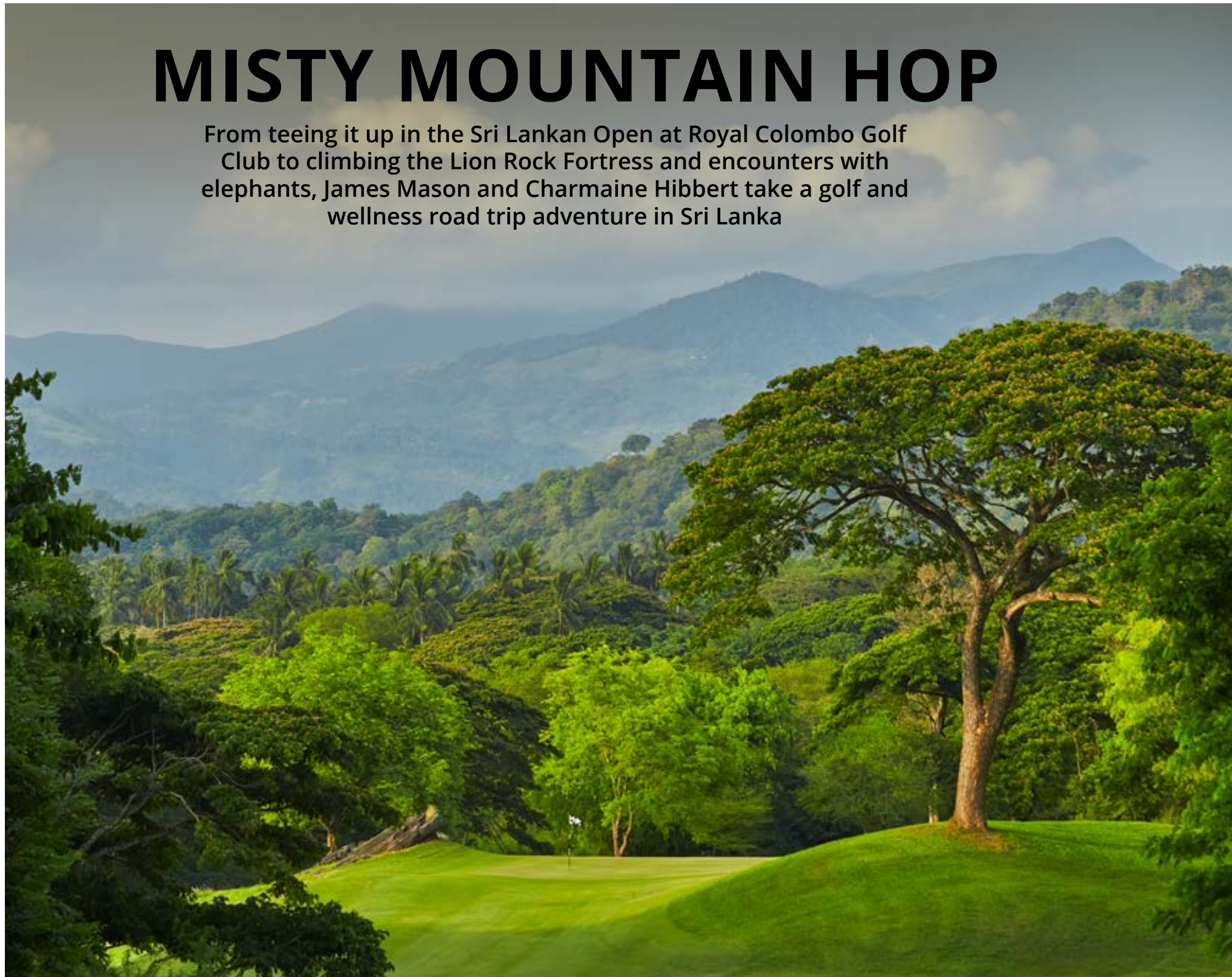
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# MISTY MOUNTAIN HOP

From teeing it up in the Sri Lankan Open at Royal Colombo Golf Club to climbing the Lion Rock Fortress and encounters with elephants, James Mason and Charmaine Hibbert take a golf and wellness road trip adventure in Sri Lanka





## ROYAL COLOMBO GOLF CLUB

Yesterday I had to make a mad dash from the airport to get a nine-hole practice round in, but here I am standing on the first day of the Sri Lankan Open with echos of “On the tee, James Mason from Ireland.”

I crash my drive down the middle and we are on our way. I am playing with two caddies from Kandy Victoria GC and the boys inform me there are quite a few of them playing in this tournament, so I have dubbed them the Kandy boys and we will be meeting up when I visit their course in a few days time.

At 425 yards with a lake at around 350 yards, it's a tough opening home from the black tees, but there are four teeing options here, so I am sure you will find a set of tees that will suit your game.

The 400-yard 2nd hole also has a water feature in front of it, so unless you get a good drive away I would suggest laying up. Now the 3rd hole is unique. As you make your way over from the 2nd green to the 3rd tee you have to cross over some railway tracks and this is a working railway so trains pass right through the course – [Click here for video](#) – with your next encounters coming behind the 4th green, in front of the green at the 6th hole and on the tees at the 8th hole and 2nd holes, which are shared.

I am not sure Colin Montgomerie would have liked it, but I thought it was quite fun waving to the passengers and it certainly took my mind off of my bad golf. To be honest I wasn't playing that badly, but the buffalo grass around the green was killing me and costing me a lot of shots.

The back nine comes to a close with a downhill par 3 of 175 yards and a birdie two sets me up for the back nine, which opens with a fairly short 360-yard, par 4.

There is a shape dogleg left at the 11th and you really don't want to miss the green right like I just have. Not only is it a steep bank back up to the green but there is more Buffalo grass to contend with and two shots later I finally make it back on to the putting surface and make seven off of two fairly decent shots.

Walking off the course I am exhausted from the heat and my personal battle with the buffalo grass and a final score of 92 off of my 5 handicap tells the story of my day. But that was my personal tussle with the elements, and it doesn't distract me from enjoying every minute



**I AM NOT SURE COLIN MONTGOMERIE WOULD HAVE LIKED IT, BUT I THOUGHT IT WAS QUITE FUN WAVING TO THE PASSENGERS AND IT CERTAINLY TOOK MY MIND OFF OF MY BAD GOLF**

on the course. I love the design of the back nine, two well-designed back-to-back par 5s, two great par 3s and although the 18th fairway is shared with the 1st, it really is a wonderful finishing hole.

My take away thoughts for you would be, put Royal Colombia GC on your must-play courses while you are here. The train alone will make you smile. Make sure you have a caddy – I am not sure I would have made 18 holes without one. Use an umbrella and hat and think about having lunch halfway round to give yourself a break. The heat really does take it out of you and it is such a nice course that I want you to enjoy the back nine, rather than endure it. →



Top left: Looking down the 1st hole  
Top right: Show time  
Above middle: Dogleg left 5th hole  
Above: Water protecting the par 3, 13th hole  
Left: The par 4, 2nd green with water tower backdrop



## EAGLES' GOLF LINKS

Those of you who don't liked to be watched on the 1st tee you may have a bit of a problem on the opening hole at Eagles' Golf Links, especially if you are going to be playing from the black tees. Put it this way: if it was raining the roof of the clubhouse bar would probably shelter you from getting wet!

I smash a half-decent drive and leave myself a short iron into the green that has two bunkers protecting the right-hand side. The 2nd is where the sea comes into play and Clappenberg Bay and Malay Cove offer some wonderful views, and after a lucky bounce that leaves me in the middle of the fairway, it now becomes a risk and reward hole.

Last week they opened up the new island green so now you have the option of in my case hitting a 7-iron or laying up. But remember it's an island green so you will still need to hit it; you'll just be coming in with a shorter iron. Anyway, after taking a penalty shot I make bogey!

The first of the par 3s on the front nine arrives at the 3rd and is played from an elevated tee, again giving you some more wonderful views. I am not sure why I am surprised and maybe subconsciously I wasn't giving Sri Lanka credit for the great golf product that they have, but Flying Officer KWMCK Wijeratne has done a wonderful design job. One great hole follows another; more elevated tee boxes, great typography and I am having another wonderful day's golf.

The front nine closes with a short par 3 and gives me time to take a breath. So far there has not been a weak hole on the course and they just keep on coming. The longest hole in Sri Lanka weighing in at 642 yards is the 11th hole that cuts its way through the trees like a snake twisting this way and that.

Apparently, there is a crocodile in the lake at the 14th and the walk to the back tee that cuts between the two lakes took on the elements of extreme sports! And the second shot is played to a raised green. Another great driving hole

arrives at the 15th and between the green and the 16th tee is a viewing point across China Bay offering more stunning views.

More risk and reward at the par 5, 17th hole again over water, but I cut my tee shot so after I laid up I am playing slightly uphill to another raised green framed by a coconut tree on the left and a bunker on the right.

The 18th is a fitting finale again played from an elevated tee but this time it's a par 3, weighing in at 169 yards with the sea on your right and, to add to its difficulty, the bunkers are in the shape of an eagle with the talons and head cutting into the green and filled with sand. It's certainly unique!

Eagles' Golf Links is a wonderfully designed golf course and will test every part of your game, but please remember you are in Sri Lanka. Yes, the manicuring, greens, the cut of the holes and flags could be better and yes investment is definitely needed. But, I would wholeheartedly recommend you play here when you visit. You certainly won't regret it.

**PLAYED FROM AN ELEVATED TEE BUT THIS TIME IT'S A PAR 3, WEIGHING IN AT 169 YARDS WITH THE SEA ON YOUR RIGHT AND, TO ADD TO ITS DIFFICULTY, THE BUNKERS ARE IN THE SHAPE OF AN EAGLE WITH THE TALONS AND HEAD CUTTING INTO THE GREEN AND FILLED WITH SAND. IT'S CERTAINLY UNIQUE!**

## COURSE VIDEO

Right: Aerial view of the eagle designed 18th green!  
 Far right top: 3rd green with the 2nd island green in the background  
 Far right bottom: Tight driving hole at the 7th







## SHANGRI LA HAMBANTOTA GOLF COURSE

I am surrounded by coconut and palm trees as I step onto the 1st tee at the Shangri La course in Hambantota and first impressions are very positive. Apart from my slightly skied drive I can't wait to see more. The slightly raised green at the 1st hole I realise starts to become a theme as I reach the 2nd green, as is the framing of the greens and fairways by coconut and palm trees. Now I will say the fairways are generous and I think understandably, with this being a resort course. But as I make my way round the dogleg left 3rd hole, where I've decided to try and cut off a bit too much and have gone from the very sticky rough into the large bunker, I have upped

and downed it for par! They are not ridiculously wide and do offer the better player a test.

The first par 3 arrives at the 4th and is played over water and at 197 yards from the blue tees – there are three teeing options here – it will certainly test any golfer. The 5th named “Coconut Alley” pretty much describes itself, but it's at the 7th hole that the course changes and opens up.

It's a two-to-three-club wind today and with the openness of the next couple of holes especially at the island green par 3, 8th hole, club selection is key. The front nine comes to a close with another wonderful aesthetically pleasing hole this time named “Monkey Business” and is again played to a slightly

raised green, framed by coconut trees.

Holes 10 and 11 see us back out in the open area part of the course and two really well-designed golf holes with risk and reward at both with water coming into play. The 12th is when the first of the par 3s arrive on this nine, which has lots of bunkering down the left and a two-tiered green that plays across you, and I have managed to put it in the bunker and not get out!

If you play with a hook then the tee shot at the 13th is going to be tough, but this dogleg left is another perfectly framed hole by coconut and palm trees. The second par 3 on this nine arrives at the 14th and while from the back tees it weighs in at only 142 yards, club selection is

key to this tricky green.

After the twisting and turning of the Par 5, 15th known as “Viper” we hit the homeward stretch with the sea coming into view at both the “Ocean Corner” and “The Tempest”. The course comes to a close with another par 3, this time weighing it at 182 yards, which has water on the left and bunkers on the right and could certainly wreck your card with one bad swing. Fortunately after coming up short I chip in for birdie – much to my caddy's delight and mine of course. It has been another wonderful day's golf. I do think they could make more of the sea holes and replace the bushes with coconut and palm trees so you can actually see the sea, but I am not sure how ecologically that would work.

Top left to right:  
3rd, 13th and 14th,  
and 16th holes  
Bottom left to right:  
15th and 18th holes

COURSE  
VIDEO 





## VICTORIA GOLF RESORT

A four-hour journey, a cold towel and a bucket of practice balls later and I am standing on the first tee at Victoria Golf Resort with my friend Prakash who I met at the Sri Lanka Open. He is a caddy here at the resort.

I get the feeling from the first tee that I am in for another wonderful round of golf, but this time the manicuring looks perfect. I smash my drive down the 404-yard 1st and we are off. As I get to the ball I have a blind shot to the green that is below me and just over the raised fairway, but a quick drive up the incline in the buggy and I get my bearings to the green.

There are buggies here and I would definitely take one and also a caddy. Prakash wanted to caddy for me today and I am playing with the pro.

Two wonderful tight driving holes follow, both played from elevated tees and I love the second shot up the hill to the 3rd hole. But it's the par 3, 4th hole and the views that will have you reaching for your iPhone. The backdrop →

Right: Amazing views at the 15th  
Below: Playing through the trees at the 11th

COURSE  
VIDEO 



**THE BACKDROP FROM THE TEE AND THE RESERVOIR ALL THE WAY TO THE DAM ARE MAGNIFICENT AND COULD ACTUALLY TAKE YOUR MIND OFF WHAT IS A BEAUTIFULLY DESIGNED GOLF HOLE AT ONLY 118 YARDS, PLAYED ACROSS A SMALL VALLEY TO A RAISED GREEN**



from the tee and the reservoir all the way to the dam are magnificent and could actually take your mind off what is a beautifully designed golf hole at only 118 yards, played across a small valley to a raised green.

As I make my way round it is one beautiful golf hole after another; the 5th again played from an elevated tee then up to a raised green and the elevation at the 6th with the dam as a backdrop is just jaw dropping.

The back nine just picks up where the front nine left off: elevated tee shots with beautiful backdrops to lush fairways, played to manicured raised greens and yes they do have their own reservoir here. But as I walk off the 18th green having just missed a birdie putt. I can't wait until tomorrow and do all this again, but this time without a camera in my hand so I can just concentrate on enjoying what is a truly amazing golf course, set among some stunning vistas. Now for a cold beer!



Left: Rocks to the left of the 12th green  
Below: A fitting finale the 18th green



## JOURNEY PLANNER

**GETTING THERE**  
**Sri Lankan Airlines**  
W: [srilankan.com](http://srilankan.com)

**GETTING AROUND**  
**Carsons Travels**  
W: [casonstravels.com](http://casonstravels.com)

**WHERE TO STAY**  
**Cinnamon Grand**  
W: [cinnamonhotels.com](http://cinnamonhotels.com)

**Aliya Resort**  
W: [themacollection.com/aliya-resort](http://themacollection.com/aliya-resort)

**Victoria Golf Resort**  
W: [golfsrilanka.com](http://golfsrilanka.com)

**Hambantota Shangri-la Golf Resort**  
W: [shangri-la.com/hambantota/shangrila](http://shangri-la.com/hambantota/shangrila)

**Tabula Rasa Resort & Spa**  
W: [tabularasaresort.com](http://tabularasaresort.com)

## WHERE TO PLAY

**Royal Colombo GC**  
W: [rcgcsf.com](http://rcgcsf.com)

**Eagles' Golf Links**  
W: [eaglesgolf.lk/China\\_Bay](http://eaglesgolf.lk/China_Bay)

**Victoria Golf Resort**  
W: [golfsrilanka.com](http://golfsrilanka.com)

**Hambantota Shangri-la Golf Resort**  
W: [shangri-la.com/hambantota/shangrila](http://shangri-la.com/hambantota/shangrila)

## THINGS TO DO

**Sigiriya Lion Rock Fortress**  
W: [sigiriyafortress.com](http://sigiriyafortress.com)

**Eco Team Elephant safari**  
W: [ecoteam.lk](http://ecoteam.lk)



## CINNAMON GRAND

Colombo, Sri Lanka

By CHARMAINE HIBBERT

# SWEET LIKE CINNAMON

**Charmaine Hibbert** discovers the amazing spaces, the beautiful design, spacious rooms and the scented atmosphere of the Cinnamon Grand in Colombo





Below: The beautiful design of the Atrium



We have just made our way back from the Royal Colombia GC and James has near run to his room to jump in the shower, but I take a more leisurely stroll with one of the concierges who is giving me a tour as we make our way to my room. We enter what must be one of the main conference/dining/gala dinner/awards area and it really is a magnificent space.

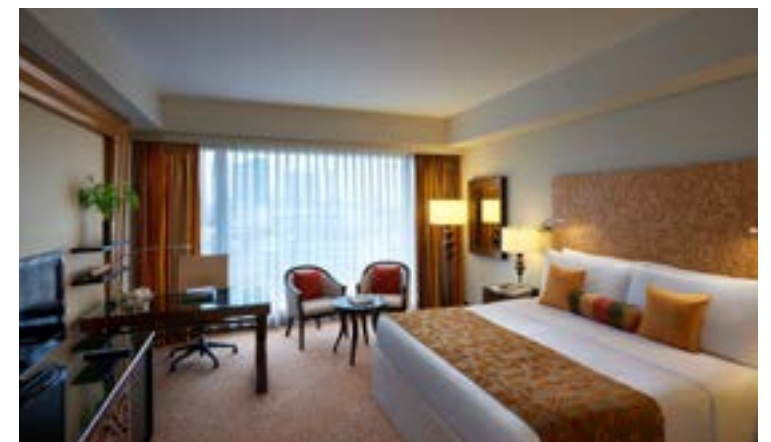
The stage/floor space is raised and hanging down are six giant lights that are suspended from the ceiling with eleven giant vases that glow and surround the raised space. All the floors in the hotel look down onto this space and its beauty needs to be taken in from both ground floor and your room level to appreciate the wonderful design.

## ROOMS

The room is strangely differently designed to what I was expecting. Don't get me wrong; it has a beautiful modern feel with lots of room and the design of the bathroom is open to the bedroom, separated by glass with drop down curtains if you want to use them for a bit more privacy. From my sixth-floor room I can also see out to the sea and the rest of the city. It really is a wonderful view.

Of course, the face dive into the pillows brings that wonderful smell of crisp linen and there is a perfectly placed desk where I am writing to you from as I look out to sea.

Right: Penthouse suite  
Middle: Bathroom  
suite. Bottom: Deluxe room option



## DINING

We are dining at Plates both nights that we are staying here and while I am not a great lover of buffet style dinners – I do understand it for breakfast – there are plenty of food options for you to choose from with the Cinnamon Grand stating that they aim to give you a culinary tour of global cuisine.

My problem with buffet dining is that you never get to experience the chefs' work or artistry as you just tend to load your plate up with the things you like. And there is plenty of mixing and matching going on as we make our way round the different options – a world fusion clashing on one plate!

As you would imagine, breakfast brings you plenty of options to →



choose from again in a buffet style, from Sri Lankan hoppers to British bacon and beans, fresh fruits and egg stations to cook them to your preference.

### NIJA LUXURY WELLNESS

It's our last day here and I am excited as I head to NIJA. With the prospect of a full body massage my senses are tingling in anticipation. Making my way up the stairs I am greeted by the team and some beautiful hanging lights, sending out nice dull yellow relaxing light, setting the mood for what is to come.

My masseur introduces himself as Jithin and I am instructed to change while he waits outside and when he comes back in he tells me to lay face down on the bed. Jithin smiles when I say forgive me if I sleep as it's been a long day. That soon goes out the window when my legs are being lifted one at a time and tilted sideways to stretch each side; I now realise that was more of a knowing smirk than a smile!

Over the next hour, Jithin has my body dancing with delight and crying in despair. It was a dance with demons, then soothed by angels and it was worth every second. In a slight daze, Jithin leads me to the steam room to relax and then I head to the shower. I think I must have floated down the stairs and back to my room as I feel like I am on cloud nine.

A massage is a must while you are in Sri Lanka, and if you're staying at the Cinnamon Grand a visit to NIJA Luxury Wellness and the full body massage has to be on your to do list. Take that dance – you will thank me later.

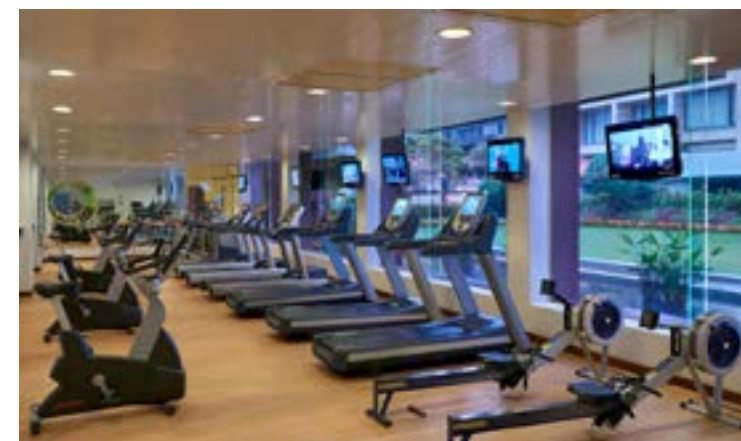
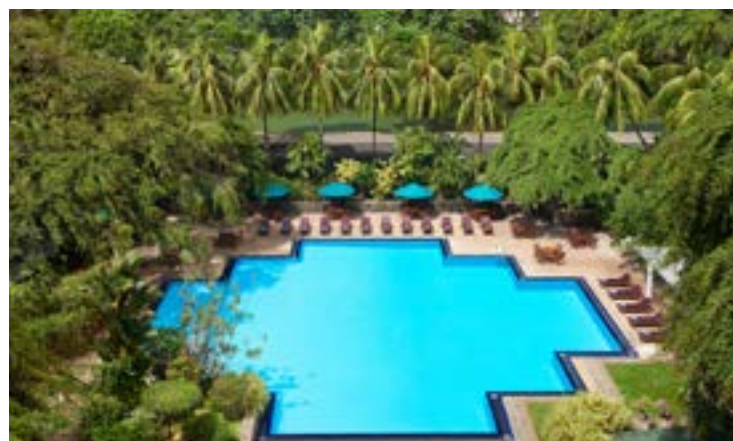
**Cinnamon Grand**  
Colombo, Sri Lanka

**T:** +94 11 216 11 61

**W:** [cinnamonhotels.com/cinnamongrandcolombo](http://cinnamonhotels.com/cinnamongrandcolombo)



Far left: Hot and cold bath at the NIJA Spa  
Left: Treatment room  
Bottom left: Plates restaurant  
Middle: Pool area  
Below: Well-equipped gym area





# ALIYA RESORT & SPA

Sigiriya, Sri Lanka

By CHARMAINE HIBBERT

## LOVE IN THE SHADOWS

In the shadow of the Lion Rock Fortress, **Charmaine Hibbert** takes a moment to soak up the splendour of the stunning view out to the fortress across the resort's infinity pool as she walks into the reception area at the Aliya Resort and Spa – knowing at that point this was going to be more than just a hotel





Coming through the gates of the Aliya Resort by Thema I knew I was in for something special. We pull up to the steps that rise up to the reception area and I had to smile as it was like keeping you in suspense a little longer.

As I make the top of the stairs and into the vast spacious reception area I am confronted by the UNESCO World Heritage site of the Sigiriya Lion Rock Fortress defiantly rising from the plains that surround it, just oozing magnificence and with a “come climb me if you dare” air about it.

But after taking in the view my eyes pull back to the infinity pool below, and in this heat, it exudes its own presence of calming, cooling waters with your body wanting to just run down the stairs and dive in. I am sure many a guest have done just that, it’s so inviting.

A cold towel and some coconut milk straight from the coconut, while the staff take my passport and check me in and I am off to my room, which turns out to be number one and not far at all.

### ROOM

The cool air conditioning is the first thing I notice! I’m being shown around by guest services; the room is white and clean with dark wooden and wicker furniture. The bathroom is designed beautifully with a deep soaker tub, dark walk-in shower, with rain head feature and modern designed oblong-shaped sink. There is also a mini bar, coffee making facilities and wardrobe with lots of options which also contains your safe.

The bed faces the large patio doors that open up to a patio bench and there is enough space to take your wicker chairs and table out there.

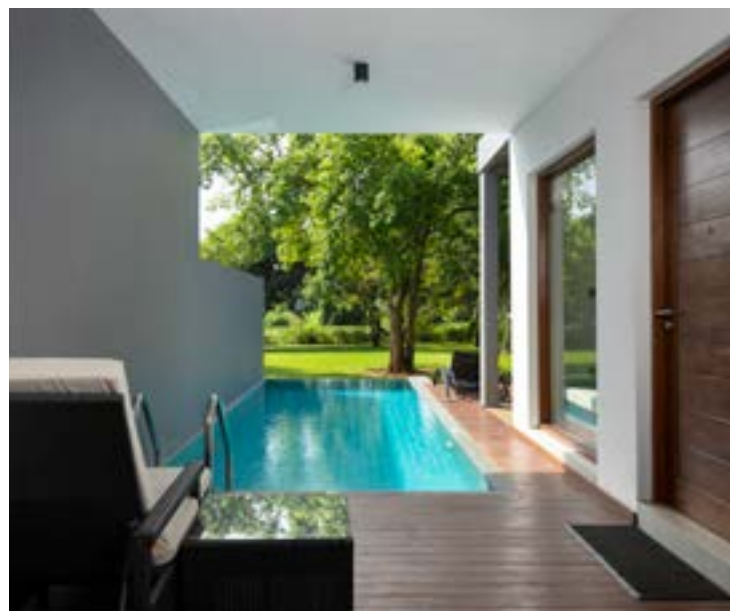
The bed is a floating bed design with dark wood slats and headboard and as usual the dive into the crisp linens reveals a nice firm mattress.

### ECO VILLAGE

After settling in I am now being shown around another part of the hotel that is all about sustainability and eco-friendly hospitality. And the small paddy fields are being harvested as we make our way round. Everything that is grown here is used for cooking in the restaurant where all dishes are produced using those vegetables and rice etc.



Top left: The amazing reception area  
Middle left and right: One of the room options  
Below left: One of the wood villas  
Below right: Private pool in one of the villa options



On arriving in this part of the hotel you are assessed by the doctor who gives you an eating plan and also massage plan, with the eco-friendly spa sitting at the heart of this section along with the restaurant.

The treatment rooms are open to the elements but private at the same time, so you can’t be seen from the outside. As we wander round we are shown the rooms, which again use natural products and while they are basic they have been beautifully designed and are very well appointed.

There is also a recycling plant, water treatment centre and local potter on site, and the potter works with you so you can create your own crockery while you are here, if you want to. I love the ideas that they have put in place and although you are not sleeping with all the bugs and snakes etc, you certainly do feel you are getting back to nature. I would certainly recommend this section if you are looking to relax and rejuvenate.

### AYURVEDA & WELLNESS

There are two spas here – the one in the eco-friendly hotel section and the Ayurveda and Wellness in this section of the hotel. Today I am having the foot massage and I am led to one of the treatment rooms. My masseur →



asks me if I just want below the knee or the whole leg and there was me thinking it was just going to be my feet!

I opt for the whole leg option and yes I am falling asleep within minutes of planting my face into the hole in the massage table! But it's those magic hands that have me relaxing in seconds and drifting off.

Yes, the foot massage does include him massaging your feet, but it is the whole experience and the working of my thighs, calves and feet both back and front that has me once again feeling revitalised. As I gaze out to the fields from the relaxation area my whole being smiling back at the sun and slowly drifting back off to sleep, with the sound of nature surrounding me, I think I've found my new happy place.

## RESTAURANTS

The Alaka Restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner and, depending on your meal plan here, the menu has lots of options, giving you fish, meat or pasta options each day with a variety of starters and desserts.

Tonight we are dining with the food and beverages manager, Gajanayaka Kumara, who has created some wonderful cocktails and has promised us that we will get to sample some tonight after dinner.

As each dish arrives my taste buds just dance in delight, and having had lunch here earlier in the day, I can vouch that the food is wonderful and carefully crafted and presented. Add in those wonderful views and an Arrack cocktail that's made with natural honey and it is the perfect end to what has been a wonderful day.

I am now all prepared to climb the Lion Rock Fortress early tomorrow morning – well as ready as I will ever be!

It's our last night here and Gajanayaka has arranged for us to have a traditional Sri Lankan night at the Nagula Restaurant and to savour local delicacies that are inspired by the ancient culinary heritage of Sri Lanka. We meet the chef who is a local lady and she has already started cooking our dishes and the beautiful aromas float past and tease our senses on the warm breeze. She informs us that everything will be cooked by firewood, the traditional way.

At the end of the meal we are both looking at each other with big smiles on our faces. It has been a wonderful night with traditional Sri Lankan music playing in the background. The colours, flavours and culinary skills of our chef made for an experience that I am sure we will both never forget.

We have only been here two days, but the memories not just of the experiences that we had climbing the Lion Rock Fortress and the elephant safari, but also the staff and food at the Aliya Resort and Spa have been truly amazing. I hope you get to experience being here one day, I know you will enjoy every minute of your stay.

**Aliya Resort & Spa**  
Audangawa, Sigiriya  
Sri Lanka

**T:** +94 662 040 400  
**W:** [themacollection.com/aliya-resort](http://themacollection.com/aliya-resort)

All images: Various views of the hotel, restaurants, spa, chefs, bartenders, activities and those amazing views of the infinity pool and out to the Lion Rock Fortress





## VICTORIA GOLF RESORT

Kandy, Sri Lanka

By CHARMAINE HIBBERT

# VICTORIA'S SECRET

Whether its enjoying breakfast or dinner with those amazing views along the reservoir down to the dam from one of the villas or looking out over the golf course from the outside terrace from one of the new chalets, **Charmaine Hibbert** finds Victoria Golf Resort has an accommodation option just right for you







Left: Romantic dinner with sunset views over the mountains and reservoir

Bottom left: A1 The Woods chalet

Bottom middle and left: One of the villa options with pool







Top left: Restaurant views. Top right: Alfresco dining in the chalets. Middle: Four poster bed in one of the villa options. Bottom left and right: cycling and trail walking are just some of the non golf activities available at Victoria Golf Resort



There has been a slight change of plan and we are now staying at the Victoria Golf Resort and although that makes perfect sense for the golfers reading these reviews, I must say I was looking forward to stay at the Madulkelle Tea & Eco Lodge.

## ROOMS

But as I walk into my chalet, which is known as A1 The Woods chalet, the lodge is soon forgotten. The view of the golf course through the floor-to-ceiling glass doors which lead onto a patio area with chairs and table is beautiful and very peaceful. The décor is perfect; a large king-size bed doesn't dominate the room and leaves plenty of room for a chair and table and there is still more space. The greys, browns and wood give it a modern yet natural feel and the bathroom with its grey and white marbling floor and stone work opens up to a walk-in glass shower that is not open to the elements but has a glass ceiling, giving it that all-natural feeling.

The face dive into the bed reveals a nice firm mattress and crisp linens with grey bed throw and plenty of soft pillows, which James is probably throwing on the floor as I write!

## RESTAURANT

The restaurant is just 40 yards from the chalets and we are meeting there to eat at 7pm as it has been a long day with the journey down from Trincomalee. There is a set menu with several choices for each course but we have both gone for the wrapped chicken with sweet chilli and salad and braised beef steak with rosemary and garlic roast potatoes and veg.

We both agree the chicken was the perfect starter and it wasn't exactly a wrap; more like balls, but very tasty. Now I had my beef well done and James went for medium but I can see blood oozing out over his potatoes and he has a big smile on his face so I know he is content and for me, well thankfully I am very glad I went for well done. And if nobody was looking I am sure we would have both licked our plates clean!

## VILLAS

After breakfast I am taken on a tour of the resort and shown some of the other accommodation options that the resort has to offer. There are several beautifully designed villas offering two, three or four bedrooms that can be self catering or the resort can organise a chef for you as well as having access to the restaurant. The pick of the villas has its own pool and looks down along the reservoir to the dam and it really is a stunning view. I can just imagine sitting watching the sunset with a glass of wine. Now that would be the perfect ending to another wonderful day in Sri Lanka.

## ACTIVITIES

Apart from golf, there are plenty of other activities on hand for the non golfers out there and with the resort set among some amazing vistas, there are two walking trails. There is also horse riding, tennis, table tennis, a swimming pool with Jacuzzi, croquet and cycling. A swimming pool with Jacuzzi, a glass of wine and amazing vistas – let me just go and change!

**Victoria Golf Resort**  
 Kandy, Sri Lanka

**T: +94 71 737 6376**  
**W: [golfsrilanka.com](http://golfsrilanka.com)**





## HAMBANTOTA SHANGRI-LA

**Ambalantota**, Sri Lanka

By CHARMINE HIBBERT

Making our way from Nuwara Elya to Ambalantota has been a beautiful journey taking in tea plantations, spectacular views and waterfalls of Ella and driving through the Yala National Park seeing elephants, deer and peacocks. Empty roads, busy towns and plenty of tuk tuks to make us smile, but as we pull into the Shangri-La Hambantota hotel relief that we have finally arrived.

You cannot help but be impressed by the wonderful design of the lobby with its open space and high ceilings. It's an impressive structure. A quick check-in sees James heading to the golf course and me heading to my room and a nice long soak in the bath is calling me.

I can hear the waves crashing on the shore and when I enter my room with the view straight out to the Indian Ocean, I can feel the power of those waves hitting the sand from here.

### ROOM

The room has plenty of space, with a large king-size bed, table and chairs and a sofa and coffee table. The bathroom has a large soaker tub and a walk-in glass enclosed shower. The décor here is an orange/yellow type →

# THE ROAD TO SHANGRI-LA

From Nuwara Elya to Ambalantota, **Charmaine Hibbert** found her road to Shangri-La filled with beautiful waterfalls, stunning mountainside tea plantations, majestic elephants, deer and peacocks. And at the end of the road a beautiful deserted sandy beach and a wonderfully-designed, air-conditioned room







Far left: My room with a view. Left: The beautifully designed lobby. Bottom left to right: Gimanhala bar and deck, Ulpatha sports bar and that deserted beach walk



stone and the bedroom is woods, whites and turquoise. The nose dive into the pillow as always brings the smell of fresh cotton but this time a medium firm bed.

But it is the balcony that calls me with those views of the sea. There is room on the balcony for tables and chairs and reclining loungers, but thoughts of relaxing in the deep soaker tub disappear as the power of those waves seems to beckon me. I make my way down to the beach and to my delight, apart from a couple and their child a long way to my left, the beach is deserted. Now that may have something to do with the red flag, but also that it is June, which is low season here. But the sun is out and I have miles of sandy beach to myself.

#### RESTAURANTS

There are several restaurants here but we are eating in the main restaurant that is buffet-style and I think you now know my thoughts on that. But

there are lots of options, from Sri Lankan, Indian and international and there are plenty of desserts such as crepes and ice creams to choose from.

#### ACTIVITIES

It has been a long journey and the sun and walk along the beach have finally taken its toll. I make my way to my room and with one night to go on this tour, I know I am going to miss Sri Lanka. But the Shangri-La Hambantota hotel has given me another wonderful experience on a journey of many. And there are plenty of facilities on offer offer, including three outdoor swimming pools, hot whirlpool bath, jogging trails, archery, billiards, darts, beach volleyball, pottery and ceramic hut, wood carving and turning hut, weaving and handloom hut, painting hut, batik hut, mask-making hut, amphitheatre, health club, yoga, aquagym, fitness classes, Chi Ayurveda spa, supervised children's activities, video games zone, table tennis and cricket.

#### CONCLUSION

You will enjoy every minute of your time here. I am sure it is wonderful here during the summer months, but that walk along the deserted beach, I do hope you get to enjoy that one day. I will have lots of memories when I depart from Sri Lanka in a few days time, but high among them will be today's walk along that deserted beach, the sand between my toes, the power of those waves and just me and my thoughts. perfect.

**Shangri-La Hambantota**  
Chithragala, Ambalantota  
Sri Lanka

**T: +94 477 888 888**  
**W: [shangri-la.com/hambantota/shangrila](http://shangri-la.com/hambantota/shangrila)**





Above: Watching the sunset from my room  
Right: The main pool with amazing views



## TABULA RASA RESORT

Habaraduwa, Sri Lanka

By CHARMAINE HIBBERT

# FINDING THE LINE

Tabula Rasa sang about the fine line between genius and insanity, but **Charmaine Hibbert** finds that this Tabula Rasa is the perfect stop-off point along the line between Ambalantota and Colombo Airport

As we make our way up the winding backroads after coming off the main road, I am now very intrigued to see Tabula Rasa Resort and as we turn the bend our driver is waved through a secluded gate which horseshoes to bring us outside reception where we are greeted by the staff.

While I am being handed a cold towel, the azure blue of the infinity pool has grabbed my attention and that then leads my eye down to the waves crashing on the beach below and I am totally mesmerised. A nudge from James brings me back to the conversation. We take a seat as refreshing cocktails arrive and our passports are taken for the check-in while we sit back and relax.

Anouk – better known as Arnie – who is one of the owners, arrives and she explains her and her husband's concept and the story behind their journey to this point. I could tell that one of them must have a design/creative background as I take in the aesthetics of my surroundings and it turns out Arnie owned a company that produced high-end woven furniture and her husband Arnoud was an architect and musician. →



Making our way round the different accommodation options from rooms to apartments, you can feel that every little detail has been thoroughly thought through, from the colours to the selection of woods to the little bottles that hold the shower gels etc.

## ROOM

Arnie leaves us and the staff show us to our rooms. When I enter the room I have been allocated my heart skips a beat in delight, as outside the double doors that take me to my deck which has loungers and a seating area and looks out over the jungle to the sea, is my own personal plunge pool!

The nose dive into the pillows of my four poster dark wooden king-size bed reveals fresh cotton and a nice, firm mattress. The décor is dark wood, white with splashes of red and orange, put together beautifully. The walled walk-in shower and sink are finished in a warm yellow, with white sink and stone vanity with wooden towel stand, all complementing each other perfectly.

## SPA

After a sightseeing tour of Galle fort and walking through the narrow streets of the city, followed by a nice cooling plunge in the infinity pool and just chilling out watching the sun go down, it is time for my spa treatment.

The hotel is in the process of changing the spa area, but Nuwan puts me at ease as I enter and change and plonk myself face down on the massage table. As Nuwan slowly assess my body along my legs, back, shoulders and head, he begins slowly massaging each leg. I am sure he then moved to my back and I remember my shoulders popping like a well-known bowl of breakfast cereal and then it was time to turn over.

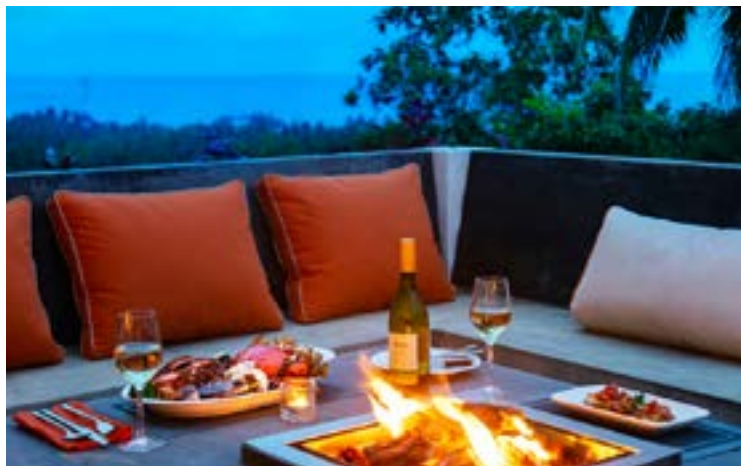
I drift in and out of sleep and then feel my head being slowly massaged and I just melt as those magic hands make every fibre in my body relax. Then suddenly Nuwan is tapping me on my shoulder to say he had finished. It was the perfect massage to finish this tour of Sri Lanka and



Above: My wonderfully decorated room.  
Below left to right: My bathroom facilities,  
spa plunge pool and spa massage views







All images: Various views of the hotel, restaurants, upper deck, pool reception and aerial view of the resort and amazing views to the mountains

prepare me for the flight home.

### RESTAURANT

I meet up with James for dinner and the restaurant overlooks the infinity pool and with it now being dark, the lights are on and the pool just glimmers invitingly. It is our last night in Sri Lanka and we honour it with our last chicken curry, followed by ice cream and passion fruit.

The rest of the night is spent with James and Arnoud putting the planet to rights and planning how Sri Lanka can become an amazing golf destination and talk of a long-driving competition on an old air force base. While Arnie and I relax with a glass of wine and take in the perfect night watching monkeys and blue-winged birds in the warmth of a beautiful Sri Lankan night.

### CONCLUSION

Sri Lanka was never one of my bucket list destinations, but now I have travelled north to south, east to west of this beautiful island, I would

definitely recommend you add it to yours.

I would also recommend that you spend some time at the Tabula Rasa Resort. With the tranquility of its position looking down to the beach and out to the Indian Ocean, while sitting among the trees, you get that wonderful feeling of being in nature, but with the benefit of these beautifully designed and decorated rooms and food that is cooked to perfection. My heart hopes this is more of a “coda” moment rather than the last time I stay here. But if it is, then it has been a beautiful and fitting finale to my trip to Sri Lanka.

**Tabula Rasa Resort & Spa**  
**Habaraduwa**  
**Sri Lanka**

**T: +94 914 549 000**  
**W: [tabularasaresort.com](http://tabularasaresort.com)**



# ALL I HAVE TO DO IS DREAM

**Charmaine Hibbert** finds the best way to start her journey to Colombo is sampling the desserts and ice cream in the lounge at Heathrow, before stretching out on her bed sipping Champagne and watching a movie, then drifting off to sleep and waking refreshed and ready for her Sri Lankan adventure





I always get to airports early, or should I say James makes sure we get to airports early for press trips, I am not as punctual when I am going away on holiday!

After a fairly quick check-in we make our way to the Cathay Pacific lounge which Sri Lankan Airlines business class passengers have the use of before their flight.

After showing our tickets to the receptionist we head into the lounge, which has a quiet zone and showers. But we are both hungry so are heading for the restaurant section. Sitting down in one of the booths, we leave our cabin bags to take a look round. There is a hot food menu and you just head to the counter and with the lounge not being that busy today the food is cooked to order, and they give you a flashing disk to let you know when your food is ready.

There is also a self-service section which has both hot and cold food, biscuits, snacks, ice cream and desserts; while there is also a selection of hot and cold soft drinks. If you are looking for alcohol, and we indeed are, then you head to the bar, where we enjoy a couple of beers and some wine to go with the food.

As you would imagine, the food is wonderful and James has gone for another helping, while I make sure the ice cream and desserts are up to standard.

After a delay to the flight, we are finally heading to the aircraft after being informed by the staff in the lounge that we can now board, which is one of the perks as you can stay there and make full use of the facilities until your flight is ready.

### I'M ONLY SLEEPING

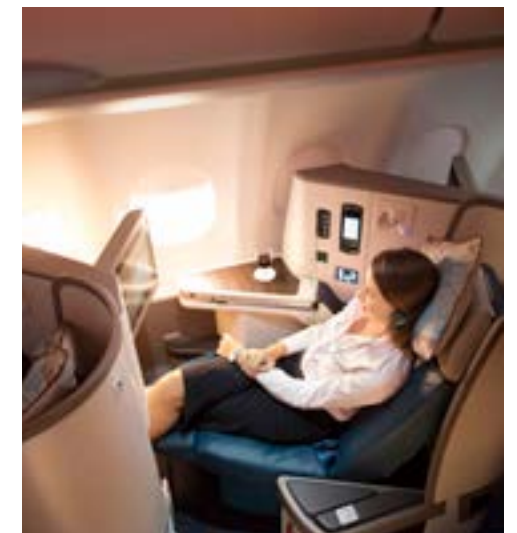
Now being an overnight flight, I was really looking forward to getting some sleep, with the business class seats turning into a full lie-flat bed. As soon as the seatbelt sign went off after take-off, I was near horizontal watching a movie with a glass of Champagne in hand, the perfect night cap before pressing a button to send me fully horizontal and out for the count.

After a good night's sleep, and I have to say a very comfortable one, I am slightly reluctant to put my bed back in seat mode for breakfast. A movie later, which I again watch from a near horizontal position but this time a few soft drinks while I drift in and out of sleep, and the cabin crew make an announcement that we are making our approach into Colombo.



### CONCLUSION

I loved every minute of my business class experience with Sri Lankan Airlines and would certainly recommend it not only for the horizontal seats and wonderful cabin service and food, but also for the lounge at Heathrow for its food and service there and the benefit of using all the facilities if there happen to be any delays.



If you are upgrading to business class, I would try to make sure you are allowed use of the lounge at Colombo Airport. The only reason we were allowed into the lounge in Sri Lanka was because we were writing this review and this is not part of the upgrade on the return flight like it is on the outbound flight. Having said that, the service on board, the food, drinks and of course

those seats that go horizontal certainly make the upgrade worthwhile.

**Sri Lankan Airlines**

**T: +44 330 808 0800**

**W: srilankan.com**

Far left: Our menu for the outward flight

Top: Perfect service

Above left: James took a photo of his leg room

Above: Seats that turn into beds



**40**  
SRIXON ZX5 DRIVER



**43**  
TITLEIST  
T150  
IRONS



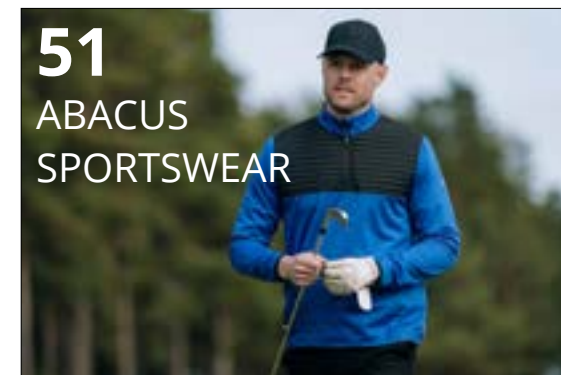
**46** CLEVELAND RTX6

# EQUIPMENT & APPAREL

# REVIEW



**49**  
ZEBRA AIT4



**51**  
ABACUS  
SPORTSWEAR



**54**  
DUCA DEL  
COSMA

# VIEW.COM





# Farleigh



## Flexible Membership

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### Option 1 £310

£310 in green fee credit  
plus 1 x complimentary  
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Limited memberships available.  
Be quick to avoid disappointment:  
Register online at [www.farleighfox.co.uk/  
membership/flexiblemembership](http://www.farleighfox.co.uk/membership/flexiblemembership)



Contact Michael Day on 01883 627711  
or email [enquiries@farleighfox.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@farleighfox.co.uk)



# ON THE REBOUND

Can there be a positive outcome from this rebound affair at Heythrop park? James Mason spills the beans





## TECHNOLOGY

The main technology in the ZX 5 Mk II is the rebound frame, which is comprised of two zones which work together. The first zone is the driver face, which deforms inwards at impact. Zone two is a ring of flexibility which is offset from the face and deforms outwardly. These two zones snap back into shape just after impact and the compound energy that you have created transfers back into the ball and delivers the maximum ball speed from your swing speed.

The rebound frame adds a 10% larger high COR (coefficient of restitution) – which is the transfer of the energy from the club face into the

back of the ball – area of the ZX5 Mk II driver face compared to the previous generation.

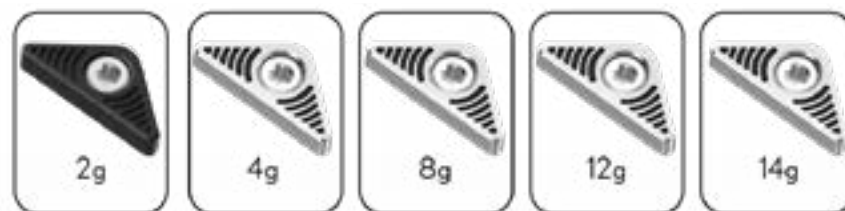
The face has been designed with a variable thickness pattern that is 0.25mm thinner in the centre and 0.4mm thicker at the perimeter than Srixon's last generation of drivers. These add to the driver's COR across the face, which again helps increase ball speed and distance.

The star frame crown is a series of ridges and latticework that gives the driver its strength and the reason why Srixon have been able to use an ultralight titanium crown. This gives them the freedom to place discretionary mass where it is best

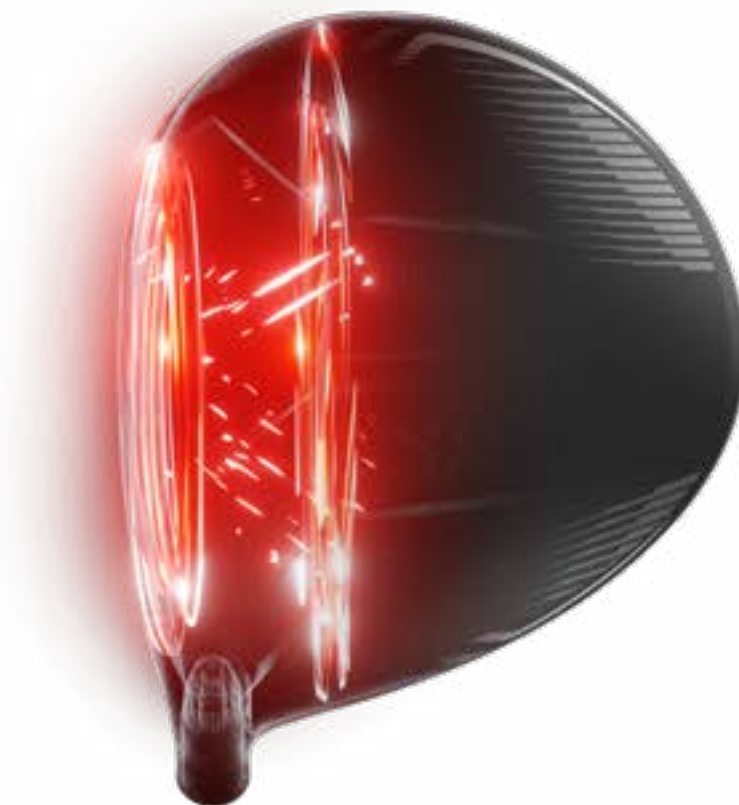
suited to optimise launch and spin.

The design has a larger footprint, flattened shape, and a 8gm rear weight has been placed low and deep to obtain a higher launch angle. The weight can be replaced from the additional weights available to adjust swing weight or this can be adjusted at a custom fitting and with the adjustable hosel you can choose your loft, lie and face angle.

The entire line of ZX Mk II Woods offers world-class shafts as standard options with Project X HZRDUS Black Gen 4 and Project X HZRDUS Smoke Red RDX shafts.



Left: Adjustable hosel and weights.  
Above: Custom weights available  
Middle and right: How the Rebound frame works at impact  
Top right: The ridges and latticework frame







#### CONCLUSION

I had enjoyed testing the ZX5 Mk II so much at Heythrop Park that I kept it in the bag an extra couple of days to play in my club competitions that weekend. I think that should tell you how much I rated this driver.

From the looks at address, the ball flight and distance, the feel and sound at impact, I loved every minute of playing with this driver and coming in at the price point it does, makes the Srixon ZX5 Mk II a must have on your testing list.

#### CLUB TESTED ▶

**Srixon ZX5 Mk II**

**LOFT** 10.5°

**LOFT SET UP** -1°

**SHAFT** Mitsubishi Diamana ZX-II

**WEIGHT** 50gm

**FLEX** Stiff

**WEIGHT USED** 8 gm

**RRP** £499 / €499 / \$499.99





# MUSCLE BOUND

James Mason heads to Heythrop Park for three days of testing Titleist's new T150 irons and its refined muscle channel and ultra-dense D18 tungsten





#### TECHNOLOGY

The T150 irons are aimed at the golfer who wants the look and feel of the T100 irons but with increased speed, distance, and forgiveness. The new refined Muscle Channel has been designed so it sits closer to the CNC milled face. This not only helps with ball speed, but the milling process has helped eliminate imperfections, giving the irons more consistency.

Titleist have introduced an ultra-dense D18 tungsten combined with a 2000° aerospace brazing process, giving the T150s a precision placed CG that helps give the irons greater MOI to its fully-forged design.

They have kept the shape, looks and blade length and offset of the T100, but increased the topline thickness and widened the sole, while making the lofts 2° stronger. The wider sole design has seen improvements to the variable bounce, which was also achieved by softening the trailing edge.

This is topped off with the Project X LZ shaft which stands for “Loading Zone Technology” that allows the player to load the shaft for increased energy transfer, increased feel and offers a lower launch with less spin.





**CLUB TESTED** ▶  
**Titleist T150 irons**  
**LOFT SET UP** 4-Pw  
**SHAFT** Project X LZ  
**FLEX** 6.0  
**WEIGHT** 120 gm  
**RRP SET 4-PW** £1,249 / €1,569 / \$1,399

## CONCLUSION

I loved testing the T150s over Heythrop Park's, Bainbridge course. For me one of the big things I look for from an iron is the feel at impact, the strike, the sound and then the ball flight.

The feel, strike and sound at impact can tell you a lot about the quality of the metal that the club is forged from. The ball flight will tell you how good the technology used is, and even more information can be gained when you misshit a shot or don't catch it out of the middle, because then you find out about the club's consistency and forgiveness.

What I learned from those three

days at Heythrop Park was that the T150s averaged around a five-yard gain in distance compared to my normal irons. I loved the design of the sole and the turf interaction and solid strike it gave me, the sound at impact and that my miss hit shots didn't turn out as bad as I thought they would be as the ball left the club-face.

So, if you are in the market for a new set of bladed irons and you want the looks of a forged blade, but with some of the forgiveness and distance of a cavity-backed iron then I would definitely make sure you get the Titleist T150s in your hands before you make your final decision.





# ZIPLINING

Three days of testing at Heythrop Park days before the Clutch Tour event, with greens in perfect condition, James Mason puts the Cleveland RTX6 Zipcore wedges to the test





## TECHNOLOGY

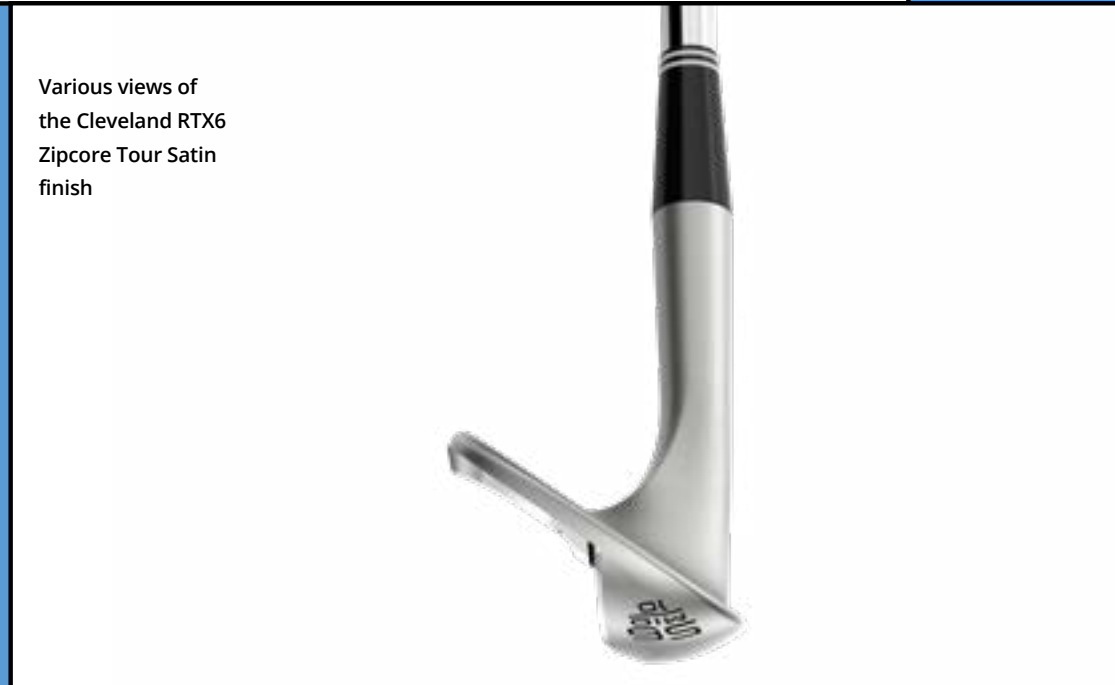
There are three main technologies that are used in the new RTX 6 ZipCore wedges, and they are HydraZip, ZipCore and UltiZip.

The hydraZip is where Cleveland have blasted and laser-milled the face to create extra friction at impact to help maximise spin in all conditions and claim that this technology has added 43% extra spin on the ball in wet conditions over previous models, while also adding more consistency.

ZipCore is a low-density core technology that has expanded the sweet spot and they have also pushed the centre of gravity (CG) right behind the impact zone. All this helps increase spin, distance, consistency, feel and control. And by adding high/low and heel/toe MOI into all lofts in their wedge system this also helps with increased spin, distance and, most importantly, control.



Various views of the Cleveland RTX6 Zipcore Tour Satin finish



UltiZip technology is where Cleveland have designed the grooves, so they are sharper, deeper, and more tightly spaced, again all helping to enhance spin rate, control and consistency.

## SOLE GRINDS

Low: available in the 58-60 degree wedges, Low+: available in the 54-56 degree wedges, Mid: available in the 46-60 degree wedges, Full: available in the 54-60 degree wedges

The four different sole grinds come in various loft options: LOW, MID, and FULL grinds and new for this generation of wedges is the LOW+ grind, which is featured on sand wedge lofts. This option adds two degrees more bounce in a C-shaped sole design, giving the player extra bounce in bunkers.

There are three finishes to choose from: Tour satin, Tour rack (Raw) and Black satin.





# CONCLUSION

I tested the 58° Mid 10° over three days at Heythrop Park and with the course in perfect condition ready for the Clutch Tour event and greens that were fast and slowly getting faster and the subtle contours, these were ideal conditions to test Cleveland's RTX 6 Zipcore wedges.


Looking down on the RTX6 at address which I had in the Tour satin finish, it inspires confidence with the classic design, and the way it sits perfectly behind the ball. Having come up short on the first hole, the RTX6 was being pulled out of the bag quicker than I was expecting and the 80-yard full wedge shot gave me plenty of feedback.

Firstly, the soft feel off the face, the compression of the ball and the ball flight and the stop and spin as it hit



Various views of the Cleveland RTX6 Zipcore Black Satin finish



**CLUB TESTED**   
**Cleveland RTX 6 Zipcore**  
**LOFT** 58°  
**GRIND** Mid  
**BOUNCE** 10°  
**SHAFT** True Temper Dynamic Gold Spinner Tour Issue  
**FLEX** Wedge  
**WEIGHT** 128 gm  
**RRP** £159.99 / €189 / \$189.99



the green. I think the smile on my face said it all and I knew I was going to be in for a fun morning.

As I made my way round, I was throwing balls in all different types of lies, bunker shots, shots out of deep rough, semi rough, long chips, short delicate shots around the green and each time the RTX 6 didn't fail to perform when it came to spin, control, feel and consistency.

One of the main things that stuck out for me was how soft, but solid the impact felt on those small delicate shots around the green. I think over the three-days I put the RTX6 in every conceivable chipping/wedge shot situation and I would highly recommend you get one of these in your hands and find out for yourself. I am sure, like me, you will have a lot of fun.







# BLACK MATH

The Zebra AIT4 answers a question for James Mason,  
but was it in the fingers, or in the brain?



## TECHNOLOGY:

The Zebra AIT 4 has a multi-material construction insert, which gives the putter the soft feel of urethane while keeping the responsiveness of a steel putter and complements the stunning black finish. The putter has been designed to allow weight to be placed to offer forgiveness and performance.

The groove pattern of the insert helps create the friction needed to impart topspin and maximise ground contact, control and

consistency during the ball's initial skidding off the face at impact and this is crucial for controlling the distance of your putts.

An elongated stripe system is utilised, helping players easily align the putter with their target and to work perfectly with this classic heel-toe weighted blade design.

The putter comes with two 15g weights, which can be replaced with lighter or heavier weights to help customise the putter to your requirements.



## CLUB TESTED ▶

**Zebra AIT4**

**SHAFT** KBS Stable-stepped

**LOFT** 3°

**LENGTH** 33"

**WEIGHT** 2x 20 gm

**RRP** £189.99 / €219 / \$219.99

## CONCLUSION:

I am a big fan of heel-toe weighted blade putters and my first impressions when I took the AIT 4 out of the box was how much I loved the black finish. Then putting the putter down to take some imaginary putts I know I couldn't wait to get it out on the course, but I also knew I had to change the weights as the standard 15g weights were too light for me.

Once I had replaced the 15g weights with two 20g weights I was

good to go. Testing was at Heythrop Park, which was a week away from holding a Clutch Tour event, so the undulating subtle green complexes currently running at 11 on the stimp meter were going to be the perfect arena for the AIT 4.

I loved the way the putter sat behind the ball and the alignment stripe system with the grey stripes and the solitary white stripe sitting right behind the sweet spot, helps you set up to your line perfectly.

The feel from the insert and the way the ball came off the face gave me a lot of confidence and the slightly wider design of this classic blade started to come into its own. Putting all comes down to feel and having a putter that you can look down on that inspires confidence. If you are looking for a new putter, I feel the Zebra AIT 4 could be just the answer to that question.





# The ultimate winter outfit



THE SAYING  
"THERE'S NO SUCH  
THING AS BAD  
WEATHER, ONLY BAD  
CLOTHES" HOLDS A  
SPECIAL TRUTH WHEN  
PLAYING GOLF IN THE  
WINTER MONTHS.  
JAMES MASON PUTS  
ABACUS SPORTSWEAR  
AND DUCA DEL  
COSMA GOLF SHOES  
TO THE TEST



# Bobbing along

As winter descends on the northern hemisphere, it's time to get those bobble hats and gloves out. But having the right winter clothing means you can still enjoy and play the game we love. James Mason puts the Abacus sportswear winter range to the test



**KERLING KNITTED HAT**  
**RRP £19.90 €24.90 \$22.90**

## TECHNOLOGY

Abacus state that they make all weather conditions insignificant, regardless of rain, wind, or heat, utilising high-performance, technical golf clothing that combines high quality, functionality and design.

With over 30 years' experience, it was founded by a golfing fanatic who wanted to improve the golfing experience by creating a range of stylish, practical clothing that would work for golfers in all weather conditions.

The company became known for its functional, smart clothing with their attention to detail. With light, stretchy, breathable, and waterproof garments being the focus.

Layering is key in the winter and so is the material that the garments are made from. Materials with high breathability and wicking properties should be next to the skin to ensure that heat and moisture are moved quickly away from the body to help you feel comfortable throughout your round.

The amount a garment stretches is also important to making sure nothing gets in the way of your golf swing. The best technical outer layer will have minimal effect and its benefits will be lost if your base layers have poor wicking properties.





**ALBATROSS POLO**  
RRP £79.90 \$97.90 €79.90



**MONTEREY DRYCOOL POLO**  
RRP £59.90 \$73.90 €79.90



**PIKEWOOD DRYCOOL POLO**  
RRP £54.90 \$67.90 €69.90



**SPIN LONGSLEEVE**  
RRP £37.90 \$46.90 €44.90



**GULLANE WARM MITTEN**  
RRP £29.90 \$36.90 €39.90



**GLENEAGLES THERMO MIDLAYER**  
RRP £99.90 \$122.90 €119.90



**GROVE HYBRID JACKET**  
RRP £129.90 \$159.90 €159.90



**LOOP HOODIE**  
RRP £69.90 \$85.90 €79.90



**GORCE BUCKET HAT**  
RRP £29.90 \$36.90 €34.90



**LINKS WARM WATERPROOF TROUSER**  
RRP £99.99 \$00 €129.90



**DRUIDS WINDVENT TROUSER**  
RRP £99.99 \$00 €129.90

Three polos, three tops, two trousers a bucket hat, a bobble hat and a base layer and mittens that can all be mixed and matched for your ultimate winter outfits

## CONCLUSION

Over the years and obviously as I have got older, there has been a shift from wanting to look good to making sure that I was nice and warm on the golf course in the winter months.

I still think winter golf is fun - although the mixture of cold and rain has never been fun. But a nice crisp morning, with the air nice and fresh, can be as enjoyable as a nice summer's day, if you have the right clothing.

The items I chose to test were a base

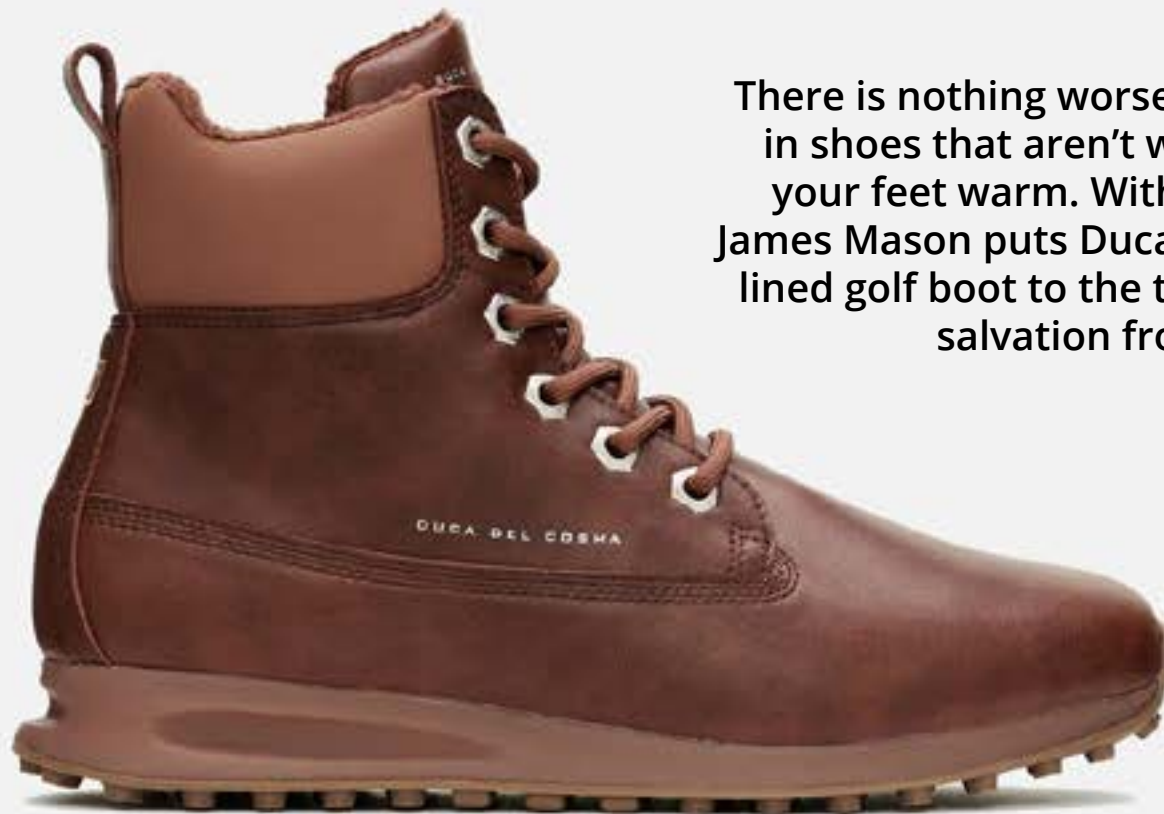
layer, three polo shirts, three tops/jackets, two trousers, a bobble hat, a waterproof bucket hat and a pair of golf mittens.

After testing these garments over the last couple of months I feel this combination would give you the perfect winter outfits. You can obviously choose different colour options and combinations, but the new Abacus autumn/winter range will give you everything you need to enjoy the winter golf season ahead.



# I WALK THE LINING

There is nothing worse than playing golf in winter in shoes that aren't waterproof and don't keep your feet warm. With those thoughts in mind, James Mason puts Duca del Cosma waterproof, fur-lined golf boot to the test and finds out if there is salvation from cold, wet feet





## TECHNOLOGY

The Fontana is a handcrafted waterproof golf boot designed from a soft recyclable material known as onMicro leader microfibre, which is used in the upper part of the boot. The Fontana comes with a high-quality warm fleece lining and a breathable memory foam ARNEFLEX inner sole, which also uses recycled cork.

The heel and toecap are also designed from a recyclable material, with the shoe being finished with a high-quality TR Airplay 9 outer sole.



## CONCLUSION

If you are anything like me, the first thing I worry about when it comes to boots is how stiff are they going to be and how long is it going to take for me to wear them in.

Thankfully I put the Fontana boots on and straight away they felt comfortable with no stiffness, so I decided to drive to the course wearing them. With all the rain and early morning dew the Fontana's waterproof credentials were soon put to the test and I have to say they came through with flying colours. My feet have been warm and dry ever since I have been testing them.

I found the boot comfortable to wear, easy to walk in and the TR Airplay 9 sole, certainly gave me plenty of traction and stability during the golf swing.

This is the second winter boot from Duca del Cosma I have tested, and I have certainly been converted from golf shoes to golf boots for the winter months – and with the added fleece lining, the Fontana will be staying in play until spring arrives next year.

## GOLF SHOES TESTED

Duca del Cosma

The Fontana

£199 / €219 / \$239



## PRO TIP



**PAUL BABBAGE**  
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E: [paul@farleighfox.co.uk](mailto:paul@farleighfox.co.uk)

**SOCIAL MEDIA**  
Instagram: [paulbabbagegolf](https://www.instagram.com/paulbabbagegolf)  
Facebook: [Paul Babbage](https://www.facebook.com/PaulBabbage)

### ALGARVE COACHING TRIP WITH PAUL BABBAGE 2024

#### 4-NIGHT ITINERARY:

**Day 1** - arrive - Welcome dinner  
**Day 2** - 3 hours coaching (driving range & short game), followed by lunch, then 18 holes  
**Day 3** - 3 hours coaching (driving range & short game), followed by lunch, then 18 holes  
**Day 4** - 3 hours coaching (driving range & short game), followed by lunch, then 18 holes and a Farewell dinner in the evening  
**Day 5** - depart

**FULL DETAILS CONTACT:**  
E: [natalie@front9travel.com](mailto:natalie@front9travel.com)  
T: 01342 653093  
W: [front9golf.com](http://front9golf.com)

# ONE DIRECTION

Through the season most golfers would say they want more consistency; one way to look at this is that, in general, direction of the shot is more important than strike. It's no good to pure a shot straight in the woods! An average strike starting at the target will get much better results

The off season can be useful to improve your consistency of direction, delivering the club back to the middle of the ball - on the target line - as often as possible.

A drill you can use for this is setting up a channel to swing through.



**Video watch:** Practice this routine over the winter months and it will not only help with a more consistent shot direction and tighter dispersion, it will also give you more confidence in your golf game come next spring



**Step one:** Take two alignment sticks and aim at the target



**Step two:** Make the gap between the sticks a little wider than the club head. (This can be adjusted narrower to be harder if required)



**Step three:** Place the ball in the middle of the sticks and align feet, shoulders, hips with target line



**Step four:** Take shots without hitting either stick



## PRO TIP



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YouTube: [shainjohnsongolf](https://www.youtube.com/shainjohnsongolf)

# TEMPO TRAP

Golf is tough enough on a bright summer day. When it comes to winter golf, it's a totally different ball game. **Shain Johnson** has a few key tips on what you need to do when it comes to playing winter golf

**Step one:** Always make time to have a good stretch before and after you play, to get the blood flowing. Warm up before your round. 20-30 balls are more than enough. Don't try to hit 100 balls



**Step two:** Wrap up sufficiently. I always keep a rain jacket in the bag; it doubles up as a wind breaker even if it doesn't rain. A beanie to keep the ears warm and hand warmers are a MUST! Check out the ultimate winter outfit reviews on page 52



**Step Three:** Take an extra club. The ball isn't going to fly as far. Tempo! Tempo! Tempo! Whether it's driving, approach shots, chipping or putting. Tempo is the key to any shot in golf. Making good contact is important, we all know that feeling of an off-centre strike in the cold on the hands.

"We all know that feeling of an off-centre strike on the hands on a cold day"



**Video watch:** Control of your golf ball is key in any weather conditions, this practice drill will not only help with control, but will also help give you a solid strike



# LONDON CALLING

Well Kent & Surrey Golf Alliance really, but why let that get in the way of a good headline!

KASGA (Kent & Surrey Golf Alliance) is a charitable golf society with over 70 members. We support the charity CALM who are tackling men's mental health and suicide. [Find out more by clicking here...](#)

We are looking for companies who wish to get involved in sponsoring us, partnering with us or wish to donate prizes for our charity raffles. All money we raise goes to CALM via our JustGiving page. [click this link here](#)

Our final event for 2023 is at

- Princes Golf Club – 1st December 2023

You will be able to find our 2024 calendar of events released on our website shortly and in the April issue of PGR Magazine.

Any support would be appreciated and will help us to raise more money and awareness for this worthy cause.



Website: [kasga.co.uk/#Get-in-touch](https://kasga.co.uk/#Get-in-touch)

Instagram: [@kasga2020](https://www.instagram.com/kasga2020)





60 MARINE TROON



64 HEYTHROP PARK



REVIEW



70 THE BULGARI SPA



VIEW.COM

STAY, PLAY & SPA



## MARINE TROON

Troon, Scotland

By PETER ELLEGARD

# PICTURE THIS

After a multimillion pound refurbishment, **Peter Ellegard** heads to Troon in Scotland and discovers first hand some of the many improvements to this historic hotel and samples the best fish & chips in Scotland at Wee Hurrie while he is there!







Imagine relaxing in a hot tub or sitting on the edge of a spa pool dipping your feet in the water, the 18th green of an Open Championship golf course and the sparkling sea just beyond framed by huge picture windows.

Or sipping cocktails from a patio bar while watching the sun set over the venerable course and its clubhouse, a mere pitching wedge away.

At the Marine Troon I do just that, thanks to its amazing location cheek by jowl with 2024 Open venue Royal Troon.

The 89-room hotel is part of Marine & Lawn Hotels & Resorts, a collection of bespoke hotels alongside iconic golf courses owned and operated by Nashville-based real estate investment company AJ Capital Partners that also includes Rusacks St Andrews, Slieve Donard, adjacent to Royal County Down's fairways, and the newly-opened Dornoch Station a short walk from Royal Dornoch's first tee.

A local landmark since it was built in 1894, the historic property reopened as the five-

star Marine Troon in mid-2022 after a multi-million pound refurbishment. It now provides a luxurious base with championship golf right on its doorstep and plenty more courses to play in the area, as well as the stunning Ayrshire coast and local attractions to discover.

### Rooms

The hotel offers a selection of rooms and suites, some with views over Royal Troon's Old Course and the sea to Lady Isle, Arran and the distant Ailsa Craig. The Classic Double my partner Julie and I are in looks out over a picnic area and the hotel car park then down the course and along the sweep of Ayr Bay to Prestwick and the Heads of Ayr cliffs.

The room is lavishly decorated and, although somewhat bijou, it has a smart TV, coffee machine, minibar and blue leather armchair while the bathroom has a walk-in shower, loo, hairdryer and ornate →marble sink with Floris amenity products. There are robes and slippers



Top left: Room with a view over Royal Troon  
Top right: The Marine Troon's exterior  
Far left: Classic bathroom styling  
Left: Classic Golf View King room





***Light floods into the pool area through the tall windows that give uninterrupted views to Royal Troon's 18th and the sea, achieved by using cleverly-designed exterior buttresses to support the roof***

you can wear to the spa plus a safe in the compact wardrobe.

It's perfectly fine and comfortable for our short stay but there are bigger rooms, some with desks, if you want more space.

### **Restaurants and bar**

The Seal is Marine Troon's bar and is named after the opening hole of Royal Troon's Old Course, which runs parallel to the 18th hole alongside the coastal path and beach.

Sporting a multi-hued décor, it is elegant yet informal and relaxing, inviting guests to sink into the plush sofas and buttoned armchairs or at small tables in comfy upright chairs. At one end is a quieter area with more seating by windows as well as a snooker table with deep purple baize. Food from light snacks to filling mains are available until 10pm and there is live music every Friday night.

The outdoor patio either side of the entrance has table service, just as the main bar does inside. We enjoy an unseasonably warm late March sundowner sitting with a grandstand view of Royal Troon's Old Course and clubhouse with one of the hotel's signature cocktails – Barassie Beach, made with gin, lime, blackberries, mint and soda. A prefect pre-dinner snifter.

Breakfast, dinner and afternoon tea are all served in The Rabbit, across the stone-floored lobby. It is named after the tricky par-3 17th hole at Royal Troon, which it overlooks. The stylish and colourful theme of the bar is continued in here, with seating options from buttoned and wicker chairs to deep blue, high-backed plush bench seats set around tables to form intimate alcoves.

The far end of the restaurant comprises a separate room with large, curved windows where the sun streams in at breakfast time.

The menus are a celebration of Scottish fare, all of it sourced locally. I recommend the hand-made haggis from third-generation Edinburgh family butchers Macween, the Isle of Mull cheddar and, for breakfast, eggs benny to die for.

### **Spa and wellness**

The Spa at Marine Troon has earned plaudits since opening last year, including being named one of Scotland's best spas for 2023 by Conde Nast Traveller. It occupies its own building to the side of the hotel. Light floods into the pool area through the tall windows that give uninterrupted views to Royal Troon's 18th and the sea, achieved by using cleverly-designed exterior buttresses to support the roof.





***Our quest is reputedly some of Scotland's best fish and chips from a tiny takeaway chippy called the Wee Hurrie, right on the harbour, and we savour amazing haddock and chips on a nearby bench watching fishing boats returning with their catch***

The hot tub has its own teardrop-shaped, multi-paned floor to roof window, giving it almost a cathedral-like feel but without the stained glass. We watch the setting sun cast orange tones through the window as we laze in the bubbling tub.

Spa treatments use Ishga seaweed-derived products from Scottish waters made in the Outer Hebrides. A Golfers Deep Tissue Massage is just the job to ease those aching muscles after a gruelling round, with other options including body wraps, hot stone, full-body and back, neck and shoulder massages, reflexology, facials and seaweed pedicures and manicures.

Facilities also include a steam room, sauna, a fitness centre and a squash court.

## Activities

With Royal Troon just a few steps away it would

be rude not to tee up at one or both of its courses. Sadly, my stay is several days before it opens for visitors to play, which is from mid-April to early October. Tee times for the public are available then on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, and if you don't want to shell out £340 for the privilege of playing a round on the revered Old Course, with its famous Postage Stamp par-3 8th, the shorter Portland Course is a more affordable option at £115.

The area is awash with more great golf, on courses including Western Gables, Prestwick, Dundonald Links, Barassie and Trump Turnberry's Ailsa.

The concierge team can arrange tee times at nearby courses and transportation. Hotel guests enjoy free golf bag storage and there are sets of Titleist clubs to borrow if they don't have theirs with them.

The hotel also has its own all-weather putting green, which I practise on under the gaze of daffodils swaying in the breeze.

You can't stay at the Marine Troon without exploring Troon. We stroll past Royal Troon's clubhouse and along Troon Beach to the charming seaside town for coffee and a browse in its shops then along the coastal path to end of the peninsula.

Our quest is reputedly some of Scotland's best fish and chips from a tiny takeaway chippy called the Wee Hurrie, right on the harbour, and we savour amazing haddock and chips on a nearby bench watching fishing boats returning with their catch. On our walk back to the hotel we take a ride on Troon's towering Ferris wheel, opened in 2022, for a bird's-eye panorama of the town and coast, followed by an ice cream.

Beyond Troon, other places to visit in the area

include the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum in Alloway and Culzean Castle in Maybole.

## Conclusion

From the moment you arrive at the Marine Troon the friendly staff, most of whom were kept on after the hotel reopened, bend over backwards to make you feel welcome. It genuinely is a cosy home from home, with the added benefit of being next to bucket-list golf in a glorious part of Scotland.

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Top left to right:  
Various views of  
the Marine Troon's  
interior; Troon chippy  
the Wee Hurrie; and  
the Robert Burns  
Birthplace Museum in  
Alloway





## HEYTHROP PARK

Chipping Norton, England

By Bernadette Kennedy and JAMES MASON

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# TO THE MANOR BORN

With history and elegance oozing from every room of the Heythrop Park manor house, **Bernadette Kennedy** and **James Mason** spend three days sampling the vibes of the nightly entertainment, gastronomy, wellness centre, golf course and cocktail mixing classes!



***As I walk inside, I can feel the history of the building just seeping through and I am struck by the amazing stone work and I can't wait to check in and explore every inch of the manor house and its grounds***

Driving up to Heythrop Park in the Cotswolds feels surreal. It's like I'm driving into a Bridgeton story tale, surrounded by peaceful green landscape. We pull into the grounds of the historic grand manor house, where Charles Talbot the Duke of Shrewsbury and Countess Adelhida Paheleotti lived in the 1700s. They wanted to build a grand palace at Heythrop in an Italian baroque style and hired architect Thomas Archer to make their dream a reality, with William and Francis Smith of Warwick finishing most of the work on the house.

When Talbot died the manor house was passed on to successive Earls of Shrewsbury, before fire gutted the building. It sat as an empty shell until railway engineer Thomas Brassey handed the keys to his son Albert as a wedding gift.

Albert hired notable gothic revivalist Alfred Waterhouse to lead the redesign. Over the years the manor house has been used as a Jesuit college, a training and conference centre, then as a hotel. In 2018, Bourne Leisure took over the hotel and estate under their Warner Hotels brand and set out a refurbishment programme while respecting the manor house's heritage.

As I walk inside, I can feel the history of the building just seeping through and I am struck by the amazing stone work and I can't wait to check in and explore every inch of the manor house and its grounds.

But first we have an afternoon tea waiting for us. The reception staff take our bags and say they will put them in our rooms and give us our keys once we have finished. We head to Brasserie32

where afternoon tea is being served and we are shown to a table that looks out onto the grounds and its wonderful gardens. I am torn between exploring and the four-tiered silver sandwich and cake stand that has just been placed in the middle of the table full of goodies with my earl grey tea, and the food wins, for now!

### **Rooms**

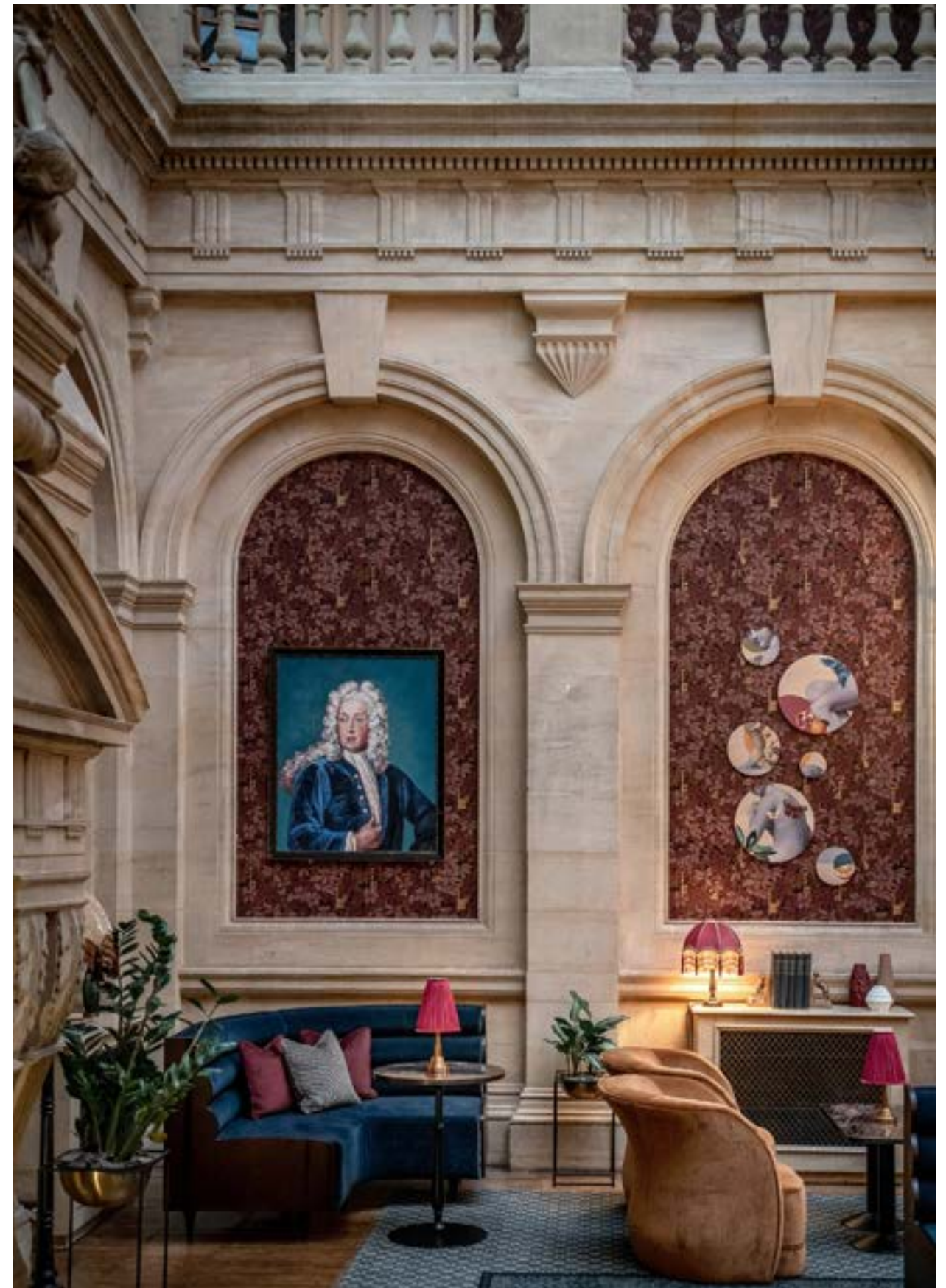
As promised the receptionist had our keys waiting as we left the restaurant. Making my way to my room I notice a subtle change in style moving from the manor house to the wings. As I enter my room it has a warm and cosy feeling with a modern twist and contemporary comforts.

Entering the bathroom I am struck by the amount of room there is: a deep soaker tub to my left, a walk in shower in front of me and to my delight a make-up ring that sits inside the large mirror above the sink that lights up, and still plenty of room to do some early morning yoga stretches.

Another added bonus is the dressing table which also has another huge mirror with light mirror ring. For those who don't know, this is every girl's dream, to have a place you can get ready with different light settings to make sure your make up and hair are perfect.

And now to explore the manor house. Making my way round I find many hidden gems around the manor house; there are a range of different rooms, lounges and bars.

Serene peaceful rooms were you can soak up the scenery, historic rooms and libraries →





with a range of art and antiques, high ceilings and stone fire places. Lounges where you can cosy up with a book or soak up some history. At Heythrop Park you will never be lost for some space to yourself. There is also a games room where you can play pool.

**Restaurants**

Apart from afternoon tea you can have a buffet lunch, or if you fancy a county pub feel they have that, too. You really are spoilt for choice. The Market Kitchen restaurant has a range of British classics and global favourites served in a buffet style.

The Travelling Duke is a fine gastro pub that serves local specialities and familiar cuisines and during the summer months, there’s a wonderful terrace to sit outside and soak up the gardens and greenery while enjoying your meal.

Brasserie32, where we are dining again tonight, offers à la carte dining and table service. For starters, I have gone for the classic prawn cocktail while James has opted for the creamy garlic mushrooms, which we are both impressed with. For the mains, we have both gone for the steak and fries, which arrive cooked perfectly.

We are now heading off to the theatre as there is a band playing tonight. As we enter I am taken aback at how big the theatre is and, to be honest, how good the entertainment is. And I love the small table next to our very comfortable chairs to place our drinks and any snacks.

**Entertainment and facilities**

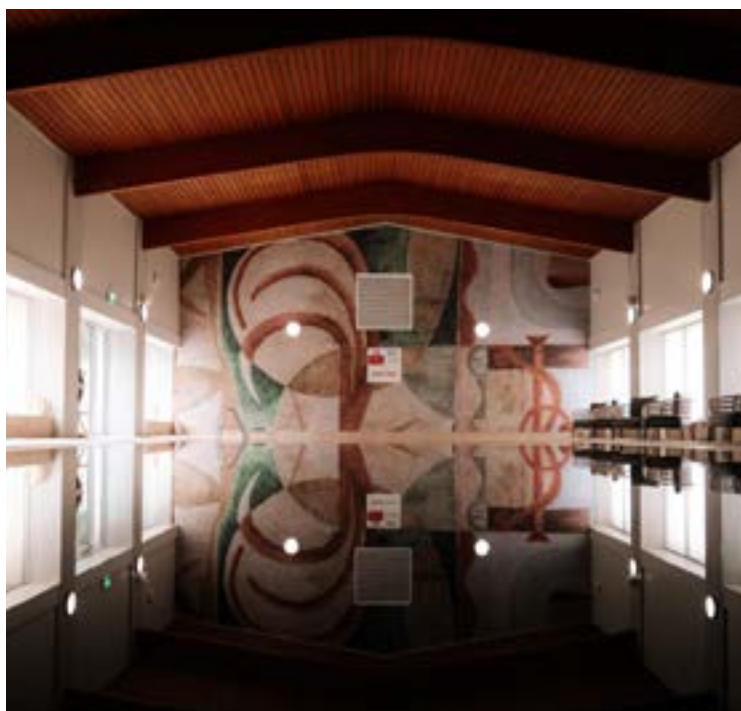
As the show finishes there is an announcement that there will be a silent disco. Now I have always wanted to go to one of these. On entering, I couldn’t help but laugh as you couldn’t hear the music people were dancing it seemed to different tunes and singing badly, but you could see all were having a great time.

We are each handed a pair of headphones and told that there are two different channels – now I understand the bad dancing and singing of different lyrics! But it is headphones on and we hit the dance floor. We are dancing, singing and having a great time and then suddenly an announcement comes that it is the last tune is being played. The night has gone so quickly, but I head off to bed with a smile on my face after what has been an amazing day. →



Left and above:  
Various views of the  
hotel, rooms, Market  
Garden restaurant,  
theatre and bar





There's a range of activities on hand for you to enjoy. Archery, clay shooting, gin tasting, a cocktail making/tasting class which I would highly recommend as it was a lot of fun, tea tasting, rifle shooting, T golf and, of course golf and you can read James's review of the golf course which follows this review.

## Spa and Wellness

I couldn't wait to just chill out in the spa and wellness centre, with its outdoor hot tubs, Jacuzzi, indoor swimming pool, steam and sauna rooms, and a beauty parlour for those wanting manicures and pedicures.

After spending some time in the hot tubs, sauna and steam rooms I am heading to the treatment rooms for my bespoke back and face massage treatment. As I lay on the treatment table I can already feel my body relaxing with the music and ambiance of the room, but when the masseuse starts to do her work my body starts to sing like a choir. I slowly fall in and out of sleep and all too soon she is telling me to take my time and relax and when I am ready, head to the relaxation room.

I enjoyed the treatment so much I am looking at the menu to book another treatment tomorrow morning before I head home, as one of the other guests recommended the "Energy Booster Treatment." Not only do they give you your treatment, but they also give you tips on how you can loosen up your muscles if you find yourself feeling tense.

## Conclusion

It has been a wonderful couple of days, starting off with afternoon tea to having my whole body sing in the wellness centre via wonderful food, music, silent discos, and lots of alcohol – all in a beautiful manor house that just oozes history. No matter how many nights you book to stay at Heythrop Park, I know you will already be looking forward to your next visit.

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Right and below:  
Various views of the  
hotel, reception,  
drawing room, suites  
and gardens





Far left: The 4th green with out of bounds wall

Left top: Tee shot at the par 4, 5th hole

Left: Carry yardages to the fairway at the 5th  
Below: Looking back up the fairway to the manor house on the par 5, 11th hole

### BAINBRIDGE COURSE

I am standing on the first tee of the Bainbridge course at Heythrop Park and it's only a few days before the Clutch Tour hold one of their events here. Looking down the fairway from this tee box, it's nearly 70 yards to the men's white tees from these black tees and weighs in at 470 yards with trees on the left and right side of the fairway right in the landing zone. It's a tough opening hole and I have a feeling a lot of competitors will be starting their rounds with a bogey. Fortunately, there are a further four teeing options that start at 404 yards from the whites down to 337 yards from the blues, so I would choose the teeing option that helps you enjoy your game, not one that will chew you up and spit you out.

The 2nd takes it down a notch with

a downhill par 3, measuring 184 to 124 yards and I am really enjoying the subtlety of the green complexes and the speed of the greens. I know they are going to be quicker for the tournament, but they are already at a really nice pace and that is with all the rain we have had recently.

The first par 5 arrives at the 4th and has a wall running all the way along the right-hand side that is out of bounds, but there is plenty of room down the left. Going for the green here is all risk and reward as there are three very deep bunkers short that you need to carry, with the green sloping left to right and OB lurking very close to the right-hand side. It's a brave player that decides to take that all on, especially from the black tees.

There's a nice little touch at the par 4, dogleg right 5th hole, with a stone →





Right: The mesmerising view down the 18th  
 Far right: The 6th green with the river behind  
 Right bottom: Elevated tee at the par 3, 13th



showing the carry yardages to the fairway which go from 245 yards from the black tees to 128 yards from the blue tees.

Standing on the 6th tee and yes I am only six holes in, but I have a feeling that this will be the hole that everyone will remember. From this elevated tee I am looking over the river to the fairway that then doglegs left to the green that sits right next to the river. And while the green is protected by a crop of tall pine trees, I am wondering at 313 yards from the black tees, how many players will have a crack at going for the green next week!

The front nine comes to a close with the second par 3 and the 10th brings you to the rear of the manor house, where the par 5, 11th tee sits and you play a dogleg left to a downhill fairway. It is not until I reach my ball and then look back up the fairway, that I'm struck by the amazing view that the back of the manor house

offers; it really is a spectacular view. No matter how long of a hitter you are, the 11th is a three-shot par 5, at 572 yards from the black tee and water short of the green, which is accessed by a very narrow gap as it is protected by trees. It really is a wonderfully designed golf hole.

The first of the par 3s on the back nine arrives at the 13th and measures 185 to 145 yards. Playing from a slightly elevated tee, over a creek and lots of stone work and shrubs protecting the front of the green and marked with red stakes, with the green laying across you, it's another well designed golf hole. The second par 3 on this nine arrives at the 15th and comes after the par 5 14th that basically horseshoes around a forest of trees. Standing on the tee, I am debating with myself as to which is the best par 3 on this nine, but they are both well designed holes.

Walking from the 17th green to the

18th tee I stop and am just mesmerised by two things: firstly the stunning view of the front of the manor house that sits in the distance behind the 18th green, and then by how straight the hole is. This must be the straightest hole in golf, as it's arrow straight, played down an avenue of trees. It is not until later that I learn from the pro that if you look in the opposite direction from the 18th tee, you can see the church spire and there used to be a road that led from the front of the manor house straight down to the church.

The course, as you can image with the tournament next week, is in wonderful condition and I loved putting on these greens with all their many subtle and not so subtle breaks and complexes. It is a wonderful design and I know you will enjoy testing your skills here and like me, I can't wait to get back out there tomorrow, but this time off the white tees!

***Walking from the 17th green to the 18th tee I stop and am just mesmerised by two things: firstly the stunning view of the front of the manor house that sits in the distance behind the 18th green, and then by how straight the hole is. This must be the straightest hole in golf***





# THE BULGARI SPA

London, England

By IESHA HINDS

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## PRIORITISE PLEASURE

The height of the pandemic was a period of self-reflection for many including **Iesha Hinds**, who has now overcome her anxiety to massages and heads to The Bulgari Spa for their Spa and Brunch experience







Top: Gym facilities if you fancy a workout  
Right: Some of the brunch sweet treats  
Far right: The 25-metre swimming pool



The height of the pandemic was a period of self-reflection for many, including me. Fortunate enough to have the flexibility to work from home, achieving a better work life balance and investing in my well-being quickly became a focus of mine. While the exercise and improved diet came relatively easy, I had to overcome my anxiety over massages, which I soon discovered was quite common. The professionalism and service from the spas I had hand-picked played a big part in getting me through any discomfort I may have felt. My friends and I soon settled on incorporating semi-regular, luxury spa day experiences to our routines to help with detoxification, stress reduction, relaxation and general maintenance.

### The Spa and Brunch experience at The Bulgari Spa London

While London offers a plethora of luxury/rejuvenating spa options, my fashion background and this spa's rank in reputable publications, led me to "settle" for The Bulgari Spa London, which is situated in the heart of

Knightsbridge.

The group opted for the 'Spa and Brunch' package which included;

- Morning access to The Bulgari Spa London, including a 25-metre swimming pool and gold leaf tiled vitality pool
- One 90-minute KLORIS Stress Melting Ritual treatment; and
- The Good Life Brunch in Sette, with three courses and live music.

We start the day with a 90-minute massage which includes a 100% organic CBD balm, aromatherapy and a hot stone massage. After our various treatments the remainder of all new, full-sized KLORIS products used during our sessions were offered to us to take home which not only eased my hygiene concerns but also as I found out later, is pretty much unheard of — a true USP! The Bulgari Spa also catered to my pregnant friend by using CBD-free products and specific massage techniques which best suited her needs.

The treatments are followed up with the offering of robes, a fruit





Top row left to right: Vitality pool, treatment room and ice shower.  
Bottom row left to right: Sette bar, Sette restaurant and Ulgari VI balcony at night



platter and beverages at a private lounge area before being shown to the spa's main area. The Good Life Brunch, situated near the award-winning Edward Sahakian cigar shop and sampling lounge had a range of options for different tastes which I later learned to appreciate as more often than not afternoon tea is on offer exclusively as part of similar packages. Overall, the contemporary interiors, wooden poolside cabanas, thermal facilities and attentive staff made for a memorable experience that I plan on replicating soon.

### Choose the spa that suits you

It's hard to get everything you want from any one experience, so it's important that you choose something based on your priorities. Initially my main focus was to have the best facilities and experienced staff given my level of comfortability with certain treatments. I later prioritised the types of treatments I was looking for. You can find your ideal spa getaway by calling around, taking a tour and/or scrolling through

Instagram (as I find Google reviews to be hit and miss). Also, consider joining a premium gym which will have similar facilities, allowing you to maintain upkeep easily.

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