

Golf Escapes

# Exploring Portugal

The Lisbon area of Portugal is seeing more holidaymakers than ever before travel with their golf clubs in tow so we sent our intrepid golf travel writer David J Whyte to find out what all the fuss is about

— Photos DAVID J WHYTE/SUPPLIED

**T**HE ALGARVE has been Portugal's 'go to' golf destination for decades but travellers are increasingly turning their focus north towards the capital city of Lisbon.

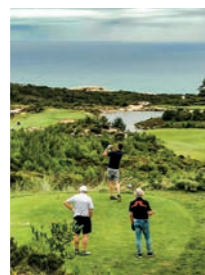
David McLay Kidd, the Scots architect, is putting the finishing touches to Terras da Comporta Dunas while Sergio and José María Olazábal are firming up plans on a neighbouring site called Terras da Comporta Torre. Add to that the already existing stupendous natural links at Troia and the city of Lisbon is suddenly becoming a pivotal point for top-class golf travels.

### BUSMAN'S HOLIDAY

It's a bit of a busman's holiday for me going to mainland Portugal having moved to the Portuguese island of Madeira several years ago but I'm always happy for an excuse to cross to the mainland. In and around Lisbon is surely one of Europe's richest, coolest, most colourful cultures.

### ÓBIDOS

An hour's drive north from the capital is the village of Óbidos with a fistful of excellent links courses close at hand. The two outstanding examples are Praia D'El Rey and West Cliffs. Let's start with the latter.



### BOOK IT PLAY IT!

#### GREEN FEES

(both courses)

**2022:**

From €54 per person

**2023:**

From €62.40 per person

#### STAY-AND-PLAY PACKAGES

**2022**

Four nights' BB hotel accommodation and

three rounds of golf

(on any course) from

**€419.30pp**

Seven nights' BB hotel accommodation and five

rounds of golf (on any course) from

**€690.50pp**

**2023**

Four nights' BB hotel accommodation and

three rounds of golf

(on any course) from

**€364pp**

Seven nights' BB hotel accommodation and five

rounds of golf (on any course) from

**€598pp**

To book, go to

[praia-del-rey.com](http://praia-del-rey.com) or

[westcliffs.com](http://westcliffs.com) (all prices

based on two people

sharing a twin/double

room).

West Cliffs is the newest course in this part of the country. Designed by Cynthia Dye (Pete's niece) and draped over a rolling piece of linksland, it is a much more complex design than any of its near neighbours which, for the most part, works well. The overriding impression is how sympathetically this course has been laced through the indigenous terrain.

I played West Cliffs in 2018 not long after it opened and left impressed, so a second visit was eagerly anticipated. It's not an easy track by any means but the secret to West Cliffs is course management. Big hitters run the risk of over-driving and disappearing into the thick, herbal hazards on numerous occasions. Your 3-wood or even long irons are often better bets off the tees.

Having said that, it can be deceptive. Holes like the tenth offer much more room than you see. The greens, by the way, are often raised, soft and slow (when we played) but if they were any quicker they would be pretty much impossible.

There's plenty to think about on almost every hole at West Cliffs and I've never seen a



Hole No.6 at West Cliffs

course that benefits more from the application of a Strokesaver. At the same time, it's also one of the most visually appealing courses in Europe. We're talking arching, inventive fairways and perfectly presented greens blended into a natural links landscape. It's simply divine.

**PRAIA D'EL REY MARRIOTT GOLF & BEACH RESORT**

I'd stayed at the Praia D'El Rey Marriott Golf & Beach Resort when West Cliffs first opened. It's had a major site-wide facelift since then and they've done an excellent job. The hotel is chic, quiet and comfortable with

give it a go. The fishing village of Peniche is only minutes from the Praia D'El Rey Marriott and they organised a lesson for some of us more intrepid journos.

A two-hour training session is only €35 with transport. They pick you up at the hotel, squeeze you into a wet suit, set you up with a surfboard, and give you a few pointers on the sand. Before you know it, you are 'hanging ten on a big one'!

I really don't even know what that means so, as you can imagine, it was all a bit of a shambles. For me, standing up as I rode the waves was all but impossible and my

of pine trees, particularly on the front nine, to add variety. There are a couple of weaker, 'filler' holes and two very short par-5s worth going at. Generally, the back nine is the stronger with the 17th and 18th especially good.

Praia D'El Rey opened in 1997, which is a while back now and I would say it's showing its age but it's actually ideal for its main clientele: older Brits who love its linky appeal and diversity of holes. The hotel and courses get busy especially through the months of March and April when it's almost fully booked so think ahead. I imagine the pace of play could be a bit sluggish!

**"My sympathetic surfing instructors consoled me by saying it's 'easier with bigger waves'. I ducked and dived, paddled and plunged and the next day was sore all over with bruises in places I'd never been bruised before. But it was worth every tumble and spill!"**

excellent food and service and particularly pleasant bedrooms, so what's not to like?

**SURF AND TURF**

This part of Portugal's 'Silver Coast' - the name given to the sandy stretch from Lisbon all the way north to Porto - is famous for surfing. So, like a fool, I decided to



sympathetic instructors consoled me by saying it's easier with bigger waves. I ducked and dived, paddled and plunged and the next day was sore all over with bruises in places I'd never been bruised before.

But believe me, it was worth every tumble and spill!

**PRAIA D'EL REY GOLF**

Praia D'El Rey is a fun course! If it was windy, as I'm sure it often is, it would show its teeth. But apart from a bit of rain on the back nine, we found it relatively benign. If you want more of a test, the best advice is to take it on from the back tees. Overall, it's a great meeting place of sun, sand and sea. The Atlantic is always in view on the coastal stretches and there are thick groves

**MEDIEVAL VILLAGE**

If the opportunity arises, make sure to visit the nearby village of Óbidos with its medieval castle and picturesque streets.

The most popular local dish here is bouillabaisse made from fish from the Óbidos Lagoon. The wines of the 'Oeste' region go particularly well. Another tasty attraction is the famous Ginjinha de Óbidos (sour cherry brandy), usually quaffed from a small chocolate cup.

Nearby is Royal Óbidos Golf Club, a venue designed by Seve Ballesteros not long before he died. It is laid out over much hillier terrain than the coastal courses. Lengthy and more open with a few tricky water hazards, it could well be worth adding to your itinerary.



Clockwise from top: The view from the second fairway of the 13th green at Praia D'El Rey; the tenth green at West Cliffs; the fourth green at Praia D'El Rey; our man David J Whyte having a blast on tour in and around the Lisbon area of Portugal