

TRAVEL We recommend...

Our favourite places

Women & Golf team members have selected some golf holiday destinations they relish and offer readers first-hand tips to ensure successful trips to Portugal, Mallorca, France and Spain

Portugal with Jane Carter

With almost 3,000 hours of sun annually, more than 50 golf courses – and more being built – it's not hard to understand why Portugal remains Europe's leading golf destination.

Getting there is easy. Regular flights with the low cost and charter companies, from throughout the UK, fly to Faro International and from there it's less than 40 minutes drive to the Central Algarve.

Here you will find the old favourites – Vale de Lobo, Vilamoura and Quinta do Lago, San Lorenzo. But young pretenders have been springing up. The eastern coast towards Spain is also starting to make a name for itself on the golf front with Monte Rei the latest resort to open up.

Accommodation is in abundance, everything from apartments to town houses to villas, to bed and breakfast, right through to five star hotels. Golf and spa is the new buzz in Portugal and most of the top resorts now offer fantastic facilities for the woman golfer after a tiring 18 holes!

Prices for golf, and eating and drinking out are comparable with the UK but the quality of both is excellent.

Why is the Algarve your favourite golf destination?

I have been going there for many years and you can't beat it for a quick week's golf in the sun. It's only a 2.5 hour flight – and they are easy to get on most of the low cost airlines. It's not as crowded or commercial as the Costa del Sol and because I know it so well I don't waste two days of the week just finding my bearings.

Where do you like to stay?

My favourite resort is the Pine Cliffs Residence at the Sheraton Algarve (www.sheraton.com). I love the fact that you can have all the luxury of a five star resort but you can stay in one of their luxury villas so you get the best of both worlds. We like to enjoy breakfast in the hotel, you can step straight onto a good nine hole golf course and there are others within 20 minutes. At night you can choose to dine in their restaurants, locally or just in your own villa.

Which golf courses do you like?

There are over 30 great golf courses on the Algarve and they are better maintained than most. My favourite is San Lorenzo. It really is a wonderful test of golf without being too harsh, with fine scenery. It's not cheap though and visitors can only book

24 hours in advance. Best rates are if you stay at the Dona Filipa or Peniza Floch.

Where do you like to eat or drink?

If we stay at the Pine Cliffs then the Akkar Moroccan restaurant is fabulous for something different. Otherwise you can't beat a steak whipped up by my partner in our villa kitchen with a bottle of red wine!

If you are playing golf at San Lorenzo, then a meal on the beach restaurant attached to the Quinta do Lago hotel is well worth it (great fish) – but it's pricey.

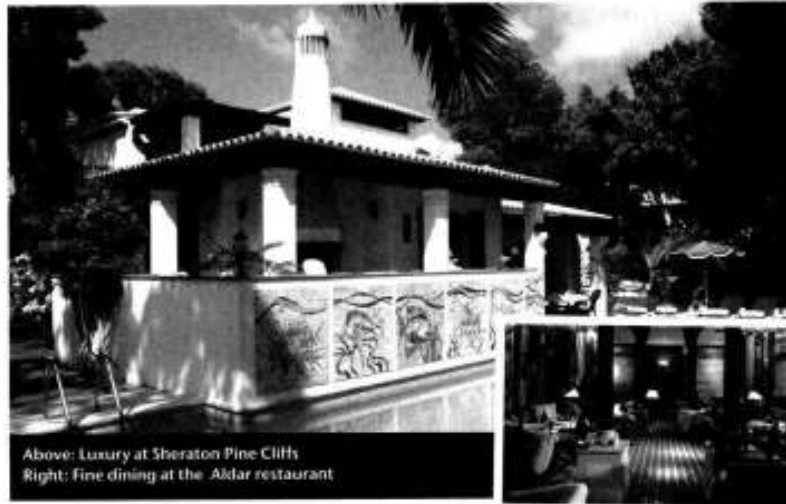
What are the best tourist attractions?

I would recommend a visit to Monchique to anyone visiting for the first time. A traditional Portuguese village on a hillside with some spectacular scenery. Faro is also worth a visit for the old part of the capital and also the shopping!

Any tips?

The courses can be quite fussy about handicap certificates. The courses get really busy with big groups over the peak November to March period. We like to go in early June when it's not baking hot and the courses are less frenetic.





Above: Luxury at Sheraton Pine Cliffs
Right: Fine dining at the Akdar restaurant

Mallorca with Alison Root

Mallorca, or Majorca as it is sometimes spelled, is the largest of the Balearic Islands, just off the south-west coast of Spain.

It attracts mass tourism, especially to its beach resorts, but there is much more to this island than sun and sangria.

The landscape is beautiful and is split into three main regions of mountains, plains and hills, so it's easy to escape the hustle and bustle of the coastline.

There are currently 18 golf courses with 10 more planned, three of which are already under construction and this is clearly an indication of how golf is developing and playing a significant part in the burgeoning local economy. All the courses are enjoyable, challenging and in good condition, and as courses in the Costa del Sol and Algarve become overcrowded and overplayed, it appears golfers are heading to Mallorca for a change of scenery.

There are several stylish areas, excluding Magaluf. Even the rich and famous have recognised the appeal of the island; Michael Douglas has owned a property in Deià, north of the island, for many years, and so does Claudia Schiffer.

Mallorca offers tourists a variety of accommodation that will suit all tastes and budget. Eating out is reasonable and a supermarket shop will leave less of a dent in your purse.

Why is Mallorca your favourite golf destination?

Mallorca has a bit of everything, golf, beaches, good restaurants, and nightlife if you want it. The sun shines almost all year round and there is an easygoing atmosphere. It's a short flight from the UK, just less than two hours, with low cost airlines operating regularly into Palma airport.

Where do you like to stay?

I'm fortunate as my friend owns a villa opposite Santa Ponsa 1 golf course, but I can recommend the Hotel Golf Santa Ponsa, that incorporates the golf clubhouse including pro shop and changing rooms on the lower ground floor. It only has 12 bedrooms, but this four star hotel is extremely friendly and includes an outdoor pool and terrace to enjoy the 19th hole! Residents receive a 50% discount on green fees and the hotel also offers very good package rates. Santa

Ponsa is a great base as there are several other golf courses in the proximity.

Which golf courses do you like?

Santa Ponsa 1 is a championship golf course, where photos of Seve Ballesteros adorn the clubhouse from when he won the Balearic Open, an event hosted here seven times. It's a long course, but enjoyable nevertheless, with generous fairways and several doglegs.

Bendinat is a hilly golf course in an extensive wooded valley. There are some fantastic elevated tees allowing great views over the hillside and down to the bay of Palma. I definitely recommend a buggy.

Where do you like to eat or drink?

Meson del Mar in Santa Ponsa overlooks the bay and serves a variety of good food. Flamagan's in upmarket Puerto Portals is worth a visit, a good place to eat and people-watch, although drinks are expensive. Enjoy roast suckling pig, a local

speciality, at Can Pedro in Genoa. Abaco cocktail bar in Palma old town is worth a visit just to see the interesting décor.

What are the best tourist attractions?

If time permits, spend a day in Palma, a sophisticated city where the old town fans out from its cathedral and is a maze of narrow streets. Good shopping too. If you like pearls, visit Mallorca's largest pearl factory in Manacor.

Any tips?

Book tee times in advance, especially in high season (October-March) and do take a handicap certificate. If hiring a car, when you arrive at Palma airport, don't proceed through customs, as hire car companies are situated in the arrivals area. Go straight to the hire car desk if someone can wait to collect your baggage as this will save a lot of time.



Bendinat's golf course is set among rolling hills