



Above The Mirador Bar offers spectacular views over the Atlantic Right The beautiful Praia da Falésia beach

Pining for luxury

One of the most famous five-star resorts in the central Algarve, Pine Cliffs attracts many celebrity guests, as well as couples and families looking to get away from it all. Sarah Seamarks finds out why it's so appealing...

After years of believing I was left-handed, it was a bit of a shock when I was told I was, in fact, right-handed. Well, at least when I'm playing golf I am, and when Portugal's number-one female professional golfer is telling you this, you don't argue!

Monia Bernardo is one of two golf instructors at the Pine Cliffs resort in Albufeira, and she certainly knows her stuff. I'd never actually had a professional golf lesson in my life. Apart from a few attempts at helplessly whacking a ball around a pitch-and-putt course, much to the amusement of anyone in the vicinity, and the obligatory round of crazy golf on visits to the seaside, my golfing skills were pretty non-existent. However, just an hour with Monia on the driving range proved she can improve anyone's game considerably – even mine!

Devil of a hole

Most of my companions were more experienced golfers and after their lesson admitted they would never play golf in the same way again. They were keen to get out on the nine-hole course and put their newly acquired skills into practice. The Pine Cliffs Golf Course is in a breathtaking position, built in a pine wood, at

the edge of spectacular cliffs and overlooking the beaches of the Algarve and the Atlantic beyond. Although it's only nine holes, the course is a challenge and is famous for one particular hole – the sixth, or as it's more familiarly known, 'The Devil's Parlour'. It requires a particularly awkward shot between two cliff-tops to get your ball onto the green. It takes real skill and, as you can imagine, many balls don't make it across the cliffs, instead falling down the gap onto the beach below.

The general manager of the resort, Flavio Bucciarelli, enjoys regaling guests with a funny story about where these lost golf balls end up. Apparently, a local man who walks his dog along the beach every day has been collecting the stray golf balls ever since the course was first opened back in 1991. He now has a collection of over 12,000 in his garage, all of which are arranged in order of colour and manufacturer.

Flavio found out about this man's bizarre collection when he was down on the beach one day. The man started chatting to him and offered him some free golf balls. You can imagine his embarrassment when Flavio introduced himself as the manager of the resort and announced that the golf balls were, effectively, his property!

"The golden sand and impressive red cliffs blend harmoniously into the natural surroundings..."

Peaceful paradise

I'm usually the sort of person who likes to explore an area when I'm on holiday, embracing the local culture. As such, I've always wondered how people can spend a week or two at a resort, sometimes without ever leaving it. Although Pine Cliffs is in the heart of the central Algarve, and has a wealth of gorgeous beaches and attractions on its doorstep, the resort claims that most of the guests rarely leave this peaceful paradise. So is there really enough here to keep people completely happy for a week or two? Even those who don't want to play golf? Well, it would appear so.

As well as golf, there's also a tennis academy where I experienced my first tennis lesson since my school days, led by resort's resident tennis coach, Nuno Da Silva. He's very easy-going, no matter how appalling you might be! He teaches

children and families as well as individuals, so he's used to players of all abilities. I'm not a huge fan of tennis but thought I would give it a go anyway, so he really had his work cut out with me. He managed to remain calm at all times, even when I managed to hit the ball right out of the court and over a nearby fence... In fact, no-one seems to get too stressed here, but then how could you in such a relaxing environment?

Pine Cliffs is a haven for the middle classes – it's where they come to get away from their stressful careers and take a break with their families. The children are well behaved. Little girls wear pretty dresses and ribbons in their hair, and the boys walk around with immaculately pressed shirts and tailored shorts. You're unlikely to hear any screaming or tantrums here – these children seem to know their manners and could be taken anywhere without worry.

There's plenty to keep them occupied as well. Porto Pirata is a supervised village at the resort created especially for youngsters, and it includes two wooden pirate ships, a basketball court, children's pool, bouncy castle, bike track and mini-golf course. Daily activities are also organised, such as football and archery.

For those who like swimming, the resort has no fewer than six pools. Whether you want outdoor, indoor, heated, unheated or kidney-shaped, you'll find that every option is covered! There are also two health clubs and a beauty centre. Treatments on offer include aromatherapy, massage, reflexology, slimming treatments, manicures and pedicures. However, be warned. When you come here the price is for accommodation only. Everything else is extra, and the average spend per person per day is around £70.



Above Just one of the resort's six swimming pools

The jewel in the crown of this resort is the Praia da Falésia beach, where the golden sand and impressive red cliffs blend harmoniously into the natural surroundings. You don't need to worry about having to venture down the cliffs to get there either – simply ride down in the impressive glass elevator, taking in the fantastic views as you descend to the sand. >>

Pine Cliffs is in a unique position, being so close to the sea. Due to new planning regulations, developments can no longer be built this near the coast, so it remains one of the most popular five-star luxury resorts in the whole Algarve region.

Luxury lifestyle

Just as families come here to get away from it all, so do celebrities, and recent guests have included Victoria Beckham and Portuguese footballer Luís Figo. However, thanks to the standard of service you receive at this resort, everyone is treated like a celebrity.

The centrepiece of Pine Cliffs is the Sheraton Algarve Hotel, which has a range of rooms and suites, while you can buy into the luxury lifestyle by owning or part-owning an apartment or villa. Prices start from just €30,000 if you take advantage of the fractional ownership scheme.

As you can imagine, the food here is also first-class and there are no less than 11 restaurants to choose from, and all of them are very different. O Pescador is considered to be one of the best seafood restaurants in the Algarve, where the fresh seafood is cooked outside on a barbecue. You simply go up to the counter and choose your fish and the chefs will cook it for you. The *camarões* (prawns) I tried here were the size of lobsters and absolutely delicious, and the barbecued seabass melted in my mouth. Other signature dishes include steamed Atlantic crab and the *cataplana*, a traditional dish from the Algarve, made with seafood and rice.



The latest addition to the culinary experience at the resort is the Amo.te Pine Cliffs Sushi Club, which is a stylish and trendy venue with various indoor and outdoor seating areas beneath the pine trees. I did think a Japanese restaurant might be a bit out of place here in the central Algarve, but as the sushi is prepared from the fresh fish that has just been caught in the Atlantic below, it makes perfect sense.

Essentials PINE CLIFFS RESORT

GETTING THERE

Budget airline Monarch flies to Faro from Birmingham, London Gatwick, London Luton and Manchester. Fares, including taxes, start from £41.50 one way (£72.99 return) and include complimentary daily newspapers and a refreshing hot towel service.
 ✉ Visit: www.flymonarch.com
 ✉ Call: 08700 40 63 00

GOLF

You can learn golf in a week at the resort for €349 per person in a group of six students maximum. Specially designed for beginners, the course includes 13 hours of tuition, unlimited golf balls during lessons, equipment, evaluation notes and tuition folder, tips and drills, and green fees. More experienced golfers might want to improve their skills with a Bronze, Silver or Gold

package. Prices vary from €149 to €599 per person.
 ✉ Visit: www.luxurycollection.com/golfalgarve

TENNIS

Tennis lessons at the resort are offered for individuals and groups of two, three or four adults. Prices start from €26 per person per hour. Prices for children's lessons start from €24 per child per hour.
 ✉ Visit: www.luxurycollection.com/algarve

ACCOMMODATION

The latest phase of apartments to be built at the resort is the Pine Cliffs Residence. If you want to buy into this luxury lifestyle, freehold investment opportunities start from €710,000 for a two-bedroom apartment and €995,000 for three bedrooms. You can rent the

apartments out when you aren't using them, with a guaranteed return on investment, and they're serviced by the hotel.
 ✉ Call: +351 289 500 369
 ✉ Visit: www.pinecliffsresidence.com

HOLIDAY RENTALS

Prices at the new apartments start from €240 (low season) and €440 (high season) per apartment per night, based on a two-bedroom apartment including breakfast and all taxes.
 ✉ Call: +351 289 500 100 or 0800 325 45454
 ✉ Visit: www.luxurycollection.com/pinecliffsresidence

MORE INFORMATION

✉ For further information on the resort, visit the official website at www.pinecliffs.com



Top There's plenty to keep the kids occupied at the resort
Above The golf tuition is superb and the trainers can help everyone, from complete beginners to seasoned golfers

For pre- or post-dinner drinks there is, in my opinion, only one place to go: the Mirador Bar. This is only open during the summer months, but it enjoys what is arguably the best location of any bar in the whole of Portugal. Set on the edge of the clifftop, this outdoor bar has amazing views across the Atlantic Ocean. As you would expect, it's very popular on warm evenings as couples flock to sip champagne and watch the sun set behind the cliffs – the perfect ending to any day. 🇵🇹