



TRAVEL DIGEST

# DESTINATION PORTUGAL

Estoril is a golfer's paradise resting on Portugal's beautiful coastline

**The Estoril Coast is considered to be** one of the Iberian peninsula's top resort destinations, and with good cause.

In fact, the region was even named Golf Destination of the Year in 2007. So what is all the fuss about? Well, causing the most stir is the landscape.

The coast of Portugal is rocky and undulating. But every so often you will come

across flatland. Moving further inland, mountains arise up. Clubs have taken advantage of this unique set up.

Courses are found speckled all over the region. Moreover, the designers and owners strive to keep the courses as natural as possible. Case in point are the Oitavos Dunes and Belas Club de Campo courses.

Straight off, Oitavos Dunes is the first

golf course in Europe and the second in the world to be recognised as a Certified Signature Sanctuary – Gold. The flora and fauna are all protected species, with these areas roped off so they are not disturbed.

The course is absolutely spectacular. In keeping with the natural beauty of the place, legendary designer Arthur Hills set Oitavos up in classic links style.





The Sheraton, Lisbon

The course is just like many here in Ireland - nine out and nine back, but it traverses three distinct terrains – forest, dunes, and open coastal areas. Each area features beautiful scenery. One moment you will find yourself surrounded by astounding pine trees, then towering dunes and soon it opens up to the winds and dramatic coastal cliffs.

Hills did not mess around. Oitavos Dunes was created to be one of the best in the world. No wonder it played host to the Portugal Open in 2009.

Oitavos is not alone in trying to keep golf as natural as possible. Built in 1998, the Belas Club de Campo is the first golf course in Portugal to earn the Certificate of Sustainable Construction awarded by the LiderA Programme. With the calibre of scenery that Estoril affords, sustainability

and preservation are at the top of the list.

Although the sights off the courses will make your jaw drop, the play will tempt you to never stop. Rated in the Top 30 of Continental Europe's best golf, the Penha Longa club is situated in gorgeous Sintra. This course is one to behold. It was designed by renowned architect Robert Trent Jones Jnr and built on the historical site of a monastery.

Every hole is one spectacular piece of art after another. You will find yourself taking shots into the mountain air and past centuries old ruins. The course is fairly steep and rewards those who take risks. One person who took those risks was Thomas Bjorn who won the Portugal Open here in 2010.

The Penha Longa club offers two courses. The more famous and challenging is the 18-hole championship Atlantic course. But for those who want to sneak another quick round in before the evening is over, the 9-hole Monastery course is just perfect. As the Atlantic's little brother, also designed by Trent Jones Jr, the Monastery course is located in the historical heart of the resort.

Back out on the coast, Quinta da Marinha Golf is one of those unique courses that make Estoril so remarkable. Unlike the Penha Longa courses, the Quinta de

Marinha course is built on fairly flat land. Surrounded on all sides by majestic pine trees, this Robert Trent Jones Snr designed course cannot be missed. Having held events such as the Quinta da Marinha Ladies Masters and the Estoril Open, this course will challenge your abilities.

Right now you're thinking, I want to get out there and play these courses but where am I to stay? Most clubs, like at Quinta da Marinha Golf, have their own hotels right on the premises.

This one in particular was recently remodeled in 2007. This five-star hotel has 188 rooms, 10 suites, 44 townhouse villas and 3 sculpted outdoor pools. One of which sits right beside the golf course. The hotel mixes old-world Portuguese with modern touches. Besides the hotel's own course, the Oitavos Dunes club is right down the street.

If you're looking for a stay that's a little more informal and 'hip', stay at the Vivamarinha Hotel & Suites. Located in the same town, the Vivamarinha features 142 rooms fully decked out in the most luxurious and modern materials.

Another good place is the Vila Bicuda Resort. This resort is different from the others in that it is entirely villas – 99 of them in fact. It may not be up to par with the three previous resorts mentioned but if you're





Left: The Golden Eagle Quinta do Brinçal Golf Course in Costa Prata



traveling with family or a small group its perfect.

The beating heart of Portugal is Lisbon. Capital of this small country, Lisbon is a great place to stay whether you're playing the courses or if you just want to see the sights.

You can't go wrong with staying in the Sheraton Lisbon Hotel & Spa. This five-star hotel has all the amenities you need. The 369 room hotel is complete with a gourmet restaurant on the top floor treating you to good food and panoramic views of the city.

Out of all the places to stay in the Lisbon/Estoril area, one stands above the rest –

literally. Perched on a high cliff wall, the Hotel Pousada de Palmela is one-of-a-kind. This centuries old building houses 21 rooms and 7 suites originally used for military purposes. The origin of the building dates back to 300BC but what stands today is from the 17th century. And don't worry, golfing is not far away.

Overwhelmed? Why not leave the planning to the professionals. There are two groups offering amazing golf vacations. Golf Passport, put on by the Estoril Tourism Board, features play at five courses for €270 or three for €171. The package allows you to pay one greens fee per course with unlimited

rounds. The courses included are: Belas Club, Golf do Estoril, Lisbon Sports Club, Penha Longa Atlantic, Pestana Belora Golf and Quinta da Marinha Golf.

Another set of packs, set up by local boy Peter Toal from County Louth and his company Estoril Golf Tours take you along the coasts to different courses and hotels. They are currently offering three trips: the Lisbon Coast, Blue Coast, and Silver Coast tours. Prices start at €580 with the Lisbon Coast.

You've read about what all the fuss is about with Portuguese golf, go out and play there yourself.