

Algarve – welcome sunshine break in mid-February only three hours from Edinburgh

Quinta do Lago in Portugal's sun-kissed Algarve is synonymous for golf and boasts three testing courses which are claimed to be among Europe's best.

Accolades including being named Europe's Best Golf Destination at the World Golf Awards in 2015 and 2016.

And, they were given Editors' Choice Award for Best International Resorts in 2016 and 2017 by Golf Digest. It is hard to argue with these credentials.

The facilities are augmented by the Paul McGinley Golf Academy and Southern Europe's only TaylorMade Performance Centre.

And they dominate the landscape which also features luxurious villas which are a sunshine second home to film, football and TV celebrities and the wealthy.

Property in Quinta do Lago is much sought-after by those who wish to enjoy luxury and the stock has risen markedly since the first plots were placed in the early 1970s.

It is also renowned for its quality restaurants offering a range of dining options from informal to formal and all we visited say they take full advantage of the local Mediterranean produce.

We enjoyed fresh seafood from the local markets, wood-fire pizzas, healthy salads and homemade desserts.

Quinta do Lago does not, however, rest on its laurels and the new Campus facility has evolved into a multi-sports hub.

THE CAMPUS:

This is a unique, state of the art multi-sports complex in the heart of Quinta do Lago, offering professional level training and coaching, whatever your level.

From world-class athletes and international competitors to active families, sports enthusiasts and rising stars of all ages, advice is available.

It has a high-performance gym, aquatic centre, rehab, recovery and wellness area, tennis, padel (like short tennis) and bike shed.

It also features tennis camps with Judy Murray, mum of double Wimbledon champion, Andy Murray, rugby camps with Brian O'Driscoll, the former British and Irish Lions and Ireland captain, football camps with ex-Manchester United defender and now TV pundit, Rio Ferdinand, and ex-Spurs star Teddy Sheringham.

When we visited the resort, English Premiership side Burnley FC and the Scottish Triathlon team were training in the area.
www.quintadolago.com

ACTIVITIES:

They claim it is "impossible to get bored" at Quinta do Lago which has a wide range of activities, services and events.
www.visitalgarve.pt

GETTING AROUND: A wide network of transport companies – transfers, car rental, private driver or taxis – are easily accessible. We used Vototransfers and they were excellent.
votransfers@gmail.com

GOLF: The testing North Course is surrounded by pine trees and exquisite properties and it was redesigned five years ago by

architect Beau Welling with former European Ryder Cup captain Paul McGinley at a cost of €9m.

The greens, tees, bunkers, irrigation and drainage systems and cart paths were re-built during the work and four sets of tees were introduced on each hole to accommodate players of all levels.

Large, undulating greens, tricky, sometimes deep bunkers and teasingly-placed water hazards are key features.

Low-cut Bermuda grass was introduced around greens to create recovery shot options and the par-72 course has green credentials with water recycling and solar energy.

The South Course is rated the crown jewel of the resort and Quinta do Lago and was designed in 1974 by William Mitchell who introduced American-standard greens, tees and bunkers to the Algarve.

The 6,500 metre, par-72 is set among umbrella pines, lakes and wild flowers, overlooking the Ria Formosa National Park and it has hosted the Portuguese Open eight times and featured Scottish-born Colin Montgomerie's win in 1989 when he shot 24-under-par, 11 strokes clear of the field.

The 8th, 15th and 18th are testing holes for low handicap players but the rest provide a challenges for all levels with shot placement at a premium.

www.quintadolago.com

Laranjal, which was originally an orange grove, opened in 2009 and two years after that the 6,480m course was voted Best Golf Course at the 2011 Portuguese Travel Awards.

The par-72 championship course is in the Ludo Valley and features five lakes, umbrella pines, cork-oaks and, naturally, orange trees.

It demands accuracy of shot-making and featurrs five par 5s,

eight par 4s and five par 3s, and the green staff major on their excellent greens.

HOTELS:

Stay and play (golf) packages are available at The Magnolia Hotel, one of the latest additions to the local portfolio.

There are 74 comfortable rooms, seven cabin-style cottages with a heated outdoor pool, gym, tennis and five-star service is promised.

Complementary wi-fi, shuttle service to the golf courses and sauna, jacuzzi and steam room is also available.

www.themagnoliahotelqdl.com

SHOPPING:

MAR Shopping Algarve combines a shopping centre, a designer outlet and an integrated IKEA Store. It is good and parking is free.

You drive into the covered, ground-floor car park and can immediately see, thanks to overhead green and red lights, where the spaces are. It would be good to see that here.

Mar Shopping in Loule – around 25 minutes from Quinta do Lago – is said to be the flagship in the south of Portugal and hosts household names including “the largest Primark in Portugal”, the first Starbucks in Algarve, state-of-the-art cinemas and the latest concept in terms of leisure and green open areas”.

The food area incorporates an innovative gastronomic concept, Algarve Chef Experience, offering top quality dining experiences by four leading Portuguese chefs.

We tried several outlets including the Subway, sushi, pasta and wok and they were all good presenting ample platefuls for even the most hungry shopper with extensive seating nearby.

www.marshopping.com/en.algarve

CULTURAL PROGRAMME AND EVENTS:

Local leaflets which are available at most venues open the door to the extensive programme and full details are available at www.365algarve.pt

GETTING THERE: Ryan Air direct to Faro Airport in just over three hours. Our flights were bang on time but the baggage handlers at Edinburgh Airport took 45 minutes to deliver the luggage to the carousel.

It's not the first time that has happened this year to us at one of Scotland's gateways to the world.