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Travel Feature

GOLFERS MAKE THE SMART CHOICE

TREVOR PEAKE spent three days in Portugal where he enjoyed some beautiful sunshine, excellent golf, and a delicious local delicacy on the Lisboa Golf Coast.



The infinity pool overlooking the course at Otavos Dunes.

A PERFECT flight with Tap Air Portugal, a mini-bus ride to the hotel and, in a little over three hours, we were transported from a chilly Manchester April day to a warm sunny afternoon in Lisbon for a short break.

Now I don't profess to be an art buff. I've strolled around the odd gallery in various countries over the years, and been impressed by some exhibits, bemused by many and dismissive of much. But in our hotel, the Pousada de Cascais, was one of the most impressive pieces of art I've ever seen. Or should I say many pieces.

A flock of swifs, or maybe swallows, is depicted swooping across the white-washed walls of the hotel foyer before seeming to exit out of one of the skylights in the ceiling. Most impressive - or at least it was to me.

The three diverse courses we played on our trip were also impressive in their different ways.

Otavos Dunes is a links course with most of the holes sitting on a high plateau overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. With the ever-present wind blowing in off the sea, some fierce rough to contend with and very tricky greens, it is a real test.

Lisbon Sports Club is a verdant parkland course with some quirky holes, while Monsanto is a pleasant tourist track with wide open fairways stretching before you from most of the trees, plenty of water and cavernous bunkers to contend with, but not much rough, and large undulating greens.

The Otavos links, built round the spectacular Otavos Hotel, are the culmination of the vision of Carlos Monteiro Champalimaud, grandfather of the current owner Miguel Champalimaud, who originally bought the land in 1908 and over the next three decades, until his death in 1937, planted pine forests to stabilise the land for future development.

His son Carlos Sommer Champalimaud continued the work, drilling wells, constructing roads and developing homes, as well as establishing equestrian and tennis facilities.

The current owner Miguel and his father Carlos then, over the next several decades, worked towards what we see today: the golf course, designed by American architect Arthur Hills in 2001, and the hotel, which has 142 suites and opened in 2010.

Measuring 6,372 metres from the championship tees, the Atlantic can be seen from virtually every hole on the course, which has an out-and-back layout, the par three ninth being the furthest distance from the impressive clubhouse.

With a par of 71, there are two par threes, the third and the ninth, and back-to-back par fives, the seventh and the eighth, on the front nine.

Then on the way home, the three par threes, the 12th, 14th and 15th, and the

two par fives, the 13th and 16th come in the space of five holes, the back nine starting and ending with two par fours.

Well bunkered throughout and with severe slopes on many of the testing greens, Otavos Dunes has been voted as Portugal's top links course and is definitely a jewel in the Lisboa Golf Coast crown.

Another jewel, for different reasons, is the quirky parkland course at Lisbon Sports Club.

Measuring just 5,309 metres from the back tees, the par 69 course has six par threes and just three par fives in its layout and, just 20 minutes from the airport, is ideal for fitting in a round on the day you fly in or out of the Portuguese capital, with visitors welcome at any time.

The LSC maintains its links with the British community that founded the club in 1922, mainly for cricket, football and tennis, with the golf course first opening in 1964 and being extended to 18 holes in 1992.

Many of the holes are played from elevated tees and a stream features prominently in the early stages. If you stray right on the short first, left on the second, right on the short third or left again on the fourth, you'll be fishing your ball out of the water.

The quickness comes in first at the long fifth where you are driving from a very elevated tee, with the first green out of sight just down below the tee, and again at the par four sixth with the green tucked up on a sort of shelf in the trees on the left.

The seventh, eighth and ninth were all quirky in their own little ways, but unfortunately because of time constraints we didn't get to play the back nine. I'm sure they are also very interesting and from what I saw, the LSC, which also has a quaint old colonial style clubhouse, is thoroughly recommended.

On a busy day, which also included some excellent wine tasting at Rascalhos, we also played nine holes at Monsanto, Hotel and Golf Resort.

Almost 2,000 yards from the back tees, with many huge bunkers and lots of water, Monsanto is an ideal destination for the holiday golfer. Most of the local rooms overlook the course, there are extensive practice facilities and it lies just 30 minutes south of Lisbon, among meadow vineyards planted more than a century ago.

The water, several small lakes and a stream, comes into play on no less than 10 of the holes. Most of the fairways are fringed by cork oak, olive trees, chestnuts and pines, but there is no impenetrable rough to contend with, which makes for a testing but pleasant golfing experience.

Opened in 1992 and extensively remodelled in 2005, Monsanto has a particularly testing finishing hole, with the



The par three 14th at Otavos Dunes.



The Lisbon Sports Club course.



The play of water at Monsanto.

green at the short 18th on an island surrounded by water.

There are more than 20 courses in and around Lisbon, and with the beautiful, historic and fascinating Portuguese capital to explore, it makes for an excellent holiday destination, with a variety of hotels to suit all pockets.

Staying at the Pousada in Cascais is a memorable experience in itself.

Basically converted from an old fortress, it has within its perimeter an Arts District, featuring six art galleries and six open studios, where some of the most important artists in the country are working. The hotel even has an Art Concierge.

Breakfast is taken in the Maris Stella Restaurant with an inspirational view over yachts in the nearby harbour and the ocean. Cascais has many restaurants and

bars as well as a beach just a short stroll from the hotel.

We spent our final night in imposing Dom Pedro Palace in the centre of the city and we also dined at the Cascais Meirago, another large, impressive hotel overlooking the beach and, on our final night at Lisboa A Noite, a restaurant in the heart of the old city.

Historic Sintra, a UNESCO World Heritage site dotted with royal retreats, castles and castles is also only a short drive away from Lisbon and Cascais.

At the end of a morning's sightseeing before we flew home we were treated to Lisbon's speciality - a Pastel de Belem, a custard, tart-like pastry made in the Belem district alongside the Hieronymite Monastery, one of the most visited sites in Portugal.

A nice way to end a lovely short break.

Useful information

GOLF - Lisbon Sports Club (www.lisbonclub.com), Otavos Dunes (www.otavosdunes.pt), Monsanto (www.montadoresort.com)

HOTELS - Pousada de Cascais (www.pousadadecascais.com), Cascais Mirage (www.cascaismirage.com), Dom Pedro Palace (www.dompedro.com), Monsanto Hotel & Resort (www.montadoresort.com)

FLIGHTS - We flew with TAP Portugal. It has regular flights from Manchester - www.flytap.com There are also charter flights to Portugal from Manchester & Liverpool.

HIRE CLUBS - Clubs were provided and Trevor's Callaways came courtesy of www.mycaddymaster.com.