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Club culture

UP TO PAR: Fancy a game of golf in the sunshine after you get off the plane? Then head to Lisbon says **Chris Stratford**.

THE time spent journeying to and from a holiday destination is often a tedious necessity, slicing off as much as two days from a trip.

If the trip is a short one, tedious becomes irksome; if it is a short golfing trip to chase the sun, irksome becomes highly aggravating. Beware the travelling golfer denied his daily fix on the course.

Travel to Portugal's capital, however, and there lies a solution in Lisbon Sports Club, a parkland golf course with British origins which, sitting within 20 minutes' drive of the airport, allows the visiting player to have a round on both the day of his or her arrival and the day of departure.

Lisbon Sports Club was one of three golfing venues visited during a few days spent on the Lisboa Golf Coast, a region encompassing Lisboa, Cascais, Sintra and Setubal and including 22 courses in a strikingly beautiful coastal area.

Lovers of the Royal & Ancient game have become familiar with the triplets 'golf, Portugal and the Algarve', but Lisbon has its own triumvirate: Golf, history and culture.



HISTORIC CHARMS: A tram makes its way through the heart of Lisbon.

While not officially twinned with Barcelona, the city of Lisbon has much in common; a slightly smaller but equally fascinating and engaging brother.

The city, comprises many different neighbourhoods, each of which reflects its origins, such as the Old Town, founded by the Phoenicians; Mouraria, Moorish Lisbon; Bairro Alto, a bohemian area; and arguably its most captivating section, Belem, home to World Heritage architecture and museums.

Here sits Belem Tower, built early in the 16th century as a fortress to guard the gateway to Lisbon's harbour, an alluring architectural structure which vies for the visitor's attention along with the nearby Jeronimos Monastery, resting place of the explorer Vasco de Gama. Both are adorned with intricate stonework incorporating motifs which pay homage to the Age of Discovery.

History also abounds at Pousada de Cascais hotel, only three years old and with all the amenities and luxury the discerning traveller requires, but created on the site of an old fortress which was built as a royal residence 500 years ago.

Breakfast taken shortly after dawn in the hotel's restaurant overlooking the marina at Cascais both fortified and

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GOLF, HISTORY AND CULTURE: Clockwise from main picture, Belem Tower, in Belem, Lisbon; Montado Hotel & Golf Resort; the Jeronimos Monastery in Belem; a view of hole 18 at Oitavos Dune.

GETTING THERE

Chris Stratford, a member of the International Golf Travel Writers Association, was a guest of www.visitlisboa.com

- www.flytap.com
- www.pousadas.pt
- www.hoteldompedropalace.com
- www.oitavosdunes.com
- www.lisbonclub.com
- www.montadoresort.com

relaxed us ahead of tackling Oitavos Dunes, a links course built inside Sintra-Cascais Natural Park.

The architect reforested the dunes and a few of the holes – including the first – have more of a parkland feel, but as the course weaves its way towards the sea the holes become progressively tougher, the wind becomes a factor and offers the golfer the challenge links golf has laid before its exponents since the sport's creation.

Oitavos offers discounted green fees to guests staying at this exclusive five-star hotel, a stunningly bold and contemporary design. It comprises 142 guest rooms, all of which have their own balconies offering sea views and vistas over the golf course.

If you stay at Oitavos and wake up one morning to find the hotel's lounge furniture in an unfamiliar configuration, you might think you had one too many.

Don't worry; the furniture is fitted with wheels so that it can be regularly moved around to provide a different aspect.

Oitavos has vast, floor to ceiling

windows, with the best view of all saved for the kitchen on the basis that contented staff produce excellent fare. The meal enjoyed there after our round validated the theory.

As at Oitavos, water is a significant feature at the third course played, at Montado Hotel & Golf Resort, but here it is the strategically-placed streams and lakes which will test the player rather than wind blowing in off the sea.

Set among vineyards, it is flatter than either Lisbon Sports Club or Oitavos, but do not assume that means less demanding. Huge greens may induce a false sense of security with the approach shot, but their subtle undulations mean a putt from distance can be an exacting task. Perhaps we should have visited the excellent Bacalhoa wine cellars before the round to settle the nerves.

Stopping at the sumptuous Dom Pedro Palace hotel for the final night of our stay – opulent accommodation comprising 254 rooms, some of them overlooking the Tejo river – put us within walking distance of Lisbon's city centre although I confess we travelled by coach to the Fabrica dos Pasteis de Belem, a world-renowned bakery which claims to produce the finest Portuguese custard tarts around. Testament to its appeal was a queue of customers which stretched down the street, and a specially-arranged tasting reinforced it.

Any guilt felt at the price such indulgence exacts on the waistline can be assuaged with a final round of golf at Lisbon Sports Club before departing to the airport and heading for home. Pastries, pars and Portugal – another great trio.

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