

MAJORCA GOURMET GOLF

GOLF AND DINING OF THE HIGHEST ORDER ON THE KING OF THE BALEARICS.

WORDS BY CHRIS BERTRAM



Son Gual's 18th epitomises the course's test of both strength and strategy.

Magaluf and Palma Nova do Majorca an especially bad service. These traditional magnets for British holidaymakers of a certain taste have given the island an indifferent reputation which is wholly undeserved.

Because turn right rather than left out of the airport at Palma and you leave the flesh pots behind and enjoy an island which instead oozes class and can satisfy even the most discerning travelling golfers.

There are six clubs to the west of Palma

— including the huge Santa Ponsa complex — but we left that alone and explored the rest of the Balearics' capital.

Over the duration of two trips to Majorca, we discovered courses out of the top drawer which are backed up by a standard of dining which surpasses many leading London eateries.

Our golfing aperitif is located in the north east at Capdepera, which is one of those clubs you want to return to time after time. Not only is the course very attractive, the whole set-up is inviting.

From the friendly welcome in the small

but well-stocked pro shop (with lots of cool European apparel we don't get over here) to the terrace area by the 18th, time spent here is utterly pleasurable.

We enjoyed lunch after our round and plenty of others were doing so too — one suspects the club's reputation for good food extends beyond golfers.

The course is perfect for holiday golf, especially when it's hot. As well as being generally easy walking it doesn't get you hot under the collar.

It's not long (though the grass seemed to grab your ball and cost you yards so it

plays longer than you think), the fairways are mostly generous and the bunkers friendly.

The back nine is definitely the better half and begins with a short par-4 dog-leg which is a birdie chance if you give yourself the best angle off the tee.

The 14th is probably the best on the course, a tough, uphill driving hole with trees on the right and even more dense foliage on the left. The approach with a long iron is also played uphill to a green framed by the rocky hills which surround the course.

The drives at 16 and 17 also look intimidating but while the 16th tee turns out to be friendly, the 17th includes random, bushy palms in the middle of the fairway. Good luck!

Next stop was Son Gual, the superstar of Majorca and a European Tour host in waiting.

This place simply oozes class with a huge emphasis on customer service in the opulent clubhouse. It was the course which impressed Golf World the most though, and which saw it become one of the highest climbers in our continental

Europe Top 100.

Choose your tees wisely though; this is no place to develop an over-inflated opinion of your game. Right from the start you realise what is in store.

On first glance the opening tee shot is elevated and enticing... but then you start to survey the acres of sand and rough which line and pepper the fairway.

Before we go on, a word about what some might see as a huge drawback to Son Gual — its location on the flight path into Palma. It is true planes appear to be coming down on a conveyor belt from the

THE COURSES

clouds, so regular are they, but after initial curiosity, we soon forgot about them. The course ensures you have no time or thought for peripheral matters.

Because while the striking clubhouse suggests this will be a big, brash championship course requiring plenty of muscle to conquer it, the attraction of Son Gual is that it requires a mixture of brain and brawn to prosper here. While the bunker-strewn 1st is 400 yards off even the yellow tees the next two are short par 4s which rely on small, sloping greens with steep run-offs and evil pin positions to challenge you.

The ability to draw the ball is helpful at the short 5th, set at an angle over water, and then off the tee of the par-5 6th, where you must decide how much of the lake to cut off.

The pace on the back nine picks up at the 13th, an exacting and brilliant hole where you must drive as close to the bushes up the left as you dare for a view of the green and then carry a phalanx of bunkers and avoid the thick rough on the left with your second.

Fine par 3s at 15 and 17 help close a lovely nine which ends with a magnificent par 5 with water up the right and the green tucked away on the left.

Retire to the verandah to drink in the views of the Tramuntana Mountains and reflect on this brilliantly strategic golf course.

The only course on Majorca which comes close to Son Gual is our next venue – Alcanada.

It was created by the Trent Jones design dynasty and gently slopes

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Majorca has 16 courses. Here are four more of the best.

PULA: Remodelled by Jose Maria Olazabal in 2005 and much improved, offering a course good enough to host the European Tour.

CANYAMEL: Pepe Ganchedo was given some terrific land on which to build a course and didn't disappoint, with existing drystone walls being incorporated into the course, notably on 7 and from 13 to 15.

PUNTIRO: Opened in 2006 and created by the Nicklaus Design team, its fairways are flanked by pines, olives and carobs.

VALL D'OR: Some great changes in elevation creating some lovely holes on probably the most underrated course on the island.

CAR HIRE

Having your own transport is absolutely essential on a trip like this and we hired our car from Autos Roig, who have their cars in the airport building so it couldn't be easier. www.autosroig.com or 00 34 971 74 43 14.



For the best views on the island head north east to Alcanada, a course flanked by sea and sierras.

down towards the shoreline with views across the bay as well as of the mountains of the Sierra de Levante.

It is undoubtedly the course with the most spectacular views on the island and Robert Trent Jones Jr was keen to talk about it when Golf World spoke to him last month.

"A course I am enormously proud of is one I built on Majorca in the late 1990s, Alcanada," he told us from his California home.

"The course swoops down to the bay and is quite spectacular. I'd urge anyone holidaying in Majorca to make the trip over from Palma to the north-east coast to play there."

Alcanada opened in October 2003 and features exacting tee shots, 58 astutely-positioned bunkers and slick greens with pronounced borrows.

Finally to Marriott Club Son Antem, which has 36 holes of championship golf. This is a place that makes it very easy to come to Majorca for a week and never leave the complex.

We stayed in a villa overlooking the 3rd fairway of the East course and it proved to be an inspired choice. Over the course of many golf trips, villas hadn't really been on the agenda – it's usually been either B&Bs in a remote Scottish town or hotels in Iberia and beyond. But villas make massive sense for any party with golfers in them. If you are part of a group, it

makes co-ordinating meals and departure times very easy – and we all know that aspect of things is often stupidly stressful in hotels. This type of accommodation also tends to be very economical.

If there are just one or two golfers in your group, the amenities in and around resort villas make nipping off for 18 holes much more palatable to the non-golfers.

Son Antem is a very large complex yet is far from intimidating, as global chain resorts sometimes can be. There is a cosiness to this resort which is often lacking elsewhere, demonstrated by everything from the beautiful but understated hotel to the golf facilities.

The courses are certainly above average as resort golf goes while the practice facilities are more like those of a Tour venue. They really do encourage you to spend 45 minutes on your chipping and bunker play.

The East Course winds its way between the villas with water coming into play on a third of the holes and mature trees lining most fairways.

Water features less frequently on the West but it does dominate the approach to the 9th and 14th as well as all of the 18th.

As well as also having tree-lined fairways, the tighter, younger and marginally better West relies on subtle changes in elevation and dog-legs to keep you on your toes. ■

WHERE TO STAY

IN THE NORTH EAST

Son Barbassa is seriously stylish. Have you ever seen sunbeds which resemble four-poster beds? No, neither had GW. Some rooms' balconies have their own luxury sunbeds, which do a good impression of a whicker space ship.

Wherever you choose to soak up the sun, you will enjoy your surroundings as well as the fabulous tapas, pizza and pasta at lunchtime. Given the quality, this place is very reasonably priced.

Son Barbassa's style extends to the beautiful bedrooms, the sprawling open-air lounge area and the restaurant.

We preferred to eat outside rather than in the chic glass-panelled restaurant, enjoying enormous steaks, several sumptuous fish dishes and delicious risottos.

FROM HERE PLAY: Capdepera (two minutes away) and Pula.

CONTACT: 00 34 971 565776, www.sonbarbassa.com



PUNTIRO

CLUB SON ANTEM

SON GUAL

VALL D'OR

ALCANADA

CAPDEPERA

CANYAMEL

PULA

SON SERVERA



IN THE SOUTH

Marriott Club Son Antem is a huge resort with two golf courses at its heart. We opted to stay in a villa – and as we suggest above, it was a masterstroke.

The hotel has all the amenities you'd expect while outside there is a great kids' play area, tennis courts and spa. The villas are equipped with satellite TV,

a built-in barbecue and sun beds in your garden plus fully-equipped kitchen.

FROM HERE PLAY: The two on-site courses, Son Gual, Puntiro.

CONTACT: James Villas on 0800 074 0122 or www.jamesvillas.co.uk

SPECIAL DEAL: A family of four can stay in a villa for £509pp in October, including flights.

IN THE SOUTH EAST

Son Amoixa is a delightfully old-fashioned Finca between Manacor and the south-east coast. It fuses beautifully historic Majorca with modern facilities and service. The skilful way the huge glass windows have been set into ancient walls is one indication of the character here.

Son Amoixa's greatest attraction is its exquisite food. Breakfast is laden with sweet and savoury delicacies while lunches and snacks are tasty and very fairly priced.

Then you sit down to dinner and it gets even better. From the cosy charm of the restaurant (a hint of an old Greek taverna) to the extensive wine list, an evening here is one to savour. The food is of the highest order. The lamb, accompanied by nothing more extravagant than the house red, was divine.

FROM HERE PLAY: Vall d'Or, Son Servera.

CONTACT: 00 34 971 84 62 92, www.sonamoixa.com



Large yet intimate, the Club Son Antem hosts a pair of challenging layouts.