

PORTUGAL

A thrill in Estoril

A stone's throw from Lisbon, the Estoril Golf Coast boasts incredible golf

WORDS ROB JERRAM



hen Lisbon's Golf Coast was named Europe's best golfing destination at the recent IAGTO (International Association of Golf Tour Operators) Awards, it was impossible to argue.

The deserved recognition came just a few days after TG spent a few days just a stone's throw west of Portugal's capital, in the beautiful fishing village of Cascais, taking in a stunning array of courses Estoril Golf has to offer.

The sport has been played in this region for centuries. Estoril GC was formed way back in 1909, making it one of Europe's oldest golf

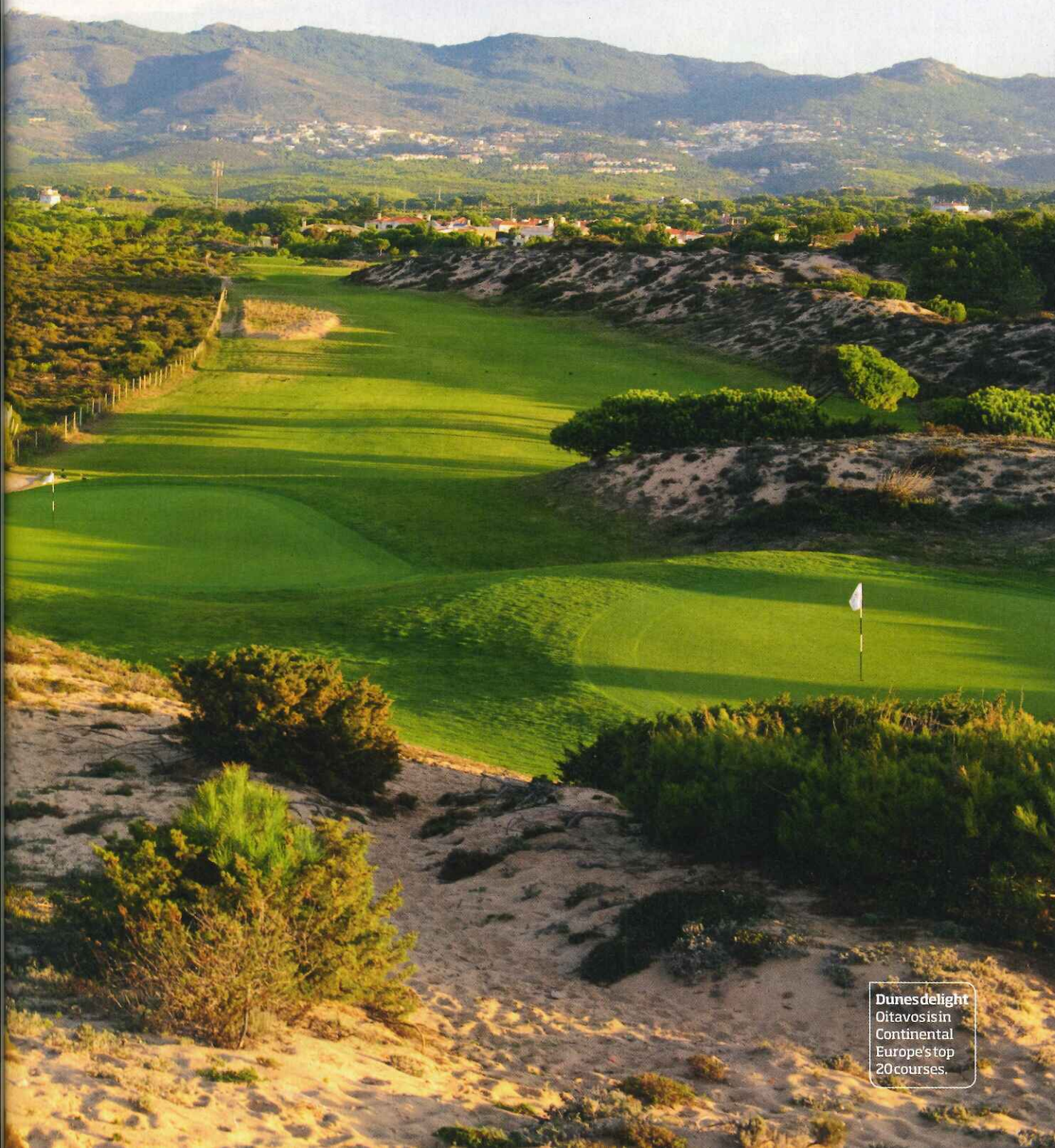
clubs. Since the stunning Quinta da Marinha and Penha Longa were added in 1984 and 1992 respectively British golfers have flocked to the area with the guarantee of sun and superb golf.

But perhaps the key moment came in 2001 when, just over a mile from Quinta da Marinha, Arthur Hills created Portugal's first championship links – Oitavos Dunes.

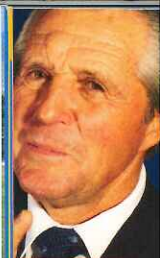
Paul McGinley is a big fan, calling Oitavos one of Europe's best courses, a view backed by our sister title *Golf World*, with Hills' design rising to 18th in the recent Top 100 Courses in Continental Europe ranking – only Monte Rei

(14th) ranked higher in Portugal. The layout has already played host to four Portuguese Opens and drew vast praise.

As the main image proves, the par-71 design takes full advantage of the stunning backdrop of the Atlantic Ocean and Sintra Mountains. The opening holes are enjoyable, guiding you through woodland surrounded fairways to small and tricky greens, before the links thrills truly kick in at the 4th, with the prevailing Atlantic wind making for a long, testing par 4. From the 5th the trees thin, the dunes grow, the ocean dominates and the next 12 holes would prove impossible for even ➤



Dunes delight
Oitavos is in
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20 courses.



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Stunning
Penha Longa is
one of Europe's
finest layouts.

Abelter
Slopes, water and
lush fairways
aplenty at Belas.

Par-3 stars
Trent Jones Jnr
designed Quinta
da Marinha.

the most fussy of links fans to fault.

In truth there's barely a hole that doesn't deserve mention but the par 3s and par 5s are Oitavos' stars. The 7th and 8th, both par 5s, are exceptional and both require three solid shots while avoiding a superb combination of trees, dunes and bunkers to stand any chance of making par.

The pick of the par 3s, and arguably the layout's finest hole, is the 14th, a 170-yarder over a storm ravine that also flanks the right of the hole. Tough enough in its own right, wind direction makes club selection a severe challenge.

The 18th is a classic closing hole, dog-legging around the spectacularly designed five-star hotel (an ideal base for your visit) and requiring the most accurate of tee shots to a narrow fairway surrounded by dunes and trees to leave a tight, uphill approach to green surrounded by banks.

A couple of minutes' drive from Oitavos brings you to the luxurious Quinta da Marinha resort – another fabulous base for your visit.

The Robert Trent Jones Jnr-designed Championship course opened in 1984 and has proved a hit with British golfers since.

The par-71, 6,500-yard layout sits slightly inland and snakes through flat turf between pine trees and holiday apartments. The par 3s, six in total, are the stars and, unlike some modern layouts, are varied in length, ranging from 140-180 yards.

Another must play is the Atlantic course at

'In 1999 Estoril Open winner Jean Francoise Remesy was the only player to finish under par!'

Penha Longa, a former Portuguese Open venue comfortably sitting pretty in 35th spot in the latest *Golf World* rankings. The undulating par-72 layout is the handiwork of Robert Trent Jones Jnr, impressively weaving in and out of mature woodland.

Star holes include the par-5 6th with the green overlooked by a medieval arched wall and castle tower and the scary par-3 15th which requires a good carry over a lake. However, this beauty can turn into a beast – in 1999 Estoril Open winner Jean-Francois Remesy was the only player who managed to finish under par!

Lisbon Sports Club is another superb option, nestled in a valley in Serra da Carregueira around 12 miles from Lisbon. Originally designed as a nine-holer in 1964, the course extended to 18 holes in 1992, taking influence from Scottish design.

At 5,700 yards, its length is not the test, but heavy vegetation, clever bunkering and a brook which meanders throughout ensure the beautifully kept par-69 layout is a true test.

Standout holes are the par-3 1st and 3rd and lengthy par-4 18th. The opener plays from elevated tees showcasing the course to a green surrounded by bunkers with the brook running alongside. The 3rd is often mentioned in conversations about the country's most beautiful short holes, with another elevated tee requiring a tee shot through trees to a green with sand to the left and the brook right. The 18th is tight and testing, requiring accuracy from the tee to leave a lengthy approach to a small green.

Belas Clube de Campo, between Belas and Vale de Lobo, is a fabulous experience. Opened in 1997, the course plays 6,900 yards from the tips and works its ways through valleys and slopes, boasting beautifully lush fairways and using large bunkers and water as its defence. If you could only play two holes you would choose 15 and 18. The par-5 15th has a stream across the fairway, while the huge green slopes back-to-front causing all sorts of problems if your approach goes long. The closing hole is a testing par 4 with a U-shaped lake sitting in front of a narrow green, desperately hoping to ruin your round at the very last.

Finally, if you have the time, be sure to take in the championship course at historic Estoril GC. The par-69 layout, redesigned in 1936 by Mackenzie Ross, overlooks Estoril and the coast and good course management is required to master it with the stunning par-3 16th being the pick.