

Costa Brava – the ideal golf getaway

Sarah Forrest from Red Tee Breaks explores the golfers (and girl's) paradise that is the Costa Brava.

Contemplating what makes Spain on the journey North from Barcelona, being driven through the concrete jungle glancing around the cars from all over the world; Japan, Germany, American, Italian, one could be anywhere in the world. Relaxing back enjoying the ride, the real Spain starts to flirt with the eyes, tantalizing you with glimpses of the country between the harsh concrete lines with its splashes of colour dancing in the sunshine. Multicoloured traditional flat top buildings tumbling down the hillside like a spilt bag of dolly mixture candy replace the grey uninspiring roadside blocks as we speed towards the Pyrenees. The scenery takes on a different appearance, monuments replace buildings sitting atop hillsides bathed in sunshine. Spain is vast, buildings blend into the brown earth, despite their bright colours, they just merge together as one, buildings with tiny windows, coppices of trees gently dotting the landscape like freckles on a child's face, to give you simple beauty. Tall Cyprus trees give the roadsides structure, waving gently with purpose if only to give the roadside an end and the countryside a start.

Passing through villages we reach Torremirona Golf Club, you almost stumble upon Torremirona with its low rise building spreading out to welcome you into this landscape lending itself as a great watering hole and a place to catch up on some local food. A gentle start to the few days in Costa Brava, Torremirona has an 18 hole golf course in the heart of Emporda an unfussy Spanish lush oasis. A large terrace overlooks the par 3 10th, and strip of water to the left of the hole menacing in appearance but easy to avoid, its simply purrs not barks warnings to the approaching golfer. Lunch consisted of the local Catalan dish, similar to paella but with noodles rather than rice; fideuà showcases the variety of fish available in the region. A relatively flat course with a backdrop to die for. The pyrenees in the background make the most stunning backdrop, almost false in appearance; like a 'poster' on a boring office wall of the mountains covering the old bits of sticky tape to try and brighten up the dull office walls of magnolia paint. But these are real, and stunning with shades of grey to purple back to grey contrasting with the foreground of the lush green golf course. Long

straight fairways, tree lined in places and water to navigate around the golf course offered a true test for our new to golf ladies as well as those who have played many times before. It has to be noted that golf balls do not float, neither do they pop over the other side of the bank despite taking on Barnes Wallis tendencies. Island green par 3's, subtle doglegs Torremirona golf course offered the arriving visitor a fair test of golf.

Next stop Hotel Peralada Wine, Spa and Golf resort, a 5* resort known to me as a golf resort already, so it was fantastic to see what else it offered. Big sliding doors open in front of you as you enter through the sweet smelling Jasmin, the open doors envelope like a friendly hug. The scene has been set and doesn't disappoint thereafter. Once checked in we had a yoga class. Yoga not only nourishes the body and sole but is designed to bring peace and tranquility into ones life of chaos and disorder. Some unnatural positions were held for what seemed like an age then we'd endeavour to bend the other way - all done with a smile. The young lady teaching us enthused confidence and her ability to speak English clearly delighted her (and us) as we did what was asked.

The direct translation of toes from Spanish to English is feet fingers, being fully grown, worldly-wise adults this made us giggle, and decided that actually that is a much nicer description than toes anyway.



Feeling stretched yet relaxed a quick shower was followed by dinner in the main restaurant. The most Northerly golf course in Costa Brava and only a short drive to France and Girona Airport it is easily accessible. Offering a vast variety of 'activities' Hotel Peralada is a must when golfing in the area, following recent renovations the hotel has had a total revamp. The new decor doesn't scream opulence; no gold menacing looking statues following your every step with wandering eyes it simply emits a relaxing welcoming feel to the hotel with an understated earthy opulence. The spa facilities are one of the best and are open to guests of the hotel offering not only a pool, sauna and steam rooms, but a variety of treatments to indulge in. There is a separate area where you can have 'parties' everything is in double, - so small intimate parties! The outside pool relaxes the eyes with the backdrop of the Pyrenees, a subtle reminder of life outside this haven. For golfers there is an 18 hole golf courses on site, leaving the hotel at the first and returning after 9 and 18, the course meanders itself around the landscape passing traditional buildings. A challenging yet playable 18 holes golf course which is fairly flat didn't let you walk away with birdie after birdie, it is enough to challenge the visiting golfer without it being unfair and giving rewards for good play. Open holes to have a good hit, par threes over water (save yourself for the 18th hole!) We were joined by the golf Pro for the back nine. Of course my game went down the drain, but my playing partner, Kaia held the team together. Paul, the friendly French (with a bit of Irish mixed in) is the golf pro at Perlada, his approach to playing mirrors the golf resort - relax and have fun. After play Paul joined us for lunch, and what was the topic of conversation? Fawlt Towers - what else would you speak to a French Man about! There is a par three 9

hole golf course as well as a driving range with the mountain range in the background, in fact the gym overlooks the driving range which has the Pyrenees in the background, layers of delight to satisfy the eye. Eating food in the main restaurant the previous night was by way of a small carefully chosen menu to showcase the local area and the specialities of the resort, lunch in contrast was tapas, a smorgasbord of mini this and mini that with taste explosions of their own happily colliding together.

Perlada has its own castle, a vin yard selling quality wine and cava worldwide, and a casino. We didn't get the opportunity to visit these elements of the resort, and probably as well as I know very little about gambling thinking that backing a horse each way, meant it had to run back again!

Fully fed, nicely relaxed and feeling pretty happy (maybe that was the cava?) we left Peralda with promises to return and made our way to PGA Catalunya for a show around their newly decorated and renovated hotel passing the golf courses with lustful glances. The PGA Catalunya Hotel has now moved from its original 4* category to a 5* by doing some simple tweaks and an awful lot of decorating. Sat in amongst the two golf courses, its a great location for a quick weekend of golf with your buddies.

Silken Park Hotel San Jorge a 4* coastal hotel was our next stop arriving just in time for a body treatment synonymous to the area called Gerunda Fuga. We only has a taste of the treatment which is the story of a girl making her way from the Pyrenees to the coast the 'massage' is designed to experience the elements on her journey. With the story playing in the background, it is difficult to listen to as you do get engrossed in the treatment, but sadly it was over too quickly. Interestingly the Gerunda Fuga



massages are not the same at each hotel you might visit along the route from the Pyrenees to the coast, with each hotel adopting their own 'take' on the story.

Relaxed and ready for dinner we were taken to Espai del peix the Museum of Fish in Palamos. Not having any preconceived ideas about what this might be we were taken into a small cinema room and watched a short video about the history of fishing in the area, it was actually really good flicking back and forth from present day to bygone days of fishing. Opening the big doors in a disney way, the group was shuffled into another room which can only be described as a slightly upmarket school cafeteria with long tables set for the diners. Cameras poised over the chef preparation areas we were given demonstrations of the preparation for dinner, which came in a number of dishes, a good experience as we not only got amazing food but got shown how to prepare the food by the ever capable chef. An experience worth considering.

The next morning the sun was shining through the window and you could really appreciate the vista views over the ocean from the balcony. Cleverly designed the hotel rooms all seemed to face seaward being built on tiers without losing privacy.

Transferring to Club Golf d'Aro- Mas Nou took us up into the hills to the highest course of the area. I played Mas Nou a few months previously and to be honest was less than impressed as it was grey and raining, however this day to was blazing sunshine and what seemed like a relatively ordinary course previously took on a whole new life. It just goes to show that one cannot judge a book by its cover and you really do need to read into the various chapters to get the full feel as the story unfolds. Simply stunning is a phase I use quite often, why because its appropriate and one I can use for Mas Nou. Buggies are recommended as it is quite hilly in places, but

being high up affords the most delightful views. I played a golf course in Colombia once, it has always been etched in my mind as a good play and a beauty, Mas Nou is now challenging my senses and vying for top spot in my list. It is important during ones game of golf to stop and take stock of that view - each turn it seems to improve and you have a feeling of being swallowed up in beauty. A pretty course itself with monoliths to circumnavigate not to mention the usual bunkers which were pretty hard but very 'puttable'!! it really didn't matter as they were just a by-product of an amazing setting, a little stunner.

Lunch on the terrace of Mas Nou was tapas - love tapas, love Spain. Postcard cats being a bit cheeky came close for food, keeping us entertained throughout lunch as we sat on the sun soaked terrace watching the golfers come up the 18th.

The final night drew to a close with dinner at the Silken Park Hotel San Jorge we were treated to an extensive menu to choose from, being served more cava pre-dinner watching the Ryder Cup on the TV, I realised life was pretty good in this beautiful part of Spain, Costa Brava. An area where couples could come and relax, a get-away from the hum drum of busy lives, a place where the girls could come and be treated to some of the best golf, food and cava or a place when all golfers can challenge the big named courses whilst appreciating some of the lesser known ones. A place where friendships are cemented, a place for golf, a place to try new things and really get what you want from your golf holiday. This is Spain.

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