

# UNDER THE IBERIAN SUN

From the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, world-class  
golf courses are proliferating across Portugal and Spain  
*// By Farhad Heydari*

**AN ODE TO THE ALGARVE**  
The tree-lined Ombria  
Resort, an inland  
alternative to the region's  
many coastal courses

**SPECKLED WITH NO** fewer than 420 courses and lavished with more than 300 days of sunshine annually, it's no wonder that the Iberian Peninsula continues to retain its crown as the undisputed epicentre of Continental golf, especially for weather-weary northern Europeans. And regardless of whether you're heading to the Algarve or to one of the Costas, you are unlikely to stumble across a track that is anything less than bonsai-perfect.

Indeed, thanks to variations in topography, vegetation and architectural approach, golf in Spain and Portugal offers 36-holes-a-day-types an endless variety of experiences across a tableau where, after a long hibernation, new layouts are once again starting to sprout up alongside a raft of new developments and refurbishments.

STEVE CARR



The most recent debut dates back four years, where an hour north of Lisbon on Portugal's emerging Silver Coast, Cynthia Dye's 6,403m **West Cliffs** ([westcliffs.com](http://westcliffs.com)) came to fruition after a 14-year gestation period. Luckily, we won't have to wait that long for the next launch. Scheduled to open in the spring of next year, a former fruit farm in a lush ancient river valley a half-hour's drive from the Algarvian capital, Faro, is being transformed into the **Ombria Resort** ([ombria.com](http://ombria.com)). Surrounded by hillsides and dotted with indigenous plants and trees, the course is the brainchild of veteran Portuguese architect Jorge Santana da Silva, who has routed the par-70 course around mature oaks to offer a contrast to most of the layouts in the area, many of which are found on the coastal plain. When completed, the resort will feature a Viceroy hotel with 76 rooms and suites and 65 residences set amid hectares of citrus groves and fig and carob trees.

Another highly anticipated launch is that of **Comporta Dunes** ([comporta.biz](http://comporta.biz)), which is finally taking shape after a six-year hiatus. Designed by the noted Oregon-based, Scottish architect David McLay-Kidd – who has been involved with

SEA AND LAND  
Below: CostaTerra Golf & Ocean Club; facing page: the view to the clubhouse at SO/ Sotogrande

the project since 2007 and has courses such as Bandon Dunes, Queenwood and the Castle Course at St Andrews to his name – it will open in the summer of 2022 on “virgin dunes that go on for miles and miles”, on the Alentejo coast, about an hour's drive from Lisbon, as a par-71. It will doubtless join the conversation as one of the premier experiences on the European continent.

**THE SAME IS** true with **CostaTerra Golf & Ocean Club** ([costaterraclub.com](http://costaterraclub.com)), the brainchild of Mike Meldman, a California businessman and real-estate developer who has built a glittering roster of residential communities in resort areas such as Idaho, Los Cabos and the Bahamas. Like his other properties that exemplify the trend towards utopian second- (or third-) home enclaves, this one on Portugal's “Blue Coast”, already home to a roster of A-listers, should attract boldfaced names, who'll be enticed by the prospect of living along one of the last stretches of untouched Atlantic Coast in Southern Europe, in the countryside between Comporta and Melides. Spread over 292 hectares, it will feature 300 cottages, villas and residences, its own vineyard, an expansive equestrian centre and the only Tom Fazio-designed course in mainland Europe, set to open in spring.

One resort that needs little introduction, **Quinta do Lago** ([quintadolago.com](http://quintadolago.com)), has also been busy burnishing its appeal, by giving its much-loved and original South Course an 18-month, €7 million upgrade. In addition to resurfacing fairways, approaches, greens, collars and tees with a hybrid type of Bermuda grass, no fewer than 48 bunkers have been given extra TLC, while some have been relocated to favour the modern game, among other improvements. Like the other two 18-hole championship courses on site – the North Course and Laranjal – the 6,500-metre long South Course wends its way among umbrella pines, lakes and wildflowers in the 809ha Ria Formosa Natural Park.

Meanwhile, outside Madrid, a new course by architects Marco Martin and Blake Stirling is taking shape at the 550ha **LaFinca Golf Los Lagos** ([lafincagolf.es](http://lafincagolf.es)) development. The centrepiece of another exclusive residential community, the 6,480m course has been fashioned by moving more than a million cubic metres of earth in order to create gentle gradients and undulations, providing remarkable golfing vistas. And while 96% of trees found on the site have been preserved, more than 1,200 pine trees have also been planted.

Elsewhere, a pair of must-know names are adding enhancements and refinements to their distinguished



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set of offerings. **PGA Catalunya** ([pgacatalunya.com](http://pgacatalunya.com)) in Girona, Spain, has recently unveiled a long-awaited €5 million wellness centre with nine treatment rooms, a gym and yoga studios, as well as thermal and water facilities set among areas that reflect gardens, forest clearings and waterfalls.

Over in Andalucía, **SO/ Sotogrande** ([so-sotogrande.com](http://so-sotogrande.com)) comes courtesy of the Accor hotel group and will be the avant-garde brand's first opening in Spain and its first resort in Europe. “The new hotel is a significant development for us,” said Marc Topiol, chairman of Sotogrande SA, of the 152-room property, complete with six restaurants and bars and an expansive wellness centre. “It provides guests with a window into our curated world here in Sotogrande and elevates our overall quality of experience even further, ensuring that those who make or wish to make Sotogrande their permanent

or co-primary home, have even greater amenities from which to benefit.”

Perhaps the most anticipated project over the course of the next two years is the long-awaited development of the South Course at **Monte Rei Golf & Country Club** ([monte-rei.com](http://monte-rei.com)) in the eastern Algarve. Designed, like its sister North Course, by Jack Nicklaus, “the South Course will have many similar features – great trees, wonderful topography, beautiful vistas – and has the potential to be another sensational course,” said the 18-time major winner. Ground-breaking for the par-72, 6,755-metre-long course is scheduled for spring of 2022 and once complete, it will offer panoramic views of the Serra do Caldeirão mountains to the north and the Atlantic Ocean to the south. It's an idyllic setting – and one that perfectly represents the beauty, charisma and world-class variation available across the picture-perfect Iberian courses.



VASCO CELIO