

CITY BREAKS FOR GOLFERS

Peter Swain says San Diego is the new hotspot for golfers seeking sun, sea and immaculate greens

TIGER WOODS' 2008 US Open victory at Torrey Pines established San Diego as a world-class golf destination and now, new direct flights from the UK on British Airways means the sporting delights of this Californian city are easily accessible for British players.

The climate, with temperatures of 19-26C, is often described as the best in the US. So this stretch of Baywatch-meets-Beach Boys' coast is perfect not only for surfing and sailing, but also for year-round play on San Diego's 37 courses.

Torrey Pines' two clifftop set-ups of ritzy La Jolla are 'daily fee', so straightforward to get on to, if expensive — from around £112 at the weekend. The US Open was played on the tough, 7,607-yard Rees Jones-designed South Course; the North is a tad easier, but still a challenge. Their condition is exemplary, the experience memorable. Both offer good twilight rates.

The uber-stylish Scottish-themed Lodge at Torrey Pines is one of the area's very best hotels, with particularly fine dining.

A few miles inland, the 18 holes at the Johnny Miller-designed Maderas club tumble across rolling hills and meandering creeks. Its friendly clubhouse, stunning design and immaculate greens regularly put it in the top 100 American course lists.

Emphasising the variety of golf on offer, the Aviara course at the Park Hyatt near Carlsbad plays through what looks like a botanical garden. With plenty of water to catch the unwary, this classic shot-making Arnold Palmer set-up is a must-play venue. Rancho Bernardo Inn is another friendly club, ideal for a warm-up.

The number and quality of courses — from beachside and parkland to mountain and desert — plus the contemporary music venues and nightlife of the revamped Gaslight Quarter and La Jolla, make San Diego one of the best golf destinations on the US West Coast. ►



Fourth hole on the South Course, Torrey Pines.

BEST OF THE REST



MARRAKECH, MOROCCO



REYKJAVIK, ICELAND



VENICE, ITALY



BARCELONA, SPAIN

► **Why go:** Marrakech is the most European of North African golf destinations. New courses, warm winter weather and inexpensive airlines make for an ideal weekend break.

► **Stay:** With views of the Atlas Mountains, the chic new Jade Jagger-designed Baglioni, with a Six Senses Spa, is opening early in 2012.

► **Play:** Cabell Robinson designed the 18-hole, par-72 Amelkis course which has an American feel, with aggressive bunkering and plenty of water. Alternatively, the Nicklaus Design Samanah set-up is new and long, with a fine clubhouse for post-game refreshment. Meanwhile, Robert Trent Jones' Palmeriaie course has been voted one of the best in Africa.

► **Eat & drink:** AnaYela is a very stylish *riad* in the old town, with a Moroccan meets new age restaurant on the roof.

► **Sample:** Three nights' B&B at Palmeriaie Village, based on four sharing a two-bedroom apartment with two rounds of golf at Palmeriaie and Amelkis, costs from £215 per person, excluding flights. T: 0800 279 7988. www.golfbreaks.com

► **Why go:** For six months a year, Reykjavik is dark and cold, but in high summer you can play golf at midnight, through a lava field or in a dormant volcano. Surreal.

► **Stay:** The art deco Hotel Borg, almost opposite parliament, has impeccable service in stylish surroundings, and is a short walk from the Icelandic capital's shopping and famous nightlife.

► **Play:** The Grafarholt Course at Reykjavik Golf Club on the edge of the city has great views of the sea and mountains, and is the country's one genuine championship set-up. At the shorter Keilir course, instead of rough, golfers play through a 1,000-year-old lava field across from the Snaefellsjokull glacier.

► **Eat & drink:** Arctic char and whale carpaccio are Icelandic favourites. Chef Larus Gunnar Jonasson's Fish Company restaurant is making waves, as is Silfur, which goes in for smoked puffin.

► **Sample:** Two nights at the Hotel Borg in Reykjavik, based on two sharing, costs from £431 per person including flights, plus around £75 for two rounds of golf. T: 020 8974 7200. www.travelrepublic.co.uk

► **Why go:** With all that water, Venice is not an obvious golf destination, but the 18-hole Circolo Golf Venezia course on the Lido is one of Italy's finest.

► **Stay:** The Ausonia Hotel is a belle époque gem with a spa and is just half a mile from the club.

► **Play:** Amazingly, the Circolo Golf Venezia has only one water hazard, being tight and heavily wooded. Asolo, 45 miles from Venice near Treviso, has three scenic nine-hole circuits.

► **Eat & drink:** A digestif at the historical Cafe Florian in Piazza San Marco is unbeatable.

► **Sample:** Two nights' B&B in the Hotel Canova at Asolo, with hire car and rounds at Asolo, Venezia and Padova costs from £295pp excluding flights. T: 01708 339300. www.leisurelinkgolf.com

► **Why go:** The combination of great golf, food and culture.

► **Stay:** The chic Hotel 1898, on the fabled Rambla, has a pool on the roof and a spa to iron out post-game kinks.

► **Play:** Greg Norman-designed El Prat hosted the 2011 Spanish Open and with 45 holes on three courses, it's the city's pre-eminent club. Other options include the demanding Barcelona Golf Club.

► **Eat & drink:** For a modern twist on tapas, Paco Meralgo. For a two-star Michelin blowout, Lasarte is tops.

► **Sample:** Two nights at the Silken Diagonal, with rounds at El Prat, Barcelona GC and Sant Joan, costs from £359pp excluding flights. T: 0800 043 6644. www.yourgolftravel.com ■

SELLING TIPS

- Long-haul business class tickets often include free golf club carriage.
- Suggest clients rent clubs in resort or from companies such as Clubs for Hire for short-haul trips to save on costly baggage charges. www.clubstohire.com
- Pre-book tee-off times to ensure clients can play when they want to.