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## OF THE BEST

The Mediterranean is renowned for demanding golf courses surrounded by luxe resorts and stunning scenery. Peter Swain picks out the highlights

## A Sicilian challenge

Verdura, Italy

This determinedly Modernist Sicilian resort, the brainchild of Sir Rocco Forte, has now been open for five years, and both the 7,318-yard West course and 7,311-yard East (left) are maturing nicely. Wide, well-separated fairways featuring links-style pot bunkers set into immaculate new turf are the order of the day. "I told designer Kyle Phillips [the designer of Kingsbarns, the Grove and Yas Links] that I wanted two equally good championship courses. Similar developments have one good, and one not so good – I wanted two great layouts," avers Sir Rocco, a 12-handicapper. "When we're busy, one has two-balls, the other, four-balls" – a common-sense approach only a keen golfer would devise. The courses challenged the Tour pros at the 2012 Sicilian Open, but are still enjoyable for lesser mortals from the forward tees; a par-3 course is ideal for beginners. Set on a mile of unspoiled Mediterranean coastline, the Olga Polizzi-designed hotel combines Italian flair with English style. [verduraresorts.com](http://verduraresorts.com)



## Perfection in Provence

Terre Blanche, France

The chic Provençal hotel, together with its two championship courses, has impeccable James Bond credentials, being built on land once owned by Sean Connery. Less than an hour's drive from Nice airport, the property's peaceful hillside location (*right*), tennis academy and gourmet food put it among the *Grand Crus* of French resorts. The 7,235-yard Dave Thomas-designed Le Château course is one of the toughest and most aesthetically pleasing in France. Swooping past ravines, treacherous water hazards and gigantic bunkers, it makes for a lovely walk even without the clubs. The undulating 18 holes of Le Riou are more strategic but still challenging. The European Tour performance centre, with its recently opened David Leadbetter Academy, immaculate driving range, short game area, and Jean-Jacques Rivet's Biomecaswing facility, combine to make Terre Blanche a game improvement facility of international note. [terre-blanche.com](http://terre-blanche.com)



## Eastern delight

Belek, Turkey



Thanks to a visionary government initiative, good natural topography and a slate of globally renowned designers, Belek has become one of the Mediterranean's premier golfing destinations. The David Feherty-designed National ([nationalturkey.com](http://nationalturkey.com)) was the first course to gain an international reputation, and is a regular fixture on the Ladies European Tour. The 6,867-yard track meanders through eucalyptus and pine trees, with the snow-capped Taurus mountains looming in the distance. The Turkish Airlines Open venue is the majestic Montgomerie Maxx Royal ([montgomeriemaxxroyal.com](http://montgomeriemaxxroyal.com), *left*), a 7,089-yard tester with eight lakes and acres of sand to challenge pros, but plenty of space off forward tees for resort players. Most of Belek's 14 18-hole courses are linked to one of the five-star hotels in this golfing paradise.



## Mallorcan triumvirate

Arabella Golf and Spa Resort, Spain



The exemplary Castillo Hotel Son Vida, King Juan Carlos's local *habitación* of choice, sits at the heart of the three-course Arabella Golf and Spa Resort, a short drive north of Palma. Surrounding the hotel, the broad fairways of the 6,125-yard, par-71 Son Vida course (*left*), one-time home of the Balearic Open, invite ambitious driving and are perfect for a first morning's play. With charming views over Palma itself, particularly from the 8th, where the line off the tee is straight at the cathedral, the hilly 6,780-yard Son Quint set-up is ideal for day two. Played through carob, almond and olive groves, the 70 pristine bunkers, four lakes and undulating 6,941 yards of the Son Muntaner course provide an altogether sterner day three challenge. [arabellagolfmallorca.com](http://arabellagolfmallorca.com)

TRAVEL, ART &amp; LIFESTYLE

## Hellenic beauty

Costa Navarino, Greece

This Ionian Sea resort on Greece's southwest Peloponnese peninsular has been picking up international awards since it opened in 2010. The hotels, spa, sailing and water sports amenities are sublime, but it is the two golf courses that garner the highest honours. The 6,780-yard Bernard Langer-designed Dunes course provides a good test of ball control for players of all standards. It traverses a classical landscape of citrus groves and ancient woodland, making for a memorable Hellenic experience. Set in rolling hills with gorgeous sea views, the three-year-old Robert Trent Jones II Bay Course (*right*) hugs the shores of Navarino Bay, rising through box canyons dotted with innumerable olive trees, including more than a 1,000-transplanted specimens. The legendary designer is renowned for his challenging creations and this set-up is no exception. [costanavarinogolf.com](http://costanavarinogolf.com)





## Algarve gold

Quinta do Lago. Portugal



Quinta do Lago is the most lustrous jewel in the Algarve's golfing crown. With three immaculate courses, another two nearby, and several other excellent tracks in the so-called Golden Triangle of golf within a 30-minute drive, the resort is sporting nirvana. Winding its way through the umbrella pines and lakes overlooking the picturesque Ria Formosa National Park, the iconic 7,108-yard South course has hosted eight Portuguese Opens. Also built in the mid-1970s, the North is slightly shorter and consequently more forgiving. The rolling terrain of the five-year-old Laranjal features challenging hazards, both sandy and watery, and from the tips, is as tough as the South. The practice and coaching set-ups are world-class. The nearby San Lorenzo and Pinheiros Altos courses are also in pristine condition, with more championship-quality choice at Vale do Lobo and Vilamoura. Water sports on the beautiful sandy beach are excellent, and *soigné* hospitality available at a range of hotels and Michelin-starred restaurants. [quintadolago.com](http://quintadolago.com)