



Portugal's ever-expanding portfolio

Portugal's Algarve is a perennial favourite for golfers seeking a mix of sunshine, uncrowded beaches and great golf. **Peter Swain** reports on the leading developments and the increasing attraction of the Eastern Algarve for those looking for an affordable home from home

In the middle of the hectic international tournament schedule, there are very few courses good enough to lure Ernie Els and Padraig Harrington for a quiet recreational game, without any commercial tie-ups. Monte Rei in the Eastern Algarve is one of them.

"Ernie was on holiday with family and friends, and Padraig was in the Algarve with his coaches," reports Golf Director, Iain McNally. "It was the first time for both, and their own free time." Many professionals believe Monte Rei to be the best course and clubhouse in Portugal, and near the very top throughout continental Europe.

This Rolls Royce resort, with prices to match, is based on the stunning Jack Nicklaus Signature 7,181-yard set-up. A second course, beach club and hotel are in the offing, and there is even talk of a possible future Ryder Cup bid down the line.

Seventies Blackburn footballer, John

Waddington, has made millions out of Greetings Cards. Now aged 57, he's using some of the cash to build his dream 4,500-square foot house at Monte Rei. "This area's a bit like Quinta do Lago was 20 years ago. The course and facilities are pure class."

Two years ago, for a half-acre plot overlooking the 6th fairway, Waddington paid over £750,000. His palatial pad could easily cost that much again. Three-bedroom linked villas start at about £1 million.

This summer, some of them will be available to rent at Monte Rei for the very first time, so even if the house prices are out of your league, a short break down there won't disappoint. The development suits long-term investors who prize a great course, nature and exclusivity. Short-term capital growth could be modest.

Algarve house prices, denoted in Euros, have fallen about 19% since the beginning of 2009, says Mary Mangan, MD of Winkworth

Bunkering is just one of the many exceptional features at Monte Rei (above), a quite stunning championship design from Jack Nicklaus that has raised the bar at the the luxury end of the market and furthered the expansion of golf long the Algarve. (Right): The timeless charm of San Lorenzo, one of the original courses within striking distance of Vale Do Lobo, still one of the Algarve's finest family-oriented communities

in Portugal. "British owners who bought 5 to 10 years ago when the pound was up near €1.50 can afford to take a modest hit on the Euro price of their property and still show a good profit in pounds when they go back home," she reports.

For instance, a house bought for £100,000 five years ago translated into about €150,000. The same house today sold for €140,000 would yield £120,000. Mangan believes the best value is currently in re-sales. "Individual sellers, particularly the British, are more prepared to drop prices to make a deal than developers."

For instance, Winkworth is marketing a re-sale two-bedroom apartment on the Boavista golf resort in Lagos on the Western Algarve for £188,000 – a 20% discount on the current resort values. It comes furnished with access to tennis, gym, indoor and outdoor pools, and discounted green fees. The course isn't spectacular, but the



price looks attractive.

A few miles to the east, near Lagoa, the largest Portuguese tourism and leisure group, Pestana, has four golf courses and several property developments set in gently undulating countryside, ten minutes from the beach. "We've been here for 20 years and see ourselves as a friendly four-star resort," says Sales Director, James Harrison. "Both the Pinta and Gramacho courses have hosted pro tournaments, and the newer Silves set-up has a couple of truly great par-5s."

While other developers have seen almost static sales, Harrison has sold 32 properties in the last 12 months, half re-sales, half new build, and nearly all at discounts of up to 20% on advertised prices.

Harrison bases his success on three factors. "Transparency – what you see with us is what you get; sensible pricing – we know there's a recession and up to a point, price accordingly; and variety – we have everything from a quarter share of a two-bed apartment for £67,000, up to a luxury four-bedroom villa for a million pounds."

One issue for some buyers on a brand new development is the risk of living on a building site for five years, as later phases are built out. Pestana always has a variety of

re-sale stock in established parts of the resort for those who don't like mud and cranes. The group is also big enough to offer their own finance, so buyers don't need to use either British or Portuguese banks for a mortgage.

The new 'hot' part of the region is reckoned by many to be the Eastern Algarve where prices are on average 30% cheaper than the central Algarve. The Quinta do Vale club overlooks the Guadiana river bordering Spain, and has 66 three- and four-bedroom villas, all with private pools, priced from £1.1 million, and 57 townhouses with communal pools in the 'Riverside Village' costing from £582,000.

"It's a really friendly set-up especially for us ex-Pats, and there are six other courses like Quinta da Ria and Quinta de Cima within a dozen or so miles," says Club member, Phil Thomas. The Quinta do Vale course is built on reclaimed salt flats and has water in play on 14 holes – not easy.

Best value on the resort is probably the townhouses with either two or three bedrooms downstairs and the living room, kitchen and views of the golf and river upstairs. They share a couple of club pools, with sailing, a marina, beach club and hotel

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in the pipeline. Reading between the lines, Quinta do Vale would probably entertain offers 15% or even 20% below asking price. "For a top end £1.1 million villa, we'd certainly look at £850,000," says Director, David Silva.

Vale do Lobo, 25-minutes from Faro Airport, was one of the very first Algarve golf developments, and is still one of the best. Hunting down re-sales at the resort is currently a good idea. A two-bedroom apartment with pool starts at £430,000, while a three-bedroom linked villa near the beach costs £615,000.

Although a few houses are a little close to the fairways, both the Royal and Ocean courses are first class. A good selling point is that several generations continue to enjoy Vale do Lobo. "Parents, children and grandchildren keep visiting because there is something for every age," says Diogo Gaspar Ferreira of VdL. The main praca has restaurants, shops and nightclubs, while the tennis centre is world class.

This big imponderable in all this is the exchange rate. Nobody knows whether by the summer the pound will be worth €1.1 or €1.3 – it's a big difference. One thing that is certain is that the Algarve still has some of the best all year round golf in Europe.