

ARGENTARIO GOLF RESORT & SPA

Tuscany, Italy

By JAMES MASON and CHARMAINE HIBBERT

TUSCAN NIGHTS

When you hear the words Tuscany, you imagine beautiful countryside, rolling hills and gastronomy that makes the taste buds tingle with anticipation. **James Mason** and **Charmaine Hibbert** discover it also offers great golf and fitness bliss





Above: The 3rd hole with the town of Orbetello and its lagoon as a backdrop. Below: The practice ground next to the 1st tee.

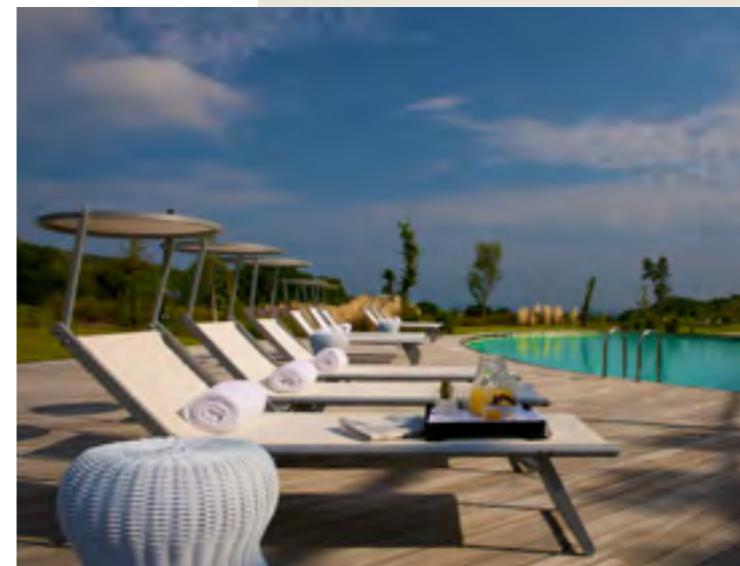
ARGENTARIO GOLF REVIEW



The golden hour is lighting up the Argentario course as shadows dance across the fairways and the bright yellow orb in the bright blue sky belies a chilly start to the day, but after climbing the steps up to the first tee this dogleg left 360-yard hole looks glorious from this elevation, the sound of my driver impacting on the ball echoes through the trees and I have managed to put it in the perfect position to attack the flag.

Unfortunately, my second shot isn't as well executed as my drive and I have to make a chip and putt par. The second tee is a bit of a trek, but once you arrive at the par 3, it's well worth the walk. Another elevated tee not only sees you looking down on the green but also the →

Top right: Relaxing by the pool. Bottom right: The beautiful decor in one of Argentario's guest rooms.



ARGENTARIO HOTEL

As the clouds disappear I knew I was in for a wonderful couple of days, the skies over Rome as we start to descend are clear and blue and as I walk out of the aeroplane and down the stairs the warmth hits me. A quick exit through the electronic barriers and I spot our chauffeur from the Argentario Resort holding his placard.

Within minutes we are on the motorway and I am stunned at how little traffic there is, it's 13.30 on a Monday afternoon and we are cruising down the motorway making rapid time and taking in the beautiful Tuscany scenery. As we cross the Diga bridge the 1.5 hour journey has flown by.

We enter through the electronic gates and pull up outside the hotel, the modern design of the building just oozes elegance, but James of course is too busy looking at the latest Jaguar range that is lined up outside – it transpires the hotel has an affiliation with the company that has offices in the local area.

On entering the reception, you can →



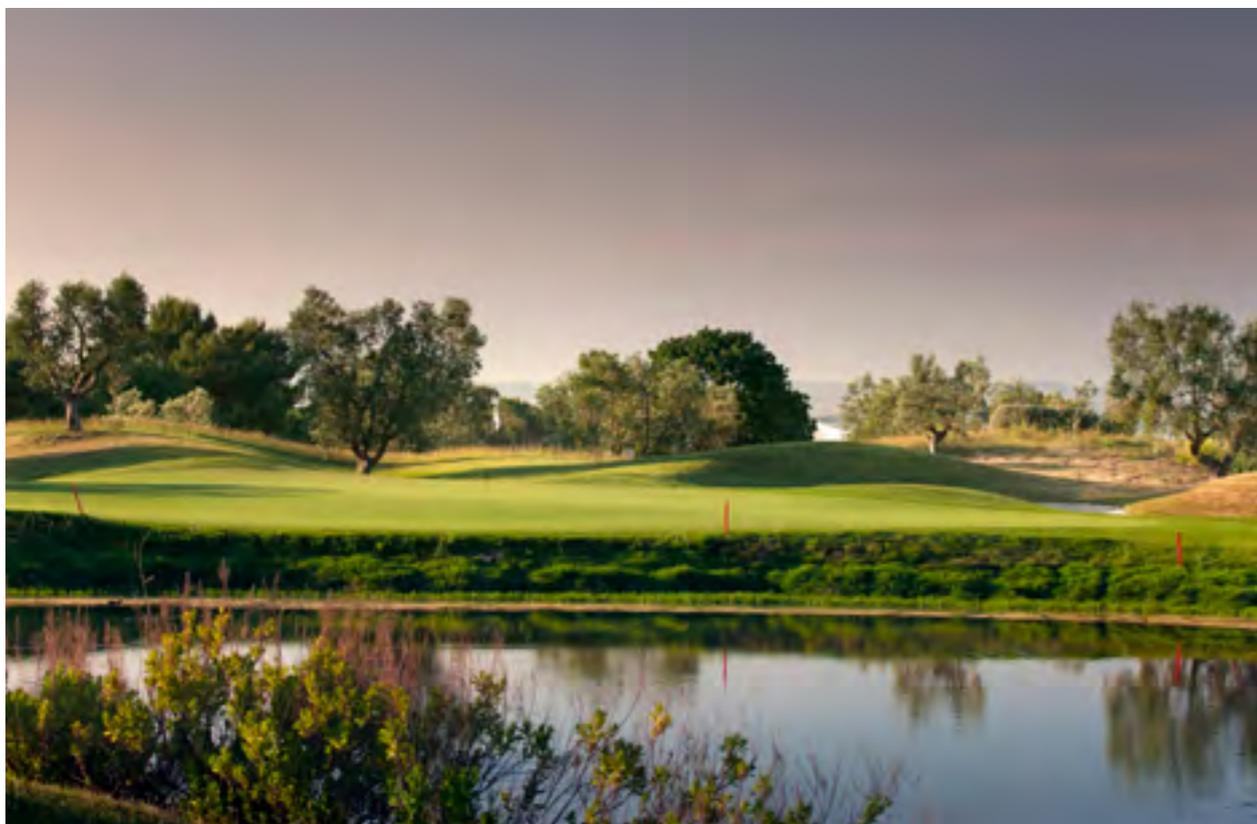


town of Orbetello and its lagoon as a backdrop.

Elevated tees seem to be an occurring theme on this course as next up is the par 5, 3rd hole, again with that stunning backdrop, the fairly narrow fairway is framed by mounding and fairway bunkers – depending on your strategy there is also a stream to carry with your drive.

David Mezzanine and Baldovino Dassu have utilised the typography of the land for maximum impact both challenging your golf game and astatically, two more par 3s arrive at the 5th and 8th with the latter played again from an elevated tee and the 8th being a tight tree lined hole. For those playing competitions it's the 7th and 9th holes that can wreak a card, with the placement of your tee shot being all important with the fairway running above a ravine that sits all the way along the left of the 7th fairway and the green sitting on a little →

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Above: Sunset over the 9th green looking towards the 10th fairway. Below: Water protecting the Par 3, 17th green.



Above: Time to relax after my spinning session. Left: The beautiful dark wood panelling at the Aper bar.

see the elegant modern vibe is continued inside with a very airy reception area and a magnificent spiral staircase that takes you down to the restaurant, bar, spa, swimming pool and gym areas which are arranged over different levels.

A swift check-in sees me walking down an ambient mood calming corridor where the walls are adorned with wonderful black and white historic golf photography, some of which are very amusing and some are of iconic golfers through the ages.

As always, the big moment arrives when I open my room door, but I shouldn't have been surprised by how beautifully appointed and well designed my room is. Spacious, modern with dark

wood, creams and beiges complementing each other, there's a deep two-person soaker tub and dark stone enclosed rain shower, which within minutes I am standing in just letting the warm water soothe my being.

After an inspection around the beautiful grounds and a view of the new villas that are being built with their stunning views out across the golf course and the town of Orbetello and its lagoon – these should be ready for occupancy from May 2019, although some are private residences. We are sitting on the clubhouse terrace overlooking what is the 9th green enjoying some light snacks and a coffee in the afternoon sun, James is of course sampling a local beer →

Right: The magnificent cellar at the Val delle Rose Winery.



Below top: Locker room at the Espace Wellness Center.

Below bottom: Overview of the golf course looking out to the lagoon.

peninsula.

The back nine comes to a close with a beautifully designed par 5, which I actually feel should be the finishing hole, as the green sits just below the deck of the clubhouse. The green is only reachable in two for the longest of hitters at 585-yards and you really need to be going into this amphitheatre of a green with a wedge as the narrow green is also protected on the right by water.

While the front nine is quite open the back nine meanders through olive trees and offers an altogether different challenge as this nine is protected by the Monte Argentario. Back-to-back birdies have seen me start this nine well and after crashing my drive down the 13th I am standing in the fairway and realise the lone oak that sits on the right is the inspiration for the golf club's logo. Its a tough green that is raised and depending on the flag position can be a three-club difference between front and back pin placements. →



“After a great session on the bike, I am now chilling out in the steam room. I much prefer a steam to a sauna but there is the option of both”

called Enki which he is raving about and brewed nearby in Grosseto, but as I have a spinning class to go to drinking alcohol is not on the agenda for me until dinner.

I change and head down the gym and pool area on a mission to explore before the start of my class, the pool looks so inviting and you can swim between the indoor and outdoor pool via a pass through in the glass surround. The gym is well equipped with bikes, treadmills, X-Trainers and a weights section, there is also an area for classes which is where I am heading for my spinning class, I am informed there are several classes you can take which include Acquagym, Aerobic Dance, Callanetica and of course spinning.

After a great session on the bike, I am now chilling out in the steam room. I much prefer a steam to a sauna but there is the option of both. Feeling

relaxed and refreshed and after a sneaky little snooze in the relaxation room I am heading back up to my room to get ready for dinner.

After a couple of pre-dinner drinks at the bar, I have ordered the rack of lamb which I am told is locally sourced like all the food that is served here, and the chef even has his own allotment for herbs. We are in Tuscany and as you would expect the food and wine are exemplary, cooked to perfection with the wine chosen by the maître d', a perfect complement to each course.

Val delle Rose Winery

After a hearty breakfast and more chilling out around the pool and steam room we are heading to the Val delle Rose Winery, it's about an hour or so trip from the hotel and another wonderful chance to soak in the beautiful vistas →

The two par 3s on the back nine sandwich the 16th, which is a wonderfully designed golf hole. To be honest I didn't realise how tough this hole could play until I reached the green, I hit driver to this dogleg right fairway and went straight for the pin over the bushes and small tree on the left with a 7-iron leaving myself a birdie putt. As I reach the green not only do I realise how wide and narrow the green is, but it also has a severe step between two tiers and I certainly wouldn't want to be putting up or down that tier if I had miss placed my approach shot.

The course comes to a close with my only criticism, don't get me wrong the dogleg right hole where you have to carry a stream with two large bunkers awaiting should you run out of fairway is a fitting finale, but you also have some very tall trees that need to be carried. Yes you can go left or right of them, which is what I have done, but I do feel it would be a much better hole without them.

I don't hit a bad tee shot, but with those trees being 200-yards from the back tee its certainly not at its apex to carry them and yes if you are playing one of the forward tees then its not too much of a problem, but I do feel they take away from what is a fantastic finishing hole.

Sitting on the terrace above the 9th green enjoying a cool beer in the warm sun, I have to say Argentario golf course is a wonderfully designed golf course surrounded by stunning vistas in a beautiful part of the world and I am gutted that I am only getting to tee it up the once.

It has been a long hot summer in Europe – at the time of playing – like many courses this has taken its toll on the greens here with some disease, but it certainly didn't effect my enjoyment of the design and I am sure by the time you get here the greenkeepers would have been able to sort the problem out and I am know like me this is a track you will want to play again and again.



Above: Looking at the 9th green this time with the 10th tee and clubhouse in the background. Right: The hacienda style Val delle Rose Winery.



Below: The iconic oak tree on the 13th



of the Tuscany countryside.

As we head off the motorway I can see the vines of the vineyards stretching out before me and we pull up outside, what I am later informed is the new winery building having expanded from the old buildings that I can see from the steps of the new. I am surprised as the architecture of the new building looks like a vast hacienda type building that I am about to find out has a massive secret sitting below it.

As I listen intently to Lisa Pianigiani who is our tour guide, I am struck by the lack of staff at the facility in fact our group and Lisa are the only people on the property today. Of course, the part I am looking forward to the most is the wine tasting and we certainly manage to taste a good many of the wines that Val delle Rose produce. It is a tour I recommend you take and as the sun sets over the hills and the orange and yellows engulf the vines, I reflect on my day so far and I can say with the exercise in the morning and now the wine tasting I seem to have this work life balance thing sorted.

usual treatments but is a wellness centre that gives advice on food education and exclusive treatments designed for you to achieve your desired weight, shape and physical-mental wellness, and how to maintain this once you have left the resort.

Things you need to know:

The Argentario resort, not only has an 18-hole golf course – which James will be reviewing in the other section – but there are 2 padel courts, 2 tennis courts, a 5-a-side football pitch and jogging paths, heated indoor pool, an outdoor pool, tubs with cervical cascades, thalassotherapy, Kneipp pools and hot tubs. During summer there's a terrace with 2 swimming pools, one of these pools is for children.

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