

Fairway to heaven

Tee up a golf break to suit any handicap, says

@katie_mcgonagle

Can you tell a birdie from a bogey? How about an eagle from an albatross? If that sounds utterly mystifying, you're not alone – golf is a world unto itself, and knowing the jargon is just the start.

Luckily, you don't have to play to make it pay – your clients are the ones who'll do the teeing off, so all you have to do is send them to the spot that best suits their ability.

Novices might be nervous of committing to a dedicated golf holiday, so ease them in with a hotel that has a spa, sandy beach and other activities, so there's a back-up plan if golf doesn't turn out to be their favourite hobby.

Intermediate players will value

a good golf school that helps them improve on technique in between some sunshine and sightseeing, while experts can go the whole hog by sampling the best courses in the business with the pros by their side.

► BEGINNERS

Golf is a good excuse for a second holiday, so remind clients booking a summer break that you can help with other holidays. Consider a weekend in the UK, home of world-famous courses such as Gleneagles and Celtic Manor – both recent hosts of the Ryder Cup – or brands such as QHotels, which has 10 golf resorts in the UK. Two-night dinner, bed and breakfast packages with six

“

Ease novices nervous of committing to a golf holiday in with a hotel that has a spa and sandy beach

hours' tuition and two rounds at QHotels start at £305.

The safest bet for beginners is a property with wide appeal, keeping golf widows and widowers amused while their other halves tear up the fairways, and acting as a safety net should players find golf isn't their forte.

“Simply Luxury by Travel 2

recommends Pine Cliffs, a Luxury Collection Resort, in Praia de Falesia in the Algarve,” says product and commercial manager Lauren Ross. “This hotel is ideal for beginners as it has an on-site nine-hole course. There is also a golf academy equipped with the latest technology, including video swing analysis, run by a team of PGA professionals”

Agents can pre-book discounted course rates, green fees and tee times for clients, plus the resort has an Annabel Croft Tennis Academy, watersports centre and Porto Pirata Kids Club, so there's no chance of non-golfers getting bored.

TOP TIP
Prestige Holidays suggests looking for hotels with a free shuttle to the course, free rounds of golf or free buggies

RIGHT: QHotels' Dunston Hall

FAR RIGHT: Velaa Golf Academy, the Maldives

BELOW: La Manga Club, Spain



PICTURE: KEVINMURRAYGOLFPHOTOGRAPHY.COM



ASK THE EXPERT

Guillaume Post, International Association of Golf Tour Operators

Golf is the biggest sports tourism sector. There are about 56 million golfers worldwide, ranging from casual to avid players. Bookings fall into two main categories: the golf holiday, where golf is the purpose of travel, and holiday golf, where golf is played once or twice but isn't a major deciding factor in the choice of destination. Some of our specialist operator members work with the trade on a commission basis or on net rates, and agents can rely on their expertise if a golf enquiry gets too complicated. Ask whether you need to pre-book tee times, if a golf cart is included and if a caddy is compulsory. iagto.com

➔ That's not the only holiday hotspot with a golf package: from the award-winning Cascades Golf & Country Club in Red Sea resort Somabay, to the nine-hole course at Velaa Private Island in the Maldives, designed by Ryder Cup-winning captain Jose Maria Olazabal, many golf resorts double as good all-rounders.

When it comes to courses with a view, however, it would be hard to match Sandals Emerald Bay. Set on Great Exuma in the Bahamas, this 18-hole course borders a mile-long stretch of white-sand beach and turquoise sea. It's not just about looks though: this Greg Norman-designed course has the goods to back it up, with five tee-off boxes and six signature holes to suit different abilities. Guests get two free rounds, and those who upgrade to a butler-service suite can play as often as they want.

▶ IMPROVERS

What about players who are keen, but not confident? Choose a resort geared



Many golfers on holiday want to improve their game but don't want to spend most of the week on the driving range

up to guide intermediate golfers through the next stage.

La Manga Club in Spain has a well-earned reputation as one of the best golf resorts around thanks to its facilities and academy, further enhanced by new director of golf training Thomas Johansson. His four-day training course starts at €325 (inclusive of guest discount), but there are also sample days, family lessons or hour-long private sessions for €150, €145 and €80 respectively.

Johansson says: "Many golfers on

holiday want to improve their game but don't want to spend most of the week on the driving range working for hours on a new swing. There are many ways to improve and we will help bring their game to another level."

One way to hone those skills is by giving golfers a taste of a professional course, and the Algarve is the ideal spot. The Oceanico Victoria course, which will host the PGA Portugal Masters in September, is next to the refurbished Anantara Vilamoura Resort, which features in Jet2holidays' Indulgent Escapes brochure, and offers an in-house golf guru.

That proximity means players can rack up plenty of course time, which is essential if they want to improve their abilities, so look out for packages that include regular or unlimited play.

The Heritage Awali Golf & Spa Resort in Mauritius has an 18-hole course, as well as a putting green, chipping green, driving range and nine-hole route, so golfers can





work on whichever aspect of their game is in most need of attention. Gold Medal recommends a package that includes daily complimentary green fees on the main course, and unlimited play on the short course.

BEGINNERS
Simply Luxury by Travel 2 offers a week's B&B at the Algarve's Pine Cliffs, a Luxury Collection Resort, from £969 until May 9. The price includes a lounge at Gatwick, flights, private transfers, one green fee and golf-bag carriage. travel2.com

IMPROVERS
Classic Collection Holidays offers seven nights' B&B at La Manga Club Hotel Principe Felipe from £1,086, including flights and private transfers. classic-collection.co.uk

EXPERTS
Beachcomber Tours offers Jeremy Dale Golf Trips at Paradis Beachcomber Golf Resort & Spa from £2,400 (£2,100 for non-golfers), departing December 1. The price includes seven nights' half-board, flights, tuition, four competition rounds, welcome party and prize-giving dinner. Also available February 23 to March 10, 2018. beachcombertours.co.uk

Golfers who are Caribbean-bound can enjoy similar added extras at the likes of Magdalena Grand Beach & Golf Resort in Tobago, where agents can upsell a stay with two complimentary rounds of golf and an upgrade from a standard to deluxe room (applicable on bookings from April 30 to December 20, with Gold Medal).

EXPERTS

If they turn up in plus-fours bearing a set of personalised clubs and lifetime membership at a local course, you know you're dealing with a serious enthusiast – and you've got to find a serious break to match.

A high-quality course does the hard work for you, and there are few better than the headquarters of the American professional game: the PGA National Resort & Spa in Palm Beach, Florida.

Malcolm Davies, Funway Holidays' product destination manager, says: "Any avid golfer should have the Jack Nicklaus-designed Champion Course on their must-play list. This world-



renowned course is home to the Honda Classic, and widely considered to be one of Florida's toughest golf courses. Florida is seeing a surge in high-end product, from stylish hotels and restaurants to upscale experiences such as golf."

Alternatively, try offering specialist tuition from a legend of the sport. Classic Collection recommends Quinta do Lago – another Algarve stalwart – where the north course has hosted the Portuguese Open eight times. Its one-on-one half-day golf school is a three-

hour intensive session (from €195), or there's the chance to play with a PGA pro (from €165 for nine holes) to get feedback on your technique.

In Mauritius, advanced players can pick up a few secrets from trick-shot artist and PGA pro Jeremy Dale. He'll be hosting specialist golf weeks at Paradis Beachcomber Golf Resort & Spa, with daily competitions, and group and individual coaching, to bring out the social side of the game.

It's a good idea to give experts the chance to pit their wits against several courses in different environments. Nicky Shafe, marketing manager for Prestige Holidays, says: "With six testing courses in just 21 square miles, Bermuda is a haven for golfers. The 18-hole, par-70 Tuckers Point – with its challenging elevation changes – is great for experienced players, and Prestige has some great offers at the resort for this summer."

If it's not possible to bring that many courses together in one place, the only alternative is to go to them. AmaWaterways' golf-and-cruise does just that, stopping off along the Danube at five of Europe's leading courses – in the Czech Republic, Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Hungary – from £4,343 for golfers and £2,498 for non-golfers, combining a seven-night cruise and three nights in Budapest or Prague.

Not only will golfers get private Mercedes transfers to each course, a pre-arranged tee time and practice balls set up on arrival, but once they've finished, they can enjoy lunch in the clubhouse while someone else cleans their clubs – now that's a result.



LEFT: Paradis Beachcomber Golf Resort & Spa, Mauritius

ABOVE Anantara Vilamoura Resort, the Algarve