



OUT TO
sea

Cruising is a wonderful way to unwind in style whilst also seeing the world. And when you can bring your golf addiction with you, there's just no excuse not to try it.

By Richard Asher, photos Hapag-Lloyd Cruises, Abama Golf, Tenerife and Tecina Golf Club

My stomach was not relishing another boat ride. My old childhood friend, travel sickness, had come back to town in recent months. We hadn't seen each other since I was twelve. Reacquaintance, though, had been swift, and the year leading up to my voyage on the MS Europa 2 had seen too much motion-inspired greenness.

I wasn't sure I should be doing this, but the chance to take my first proper ocean cruise, with golf trips ashore thrown in, was too good to miss. So here I was on Lisbon's quay, pre-loaded with pills. Ready to rock, but hopefully without the roll.



My experienced cruise companions had already warned me that the Europa 2 might unfairly raise a rookie's expectations. Apparently, cruise ships didn't get much better than this one, a relatively small, German-run vessel, offering an understated, spacious, quality-over-quantity experience. The only way from here would be down. Oh well. I could think of worse problems to have.

SUITE SUCCESS. I didn't know where to look first. The Spa Suite was a staggering wonderland that put most earthbound lodgings to shame. It was one of those clever, romantic rooms with a giant window between the bathroom and the bedroom. A design which - among other things - lends a great feeling of space to the suite.

Food lay all over the tastefully partitioned lounge area. Welcome champagne, piles of fresh fruit, caviar-laden delicacies whose names I couldn't tell you, and far more chocolatey treats than I should be presented with so close to dinner time. As the cruise wore on, I surely disappointed my butler with my failure to keep up with the kitchen's regular snack offerings. If I'd put it all away though, I might have had to leave the room by the balcony.

The suite held other interests too, like a tablet, a sun deck big enough for four, a Jacuzzi bath and enough drawer space to house six months' worth of socks. But I forgot all that when I realized the walk-in

shower doubled as a steam room. Simply outstanding.

AT SEA. What a romantic port Lisbon is for a departure! Under the Tagus bridge and past the statue of Christ we slipped, just after midnight, then swept out into the vast blackness of the ocean. I thought of the great Portuguese explorers, who would have sailed out of here with little clue where they were going, or whether they were ever coming back.

I felt the boat begin to sway as we left the estuary's embrace and the North Atlantic grabbed us. But the pills did their job; I went to bed feeling solid. And the dreaded seasickness never did catch up with me. God bless the pharmaceutical industry.

Day one was spent at sea, so I prowled the decks. The Europa 2 is small enough that you never feel overwhelmed. It's deliberately designed with a lot of 'wasted' space, indulgent to its core! And the sea is visible almost everywhere on board, so you never forget you're on a ship.

It was a good day to try the quintessential cruise experience, lying on a deck chair, watching the ocean slide by. I could see the appeal, especially with a warm November sun frying my starboard balcony. There was something about this cruising lark that made relaxing a lot easier than usual.

ROYAL AND ANCIENT SLICE. If you've had enough ocean-gazing, then there's the perfect antidote if you're a golfer: a virtual game at the indoor golf centre. Here you can get a lesson from the on-board professional, with the help of the state-of-the-art Full Swing/E6 system. I'd always wanted to try a round at St Andrews, yet kept putting it off. Mainly because I fear my slice will have me miss golf's widest fairway. This seemed like the perfect time to test my nerve under the imaginary gaze of the R&A members. So pro Roland Milich set me up on the first tee, and sure enough, I promptly blasted it out of bounds. More than once.

I skipped to the 17th and 18th, but things remained dire, which told me the simulator is pretty sharp! The projected flight looked disappointingly true to the mishits I manage in the real world.

CASABLANCA. Casablanca is an evocative name, and I was off the boat like a shot when we docked. And I liked easing into a new land in this way. Running down the gangway and onto solid land (OK, concrete) really beats the airport thing. Even the crack-of-dawn walk through the deserted harbour was surprisingly atmospheric.

After a spot of sight-seeing, our group lunched at Rick's Cafe, a name instantly recognizable to fans of the film to which this city lent its name. It's a faithful recreation, opened a decade ago by a passionate former US embassy attaché. She's created a convincing



On select cruises on board the EUROPA, you will be treated to exceptional culinary creations prepared by the legendary Michelin-starred chef Dieter Müller



Abama Golf, Tenerife

ambience with décor and music, and the food's hearty too. It's a nice touch for Casablanca, since none of the film was actually shot there.

GOLF OUTING. Today was also the first golf day of the cruise, what a terrific one it was for the game at Royal El Jadida. Pleasantly warm, with delightful blue skies and no wind, but a long way from the oppressive heat you'd get in summer.

The course was an hour or so up the coast, but certainly worth the ride. The front nine was a lot more wooded than you might associate with golf in a desert country – bad news for that slice of mine! The back nine was more open, though, and the rolling

terrain allowed for some magnificent sea and sky views.

Halfway eats were part of the package, and you had to approve of the local touch to the fare. Dates and figs accompanied the cakes and sandwiches, so none of the 20 or so players could forget they were in Morocco.

It was an altogether fun, easy way to spend one's day ashore. And I was pleasantly surprised to find that the crew even give your clubs a thorough clean before returning them to you!

BRIDGE PARTY. Captain Wolter kindly invited us to the bridge twice. On the first visit, during our at-sea day, we saw dolphins at play around the front of the vessel. And now we savoured the

excitement of departing Casablanca, trying - and not always succeeding - not to block the Chief Officer's view as he pulled away from the pier.

A no-nonsense seaman, albeit one with an incongruously playful penguin-motif coffee mug (never rinsed, per German custom), our Kapitän always greeted us with firm handshakes. He and his crew steered a steady ship throughout the voyage. I'd recommend them.

By sunrise, urban Morocco had long disappeared on the port side, replaced by a savage landscape of parched, rocky hillsides dropping straight into the sea. It looked romantic from afar, but not the sort of place you'd want to get washed up needing help.

HIGH MOUNTAINS AND HIGH TEA. Late on the third morning we reached Agadir. Having discovered city life the day before, it was time for a more rural Moroccan experience. So I resolved to climb the bare-looking hillside behind the docks.

I found solitude in abundance. It only took ten minutes to hike away from the bustling coast road and reach a windless scrubland. There, buzzing flies were the only sound. The views over the Atlantic were epic, as were those of Agadir from the medieval kasbah further along the hilltop. Beyond the city, the coastline swept south as far as the eye could see, to even more exotic places like Mauritania.

Perhaps suffering a touch of sunstroke after my walk, I was more than ready for high tea after hitch-hiking back to the Europa



Tecina Golf Club, La Gomera

2. I had to sample unlimited cakes at least once on the trip! For me, too much of the selection had hidden bits of fruit in it, but as an event -- a pianist in the corner and a steaming cup of Assam in my hand -- tea did not disappoint.

RESTAURANTS. As if the relentless replenishment of my suite's food supplies wasn't enough, I was also expected to eat three multi-course meals a day! For fine diners, the ship offers French, Italian, Japanese, Asian and other international restaurants.

My meal at Elements, which offers an Asian flavour, stood out. I liked its cosy ambience (although the more airy Tarragon did score points for boasting not one but two paintings of Hungarian Puli dogs, courtesy of German artist Cornelius Völker) and its mouth-watering menu made me an indecisive wreck. Everything from the laksa to the tuna steak to the coconut and honey crème brûlée was a taste sensation. For a more casual dining experience -- though the food quality remains -- the partially al fresco Yacht Club restaurant is a true pleasure, especially for daylight dining.

LAST BATH AND LAST DAY. All that remained on the fourth and final night was to find time for the Jacuzzi bath, which I'd neglected amid the lengthy to-do list on ship and on shore. I thought I'd been cunning by running it hot well in advance - it takes a while to fill - and then letting it cool for an hour or so. But the bath laughed in my face with its incredible heat retention qualities. I think I could have evolved cold blood in less time than it would have taken to be useable.

Eventually I found room for enough cold water to allow entry. A couple of minutes with the jets and the light show were worth the wait though. Especially the white light, which makes you feel like you're bathing in milk.

Next day, it was unexpected rain and chill as we approached Lanzarote and prepared to leave the cruise at its midway point. Appropriate enough, as those of us departing were pretty miserable about doing so. For me, the idea of missing out playing

golf on Tenerife, and of course the quirky Tecina GC on La Gomera, made matters even worse!

It's surely impossible not to have a great time on the Europa 2. Maybe I've been spoilt, but if that's cruising, I'll have some more please! With a side helping of those pills... **GGM**



GOOD TO KNOW

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LISBON TO BARCELONA

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