

HIDDEN GEMS

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

Aphrodite Hills is the jewel in the crown of Cyprus, which is ready to rival the established golf destinations abroad

BY SEAN RAMSDALE

From the moment you arrive at Aphrodite Hills' five-star InterContinental resort hotel, you are treated like royalty. A glass of chilled champagne is placed in your hand as you move through reception – welcome refreshment after a four-hour flight and a short but sticky trip from the airport – to mark the start of a luxurious stay.

The resort is situated across two elevated plateaux either side of the Randidi Gorge, a natural ravine and public nature reserve surrounded by the Randi Forest – a protected area dominated by the area's many olive and carob trees.

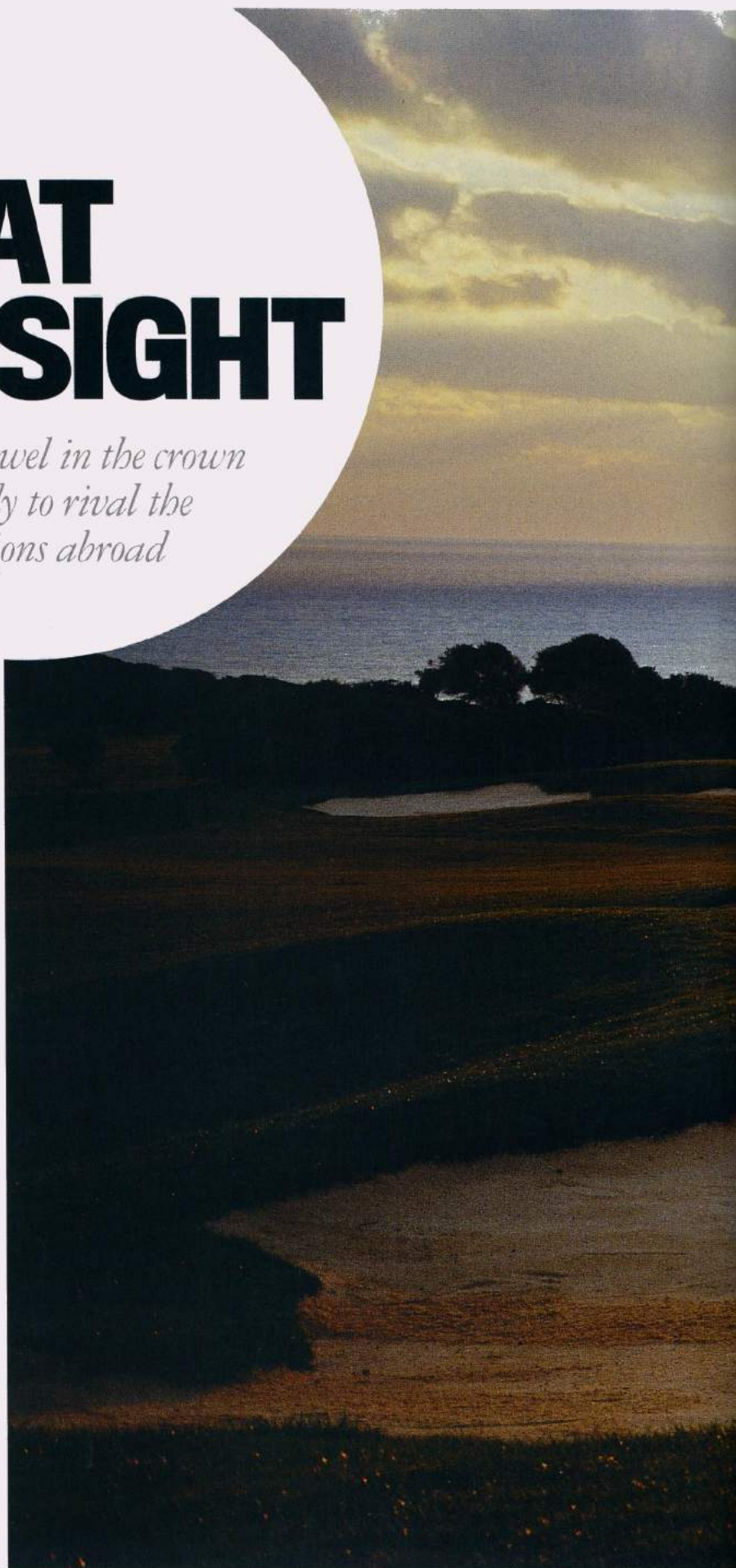
In fact, the complex can barely be seen until you turn off the main road, drive up through the security gates and arrive in the lap of sheer luxury and relaxation. Indeed the phrase 'chill out' could have been invented here...

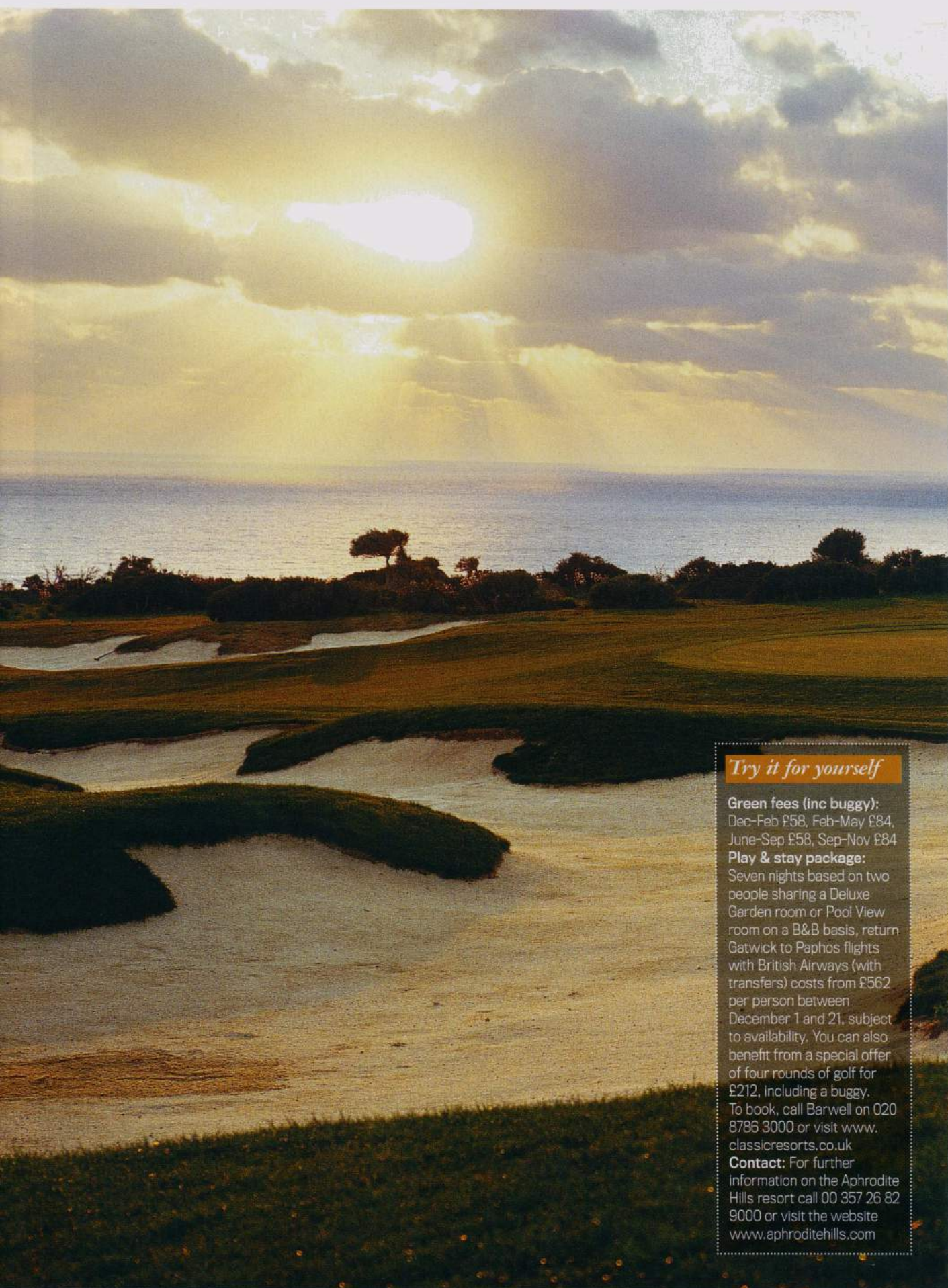
The hotel, which opened in 2005, is spacious and contemporary yet with touches of traditional Cypriot style.

It offers a wide range of luxurious guest rooms and suites, all with private terraces and some with private pools.

Wandering around the complex, you soon realise you needn't leave for the duration of your stay, as there is a superb selection of bars and restaurants on the site – from an al fresco sea view at L'Atelier Brasserie to an à la carte experience at Mesogios or more informal dining at the Asian Corner, Zimi Italian or traditional Cypriot Taverna.

With a village square, shops and plenty of hotel activities around the outdoor pool complex, this is a holiday paradise.





Try it for yourself

Green fees (inc buggy):

Dec-Feb £58, Feb-May £84,
June-Sep £58, Sep-Nov £84

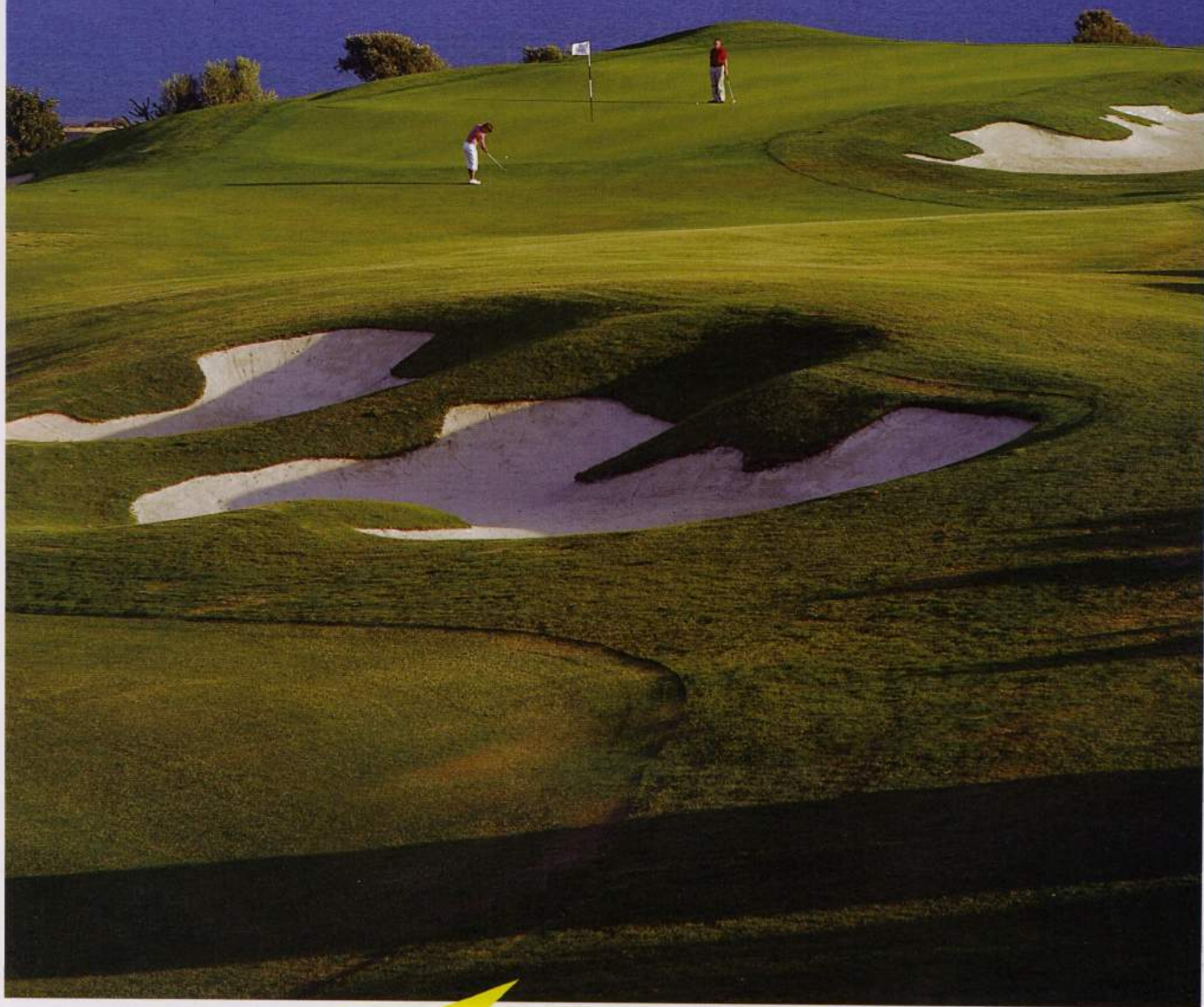
Play & stay package:

Seven nights based on two people sharing a Deluxe Garden room or Pool View room on a B&B basis, return Gatwick to Paphos flights with British Airways (with transfers) costs from £562 per person between December 1 and 21, subject to availability. You can also benefit from a special offer of four rounds of golf for £212, including a buggy.

To book, call Barwell on 020 8786 3000 or visit www.classicresorts.co.uk

Contact: For further information on the Aphrodite Hills resort call 00 357 26 82 9000 or visit the website www.aphroditehills.com

Golf is set to grow in Cyprus with new courses in the pipeline. Until then head for Aphrodite Hills. You won't regret it.



See thousands of course reviews @ www.todaysgolfer.co.uk



Hitting the wall
A rocky death awaits anything short on this charming hole.



Sand trap
Aphrodite boasts some beautifully-sculpted bunkers.

The luxury of the resort is one thing and the gorgeous Cypriot climate another but I was here for the golf and I couldn't wait to get out on the Cabell Robinson-designed course, only the third to be built on the island.

Robinson, responsible for Spanish gems La Cala and Las Colinas, rates Aphrodite Hills as among his best work. He has combined the natural landscape, the wonderful sea views and the tranquil environment to create one of Europe's finest new tracks.

After warming-up on the double-ended 350-metre range and large pitching and chipping areas, I was ready to tee it up on the relatively-short 1st hole, which has an 18th century kiln right in the middle of the fairway, forcing you to choose a side to drive down... or open the shoulders and try and fly it over the top.

The opening two holes are a gentle introduction to the more spectacular holes which begin at the 3rd. I spotted a small tee on the edge of the ravine and prepared to drive off when a greenkeeper suddenly appeared and asked me if I was going to 'play it off the back?' There was good reason for the absence of a black tee box because few will relish finding the sliver of fairway 250 yards in the distance. With a strong breeze blowing, my usually strong driving faced a stiff test – especially as the greenkeeper claimed he'd never seen anyone reach

Been there, done that...

"The buggy drive between the 6th green and 7th tee is one of the most nervous I've ever experienced! The steep cart path zig-zags like a snake and is not one for the faint-hearted! Buggy trauma negotiated, a cracking tee shot awaits at the par-3 7th which makes the drive worthwhile."

TG Instruction Editor
Carly Cummins

"The Aphrodite Hills course is as good as any I have played in Portugal or Spain. It's very well thought out and calls itself the best golf course in Cyprus, which is impossible to argue with."

Reader
Peter Jackson

it before! Seconds later he had. I felt great pride as I negotiated one of the most intimidating tee shots I've faced. It is a truly exacting driving hole off the tips – which turns it into a par 5 – but even high handicappers should experience it... even if just for fun!

Other fine holes on the front nine include the attractive 4th, which winds between olive and carob trees, and the par-3 5th, which sees you shooting uphill into a bowl green.

I had heard about Aphrodite's signature hole but was still stunned by the par-3 7th, which is set down into a ledge and only accessible by a long buggy ride around the other side.

Like the 3rd, the multiple tee box options mean that every level of golfer stands a chance of getting it close from the tee. From the front tees, golfers have a short flick with a wedge, while more daring players face a 210-yard carry from the tiny back tee.

Another career shot with a hybrid to 10 feet set up my second two of the round. It was clear I was being inspired by the jaw-dropping holes.

A battery-draining ride onto the resort side of the ravine revealed a couple of great holes set in front of the hotel on the edge of the coast.

The short 8th has a tight drive in the direction of the ocean across a sloping fairway while the short, par-4 9th is peppered with bunkers and ends with a sloping green.

Four things...

...you didn't know about Aphrodite Hills

- Its name was chosen due to the fact the ravine overlooks the exact spot where the Greek goddess of love 'Aphrodite' is said to have emerged from the sea. Legend has it that if you swim around the prominent rock three times, naked and under a full moon, you'll find true love.
- Some of the oldest olive trees in Cyprus can be found among the 7,000 around the resort, including a 500-year-old monster at the main gate.
- The British Olympic Association used the resort as the training camp for their athletes – including Dame Kelly Holmes – before the 2004 Olympic Games in Greece.
- Sports stars such as Gary Player, Tony Jacklin, Kenny Dalglish and the late George Best have all visited and raved about the course and resort.

TIME
TO GET
THE BIG
STICK
OUT...



Ace hole

573-yard, par-5 3rd

- This brute of a par five requires a daunting carry of 200 yards just to make it over the canyon between the back tee and the fairway. Only the brave will take this on and will need their very best to find the short stuff. The hole can be played as a two-shotter from the considerably less daunting teeing areas further forward.



Crystal clear
Cyprus enjoys a
fabulous climate for
year-round golf.



The two nines at Aphrodite Hills are quite distinct with the front nine the more scenic and demanding of the two. The shorter back nine begins with a good par 5 and every hole on this clever layout stands out in its own way. Few holes run alongside each other, which gives a feeling of privacy – and nobody sees your bad shots!

The other highlight of the back nine comes at the tough 16th, which has another gorge running all along the right side of the fairway, making par a very respectable score.

The tasty finale is a terrific par 5 which rolls around the contours leaving a long shot over water to a narrow green or a decision to lay up and spin one in to birdie range... possibly!

Off the backs, the course can be a serious challenge for strong players at over 7,000 yards but with tees offering options from 5,500 yards up, you can make a selection to best fit your ability.

Cypriot golf isn't just about Aphrodite Hills, although it is the main attraction. Golf on the island kick-started when Donald Steel's splendid Tsada layout, on the outskirts of Paphos, opened in 1994. Two years later Secret Valley, which virtually neighbours Aphrodite Hills, opened. However it wasn't until 2002 and the birth of Aphrodite Hills that Cyprus really arrived on the golfing map.

Now Cyprus looks set to become a

Top tips

○ Make use of the hotel's free shuttle to their private beach a few miles away where you can enjoy tasty food and cooling drinks with the sea lapping at your feet.

○ Some long walks between holes make a buggy essential – although the back nine is definitely walkable on a cool day.

Coming soon...

Numerous new courses are in various stages of planning, including the Nick Faldo-designed Palmerston Anatolikon Golf Resort – due to open in 2009.

major player on the golf scene with big names like Nick Faldo and Gary Player involved in projects, while the first 18-hole course to be built in Northern Cyprus opened last year. Situated on the coast at the foot of the Five Finger mountain in Esentepe, Korineum Golf & Country Club's layout is carved from a natural forest of umbrella pines and olive trees with stunning mountain and sea vistas.

But it's Aphrodite Hills that offers utter luxury for that all-round holiday experience. There's a tennis academy with four (soon to be 10) championship courts, an award-winning Retreat Spa – a complete haven of calm including 24 treatment rooms, Greco-roman thermæ experience, infinity pool, gym – as well as a nature trail, horse riding and mini golf. Something for everyone...

And there's no better way to end the day than sip cocktails in the Sunset Bar at the hotel, gazing out at the Mediterranean and an incredible sunset. The outside world feels like a world away from the seclusion of Aphrodite Hills but if you do venture out of the resort, head for the nearby charming villages or venture into the cultural, party town of Paphos.

Golf is set to grow in Cyprus with several new courses in the pipeline. Until then head for Aphrodite Hills for some thrilling golf and plenty of luxury. You won't regret it.

Winning trio

Introducing more of the island's attractions

○ Secret Valley

Opened in 1996 Secret Valley nestles, you won't be surprised to learn, in a scenic valley. Being surrounded by grand trees adds to the maturity of this fairly new course, which continues to bed in very nicely.

The beautifully-sculptured rock formation offers panoramic views, giving golfers both the beauty of nature and the pleasure of great golf.

Course: Par 71, 6,456 yards.

Location: 12 miles east of Paphos.

Green fees: £38 to £50.

Tel: 00 357 26 27 4000.

○ Tsada

Tsada is set in the grounds of a 12th century monastery which lies in a picturesque valley. Being situated 550 metres above sea level ensures cool breezes, which are very welcome during the hot summer months. Designed by highly-respected course architect Donald Steel, the course opened for play in 1994.

Course: Par 72, 6,607 yards.

Location: 20 miles north of Paphos.

Green fees: From £38.

Tel: 00 357 26 64 27 74.

○ Vikla

This is a 12-hole course which is currently being developed into a full 18. It's a cheap and cheerful venue for the beginner or family fourball as there is no formal dress code and no handicap certificates are required. One to bear in mind if you're after something a little less taxing.

Course: Par 68, 5,396 yards.

Location: 15 miles north-east of Limassol.

Green fees: £23.50.

Tel: 00 357 99 674 218.

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