



Greece is the word now for golfers

With two new courses being built, the five-star Costa Navarino resort in Kalamata is pulling out all the stops to become one of the best in Europe, says **Chris Folley**

LOOK at that snow!" piped my excitable youngest son as we made our way through winding mountain roads. Was I going mad? We'd done the ski trip a few weeks before, and I could swear that we'd arrived at Athens airport, not Geneva.

But snow there was, and yes, we were in Greece. This Alpine scene was on the 8,000ft Mt Taygetos, clearly in view on the long drive from Athens to the southwest Peloponnese, and one of many surprises on our first trip to the region.

Once down from the mountains the scene changed to sleepy villages, rows of olive trees, vineyards and finally the Ionian Sea. Our destination? Costa Navarino, the vision of former shipping magnate Captain Vasilis Constantakopoulos and now, I was told, the leading golf resort in the country.

Therein lay the next surprise: Greece had never been on my radar for golf. Yet

I found myself the next day standing on the highest tee on the Bay course, with a pristine rolling fairway ahead, lush green in the distance and the blue waters of Navarino Bay behind it.

The Costa Navarino golf experience also takes in the Dunes course — located within walking distance of two five-star hotels, the Westin and the Romanos — while two new courses are being designed by former Ryder Cup captain José María Olazábal. They're set for completion in 2021.

We checked into the Westin, built in traditional stone and offering 455 rooms and suites. While I'd been sold on the golf aspect of Costa Navarino, it is also hugely popular with families: my young ones were most excited by the thought of buffet breakfasts by the pool. There is also a wellness centre and an

aqua park for children to play in, as well as an indoor bowling alley.

It would have been easy not to set foot outside the resort — half-board dining options include dinners at Da Luigi and fine dining at Flame — but I for one get cabin fever.

Fortunately, Navarino Outdoors offers bike rentals and tours for all levels — we found an easy ride to the beautiful crescent-shaped Voidokilia beach. For a more adventurous trip you can head to the Giavola lagoon, where flamingos sometimes gather, or the pretty harbour town of Pilos.

Back in the resort, I didn't think I'd be interested in the "entertainment" — until an invitation came to try eight blended and single-malt whiskies. The Game of Thrones tasting was attended by 50-plus mainly Athenian aficionados — and two thirsty Brits. Whisky meets Westeros: sounds like a winning formula.

DETAILS

COSTA NAVARINO

● Elegant Golf Resorts (0333 455 3580, elegantgolfresorts.com) offers seven nights B&B, sharing, return flights from Gatwick to Kalamata with easyJet (includes luggage and clubs) and four rounds of golf or via Athens from Heathrow with Aegean (Aegean.com) from £1,099pp.



► 5 June 2019



Greek dreams: the Dunes course, main picture. Top right, cycling in the hills near Voidokilia beach and villa living at the Westin



Edited by
Cathy Adams