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RATED TRAVEL Compiled by Trisha Harbord



Majorca: Sunset to love

Nadal's home turf is ace for tennis breaks

By James Weatherup, 27/06/2010

EVER dreamed about smashing a tennis ball around the court like Rafael Nadal?

The Spanish ace has been showcasing his talents at Wimbledon which goes into its second week tomorrow.

But you don't have to be able to serve at 140 miles per hour to enjoy a good game of singles or doubles.

I've played regularly since I was a teenager but I've never had any lessons - that's my excuse anyway!

The one thing I've always wanted to do though is try a holiday abroad with some proper instruction.



ACE: Learn to play like Rafael Nadal

And what better place to pick than No 2 seed Nadal's home turf on the beautiful island of Majorca.

He grew up playing tournaments here so I hoped maybe a little bit of his magic might rub off on me.

I picked a Jonathan Markson Tennis holiday and stayed in the four-star Hotel Villamil in the pretty Mediterranean town of Paguera. The other option was the cheaper Hotel Reina Paguera which has a huge pool and offers half board.

The location was perfect for both hotels - just 20 minutes drive or taxi from Palma Airport and a few minutes' stroll to the tennis centre. The good thing was that it doesn't matter what standard you are as the coaches sort out the right hitting partners for you.



ANYONE FOR DUECE? Relaxing pool area at four-star Hotel Villamil in Paguera

It's not for the faint-hearted though. Prepare for three solid hours of instruction, games and drills every morning for five days!

Our friendly group of 10 was made up of students, teenagers and mums and dads all wanting to hone their skills and play that bit better.

Fun

The programme has been devised by former Davis Cup player and top coach Ali Yenilmez who has had 30 years of coaching adults and children at all levels.

And each day the coaching team - we had ex-British county players Anthony McNairney and Suzanne McNaughton-Brown - focus on a different shot.

It was tough but fun and very rewarding, and I admit I had a few aches and pains after the third day but I felt much fitter and lost a few pounds in the process by the end of the week.

The popular club has 15 courts and a cosy rooftop bar and restaurant - a nice place to relax and make friends after a gruelling morning session on the courts.

If you want to arrange a game or extra tuition privately afterwards you can also book a court or an individual lesson with one of the pros. Expect to pay around 13 per hour (about £11) for the court or 39 an hour (£32) for a lesson.

The courts are in good shape and former Wimbledon champions like Nadal, Boris Becker and Steffi Graf have all played and practised there over the past few years.

And if you really are fit and sporty and you've got some energy left, Majorca is also a wonderful place to play golf.

One of the nicest courses - just a 10-minute drive from the hotel - is Golf de Poniente near Cala Figuera.

I played it twice - expect to pay at least 80 (£65) - and enjoyed the challenging par 72 course.

The fairways and greens are superb and the scenery is amazing - as long as you don't hook the ball into the trees.

If this all sounds too exhausting don't panic because the hotel will help you unwind.

There's a spa with sauna and steam room, indoor pool and hot tubs to soothe those aching muscles.

Beauty therapy and massage treatments can also be booked.



ON COURT: James shows off his backhand

And outside there's a sunbathing terrace and pool with a panoramic view of the whole bay to enjoy after a game.

Almost all the rooms in the Hotel Villamil have stunning sea views and are elegantly furnished with a private bathroom, terrace, mini bar, air conditioning and satellite TV.

There are two restaurants serving superb international and local cuisine and outside sun loungers and towels are provided. If you prefer, you can walk directly out of the hotel on to the beach where there are plenty of restaurants for lunch or dinner.

Paguera town itself is crammed with superb eateries which have a choice of menus - from tasty pizzas, paellas to five-course gourmet feasts.

Some of the bars put on free entertainment like flamenco dancing and there are also two nightclubs a few minutes' stroll from the hotel, which also hosts live entertainment in the main bar every evening.

If you walk along the seafront you can pick up a fantastic glass-bottomed boat trip which costs around 13 (£11) for two hours and the kids will love it.

Delights

If you have a hire car, you can reach beautiful Port Andratx in the south west of the island in 20 minutes and enjoy a coffee or a lovely meal in the harbour.

Off course, Palma and all its delights such as the cathedral and shopping is not far away if you fancy a super day out, and there's a bus stop just a few metres from the hotel if you are on a budget.

It's also worth pointing out that non-tennis players don't miss out either - they receive a £200 discount off the booking price in the brochure.

And prices for tennis players vary depending on where you go for your coaching.

Now, about that backhand...

GETTING THERE

SEVEN nights at the 3-star Hotel Reina Paguera based on two sharing and including dinner and a 15-hour tennis programme in September costs from £660 per person.

Seven nights B&B at the 4-star Hotel Villamil with the tennis programme costs £1,130 per person. Visit www.marksontennis.com or call 020 7603 2422.

Flights not included but easyjet.com flies from UK airports and ba.com now has flights from London City Airport to Palma.

Other centres that give good service

JONATHAN Markson have 15 venues at home and abroad. They include centres in:

OXFORD - Specialist tennis camp was set up in 1981 by Jonathan Markson, ex-captain of the Oxford University tennis team and a Scottish international. Players stay in college digs and receive intensive lessons from a team of 30 coaches. £890 a week full board, accommodation and tennis.

YORKSHIRE - Summer camp for kids aged 10 to 18 at Giggleswick School in the Dales. Suits all playing levels with one or two-week stays from July 11 to 25 and tennis up to 30 hours a week. Residential from £720 a week, non-residential £350.



BE IN-SPIRED: At Oxford

SEADOWN AFRICA - Top coach Tim Armstrong directs the programme at Meadowridge Tennis Club in Stanning Constantia outside Cape Town. Stay in the historic Alphen Country House Hotel or stylish guest-house accommodation.

TUNISIA - Five-star Le Hammamet is the luxury base on the beach at Yasmine. All players catered for in a 15-hour weekly programme on hard courts with breakfast and dinner included. There are two golf courses about 20 minutes away.

CYPRUS - Luxury five-star Paphos Amathus Beach Hotel near Paphos with coaching led by Brit John Potter.

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