

THE GAME

TRAVEL

Kalos Golf Cruises



THE DOLPHINS APPEARED our first morning at sea as we were cruising in the Atlantic, south from Lisbon, toward the southern end of Europe. They swam close to the boat, leaping, spraying, playing. At the same time, the crew of our ship, the 360-foot *Sea Cloud* (pictured above), was scampering up and down rope ladders, unfurling the broad white sails of the four-master, pulling on giant lines, calling to one another in a performance that's been repeated on the high seas for hundreds of years. Dolphins in the water below, sails in the sky above: It was hard to know where to look.

A few days later when dolphins came alongside again, few of us even noticed. We were engrossed in a lecture on Spanish history: learning the derivation of the famous Castilian lisp, marveling at the confluence of cultures, realizing that there is more to know than Ferdinand and Isabella.

Between the two sightings, the 60 passengers on this Kalos cruise had been to the top of the Rock of Gibraltar, taken a private tour of the Alhambra, walked the beaches of the Costa del Sol, and been fed almost as well as the kings and queens of long ago.

We'd also played five rounds of golf, including one at Valderrama, site of the 1997 Ryder Cup.

The hard thing to remember on a Kalos Golf Cruise is that it is, in fact, a golf cruise. Whether on our "Iberian Peninsula" cruise or any of the company's 14 trips a year in Europe, the emphasis is on the mix of activities—cultural, culinary, and on-course—and making every one an exceptional experience. Jim Lamont, president of Kalos, described each cruise as a "floating country club," and, indeed, the passengers tend to be private-club couples with the time to enjoy the leisurely pace. But it also is, said Tom Hook, cruise director and after-dinner piano player, a "house party."

For seven days, as we sailed from Lisbon to Barcelona, overnighting in ports along the way, our house was the *Sea Cloud*, which had been built in 1931 by financier E.F. Hutton for his bride, socialite Marjorie Merriweather Post. Their cabin is available, along with 31 others—some original, some added in

the 1970s, all recently redecorated. The ship sleeps up to 64 passengers and nearly as many crew, who keep the teak decks swabbed, the brass fittings shiny, and when the wind is up, tend to the 32,000 square feet of sails. (It seems like a lot of people, but only feels like close quarters in some of the smaller cabins.)

The centers of activity onboard are the Lido Deck—with lounge chairs for reading and napping, tables for card games and listening to lectures, and a well-stocked bar (with fresh Cuban cigars)—and the dining room. We were never more than minutes from some sort of food. The tiny galley created excellent, multi-course meals, as well as afternoon teas, groaning sandwich boards, even make-your-own-sundae orgies (with melted Swiss chocolate). On those mornings when we were preparing for an excursion—off to play golf or tour—we packed our own cooler bags with bread and meat, fruit, yogurt, sweets, and drinks. No one ever went hungry.

Every Kalos cruise includes the finest golf in the region, and southern Iberia has some of Europe's best. Early on, we played Penha Longa near Lisbon, then Montecastillo, a Jack Nicklaus design about an hour's drive from Cadiz. Good courses, but really warm-ups for the trio to follow: Valderrama, Sotogrande, and El Saler.

Immaculate Valderrama (below) was a treat—weaving among the cork trees, putting on perfect greens, and anticipating 17, the water-guarded par-five that drowned the hopes of many a Ryder Cup warrior. Sotogrande is a big track in the American mold, a companion to the nearby Valderrama but neither as challenging nor as dramatic. El Saler, which we played while docked in Valencia, is off the beaten path for most golfers visiting Spain, but worth the trip. Along the Mediterranean and rolling with the sandy soil, it felt like playing a British Open course—but in perfect weather, sunshine, and cool breezes.

Golf fell roughly every other day, which meant we all took the day-long tour inland to the Alhambra, the 14th-century Moorish castle-turned-museum. Golfers got abbreviated tours of Gibraltar, the tiny English colony stuck on Spain's bottom, while the few non-golfers always had their own activity, usually an extended tour (that golfers could go on, forsaking the round that day).

Thankfully, there were days when we did nothing but sail, and the activity was no more strenuous than lifting a book or a wine glass. And scanning the horizon for dolphins. —James A. Frank

SAIL AWAY

THIS YEAR, Kalos offers 14 cruises between April and October. Sea cruises travel to southern Spain, the Baltic Sea around Britain (including tickets to the British Open at Royal Liverpool), and along the Riviera; river cruises travel the Danube and Rhine. With round-trip transportation, trips are 10-12 days long; optional excursions are available before and after. Prices—depending on the itinerary, ship, and cabin choice—range from \$6,000 to \$12,000 per person. All tours, golf, onboard meals, and local transportation are included; airfare is extra, although the Kalos staff can help with all travel arrangements. 800.314.3162; www.kalosgolf.com.



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