

# Go into action with an Algarve autumn

## Sarah Oliver picks the perfect time for a family activity trip

**T**HE weather gods were smiling on the Algarve. The autumn breeze blowing up from Morocco was bringing the warmth of North Africa, big blue skies and a placid sea. For an activity week in half-term, designed to squeeze the last drops out of summer, it could not have been better timed.

Every day, my husband Ciaran, our sons and I climbed on to mountain bikes and pedalled the mile or so down to the wooden boardwalks and salty lagoons of the Ria Formosa. There we would cycle or hike among the scented curry plants, and watch herons fish and birds wading in the sun.

We even navigated our way along the water itself, Ciaran and me astride a stout yellow kayak, fast outstripping Rufus, 14, and Felix, ten, who were posing on stand-up paddleboards. That warm wind saw us fly across ragged little wavelets on the

way out, and then worked our biceps and forearm muscles all the way back home. We also spent happy hours bunkered down with our books behind the natural shelter of the dunes, and gazing out at the bottle green of the Atlantic.

Because the most surprising thing about this Active Living week at Four Seasons Fairways is that when you don't want to do very much at all, you don't have to.

The resort offers plenty of sport on these carefully curated early- and late-season fitness holidays: tennis courts, indoor and outdoor pools, a gym and exercise classes led by resident personal trainer Rui Pedro. But it's an à la carte menu of choices rather than

an alarming boot camp.

We found our equilibrium – working up a sweat in the morning, enjoying an afternoon off, then returning for a swim and a cool-down stretch before dinner.

British Olympic rowing champion Helen Glover is an ambassador for Four Seasons Fairways Active Living, and she knows that sport – whether getting started, raising your game or trying something new – can be intimidating. What's offered here is encouragement and opportunity for us mere mortals,

plus the benediction of beautiful weather at a time when it's turn-

ing cold at home.

Four Seasons Fairways is a private members' club set amid the international golf courses of Portugal's oldest resort, Quinta do Lago, though it's not purely a golf resort, and only about a third of its guests arrive with their irons.

We stayed in a three-bedroom, three-bathroom apartment with a private pool and a barbecue terrace. It had extravagant views across the Algarve hills, which turned violet and ginger in the setting sun, and was luxuriously furnished in the dove greys and buttermilk shades of a boutique hotel. But its facilities – a well-equipped kitchen, a mini laundry room, tons of loafing space – made it a robust family property.

As part of the Active Living



programme, a net of local oranges was delivered to us daily for juicing – probably the only culinary chore I have ever seen my sons fight over.

It would have been easy to pedal and jog around Quinta do Lago for the entire week, but that would have been a bit myopic, for shoulder-season Algarve, minus its sea-and-sun crowds, is an underrated destination.

One afternoon, we headed across the border into Spain, luring the boys to Seville to scout locations from Star Wars and Game Of Thrones. The Andalucian city, with

its Moorish architecture and celebrated light, is the Kingdom of Naboo and Dorne, respectively.

On another, we drove to the far west of Portugal to enjoy the soaring cliffs and crashing seas of Cabo de Sao Vicente and the pretty surf beaches of Sagres. Usually, though, we stayed closer to home, including spending a couple of hours exploring the medieval streets of Tavira. There we enjoyed Portuguese ice cream – the antithesis of the healthy breakfast bowls of salmon, eggs, asparagus and cherry tomatoes with which we'd fuelled up that morning at Vivo, the Four Seasons

Fairways restaurant. Our top day out? Taking the jaunty yellow speedboat shuttle ten minutes down-river from Faro to the Atlantic sandbar of the Ilha Deserta for a hike on the beach and a fish lunch at Estamine. This family-run restaurant, with a 360-degree ocean view, serves local delicacies such as clams, mackerel and samphire. We really didn't want to leave Ilha Deserta's empty and pristine shore, and had to run to catch the last ride out on the little blue-and-white catamaran.

At night, we ate in our apartment – the local supermarkets are full of great fish and shellfish – or casually at Vivo, but Four Seasons Fairways is proud of its destination restaurant, Amara, so on our final evening my husband and I took

off our now-battered trainers and tried that too. A delicate Ria Formosa crab and a seared fillet of sea bass with a citrusy orange sabayon sauce were my choices, served up with a table-side lesson in the wine regions of Portugal from the sommelier, Miguel Silva.

Over a glass of very grand madeira, Ciaran and I reflected on how the resort's Active Living week had made it easy for all four of us to get up, get out and get going.

No sporting records had tumbled, but in terms of family fitness, it had been a personal best.

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**FASCINATING:** The historic city of Tavira, top, and, above, a room at Four Seasons Fairways





**MAKING WAVES:** Olympic rowing star Helen Glover is an ambassador for the resort



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## GETTING THERE

Sarah Oliver was a guest of **Four Seasons Fairways**. Its Active Living programme runs from October 2020 to April 2021. A seven-night stay for two in a two-bedroom apartment with Jacuzzi costs from £920, including breakfast, bike hire, tennis court hire and two classes with a personal trainer. Flights are extra.

