

WINTER SUN?

ALGARVE SOME OF THAT!

Richard Jones escapes with his family to Quinta do Lago

As we made our way across the wooden bridge, the calming sound of the Atlantic Ocean slowly filled our ears. Then I finally clapped eyes on something I had waited a while to see.

Admittedly, I have been to countless beaches before, but this one was special. It was the pristine Praia da Quinta do Lago in Portugal, and more importantly, it wasn't just any day - it was Christmas morning.

The older I get, the less I like the British winter, and by the time Yuletide arrives, I'm desperate for a break.

This year my wife Rachel and I decided to get away from all the seasonal stress and, along with our daughters Isla and Evelyn, traded sleet and snow for sand and shells, and battered brollies for parasol pine trees.

Our destination was the resort town of Quinta do Lago, a 20-minute drive from Faro airport on the sun-drenched Algarve.

Quinta was founded half a century ago by property developer André Jordan.

Rumour has it he sat on a hillside by an old stone farmhouse one sunny day and dreamt of a place where velvety green golf courses were woven between pristine white villas overlooking the Atlantic and Ria Formosa lagoon.

Half a century on, Quinta signifies one of the three corners of Algarve's 'Golden Triangle', along with the resort-town of Vilamoura and the village of Almancil.

A playground for the rich and famous, the prestigious area is

regularly visited by sports stars like Cristiano Ronaldo and Rory McIlroy, as well as celebrities such as Niall Horan and Madonna.

Nestled in the heart of the Quinta development is Four Seasons Fairways.

Combining the space and privacy of a self-catering apartment complex with the luxury of a five-star hotel resort, FSF prides itself on its 'home from home' hospitality.

Over the past two years it has undergone an extensive refurb, and the results are spectacular - sunset colour schemes and cool minimalist styling perfectly compliment the traditional Portuguese architecture.

We checked into a family apartment comprising two large bedrooms, three bathrooms, and an open-plan kitchen which is perfect for a lazy lunch or night in.

There was also a dishwasher, washing machine and, on arrival, the groceries that we had ordered from the mini-mart before we left England were on the worktop and in the fridge.

Out on the terracotta-tiled terrace, we had our own gas-fired barbecue, and one lunchtime we ordered sausages and burgers from the restaurant to pop straight onto the grill.

Our large hot tub was ideal for a dip in the cool mornings or evenings, while there is a full roster of English, Irish and sports channels on the TV sets inside.

Up at the newly renovated Clubhouse, there are indoor and outdoor heated swimming pools, a sauna, steam room, gym and Kids Club.

Meanwhile, the snooker room is

STAY

Richard Jones and his family were guests at Four Seasons Fairways in Quinta do Lago, southern Portugal (fourseasonsfairways.com). They offer seven nights in a three-bed villa (sleeps six) with a private pool on a self-catering basis from £1,086, based on travel in November 2022 and not including transfers or flights. Book before the end of February and receive 15% off stays between May and the end of the year (subject to T&Cs).

Leading leisure airline jet2.com offers friendly low fares, great flight times, and a generous 22kg baggage allowance from most major UK airports. Flights to Faro in November start from £112 per person return, including taxes.

a great place for kids like Isla and Evelyn to hang out.

You're probably thinking all this sounds expensive, but with a family stay at FSF less than an equivalent break at a UK holiday park, it's a snip.

The resort is also great for health and wellbeing. Last year, Amy Williams took over from Helen Glover as the resort's active living ambassador, and guests can join up with the Olympic skeleton gold-medallist during selected weeks for classes and workouts.

Food-wise, breakfast is served in the Fairways' Vivo restaurant, which then provides snacks, lunches and cocktails by the pool.

Its dinner menu is more extensive, with wood-fired home-made pizzas, sea bass and fillet steak their specialities. There is also live music most evenings.

During our stay, we had a delightful Christmas lunch at the newly reopened à la carte restaurant, Amara.

Gazing out over the golf course through the floor-to-ceiling windows, we made our way through a sumptuous buffet of salad, soup, roast turkey and desserts, washed down with a glass or three of bubbly.

Beyond the FSF grounds, there is plenty to see and do, and although public transport isn't really an option in Quinta, most places are within reasonable walking or biking distance.

Just up Avenida André Jordan is Quinta Shopping, a boutique mall with a selection of fashion stores

RIGHT: A Fairways villa at Four Seasons, Quinta do Lago, Portugal

Picture: ALMA MOLLEMAN

BELOW: A view over the 11th at Four Seasons Quinta do Lago

Picture: RICHARD JONES



Richard Jones and his family at Four Seasons Quinta do Lago

Picture: JONES FAMILY



A villa bedroom at Four Seasons Fairways in Quinta do Lago

Picture: FOUR SEASONS



and eateries, including gastro/Irish bar Cheeky Pup, where we headed on Boxing Day.

Then, back down Avenida Ayrton Senna, past some of Quinta's most spectacular villas, is The Campus sports facility, with its on-site sports bar Dano's.

Our Christmas morning stroll took us over the spectacular bridge and boardwalk spanning the Rio Formosa marshlands.

Then, after the girls splashed in the ocean, we made our way back through the Passadico do Ancaao hiking area.

For the more adventurous and those with a car, Vilamoura and Almancil with their famous fish markets, are great days out, as is the 'Pearl of the Algarve', Faro.

And even if you are of the 'golf is a good walk spoiled' persuasion, you can't really visit southern Portugal without getting in the swing a bit.

After hitting a few balls on the range at the Paul McGinley Academy, I played a round on Quinta South, regularly included in Europe's top courses lists.

Its breathtaking signature hole, the 15th, is one of the most photographed of the Algarve, and

requires players to hit a challenging 200m tee shot over a lake onto a green shaded by pine and palm trees.

Residents at FSF can benefit from reduced green fees at local courses, and during our stay, the annual Four Seasons Fairways Masters was taking place - we were invited to the gala dinner following the tournament.

For Christmas this year, I wanted one thing: to feel the sand between my toes on a foreign beach with my family.

However, our trip to Portugal provided the four of us with many other unforgettable festive treats and memories.

On our last day, the sun was shining, the temperature was in the 20s, and I was looking out from the terrace onto the manicured lawns beneath the umbrella pines.

The peace and quiet that I had craved in mid-December was only broken occasionally by a cheeping sparrow or humming grasshopper.

As I took a large sip of my favourite (and Portugal's most famous) seasonal tippale - port, it felt like all my Christmases had come at once.

RIGHT: A villa apartment at Four Seasons Fairways

Picture: FOUR SEASONS

