

VERDURA GOLF & SPA RESORT, SCIACCA, SICILY

A swanky Italian job

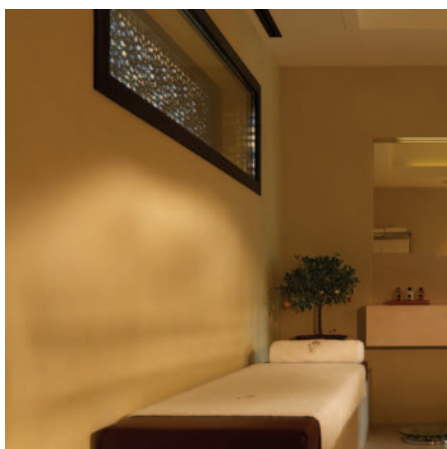
Given the effect that volcano's have had on travel plans recently, **Tim Smith** was somewhat relieved that Sicily's best-known landmark – Mount Etna – did not disrupt his trip to visit Sir Rocco Forte's latest development, Verdura

The eighty-minute drive from Palermo airport to the Verdura Golf and Spa Resort provides a glimpse of just how beautiful and seemingly unspoilt Sicily is. Quiet roads took me through a largely rural landscape of citrus groves, olive trees and vineyards which, added to the sublime coastline, explained Sir Rocco Forte's delight in securing oceanfront property upon which he instructed noted architect Kyle Phillips (Kingsbarns, The Grove) to create a golfing experience worthy of its location.

Having scoured the area, Sir Rocco eventually settled on a flat piece of agricultural land near the ancient town of Sciacca, on the south coast of Sicily, which he particularly liked for its "away from it all" seclusion. A keen golfer himself, he explained to me at a brief meeting in London, prior to my visit, that he liked and shared Phillips' philosophy on course design, feeling that it mirrored his own approach to hotels. What he wanted was an original idea – one that would provide something unique for this part of the world.

Phillips duly obliged, carving out two courses that closely intertwine as they play through the Sicilian landscape. In keeping with design principles that 'emphasise the use of contours to create strategy', Verdura features gently undulating fairways and has a pleasing linky feel. The strength of both layouts rests with a series of holes running hard by the sea – given a half-decent wind you might even feel the sea-spray on your face standing on the green at the par-four 8th on the West Course.

There's no doubting the quality of the golf, although at times it's easy to lose track as to exactly which courses you are playing. Sharing the same piece of property, holes seem to be continually mingling, and if I were to find any fault at all it would be that neither of the two layouts have their own character. This, in part, I'm told was intentional, as the aim is to create a com-



CONTACT

Verdura Golf & Spa Resort
Tel: +39 0925 998180
www.verdurasort.com

GOLF

Two championship 18 holes and a fun 9-hole, by leading architect Kyle Phillips, renowned for his work at Kingsbarns and The Grove

GETTING THERE

Tim Smith flew to Palermo, via Milan, with Alitalia. Ryanair fly to Trapani from various locations, Easyjet fly from London Gatwick to Palermo and BA fly direct to Catania. For further information on golf in Sicily, visit: www.italiantouristboard.co.uk

posite 18 holes that will very shortly be hosting professional tournaments.

The overall philosophy, according to Sir Rocco, was to create a "proper" golf resort, where guests would be warmly welcomed as if members of a private club. This he has undoubtedly achieved. The moment you arrive at Verdura you are made to feel very special, and the facilities are exceptional. I was also very pleased to discover that both courses are designed with walkers in mind, and while buggies are available they're not obligatory or indeed necessary.

All this attention to detail, of course, comes at a price. In addition to paying around 420 euros a night for a double room (and that's during low season), golf is extra and green fees are set at around 100 euros per person per round. Starters on the menu at one of the resort's eight stupendous restaurants will set you back in excess of 20 euros! That said, you may get to meet Fulvio Pierangelini, an acclaimed Michelin starred chef who often insists on delivering the food to your table himself!

Now *that's* service.