



Verdura Golf & Spa Resort

Designer: Kyle Phillips

Year Opened: 2010

The dream was to create Europe's finest golf destination. The vision was that of hotelier Sir Rocco Forte, a passionate golfer who apparently scoured the Mediterranean coastline in search of the perfect site upon which to build a luxury resort for a discerning, high-end golf market. Remarkably, given its location, reputation and lack of golf amenities, his quest brought him to the south-west shores of Sicily, an Italian island better known for its links to organized crime than any propensity to organized recreation like golf.

Forte's initial problem was that his chosen site was comprised of more than 70 individual parcels of land. Unperturbed, he acquired the necessary space (570 acres) to build his great sprawling dream and appointed Kyle Phillips to create a golf-centred Masterplan that would include two full layouts and a nine-hole par three course along with a superb 5-star hotel, conference centre, beach club, restaurants and Europe's largest spa. There will also be a small residential subdivision here, but pleasingly the home sites are well removed from the golf.

Indeed, it's the golf holes at Verdura that will put this resort on the international map and Sir Rocco rightly allowed Phillips to pick and choose the best parts of the property for his two main courses. Despite both tracks being built to the same standard, and occupying similar ground, the East and West courses provide alternate journeys for golfers to enjoy. Both start beside an internal practice range, the West has a more out-and-back arrangement with a long stretch of consecutive holes on the front nine but a stirring four-hole seaside finale. The East, by contrast, enjoys a two-loop routing that changes direction more frequently, its 18th hole is played right alongside the cliffs but the rest of the closing stretch is set on higher, tumbling ground.

The Phillips routing is probably the highlight of the entire golfing component at Verdura. The property enjoys nearly 2 kilometres of beach frontage and it would have been easy to build one course along the coastline and have the other away from the sea. There was plenty of natural undulation through the deceptively spacious interior, however, and Phillips wisely chose to spread the best holes, and best terrain, across both courses, giving each a tremendous seaside closing run and an exciting central area that touches the blue waters of the Mediterranean. The resultant journey, which twice takes golfers to the sea and back again, is richly rewarding here, particularly on the more diverse East Course.

The West Course actually incorporates more coastal land, but a number of its early holes stretch consecutively along the eastern boundary and a few fairways are a touch tight given the exposed nature of the site. The beachside holes are its star attraction, golfers get their

first glimpse of the sea at the 8th and 9th before returning for a four-hole encore at the 15th. It's these final four holes with their uninterrupted views that really steal the show. The 16th and 18th are beautiful two-shotters, the 18th routed right along the shoreline, while the 15th and 17th are short holes dominated by watery backdrops. There are other standouts as well, including the strategic par five 4th and the strong par four 5th, with its rousing approach played partly across a pronounced natural depression. The first coastal hole, the two-shot 8th, is also terrific.

The more undulating East Course is an equally memorable place for golf. Its finishing holes don't quite have the glamour of the West's and the front nine par fives that link the central area to the southern beach holes are a little underwhelming, but there are more directional changes here and plenty of design surprises as well. Highpoints include the short par four 3rd, early water holes at the 5th and 6th, each with stunning outlooks, the intimidating ridgetop par three 12th and the semi-sunken 13th green. From the 13th the course turns seaward, both the 14th and 15th are long holes that plummet across glorious linksy ground while the 16th is a delicious short hole played into a wickedly shallow target. The finishing duo are also really strong; the penultimate hole rising gently into the foot of a Sicilian hillside, and the fabulous par four closer crashing from an elevated tee right along the craggy coastline.

Although its dramatic seaside holes are likely to live longest in your memory, the great thing about Verdura is how consistent the golf holes are across both courses and how fun and interesting the rolling fairways and greens play. Once the native grasses have fully established and the layouts have further matured, Verdura will fulfil Sir Rocco Forte's ambitious aim and become continental Europe's finest golf destination.