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# Vero Beach

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## Magazine™



**A Fair Wind To The Fairways**  
*Vero Beach golfers set sail to exotic courses*

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How a golfer stays happily married...

## BIRDIES FOR HIM, BARGAINS FOR HER

BY MARK MULVOY

**O**n paper, it seemed like the ultimate oxymoron: Golf cruise.

Golf cruise? What, you roll around the high seas aboard the *QM2* and whack multi-colored golf balls off the deck in the direction of Casablanca or Carnoustie? Or maybe you play putt-putt all day on the mezzanine deck? Or watch instructional videos as some retired pro from Bogey Gulch Dunes explains the nuances of the flying elbow?

So, when the wife suggested that we ought to take a golf cruise, I gave her a quick, "I'd rather take up tennis."

She nastily called me a sick-o golffaholic, and not just because at that very moment I was TiVo-ing the Pro-Am practice round of the ATT/Cingular/Bell South/Bell West/Verizon/Pac Bell Quad Cities Classic Festival Invitational. Then she threw a brochure from Kalos Golf at me.

"Check this out," she said, standing there and blocking my view of Joe Ogilvie hitting a left-handed pitchout from behind a weeping willow alongside the 5th green. "The Danube River Golf Cruise on Page 4 is for you. And for us. You get to play your stupid golf in places you've never been, and I get to see some great cities, visit historic museums, hear the Vienna Boys Choir, do some shopping, have lunch with some leftover Hapsburgs—plus we have a few cold ones at the Hofbrau Haus in Munich and finally meet some people who know there's more to life than curing your case of the shanks."

I looked through the literature from Kalos Golf, a travel company that operates river cruises on the Danube



and the Rhine and numerous sailing ship golf trips around the Mediterranean, the Iberian Peninsula, the British Isles, the Baltic, Northern Ireland, New Zealand and a few other places. And they all tend to sell out quickly.

This time the wife was right. The Danube cruise seemed made to order for me. Ten days, two in hotels and eight aboard the *River Cloud*, which looked to be a Ritz on water. Six rounds of golf for me. Museums, shopping and all that historical stuff for her. Golf carts or caddies at all courses. Your clubs always waiting for you.

Book it!

**A**rriving in Budapest, after a few days' stay in Prague, I was stunned to discover that it is really two cities—Buda and Pest—which stare at each other across the Danube. We met the rest of our fellow travelers, 78 in all, and the intrepid Kalos staff at the traditional

welcoming cocktail party at the hotel. Most of the men were surprisingly low-key and either retired or thinking about becoming retirees, while all the wives seemed to know where they wanted to shop each day.

The next morning I took off to play the Pannonia Club, while my much-better half embarked on a full-day tour along the Danube, visiting countless museums and art galleries and the island of Szentendre, which she thought was famous for something. She couldn't quite remember what.

I will tell you that I expected the six golf courses on our itinerary to be about a six on my scale of one-to-10. For sure they would be the types of course you might find in Eastern Montana or Southern Kentucky—more cow pastures than fine links. I mean, who goes to Hungary to find Merion?

Back in the 1800s, the grounds of Pannonia had been a weekend retreat for the royal Hapsburg family. Now,

*Back at the River Cloud, my lovely wife was there to greet me with a big smile. "Wait 'til you see what I bought today," she said. I could barely squeeze into our room. "Stop pouting," she said to me. "You belong to a dozen golf clubs. I shop. It's an even trade."*

Canadian golf-course architect Doug Carrick has turned the old jousting grounds into a first-rate golf course, about an 8.8. Pannonia has a strong links feel, and Carrick wisely eschewed the bulldozer as he marvelously worked the layout into the natural terrain. The bunkers are strategic, the greens rolling and true, and the overall condition was comparable to that of any course played on the PGA Tour.

Oh, yes. Add Hungary to the growing list of countries where I have lost a Titleist, a rather expensive proposition in these days of the shrunken dollar, with new Pro VI's going for \$110 a dozen in Europe.

The next morning, after a visit to the gilded interior of the State Opera House and, later, to Heroes Square, we boarded the *River Cloud* and departed Budapest for the 20-hour cruise up to Vienna.

Let me tell you, the *River Cloud* is my type of vessel, sturdy and steady with no bouncing around. The accommodations were first class, and the service proved to be superb. We opted for one of the six suites, and had a little sitting area and a television—the easier for me to watch my golf videos. We soon settled in for the afternoon on the top deck and had some good native Red as we marveled at the idyllic countryside along the Danube.

That evening, the captain hosted a lavish welcoming dinner—never go on a Kalos trip if you are a calorie counter—for his guests, and by midnight I had made my golf games for the rest of the voyage. On the deck that afternoon I was wearing my Red Sox 2004 World Series Champions hat and struck up a conversation with a guy named Milty

who was wearing a Chicago Cubs cap. Milty told me over and over again that the highlight of his entire golfing career came when he had made a putt to win some Mixed Eclectic at his home club in Chicago. I told him how happy I was for him. And then I beat him up over the sorry plight of his beloved Cubbies.

Much to my surprise, we slept easily throughout the night, and then took to the top deck again for the final two hours of the cruise into majestic Vienna. Unfortunately, the Vienna Boys Choir had just gone on its summer holiday, but there was still plenty for us to see as local guides led us on a walking tour of the Ring Road and visits to the Hofburg Palace and St. Stephan's Cathedral. That night, the Kalos people arranged for a private concert at the Palais Palfy that featured some classical Strauss, various Austrian operettas and dancing. A real treat.

I had not played golf now for almost two whole days, and I was getting anxious for some action. I had just read in one of the golf magazines that the latest new swing thought on the Tour was to take the club head two inches short of parallel on the backswing, and I was desperate to try that move.

We motored out to the Fontana Golf Club, about an hour from Vienna, and what did we find but an absolute gem of a layout created by the same Doug Carrick who had created Pannonia back in Budapest. Fontana and Pannonia proved to be as different as Pine Valley and Rancho Santa Fe. While Pannonia has a unique links feel, Fontana is a real-estate development

with ultra-modern facilities for many sports. Fontana, indeed, is becoming the weekend family destination—the Austrian Hamptons, the Austrian Palm Springs—when the ski slopes turn to mush. In truth, thanks in no small part to bulldozers, Fontana is a superior golf course, with plenty of water and bunkers placed strategically over the well-shaped landscape. A former president of the United States Golf Association happened to be in my foursome this day, and we both agreed that Fontana rated at least a 9.

Back at the *River Cloud*, my lovely wife was there to greet me with a big smile. "Wait 'til you see what I bought today," she said. Ugh! In between visits to several palaces and museums, a special apple strudel demonstration and a big lunch, my wife had shopped all over Vienna. I could barely squeeze into our room. "Stop pouting," she said to me. "You belong to a dozen golf clubs. I shop. It's an even trade."

The next morning she went searching for any shops she had missed the day before, and I played the Golf Club Schof's Schonborn, regally nestled on the grounds of a 300-year-old castle. On one hole you tee off in front of an Orangerie and take aim at a castle; on another hole you have to deal with a number of statues of long-dead members of various ruling families. Gave it a 7.8. Lunch was a 10.

After golf we met the tourists back at the *River Cloud*, and my wife assured me she had gotten some "very nice deals" on her six new outfits and five new pairs of shoes. She also revealed that she now knew how to work an ATM machine.

We cruised up the Danube to Durnstein, certainly the most spectacular and picturesque town along the river, where we visited the ruins of the castle fortress, 520 feet above the river. It was here that Leopold V held Richard the Lion-Hearted of England prisoner



back in 1193, which, as I told Milty from Chicago, was another year when the Cubs did not win the pennant.

No golf the next day, just a long, quiet cruise through the Wachau Valley to Passau, with a stop to tour the famous baroque buildings of the Melk Abbey and then a fantastic pig roast lunch on the top deck.

The next two golf courses were of the type that probably most of us had expected all the courses to be. Brunnwies, in Bad Griesbach, Germany, is a rolling Bernhard Langer design, perhaps a 6.5—really just a nice walk in the park. In Regensburg, Germany, we played Sinzing am Minoritenhof, a very strange setting in that the front nine rolls through a serious mini-mountain that offers no level lies, while the back nine moves flatly alongside the Danube and demands skillful shots with almost

every club in the bag. We gave Sinzing a 6.0 and the German beer at both courses a 378.4.

For our final round, we played a new Graham Marsh course in Velburg, Germany, called Golf am Habsberg. The layout had a slight American feel with steep bunkers, enormous bent-grass greens and many treacherous collection areas that demand inventive means of escape. Milty from Chicago was MIA for a half-hour in one of those pits. We rated the course an 8.3; the rainbow got a 20.

After golf, Dottie and Jim from Chicago and the wife and I decided to pass on the farewell dinner and, instead, took a limo to Munich so the wives could do a little last-minute shopping before we went to the Hofbrau Haus

for a final night of storytelling.

"So, tell the truth, did you like it?" my wife asked me the next day after I had paid her excess baggage charge of \$356—she came with two bags, went home with six—and we had settled into our seats for the flight back across the Atlantic.

"Here's how much I liked it," I said. "Just talked with the Kalos people and we're booked on the *Sea Cloud* for a 10-day Mediterranean golf trip in 2008. Nice, Monte Carlo, Cannes, St. Tropez, Corsica, Sardinia and then Rome. I'll have to miss the Mixed Invitational Better-Ball Hullabaloo, but I can deal with it."

"Great," she said. "Via Veneto, here I come." ❁

*MARK MULVOY is a winter resident of Vero Beach and a former publisher and managing editor of Sports Illustrated.*

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