

Gi Lifestyle

THE BALEARICS

Advantage, Mallorca

A native of the island, keen golfer Rafael Nadal has been appointed as Ambassador to the Balearic Island's Tourism Board. And it's hard to fault Mallorca's claim as Europe's 'Golf Island', writes Andy Farrell

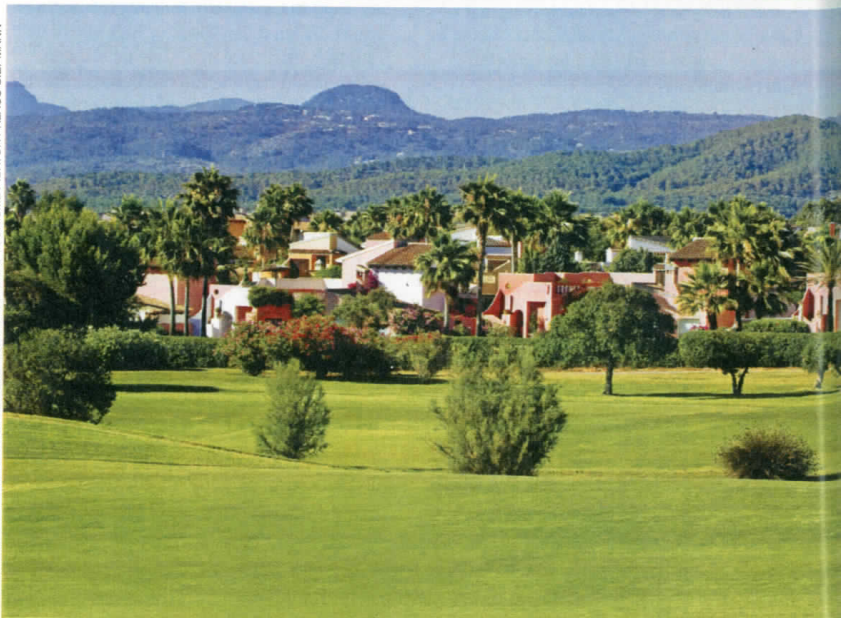
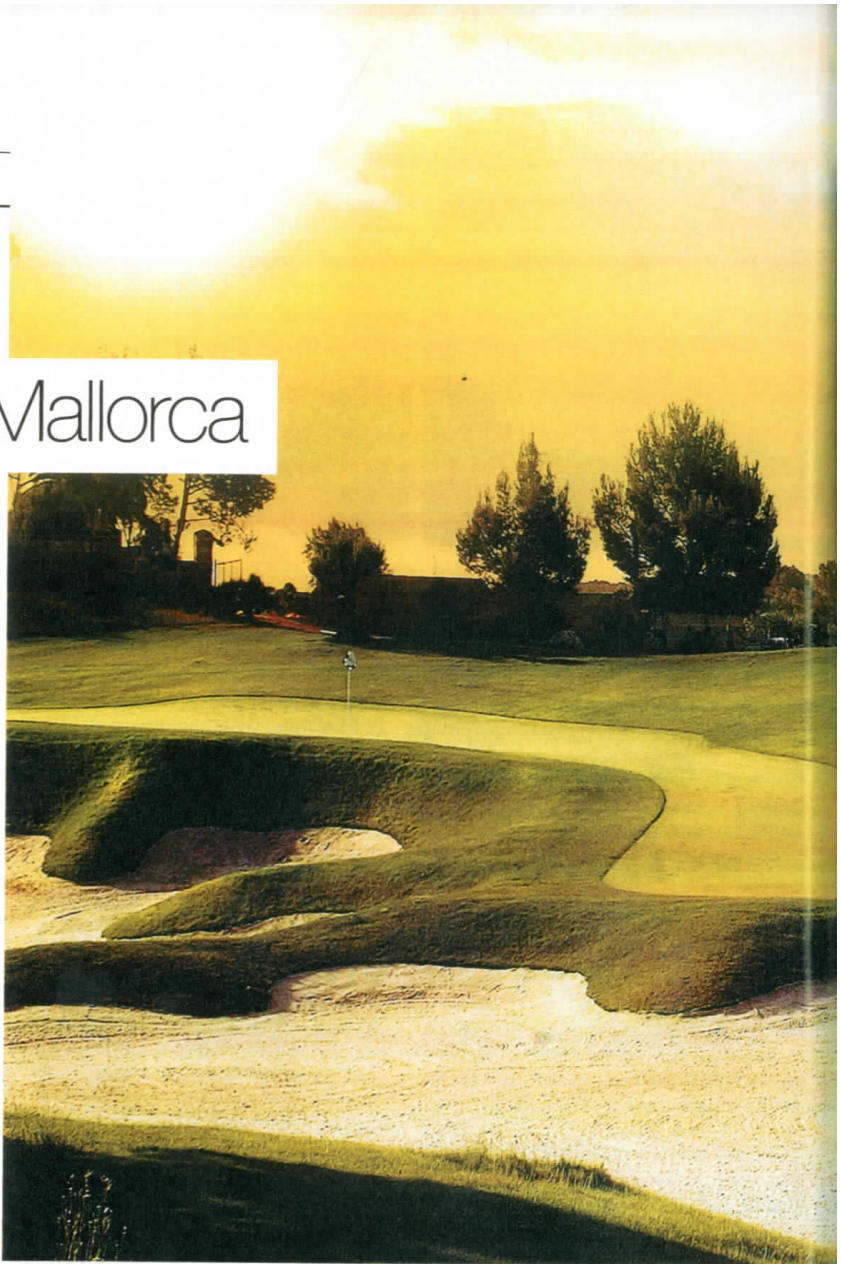
Things have not exactly been going to plan for two of Spain's greatest sporting stars, Sergio Garcia and Rafael Nadal. While Garcia started the year with concerns over a wrist injury and ever-present putting exasperations, Nadal, briefly the world No1 in 2009, limped out of his defence of the Australian Open, the first tennis major of the year, with a recurrence of the knee injury that kept him out of Wimbledon last year.

If last summer is anything to go by, however, when Nadal is forced off the courts he just heads for the course. Nadal is an eight-handicapper and plays right-handed - he is a lefty with a racket in his hand - who is frequently found at Pula Golf, where he played with Garcia in the pro-am before the 2007 Mallorca Classic.

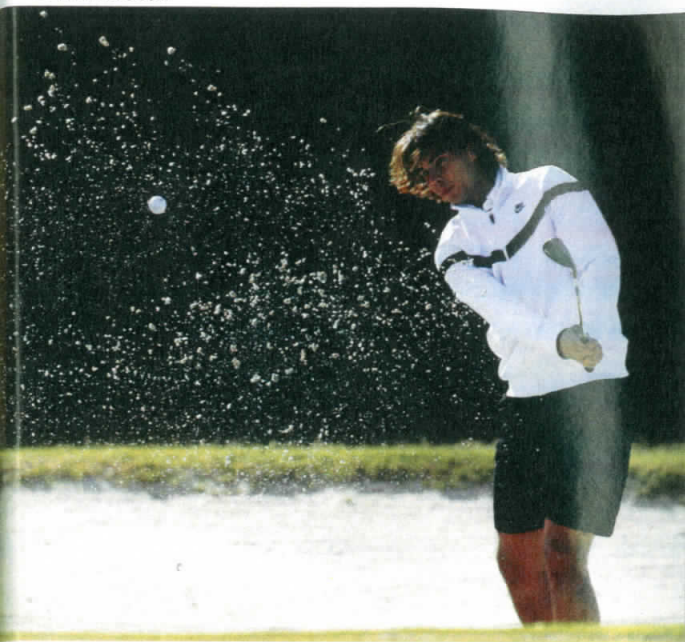
While that event lost its date on the schedule to the Castello Masters, ironically in Garcia's neck of the woods near Valencia, Pula will return to the European Tour this May with the Open Cala Millor Mallorca. It is a big step forward for what they call Golf Island. There are 23 courses on Mallorca and 25 in the islands as a whole.

Nadal is an ambassador for the Balearic Islands Tourism Board and features in their latest television advertising campaign. The aim is to promote the islands as home to more than just sun and sand, with culture, sailing, cycling and golf also of the highest order. Nadal is certainly a golfer. "I play a lot when I am at home," he said. "Last summer I played more an ever because of the injury. It was good for my golf if not my tennis."

Perhaps, when the knees give out for good, he will be able to play ever more golf. When asked who was the better golfer, himself or Roger Federer, he said: "I don't think Roger plays very much." With twin babies and 16 tennis majors to his name, perhaps Federer does not have the time but he is thought to be about a 13-handicapper. The smart money may be on Nadal and Garcia if they ever played a fourball against Federer



GOVERNMENT OF THE BALEARIC ISLANDS / CONSELLERIA DE TURISME / IBATUR / KLAUS SIEPMANN



Nadal's style has been honed on the pristine layouts Mallorca has to offer – including Son Vida (left) and the championship test at Santa Ponsa (below)

and his friend Tiger Woods.

García, who has also hit on the tennis court with Nadal, said: "Actually he was quite impressed with my tennis. He thought I was going to be a little bit worse. I was very impressed with his golf when we played the pro-am in Mallorca."

The pair keep in touch and exchange thoughts on their various fortunes. "I watch the golf a lot and always follow Sergio and, of course, we talk," Nadal said. "He did not have the best year but he works hard and hopefully this year will be good for him."

Comparing golf and tennis, Nadal added: "The thing that is the same is the concentration. In tennis, you can hit a good shot and still lose the point. In golf, you hit a good shot and hopefully you make birdie. But the thing in golf is that you must not have one mistake after another. You have to make sure you recover on the next shot."

Despite raving about a round with Fred Couples once in Indian Wells, asked for his perfect fourball, the modest Nadal went for his friends from home. "This is the best golf, spending time with your friends, being out on the course and in a beautiful place."

Susanna Sciacovelli, director of the Balearic Islands Tourism Board, is keen to increase the annual tally of golfing visitors, currently around 120,000, emphasising the all-year-round climate – last year they enjoyed their hottest November for 40 years – and the two-hour flight time from much of northern Europe. As for Nadal, she said: "He loves his islands and he is a wonderful ambassador for us. We can use a picture of a beautiful beach in our adverts but with Rafa it has more impact. He is not just a talented sportsman but has a very appealing character."

Find out more: www.baleargolf.com