

Pravets

BULGARIA'S GOLFING SECRET IS OUT

By Alex Gallemore

Championship golf, Balkan Mountain scenery, an upper upscale Hyatt resort and one of Europe's most underrated capital cities under an hour away. Pravets is not yet on every golfer's radar. Frankly, that is half the charm.

There is a particular pleasure in finding a golf destination before the crowds do, rather like discovering a decent local pub just before it gets a Sunday roast review in the papers.

Spain, Portugal and Turkey have the European golf break down to a science. You practically know the itinerary before the plane has left the runway. Bulgaria, on the other hand, tends to conjure images of skiing, Sofia weekends or the Black Sea coast long before anyone thinks to mention golf.

Pravets may well change that.

WHERE MOUNTAINS MEET FAIRWAYS

About 45 minutes by road from Sofia Airport, Pravets Golf Club and the Hyatt Regency Pravets Resort sit beside a lake, ringed by the Stara Planina, or Balkan Mountains. It is the sort of setting that makes you wonder, almost immediately, why more golfers have not already found it.

The star of the show is Peter Harradine's 18-hole, par-72 championship course, stretching to 6,470 metres from the back tees. It has hosted serious tournament golf, yet what struck me most was not its championship pedigree. It was simply how playable it is.

That distinction matters. Plenty of courses spend four hours reminding you that you are, in fact, nowhere near Scottie Scheffler's league. Pravets refuses to join in.



A COURSE WITH A SENSE OF HUMOUR, AND OPTIONS

Harradine's brief was an interesting one. The original site was largely flat, clay-based farmland easing gently down towards the lake, which is architect speak for not much to work with. His answer was to manufacture elevation, movement and character through clever planting and shaping, letting the landscape do the heavy lifting where it could.

Harradine himself described his aim as creating a "challenging but fair test," with the lake in view for much of the round and the mountains supplying a backdrop no amount of budget could otherwise buy.

Having played it, fair feels like exactly the right word. Pravets does not set out to bully you. The fairways generally offer somewhere sensible to aim, though that is no excuse to switch your brain off entirely. Better players will soon find themselves thinking in angles

rather than raw yardage. Take the bold line and there is usually a reward waiting. Play safe and you can still make par, though the next shot tends to ask a slightly trickier question. That, in short, is good design.

From the forward tees, higher handicappers can simply get the ball moving and enjoy the view. Head back towards the championship markers and the very same holes suddenly turn considerably more demanding. At 6,470 metres, there is plenty of course left for anyone determined to find it.

Space is another quiet luxury here. With the lake, mountains and hotel all taking turns to appear throughout the round, Pravets feels like a genuine resort course rather than a golf course with a hotel attached as an afterthought.

Water inevitably comes into play, and there are enough bunkers and well placed hazards to keep

your attention honest, but Pravets never tips over into unfairness.

Then there are the holes that stay with you. The par-three eighth, played to an island green, is the obvious photo opportunity and offers just enough jeopardy to make you second guess your club selection. The closing stretch asks rather more serious questions still, particularly if you are nursing a card worth protecting.

Best of all is how the course gathers itself towards the clubhouse. The ninth and eighteenth greens sit beneath it, the lake stretching out beyond. Harradine originally conceived the two as one enormous double green complex, and the result is a properly dramatic finish. More usefully, the clubhouse terrace looks directly over both, which means your friends can watch you unravel on the final hole in comfort, drink in hand.



PRACTICE, NOW WITH RATHER MORE TECHNOLOGY

Pravets is not relying on the course alone. Its Golf Academy offers extensive practice facilities and PGA instruction, but the real news for 2026 is the arrival of Toptracer Range technology.

The covered driving range bays now let golfers track shot data, get instant feedback, play virtual courses and take part in games and challenges, with shot history stored through the Toptracer app. For serious golfers, that turns the range into somewhere you might genuinely spend an hour rather than somewhere you reluctantly hit twenty balls before teeing off. For families and beginners, the interactive games make golf a good deal less intimidating.

It is a smart addition, because the best modern resorts have worked out that practice facilities need to entertain as well as instruct. Pravets has embraced the idea fully, with the club describing its Toptracer installation as a first for Bulgaria.



RATHER MORE THAN A GOLF HOTEL

The other half of the equation is the Hyatt Regency Pravets Resort itself. The property offers 244 contemporary rooms and suites, each looking out over either Pravets Lake or the Balkan Mountains, alongside four restaurants, extensive leisure facilities and a conference centre able to host up to 500 delegates. It is large enough to feel like a proper international resort, yet the setting stops it feeling anonymous. That matters, too, when travelling with someone whose enthusiasm for golf tends to evaporate somewhere around the fourth tee.

The ORTUS Spa is a serious operation in its own right, with eight treatment rooms, a couples' massage suite, a VIP spa apartment, a Floating Salt Pool and an Ottoman-style hammam complete with heated marble beds. There is also a 25-metre indoor swimming pool, plus two tennis courts outside for anyone who has not quite exhausted their competitive streak on the course.

Food matters too, because no golf trip has ever been improved by a disappointing dinner. Lion & Rose takes the more distinctive route, built around Bulgarian culinary heritage, game, local produce and seasonal ingredients within an open kitchen supper club setting. Mercato is the relaxed all day option, blending Bulgarian, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern influences across buffet and à la carte dining, with a terrace looking out over Pravets Lake.

That Middle Eastern influence is a small but useful detail for golfers travelling from the Gulf. Pravets feels distinctly European, but never unfamiliar.

DISCOVER BULGARIA WITHOUT REALLY LEAVING PRAVETS

There is also an unusual attraction virtually next door. The Bulgaria Land Cultural and Historical Park occupies a fourteen-acre site beside the lake and recreates major Bulgarian cultural, historical and natural landmarks in miniature.

More than fifty models represent attractions from across the country, including monasteries, monuments and natural landmarks, giving visitors an entertaining crash course in Bulgaria without committing to a week-long road trip. The attraction opened in 2025 and includes a visitor centre and souvenir shop.

For families staying at the resort, it is one more reason Pravets works as considerably more than a golf weekend.



DO NOT FLY HOME WITHOUT SEEING SOFIA

The biggest mistake would be flying into Sofia, driving straight to Pravets and never actually setting foot in the capital. Sofia deserves at least a day of anyone's time.

It is one of Europe's oldest capitals, and the architecture tells you immediately just how many chapters of history the city has lived through. Roman remains sit beside Orthodox churches, Ottoman influences, communist era buildings and a thoroughly modern scene of bars and restaurants, all within easy walking distance of each other.

The obvious starting point is the enormous Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, one of Sofia's defining landmarks. The Neo-Byzantine cathedral covers 3,170 square metres and can accommodate around 10,000 people, making it the largest cathedral in Bulgaria and not a bad opening statement for a first afternoon in the city.

But Sofia's real charm is contrast. You can spend

the morning among churches, archaeological remains and museums, have lunch somewhere thoroughly contemporary, then look up to find Vitosha Mountain dominating the skyline. Few European capitals have a mountain of that scale practically on their doorstep. Vitosha is easily reached from the city and offers numerous hiking routes, mountain huts and recreational areas for anyone keen to stretch their legs beyond the eighteenth green.

The food scene is another pleasant surprise, with traditional Bulgarian cuisine sitting comfortably alongside increasingly sophisticated modern restaurants, cafés and bars, and prices that still feel refreshingly sensible compared with Europe's more established capitals.

Sofia is also becoming easier to reach by the year. The airport now has direct links with dozens of European cities as well as the UAE, making Pravets a far simpler proposition than many golfers might assume.



WHY PRAVETS WORKS

That ultimately is the appeal.

Pravets does not ask you to choose between a golf holiday, a resort break and a city escape. You can quite comfortably have all three. Fly into Sofia, spend a night exploring the capital, head up into the mountains, play a Peter Harradine championship course, tinker with your numbers on the Toptracer range, disappear into the spa for an afternoon, then finish the day looking out across the lake from the clubhouse terrace with a drink in hand.

And because Bulgaria remains relatively

undiscovered by travelling golfers, there is still the pleasant sensation of having found something, rather than simply following everyone else's itinerary.

The golf course is good enough for the serious player yet friendly enough for the holiday golfer. The resort keeps non-golfers thoroughly entertained. Sofia adds culture, nightlife and history, while the Balkan Mountains provide a backdrop that no construction budget could otherwise manufacture.

Pravets Golf Club calls its philosophy "Everyone Can Play." On this evidence, it is only a matter of time before everyone does.

TRAVEL FILE: GETTING TO PRAVETS

From the UAE

Dubai to Sofia: Direct services operate between Dubai International (DXB) and Sofia (SOF) with flydubai, with a flight time of approximately five to five and a half hours.

Abu Dhabi to Sofia: Wizz Air is scheduled to begin direct services between Abu Dhabi (AUH) and Sofia from 25 October 2026, adding another useful connection for UAE-based golfers.

Sofia Airport to Pravets: Approximately 65km by road, with a typical driving time of around 45 minutes depending on traffic.

DIRECT EUROPEAN CONNECTIONS

Sofia is exceptionally well connected for a golf weekend. Current direct routes include:

- London Heathrow: British Airways and Bulgaria Air, approximately 3 hours 20 minutes
- London Gatwick: direct services available
- Manchester: direct services available
- Frankfurt: Bulgaria Air and Lufthansa, approximately 2 hours 30 to 50 minutes
- Munich: direct Lufthansa services
- Vienna: direct services with Austrian and Ryanair
- Paris: direct connections including Charles de Gaulle and Orly
- Amsterdam: direct Bulgaria Air services, approximately three hours
- Milan, Zurich, Dublin, Copenhagen, Berlin and numerous other European cities are also directly connected with Sofia

Flight schedules and frequencies are seasonal and should be checked before travel.

PRAVETS AT A GLANCE

Golf	18-hole Peter Harradine designed championship course
Par	72
Championship length	6,470 metres
Practice	Golf Academy, extensive practice facilities and Toptracer Range
Hotel	Hyatt Regency Pravets Resort
Accommodation	244 rooms and suites
Dining	Four restaurants and dining venues
Wellness	ORTUS Spa, Floating Salt Pool, hammam and 25-metre indoor pool
Other activities	Tennis, fitness and Bulgaria Land Cultural and Historical Park
Setting	Pravets Lake and Balkan Mountains
From Sofia	Approximately 45 minutes
From Sofia Airport	Approximately 65km, 45 minutes by car
Best suited to	Golf breaks, couples, groups, families, corporate trips and combined golf/city breaks