

TIMELESS APPEAL OF PENHA LONGA

History of famous monastery, palace and estate dates back more than 750 years

PENHA LONGA (PORTUGAL), March 2011 - Times may change, but some things stay the same, like the sense of serenity that infuses Penha Longa Hotel, Spa & Golf Resort. Generations of kings and princes have left their mark on the area, but Penha Longa's inviting valley climate, calming natural beauty and inspirational peacefulness remains as captivating as when Friar Vasco arrived to establish Portugal's first Hieronymite Order in the 14th century.

As every building, fountain, garden, statue and mosaic has a role to play in Penha Longa's unique story, it is a wonderful experience for guests to explore the estate that surrounds the hotel. Today maps are available to help guide guests around the secrets of this special place and below are some of the historical highlights that continue to inform Penha Longa today.

The History

14th century: Inspired by the teachings of Saint Hieronymus, Vasco Martins returns from Italy and discovers the wilds of Penha Longa are the perfect place to start a religious community—next to the tiny Our Lady of Piety chapel. King John I later lays foundations for a monastery.

15th century: Successive royal families find the calming valley cool of Penha Longa a relaxing alternative to the heat of Lisbon and discover the countryside is excellent for hunting. The monastery thrives.

16th century: King Manuel adds an elegant nave, sacristy, refectory and entrance to the priory and constructs royal apartments. In 1584 Penha Longa Monastery hosts the first Japanese Delegation to Europe.

17th century: The Penha Longa Church is constructed on the site of the Our Lady medieval chapel reinforcing its role as a religious lynchpin of the local community.

18th century: The Lisbon earthquake of 1755 severely damages the church and surrounding buildings at Penha Longa and restoration work dominates the remainder of the century.

19th century: Monks are forced to leave the monastery following 1834's expulsion of religious orders and the estate is given to the nation. Although purchased by Marquis de Saldanha it is abandoned.

20th century: In 1910 the church is protected as a national monument. But in the decades that follow the estate is bought and sold by successive families and corporations until it is transformed into a hotel managed by The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, L.L.C.

PENHA LONGA AND ECHOES OF THE PAST

14th and 15th centuries

- The faith, learning and dedication of Friar Vasco's 14th century community infuses every element of Penha Longa and continues to infuse a sense of sanctuary today. Looking around the beautifully landscaped grounds, imposing church and striking buildings it seems incredible to think that they were all inspired by a dedicated man and his followers living in a humble hermitage next to a tiny ancient chapel in the middle of the wilderness.

- Glimpses of the wilderness that inspired royal hunting parties as well as Friar Vasco's devotion are everywhere from the rocky Penha Longa (or 'long rock') topped with a simple cross—once used for shelter by prehistoric communities—to nearby protected forests that are rich with endangered species of birds and animals. Almost 80 hectares of the 220 hectares at Penha Longa are devoted to protecting rare habitats.

16th and 17th centuries

- The Cardinal's Garden and Fountain of Tears and built by Portuguese 'Cardinal' King Henry remain evocative reminders of 16th century royal visits while the Nuncio's Garden and the Monastic Garden contain pieces of reconstructed architecture that feature stunning renaissance motifs, tiles and inscriptions. These lavish areas continue to serve their original purpose as perfect for relaxation and contemplation.

- Penha Longa's famous Fountain of the Pig is still celebrated for the healing power of its waters. The imposing sculpture of a sow gave the fountain its name and the monastery's medical learning its famous reputation. More inspirational historical detail can be enjoyed inside the church where the chancel is dominated by 16th century carved figures of the Apostles and Evangelists and the cloister is an early renaissance example of a two-storey structure. Tiles commemorating the first visit to Europe by a Japanese delegation in 1584 can be viewed in the hotel.

- The royal apartments built by King Manuel still dominate the estate today, although their restorative properties are now dedicated to the more contemporary relaxation of spa treatments. Other buildings around Penha Longa – such as stables and the Royal Falcon House – remain lasting tributes to the royal family's love of hunting, particularly falconry. Today some of these buildings are used for the sport of choice today, golf.

18th and 19th centuries

- The 1755 earthquake devastated much of Penha Longa and renovation work proved to be an opportunity to introduce new design philosophies to the church, monastery and surrounding buildings as well as restore original features. The nave of the church, for example, was rebuilt in a neoclassical style, a new vaulted hall was added and the refectory completely transformed. Particularly striking today is the work that was carried out in St Gonzalo's Garden, here a trompe l'oeil was painted on the walls around the pool

and 18th century tiles added to the chapel interior.

- After the expulsion of the monks in 1834, the constantly changing ownership of Penha Longa is reflected in a range of buildings particularly stable blocks attributed to Portuguese noble families such as those constructed by the Viscondessa da Gandarinha and the Contessa da Penha Longa.
- After more than 750 years the church becomes a national monument and is a lasting legacy to Friar Vasco's 14th century devotion. Visitors still continue to explore its treasures and for a lucky few it can be the venue for their wedding, even today.

Ends

About Penha Longa Hotel, Spa & Golf Resort

The estate of Penha Longa in Portugal, located within a 545-acre/220-hectare National Park on the southern Sintra mountains has been a place of sanctuary for centuries. The Catholic fathers founded their monastery here, finding peace and tranquillity in its setting while the Royal Family came in the summer to find a cool refuge from the heat of nearby Lisbon. Today, the Penha Longa Hotel Spa & Golf Resort retains a calming atmosphere of mystery and meditation. The breathtakingly beautiful resort, encompasses a luxurious hotel, a 14th century former monastery, two spectacular golf courses, a superb Six Senses Spa and a stunning new restaurant by Sergi Arola.