



## California dreamin'

Peter Swain looks at changes made to the famous Californian links ahead of this year's US Open Championship in June – and also at what else the surrounding Monterey peninsula has to offer visitors golf-wise...

Pebble Beach, the USGA and NBC television are breathing a collective sigh of relief that Tiger's back and Phil's on fire. At least they were until the World No. 1 walked off the 7th fairway during the final round of the TPC at Sawgrass citing a mysterious neck injury (mysterious in that it was the first time he'd mentioned it and, well, apparently it has been causing him some jip for weeks).

Hey ho. The last time the US Open was held here on the Monterey peninsula, in the year 2000, Woods – then coached by Butch

Harmon – won by a staggering 15 strokes. Fingers crossed, Tiger will be fit and well to return, no doubt in the hope that memories of his performance 10 years ago might rekindle the spark that has been missing since his return at the Masters. Speaking of which, local hero Phil Mickelson will, of course, be looking to add a second US Open to his increasingly impressive resume, while Lee Westwood and Rory McIlroy will front a strong contingent of British players making their way to California in serious form.

This is the fifth time America's most famous public golf course has hosted the tournament, the other past winners being Jack Nicklaus in 1972 (with a score of +2), Tom Watson in 1982 (who could forget that magical chip-in at 17 on Sunday en route to a winning score of -6) and Tom Kite in 1992 (-3). Tiger's procession in 2000 remains, in the eyes of many, his greatest performance – 12 under par, he won by no fewer than 15 shots. With all that has happened these last few months, the prospect of watching him attempt to repeat that historic victory – a feat watched by the largest US Open television audience in two decades – is a tantalising one indeed.

Like the Old Course at St Andrews, Pebble Beach is a set-up that encourages the cream

to rise to the top, and for worldwide TV audiences, the sight of the Pacific surf pounding the rocks beyond immaculate fairways and greens puts it right up there with Augusta National as one of golf's truly great sporting arenas.

1919 was the year founder Samuel Finley Brown Morse, a distant cousin of the eponymous telegraph-inventor, officially opened the Jack Neville and Douglas Grant-designed Pebble Beach Golf Links, a 90 minute drive south of San Francisco. The intervening years have seen numerous changes, and this year's field will find that Arnold Palmer's recent modifications have brought the ocean into play more than ever before.

"I didn't try to change the golf course. I tried to do some additional things that



Golf's ultimate seaside setting: the short 7th at Pebble Beach (main photo left) may be one of the shortest holes in major championship golf, but it's also one of the toughest; (top) known locally as the 'poor man's Pebble', Pacific Grove boasts some dramatic seaside holes of its own, and at around £25 a round is the best value in town; (below) the 17th green at Pebble – where Tom Watson sealed his 1982 victory







would play better for the Open,” says Palmer. “We added a couple of hundred yards, but you need to respect the traditions of these great courses.”

In total, four greens and 16 bunkers have been rebuilt, altered or installed, 11 tees have been enhanced or lengthened, six holes have seen new trees planted and the total length of the figure-of-eight course has been extended to a still modest 7,040 yards. Head Golf Professional at the course, Chuck Dunbar, gave me the tour.

The first is a shortish and relatively friendly dogleg right to a new green – a definite birdie opportunity for this US Open field.

Despite Palmer’s extra length, this is not a course that penalises shorter drivers of the ball such as Accenture winner Ian Poulter. “Driver may only be used once on the first five holes: on 2 to reach the pin at about 502 yards,” suggests Chuck. “The next drive is on 6, not 8, then 9, so most players may only use driver three times on the front nine.”

The tee on the third has been moved 25 yards back and left, requiring a lay-up with a 3-wood for most players. With trees down either side, a driver only puts the bunker in play. The first hole with the ocean in play is the fourth. “On the outward oceanside par 4s and 5s, the philosophy of the changes is to bring the Pacific into play wherever possible,” says Dunbar.

“Fairways will be narrow and the rough cut short next to the hazard, so rather than being saved by the longer grass, expect to see a few balls tumbling over the edge towards the ocean.” On hole 6, for instance, five new bunkers have shifted the landing area much closer to the rocks.

The short par-three 7th, just 106 yards from an elevated tee towards the surf crashing onto the rocks below, is one of the most photographed holes in golf. Depending on the wind, it requires anything from lob wedge to five-iron.

Jack Nicklaus rates the approach to the par-four 8th hole (above) as ‘the toughest second shot in golf’. The dramatic rise in elevation at the 6th is revealed in this great shot by lensman Mark Alexander

There’s another way to play the hole. “Sam Snead once putt down the cart path when the wind was howling during a Bing Crosby Pro-Am,” explains Dunbar. “He took relief at the bottom of the hill and got up and down for a par.”

From the eighth hole on, the going gets tough. “The first seven holes allow offence,” he suggests, “the next 11, at least for most amateurs, need defence.”

According to Jack Nicklaus, the eighth has the most difficult second shot in golf. A 240-yard drive puts the player on the edge of a deep chasm overlooking the ocean. The green is 180 windy yards away and slopes severely from back to front. Not for the fainthearted. Holes 9 and 10 have been lengthened, and at 11, the course turns back inland.

At the AT&T this February, Paul Goydos was leading the tournament until he came to the par-five 14th. The small contoured green is protected by a bunker front left and strategically placed Cypress trees, so most players lay up for their approach. Goydos was in perfect shape after his second but still managed a quadruple-bogey nine. With a brutal pin position, expect more excitement here on Sunday afternoon.

The pot bunkers at about 280 yards on 15 are so deep, a stepladder is helpfully provided to get out of them. Around and about, the ankle-deep Scottish links-style fescue rough is penal.

“The way I define a great golf course, is that it builds to a crescendo,” says Chuck Dunbar. “You can score on 1, 2 and 3, then you get to the heart of the story, the ocean holes, dramatic and unbelievably beautiful settings. Then we come back away from the



ocean, a slight lull, then once you turn the corner back to 17, 18, boom – this fantastic climax to your story.”

The par-three 17th saw Tom Watson win, and Jack Nicklaus lose the Championship in 1982. One down, Watson’s two-iron drifted into the rough left of the green. With a sand wedge, he holed from 16 feet. It’s a great hole with late drama guaranteed.

The majestic par-five 18th is quite simply one of the best, if not *the* best finishing hole on the tour. The classic risk/reward fairway hugs the ocean in a gentle right to left arc. Two new Cypress trees and a fairway bunker have been added in the landing area, forcing longer hitters to aim left towards the Pacific, but most players will lay up and pitch over the front bunker protecting the final green.

In 2002, at considerable cost, the large pine tree front right of the green was replaced by a huge mature Cypress, providing a picture perfect climax to the round for the galleries and worldwide TV audience.

That Pebble Beach is called a ‘public course’ is slightly deceptive. True, anyone can play, but the green fee is currently \$495 (£335) and can only be booked together with a two-night stay costing a minimum of \$595 (£400) per night per room. So even if you share a room, look to spend at least £735 for the privilege of walking in the spike-marks of champions.

The other caveat is that the course is so heavily booked throughout the year by players of all abilities, rounds can take five and even six hours. Still, with a seascape like this, what’s the hurry?

The other three courses operated by Pebble Beach are Spyglass Hill, Spanish Bay and Del Monte. Opened in 1966, the Robert Trent Jones Snr. designed Spyglass Hill takes its inspiration from Treasure Island, with holes named after characters in the book. From the tournament tees, it’s consistently rated one of the toughest courses in the world with a slope rating of 147, even higher

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than Pebble Beach itself.

Spanish Bay is modelled on a Scottish links, with wind and bristling grass the biggest challenges to good scoring. The inland Del Monte opened in 1897, making it the oldest course west of the Mississippi. It’s a tad easier than the others so ideal for the first game of a golf package.

Three Pebble Beach-owned hotels service

heavy-hitters playing locally. The most exclusive is Casa Palmero where rooms start at \$845 (£570). Next is the Lodge at Pebble Beach which has suites overlooking the Championship’s 18th hole, with rooms from \$695 (£470). The hotel and clubhouse have good food, charm, history and great views.

The Inn at Spanish Bay is the most reasonable, with rates starting at \$595 (£400). The fire pits behind the clubhouse are perfect for that post-game cigar, and the clubhouse bar, Roy’s, serves delightful East-meets-West fusion food – the unfiltered Dreamy Clouds sake is lethal. At sunset, a lone piper in full Scottish kit appears playing, after my round, a wholly appropriate lament.

Pebble Beach has been owned since 1999 by a consortium that includes Clint Eastwood, Arnold Palmer and LA Olympics maestro Peter Ueberroth. For many golfers, a visit here is a once in a lifetime experience, so not surprisingly, the standard of service and organisation that you encounter on each



course and in every clubhouse and hotel is quite exemplary.

There are, however, a number of other outstanding courses in Monterey County, eight on the five-mile square peninsular alone. The best is probably Cypress Point, but it's a private club with play limited to the 250 members and their guests only, so difficult to get onto.

The tree-lined Bayonet and hilly Black Horse have just had a \$13 million makeover, and, when I played them recently, were in quite stunning condition. With weekday afternoon green fees at just \$75 (£50), these two courses probably represent the best-value quality golf in the area.

Winding through the Del Monte Forest inland, Poppy Hills is inside the Pebble Beach estate but independently owned. The Robert Trent Jones Jnr. set-up has vast greens, partly to accommodate the huge number of rounds played here each year. It's tricky but fun – an ideal warm-up for more difficult local challenges.

The local joker in the pack, right on the point of the peninsula, is Pacific Grove. The 'poor man's Pebble Beach' has stunning views of the ocean on the back nine. It's a short 'muni' or municipal course, not in the same class as some of the others, but at about £25 a round, friendly enough for mid and high handicappers.

There are plenty of good local hotels outside Pebble Beach itself, of which the best is probably the Monterey Plaza on the main drag in Cannery Row. Rates start at about \$220 (£150) a room, and dinner at the Duck Club restaurant is pretty special.

The more modestly priced Portola Hotel and Spa is smack in the middle of Monterey itself, specialises in golf packages and is nearer the £100-a-night mark. It's a confer-



While Monterey County is stacked with high-end golf clubs, do your homework and you will find a number of terrific alternatives at sensible prices, such as Poppy Hills (above) and Pacific Grove (below)

ence hotel so a little frayed around the edges but well-placed for the brilliant eateries on Fisherman's Wharf.

As well 20-odd other hotels including a Hyatt Regency and an InterContinental, there is a host of smaller inns and bed-and-breakfasts, perfect for short oceanside breaks.

Monterey is as good a destination for 'golf widows' as players. The area is hip-deep in spas, while shopping on the strip in colourful Cannery Row or in up-market Carmel-by-the-Sea could easily cost much more than a round of golf. Carmel is still home to its one-time mayor, Clint Eastwood, who can often be seen pottering around town. The Dirty Harry star has even built his own private golf course, Tehama, rumoured to have cost \$80 million-plus.

Proud to be a 'dog-friendly' community,

Carmel has some wonderfully quaint bylaws including a ban on high-heeled shoes. It's also home to more than 50 art galleries and some particularly ritzy restaurants. Just out of town, the romantically situated Highlands Inn is popular for honeymoons, its brilliant Pacific's Edge restaurant good for seafood, local Californian wines and celeb-spotting.

The whole district prides itself on its locally produced fine food and wine. Wineries in the Carmel Valley such as the Chateau Julien Wine Estate, Bernardus, Robert Talbott and the Joullian Vineyards make for an interesting and bibulous day out, with Pinot Noirs a speciality.

After all the gastronomic excess, wild and rugged Big Sur, a truly beautiful 90-mile stretch of coastline south of Monterey, is perfect for hiking, cycling and whale-watching.

With over 20 courses, the Pacific Ocean, amazing beaches, and terrific food and wine, Monterey County is more than just Pebble Beach. But come the third week in June, all eyes will be on the most famous US Open venue of them all. 📍



For the golf, hotels and spas at Pebble Beach: [www.pebblebeach.com](http://www.pebblebeach.com)

For a Monterey County overview: [www.seemonterey.com](http://www.seemonterey.com)

Other golf:  
[bayonetblackhorse.com](http://bayonetblackhorse.com)  
[www.poppyhills.com](http://www.poppyhills.com)  
Pacific Grove – [pggolflinks.com](http://pggolflinks.com)

Wineries:  
[bernardus.com](http://bernardus.com)  
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