

Green Monkey course at The Sandy Lane resort, Barbados

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PUTTING PARADISE

Ocean views, lush green vegetation and great design make the best Caribbean golf courses truly world-class. Peter Swain reports

With seven great courses, Barbados is a premier golfing destination. The Sandy Lane resort, where Tiger Woods got married, has 45 holes: two 18-hole courses, and the half-length, Old Nine. The Green Monkey and the Country Club are both designed, with no expense spared, by the maestro, Tom Fazio.

“You need two things to make a great course - dollars and dynamite,” he quipped after working on the 7,343-yard Green Monkey, built through an old limestone quarry. With dynamic elevation changes, it’s a ‘must play’ course for professionals and low handicappers. The Country Club has five lakes and wider fairways, and both championship courses feature stunning seascapes, immaculate conditioning and outstanding clubhouse service.

Royal Westmoreland boasts Wayne Rooney, Ian Woosnam and Gary Lineker as part-time residents. The Robert Trent Jones Jnr. 7,045-yard course has some of the best par-3s in the world, according to Woosnam. Other holes feature unnerving jungle-filled gorges, and as with all Bajan courses, swirling trade winds. A magnificent colonial-style clubhouse is the perfect end even for an imperfect round. A second course is planned.

Up on the island’s crest, the recently opened Apes Hill was designed by Landmark of Kiawah Island fame. Generous fairways and strategically located bunkers ensure the 7,049-yard set-up is a challenge for scratch players but also user-friendly from the forward tees. A team from Wentworth is training staff and managing the service side of the club, which also has a polo field

and close links with the Port St Charles yacht club. Also worth playing is Barbados Golf Club, where the motto is ‘Golf for all’.

With a dozen or so courses, the islands of the Bahamas combine to offer excellent golf with the best of American-style service.

Sean Connery’s favourite is the Abaco Club at Winding Bay on Great Abaco. Designed by Donald Steel, Abaco is a ‘tropical links’ with six holes along the turquoise

Atlantic, pot bunkers, springy Paspalum turf, palm trees and giant roller-coaster greens – think ‘Scottish with a tan’. The restaurant has superb food, with a spa and bone-fishing on hand for non-golfers.

The one-time James Bond actually lives at Lyford Cay, an uber-exclusive private enclave built around a pristine course on New Providence, capital Nassau. The set-up is superb but, without an invitation, extremely difficult to play on. At the other end of the same island, near to the Atlantis

hotel complex, the Ocean Club is part of the luxury One&Only resort. The Tom Weiskopf-designed course works for weekend warriors and serious golf fanatics alike, and hosts the annual Michael Jordan Celebrity Invitational. The Els designed Albany course is opening in late 2010 and looks promising.

The Sands Emerald Reef 18-hole resort course at Emerald Bay on Great Exuma, designed by Greg Norman, is a classic oceanfront links with fairways running past sand dunes and tall seashore grasses. The





18th is at the end of a spectacular peninsula. The Our Lucaya resort on Grand Bahamas features two 18-hole courses, plus a Butch Harmon Golf School. The sporting and hotel facilities are high quality and provide variety for all the family.

Jamaica has excellent courses, many attached to well-established luxury resorts on the north coast. Describing itself as a ‘mix of fun and challenge’, the Tryall Club hosted the World Championship in 1995. The course meanders between the shoreline and deep ravines with the par-4 7th featuring a tee-shot through the stone pillars of an old aqueduct. Caddies are experienced and entertaining.

Just a few miles away, the award-winning Half Moon at Montego Bay is a classic Robert Trent Jones Sr. course, recently refurbished to accommodate both casual golfers and long hitters. Players may find the undulating greens tough to score on.

Also in Rose Hall, there are two excellent Robert von Hagge courses. With sea views on 16 out of 18 holes, the 6,859-yard White Witch features mountainous terrain and glorious tropical flora. The wind makes it alluringly unpredictable, but it’s always in great shape. Cinnamon Hill completes the local picture. Featuring tricky water hazards, the front nine is open and friendly; the back nine, with more bunkers and jungle, is high maintenance and difficult.

The Dominican Republic has over 20 courses, of which three of the best, all designed by Pete Dye, are at Casa de Campo. Chiseled out of the coral, Teeth of the Dog is regularly voted pre-eminent in the region. The back tees are strictly for professionals, the front ones still very challenging – a course not for the faint-hearted. The 7,740-yard Dye Fore is the newest and most scenic set-up, with seven cliff-side holes and others running along the Chavon River. It’s still tough but a tad easier for mid-handicappers. The inland Links is the friendliest of the three, but five lakes still make life awkward. A Leadbetter Academy is also on site making an all-round good facility even better.

The Punta Espada Jack Nicklaus Signature course at Cap Cana is also right up there. Overlooking the ocean with elevated tees and beautifully manicured greens, the generous fairways make this a course any golfer can at least try to play. Not cheap, but good service and a beautiful clubhouse add up to a great package.

The two courses at Puntacana, La Cana and Corales, designed by Dye and Fazio respectively, are picturesque, featuring palm trees, the ocean and plunging canyons. A third course due to open in 2011, plus a tennis centre and spa make this an attractive sporting destination.

With eight courses, Bermuda has more golf clubs



The Country Club course

per square mile than anywhere else in the world. This October, Port Royal is hosting the PGA Grand Slam of Golf for the four Majors’ winners. Following a \$14.5 million facelift, the original Robert Trent Jones Snr. public course has new greens, bunkers and added length. Holes like the par-3 16th, with a 238-yard carry across the ocean, make this a truly world-class links. Ocean View and St George’s are also public, if not quite in the same class.

The Mid Ocean is an exclusive private club, so difficult to play on unless you’re staying in a hotel owned by a member. It held the Grand Slam in 2007/8 so is a true championship course. Dwight Eisenhower, Winston Churchill, George Bush and Babe Ruth have all played here, correctly dressed, of course. Proper attire is a must on Bermudan courses.

On a smaller scale, St Kitts and Nevis is fighting to become a golfing destination. Royal St Kitts at Frigate Bay has recently been refurbished, with the back nine along the seashore offering a stiff and particularly scenic challenge. The island describes itself as ‘the Caribbean, the way it used to be’. A hardcore of local British residents plays every Thursday, giving the friendly clubhouse a Surrey-in-the-tropical-sun feel.

Tom Fazio is building a second course at the ambitious Christophe Harbour development, on the southeast peninsular. When it’s finished next year, it will be as spectacular as anything in the region. The Four Seasons course on Nevis is long and tight with a premium on accuracy off the tee. The hotel reopening is currently on hold but the course itself is unaffected.

Throughout the region, there is true golfing quality. Add the friendly and efficient service, rum cocktails and sun, it all makes for a hole in one. **CW**

Other good courses

The Raffles Canouan in the Grenadines is magnificent and tough. Temenos on Anguilla, managed by Cap Juluca, is long, featuring water on 13 holes. In Puerto Rico, the two courses at Dorado Beach, plus the River and Ocean at Rio Mar are challenging, with excellent facilities. On Curaçao, the Pete Dye-designed Old Quarry Hyatt Regency course is very enjoyable. The Provo club in the Turks & Caicos hosted the 2009 Caribbean Amateur Championship. Jolly Harbour on Antigua, the St Lucia Golf Resort, Mount Irvine Bay on Tobago, and Varadero in Cuba are all fun if you’re on those islands already.

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