

An aerial photograph of a golf course. A river flows through the center, surrounded by dense tropical-looking vegetation. Several sand traps are visible on the right side of the course. In the background, there are rolling hills and a larger body of water.

WHERE TO PLAY

WHERE TO PLAY

IN GREAT BRITAIN AND ABROAD



WOBURN

BEDFORDSHIRE



"This is a fabulous venue, a very, very good golf course. I think we have a real jewel here," said Colin Montgomerie when he first played the Marquess' Course in 2001, soon after it opened. Most agree that this latest addition to the already outstanding Duke's and Duchess' courses has made Woburn one of England's premier clubs.

As befits a layout with such aristocratic connections, winners over the years of the European Masters, played originally on the Duke's and latterly on the Marquess' course, have included golfing royalty: Lee Trevino, Nick Faldo, Seve Ballesteros and Greg Norman. Since 2003, Ian Poulter has been the club's Touring Professional.

All three courses are carved through mature woodland on the Duke of Bedford's estate, and look to have been in play for 100 years, but amazingly the club only dates back to

1976, the year the Duke's opened. Of the three, the Marquess' is the longest, the Duchess' the shortest, and the Duke's the most historic. Unlike other 54-hole clubs in England, each course has its devotees, none losing anything in quality to its siblings.

The 6,973-yard Duke's is characterised by long avenues of pine, chestnut and silver birch leading to immaculate greens, some of which, like the short par-3 3rd, are framed by colourful rhododendrons. Several greens have severe trouble short or long, so good club selection and distance control are vital. The ability to move the ball both ways is also an asset, as is straight hitting – anything off line is likely to clatter into the trees. In fact, it is a complete test of golf.

The 7,213-yard Marquess' feels a little more modern. Fairways are wider, there is more variety of hole

design, and greens are larger and more severely contoured. Position is everything, so getting drive and approach in the right place is essential to leave a comfortable two-putt.

The 6,651-yard Duchess' is popular with both members and the Ladies European Tour. The layout rewards good game management rather than brute strength, and in deepest winter, because of its topography, it is often the driest of all the three courses.

The coaching setup is top notch, with a huge variety of teaching options, greatly helped by the Performance Centre, which houses a full indoor fitting and simulator studio. Only an hour north of London, Woburn's three courses and game-improvement facilities are quite simply world-class – there are no excuses not to try them. www.woburn.co.uk/golf

WHERE TO PLAY



OLD HEAD

IRELAND



When it comes to golf course design, the word 'spectacular' is overused, but in the case of Old Head Golf Links it is wholly appropriate. It required an extraordinarily imaginative leap of faith to turn this 220-acre diamond-shaped promontory, jutting two miles out into the Atlantic, into a golf course, but that is precisely what the O'Connor brothers accomplished 17 years ago. High above the crashing surf, it is like teeing off at the edge of the world.

In its first few years, the course, only connected to the Irish mainland by a narrow rocky isthmus, struggled to live up to its breathtaking location. Greens were damaged by winter storms, conditioning was uneven and holes lacked definition.

But with maturity has come something close to perfection. When players like Woods, Michelson and Garcia play

somewhere for pleasure, and the likes of Michael Jordan and a raft of Fortune 100 CEOs make the trip over from the US just for fun, it gets the golf world's attention.

Mastering the five par-5s, five par-3s and eight par-4s, which make up the 7,215-yard links, requires a good caddy, a strong stomach and a player's 'A' game. Of course, there are shorter tee options, down to 6,500 yards or so for the men and something over 5,100 for the women, but any ball that misses the short grass is in trouble, so above all this setup needs accuracy.

The tee shot on 18 encapsulates Old Head. To make it onto the heather-lined fairway from the back tee set on a sliver of land in the lee of an 1853 lighthouse, you need to drive the ball at least 220 yards over a churning chasm. It

is a memorable golfing experience.

Once described as Pebble Beach on steroids, part of the pleasure of playing Old Head is its environment. As well as the dramatic cliffs over which peregrine falcons, guillemots and cormorants wheel and cry, Irish history in the form of Iron Age Celtic remains, and the ghosts of those lost on the Lusitania just eight miles away in 1915 suffuse this magical place.

However, it isn't really a course designed for novices. There are practice facilities, but they provide no more than a brief preparation for the battle ahead. High handicappers can get round, but the layout really favours skilled players wanting to pit themselves against one of the most scenic golfing challenges in European golf. Who dares wins.

www.oldhead.com

STOKE PARK

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE



The one word that sums up Stoke Park is 'classy'. This celebrated country club, hotel, spa, golf course and tennis centre, just a 45-minute drive west of central London, is so illustrious *James Bond*, *Bridget Jones*, Daniel Craig in *Layer Cake* and Paul Bettany in *Wimbledon* have all stayed and played here.

It has impeccable breeding: Capability Brown landscaped the 300-acre grounds; James Wyatt designed the main house in the 1790s; and the golf course was built in 1908 by Harry Colt, the maestro who also created classic designs at Sunningdale and Wentworth. The history is impressive, but today's golf club is a modern, friendly and efficient affair, beautifully set up for a day's recreational play, a corporate event, or even a short break.

The main 18-hole parkland course wanders between mature oak and fir

trees, skirts several lakes, and has, as its main defence, aggressive bunkering and slick greens. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then the signature par-3 7th, requiring a 160-yard mid-iron from an elevated tee over water to a diagonal green is a classic. Colt's good friend Alistair MacKenzie copied it to create the 16th at Augusta National.

Unlike other courses in the area, there is little gorse or tangly undergrowth, so a bad drive may lead to a loss of position, but is unlikely to result in a lost ball. In fact, this is a particularly good track for players of all abilities: novices can enjoy the scenery without being beaten up too badly, while scratch golfers playing from the tips will find low scoring a real challenge.

There is a third, slightly shorter loop of nine holes, making 27 magnificent

holes in all. And the coaching facilities are as classy as the course. The driving range is wide, long and well equipped, the short game area a model of its type, and practice green even equipped with some $\frac{3}{4}$ -sized holes, the better to rehearse those clutch putts.

But the star of the teaching show is the indoor Swing Studio, equipped with the very latest V1 software, cameras and plasma screens. Excellent PGA coaches are on hand to interpret, guide and instruct.

And after a game, Stoke Park's leisure facilities are second to none. Spa, swimming pool, restaurants and bars in the palatial clubhouse, well-equipped pro shop, not to mention several pristine grass tennis courts, all combine to create the perfect relaxed country club ambience. It is a licence to chill.

www.stokepark.com

ST ANDREWS LINKS

SCOTLAND



Did you know? St Andrews Links is run by a self-funding charitable trust put in place by an Act of Parliament in 1974.

From the iconic Swilcan Bridge on the Old Course to Tom Morris's masterful architecture on the New Course, St Andrews Links has developed over 600 years to become one of the most famous locations in golf. Perhaps most fascinating, however, is the fact that all seven courses here at the Home of Golf are public and open to everyone.

The three championship courses – the Old Course (1400s), New Course (1895) and Jubilee Course (1897) – run parallel to each other along the famous West Sands of St Andrews. All three offer a fantastic Links experience, with Tom Morris's New Course being a favourite with local golfers. A round on the Old Course is £155 during peak season and can be booked in a number of ways, the most popular methods being the advance reservation process, which opens every September, or by entering the 48-hour ballot. The New and

Jubilee green fees are £75 peak season and can be booked online or by phone.

Nestled on the opposite side of the Links are the Eden Course (1914), Strathtyrum (1993) and the only nine-hole course, the Balgove (1992). These hidden gem courses offer a more relaxing round and are the ideal practice ground for those starting out in the game. The green fee for the Eden is £45 and the Strathtyrum is £30, and both courses can be booked online or by phone. The 9-hole Balgove is £15 peak season, and players can simply walk on to this friendly Links course.

A five-minute drive from town is the seventh course at the Home of Golf, the award-winning Castle Course (2008), which offers dramatic views over St Andrews from its spectacular cliff-top location. Steadily climbing the Top 100 lists since it opened, a round on the Castle is £120 peak season.

In addition to the seven courses, St Andrews Links is home to a state-of-the-art Golf Academy, which houses the Callaway Performance Centre for Scotland. The Academy's dedication to excellence is demonstrated through its offering of biomechanical assessments, fitness instruction and golf psychology sessions in addition to the more traditional instruction. Both adults and juniors can benefit from the schools run by the academy instructors, and the 'Prepare the Play' lesson will equip you with the inside knowledge you need when tackling the famous Old Course.

A visit to St Andrews Links is a golfing trip like no other. Whether it is soaking up the atmosphere at the Home End or visiting Old Tom Morris's shop, St Andrews Links defines golf. A bucket-list trip for golfers worldwide, it all started here.

www.standrews.org.uk

THE LONDON CLUB

KENT



Set in lovely rolling Kent countryside not far from Brands Hatch, the two London Club courses are some of the newer additions to England's golfscape. The Heritage was opened in 1993 by Dennis Thatcher, and its first serious match took place the following year: a skins game between Seve Ballesteros, Tony Jacklin and course designer, Jack Nicklaus. The Spaniard's short game won the day, and the same skill set is needed to master the layout today.

Nicklaus has created a typically American course: wide open off the tees to encourage expansive driving, leaving most of the trouble for the approach shots. Accurate mid irons are needed to tackle huge USGA-spec greens, protected by enormous bunker complexes. Five sets of tees enable players of all abilities to have a crack, but a deft short game, not far off Seve's, is needed to make a low score.

Water is in play on the 5th, the 7th and the short par-4 388-yard 13th, where an accurate lay-up off the tee followed by a delicate mid-iron approach to a sloping green, protected by water, is fairly typical of the gauntlet Nicklaus has thrown down. Otherwise, it is the course's length and the fast undulating greens that make life challenging.

As befits a track that features regularly on the European Tour, most recently as the venue of the 2008 and 2009 European Opens, the condition of the fairways and greens is admirable. However, its taxing setup is best suited to pros and skilled amateurs.

Mid and high handicappers will find their ideal golfing experience on the International course, which is almost as long but much more forgiving. There is still plenty of water to catch the unwary, but the rolling fairways funnel the ball toward the greens, the traps are less

penal and flags are easier to attack. As a result, the International is the more popular course for corporate and society days.

Again following the American model, the substantial new clubhouse is well suited to handling large numbers of heavy hitters from both courses. There is a good variety of food from bar snacks to fine dining, backed up by excellent service.

The club's practice facilities include a double-ended driving range, enabling players to hit off turf all the time, covered bays to protect them from inclement weather, plus a chipping green, two bunkers and a putting green.

It may be relatively new, but the London Club is already a fixture on the must-play list.

www.londongolf.co.uk

PGA CATALUNYA

SPAIN



Just outside Girona in northwest Spain, PGA Catalunya is to Spanish golf what nearby Barca's famous Camp Nou is to football: a wonderfully atmospheric venue for international sport. And as it is within an hour's drive of Barcelona to the south, the Pyrenees going north and the beaches of the Costa Brava to the east, it is equally popular with competitors and their non-playing families.

The tree-lined 7,205-yard Stadium Course regularly hosts the Spanish Open, and is regarded by many as the best test of golf in the country. It is also particularly scenic, but that beauty can be distracting because when the winds blow the narrow fairways, sneaking between the pines and gorgeous purple heather, are difficult to hit, while the water in play on seven holes exerts a strange magnetism.

Greens are often undulating and

usually fast, so there is a premium on short game accuracy. All in all, the Stadium can be something of a beast. There are, however, four sets of tees, so high handicappers looking to survive with just one sleeve of balls can cut the length down to a more manageable 5,578 yards for the men and 5,160 yards for the ladies.

In comparison, the Tour Course, at 6,453 yards, is rather less challenging, making it an ideal warm-up for its big brother. Wider fairways and less aggressive bunkering encourage ambitious driving and, although there is still plenty of water, the approaches are easier and the greens more forgiving.

The condition of both setups is immaculate, and facilities in the clubhouse, where the cuisine is typically Catalan, exemplary. And for more ambitious fare, El Celler de Can Roca,

currently the best eatery in the world according to *Restaurant* magazine, is just down the road.

As well as two courses and a hotel, PGA Catalunya has superb practice and coaching facilities. With the latest video equipment on hand, the Sergio Garcia Junior Academy aims to teach children aged 6-9, 9-12 and 12+ all the basics in a fun environment. Adults are equally well catered for.

The driving range is spacious, and the short game area, which features no less than five bunkers, each with a different sand – Augusta, St Andrews, Hawaii volcanic, local PGA Catalunya, and Pebble Beach – is difficult to fault.

With two reliable international airports, Girona and Barcelona, within 30 miles, and other good clubs nearby, PGA Catalunya has all golfing bases supremely well covered.
www.pgacatalunya.com

FOUR SEASONS NEVIS

CARIBBEAN



The 6,766-yard Robert Trent Jones II masterpiece on Nevis is consistently rated one of the best courses in the Caribbean. The undulating design is very demanding, condition pristine, and views up towards the heavily forested 3,500-foot high Nevis Peak and out over the Cerulean Ocean truly dramatic. All in all, it is a tropical gem.

Built in 1991, the surprisingly mountainous setup winds up steep slopes and across jungle-engorged ravines before plunging back down to finish within a few feet of the beach. Adding to the colour, troops of Green Vervet monkeys swing through the exotic flora that festoons the fairways.

The key to playing well here is the ability to place your drive in the right area off the tee – it is easy to be blind-sided on the tricky doglegs, and the very first hole is actually one of the

toughest. Immaculate greens are quite receptive, although several are difficult plateaus to approach with anything longer than a short iron.

The standout hole is the monster 663-yard par-5 15th. Downhill all the way, it plays nearer 563, but the tee shot is semi-blind and needs a 240-yard carry over the jungle to reach the fairway, so it demands respect.

Facing on old sugar mill and Nevis Peak, the spacious driving range and short game area is the perfect place to improve your golf under the tutelage of Golf Director Bruce Wilson. A truly outstanding coach, he has all the video bells and whistles to help novices improve and encourage good golfers to play better.

The grass on the course and at the range is Bermuda, so for those not

accustomed to this particularly tangly cultivar, half-an-hour warming up before a game is advisable.

Like all truly great golf resorts, there is also plenty to do after, or even instead of, the game. There are 10 tennis courts, of which five are floodlit, the better to avoid the intense midday heat; the spa is a typically soigné Four Seasons affair, with therapists equally adept at dealing with players' post-game ailments and pampering the less sporty; and both golf and tennis facilities are backed up by a well-stocked pro shop.

Then there is the elegant hotel with three restaurants, the pools and the beach. It is a great destination, but the star attraction is the golf course, and as a place to hunker down and develop your game it is difficult to beat.

www.fourseasons.com/nevis

PEBBLE BEACH

CALIFORNIA



Regularly voted the best public course in America, the iconic Pebble Beach links is one of golf's truly great sporting arenas. Top of many amateur players' bucket list, the Monterey peninsula course has hosted countless PGA events, including five US Opens, the last won in 2010 by Northern Ireland's Graeme McDowell.

The walk alone is worth the (hefty) price of admission. The Pacific Ocean features in no less than nine majestic holes, of which the most photogenic are the famous short 7th playing downhill to a small green set on top of vertiginous cliffs, and infamous 18th, a dogleg around the seashore and one of golf's great closing holes.

According to Jack Nicklaus, the 8th has the hardest second shot in golf. A 240-yard drive puts the player on the edge of a deep chasm overlooking the ocean. Then, requiring nerves

of titanium, the approach needs a confident long iron to a sloping green, 180 windy yards away over the churning surf. It is tough.

Even then, it is a doddle compared with the handicap 1 par-514th, which features a wickedly contoured green tucked in close to strategically placed Cypress trees. Everywhere one looks on this course, hearts have been broken and history made.

And yet, for the amateur, Pebble is still quite playable. For the last US Open, the setup was 7,040 yards long, but from the men's forward tees it is just 6,116. Players need only use a driver three times on the front nine and, although they may lose a ball or two in the ocean, it is guaranteed to be a memorable round. One downside is playing time, which occasionally stretches to 5½ hours, but with a seascape like this, who's complaining?

In addition, golfers looking to advance their game will be chomping at the bit to use the brand-new Pebble Beach Driving Range and state-of-the-art Golf Academy. The facility provides players with everything from individual game improvement and group instruction to complete warm-up training and club fitting.

As well as a double-ended driving range and short game area featuring the same bunkering and green speeds found on the links, the Academy has the very latest instructional video technology supervised by world-class coaches.

Pebble Beach Resorts also run three stunning hotels and three other courses, including the outstanding Spyglass Hill. For golfers of any standard, it doesn't get much better than this.

www.pebblebeach.com

ANAHITA

MAURITIUS



After a blissful visit in 1896, Mark Twain mused: "You get the idea Mauritius was made first, and then heaven." When surveying the Anahita course, built over a one-time sugar plantation on the Indian Ocean island's east coast, most golfers would agree.

Ernie Els first saw the land in 2004. "My standout memory from those early site visits was the sheer beauty of the setting, so a key part of my design brief was to maximise the visual impact of the scenery while preserving the coastline's natural charm."

He has succeeded admirably. Hole routings move in and out of the trees and along the water, giving players of all abilities great variety and superb views of the ocean. A pro-am is played here every December, and the course works just as well for amateurs as top players.

Most fairways are wide open, which

encourages ambitious driving. Els has left local features like the old stone wall slanting across the 14th fairway and the ruins of a sugar estate mill on the 18th. "It's important the golfer experiences a genuine taste of and insight into the Mauritian way of life," enthuses the South African legend.

Other facilities at the Four Seasons Golf Club at Anahita include a well-equipped pro shop, and fine dining in Le Club bar and restaurant.

What really makes Anahita such a great venue for those wanting to lower their handicap is the fine Academy. There is a 350-yard driving range with nine target greens, complemented by a superb short game area complete with bunkers, chipping and putting greens.

But the heart of the setup is the studio, equipped with a state-of-the-art video and a computer swing-analysis system,

which records a player's swing from three camera angles and plays it back on a 52-inch plasma screen.

Multilingual coaches are on hand to organise one-on-one sessions as well as group instruction, particularly popular for children. The super-keen can even sign up for an intensive week-long clinic. To sum up, it is difficult to imagine a better-equipped teaching facility, or at least one set in such paradisiacal surroundings.

For golfers, the rest of the island offers amazing choice. Anahita is the jewel in the crown, but the Le Touessrok course, Belle Mare Plage, the Heritage Golf Club in the south and the rocky Tamarina are all gems well worth playing.

To paraphrase another great man, when a golfer is tired of Mauritius, he is tired of life.

www.fourseasons.com/mauritius/golf

BLUE CANYON

PHUKET



The chance to combine golf with a holiday in the exotic Orient is a dream for many players, and as facilities in the region have improved exponentially over the past generation it is now easy to arrange. Japan and South Korea were first on the tee, with Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and China now catching up fast.

But some of the best-run and most picturesque clubs are in the ancient Kingdom of Thailand, where the culture, food and climate are pleasantly colourful, hotel service superb, and golf course design world-class.

The club that put the country on the golfing map was Blue Canyon on the holiday island of Phuket in the Andaman Sea. During the 1990s, the Canyon Course hosted the Johnnie Walker, won most memorably by Tiger Woods in 1998 after coming back from a nine-shot deficit on the final day.

"One of the best courses I've ever played," judged the champ.

Rolling fairways snake through dense forest, past large lakes toward fast and beautifully manicured greens, on a site that used to be a tin mine surrounded by rubber plantations. As the name implies, there are several yawning canyons to negotiate, of which the 13th, now christened the 'Tiger Hole' after Woods nailed a 270-carry straight onto the green, is the most memorable.

The back nine is seriously tough – a tropical version of Wentworth's West Course. To help visitors through the challenge, caddies at Blue Canyon are mandatory, usually female and always invaluable. This is a walking-only course, and in the heat and humidity that often prevail a bag carrier is a must. As well as being helpful with club selection, local caddies read the subtle greens with a practised eye.

After the round, players enjoy the facilities of a palatial clubhouse, which includes a spa featuring therapists expert in ironing out those post-game kinks. The Terrace bar is a good place to dissect the round, accompanied by a snack and a cold beer, and Canyon Restaurant is ideal for fine dining.

The other layout at Blue Canyon, the Lakes Course, is an altogether gentler challenge, well designed for the first round of a trip. Water is in play on 17 of the 18 holes, but it is shorter than the Canyon and far more open – perfect, in fact, for a little game improvement.

Phuket has several other good courses, outstanding beaches, a fun nightlife, and a variety of hotels to suit every pocket, making it the supreme destination for a long-haul golfing break.

www.bluecanyonclub.com