

|On the Green|

A newly reimagined course on Barbados joins an assortment of standout links to make this island the best golf destination in the Caribbean, says Peter Swain

BAJAN BIRDIES

Apes Hill's signature
overwater 16th hole

The big news on Barbados this year is the opening – or, more accurately, reopening – of the course at Apes Hill (apeshill.com). Fifteen

years ago, 18 scenic holes were routed around and over deep gullies, coral rock outcrops and giant bearded fig trees in an old sugar plantation close

to the island's highest point. The natural topography and over 100 bunkers made it a visually stunning, if extremely challenging, proposition.

The 19th is a Sawgrass-style lake-island green below the brand-new contemporary clubhouse and bar – a place to settle all bets at the end of the round

Then, in 2017, financial difficulties closed the club.

In 2019, Canadian entrepreneur Glenn Chamandy took over, injecting a reported \$30 million and new dynamism into the golf side of the rolling 475-acre estate, with the triumphant results coming to fruition this summer. Under the guidance of one-time Walker Cup player Roddy Carr and designer Ron Kirby, the course has been softened and opened out. “The newly reimagined Apes Hill is now one of the most spectacular golf courses in

the region, with vistas from the top of the island over the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea,” says Carr. It’s still a stern 7,002-yard test off the tips, but it’s now more inviting for mid-handicappers. “The key focus was to make golf at Apes Hill a truly enjoyable playing experience.”

Fifty, mainly fairway bunkers have been removed, with the designers taking the view that average club players want to open their shoulders off the tee without fear of finding penal hazards. Generous Zorro Zoysia fairways,

which reduce the need for irrigation, now reward ambitious driving, while shorter hitters, playing off forward tees, can still get on the flawless TifEagle greens in regulation. In fact, I found the par-3s – 5, 8, 12 and 16, as well as the drivable par-4 2nd – to be the defining holes of the round. The 16th Cave Hole, played over water to a green just in front of a large limestone cavern, has a genuine “wow” factor.

The Performance Center, with Full Swing and PuttView technology, offers instant, visual feedback to help players of all standards improve. I spent 30 minutes hitting balls under the eagle eye of Scottish golf director Jody Addison and left wishing I could come back every week. “Until now, elite amateurs in the Caribbean would have to travel to the United States to hone their game in a teaching facility like this, but now they don’t have to,” declares Addison, who also supervises the multibrand club-fitting facility.

Another new feature, to be known as the 19th, is a Sawgrass-style lake-island green below the brand-new contemporary clubhouse and bar – a place to settle all bets at the end of the round – and Carr is also currently laying out a par-3 nine-hole. This is an outward-looking, family-friendly set-up that’s welcoming to allcomers but with particular appeal to younger players.

Before taking on sterner challenges, island visitors might first play the Barbados Golf Club (barbadosgolfclub.com). Originally built in 1974, this is another course revived by Carr and Kirby. “Barbados Golf Club is the ‘Home of Golf’ for locals and South Coast visitors,” reports Carr. “The welcoming links-



Sandy Lane's
72-par Green
Monkey course

style layout was redesigned in 2000 and is the most popular and affordable 18-hole course on island.” The 6,805-yard par-72 track features two returning nines finishing back at a lakeside triple green – and, when the trade winds blow, is a serious challenge.

The more famous course on island is the Tom Fazio-designed Green Monkey at Sandy Lane (sandylane.com). The legendary 113-key resort is owned by Dermot Desmond, JP McManus and John Magnier of horseracing fame – Tiger Woods married Elin Nordegren here in 2004, and a host of heavy hitters have stayed and played over the past 20 years.

The Green Monkey is a demanding 7,343-yard masterpiece

carved through an old limestone quarry with substantial elevation changes. Almost a private club, it can only be played by Sandy Lane guests between 8.30 and 10am, and only those who play the course can buy Green Monkey merchandise from the pro shop.

Rather more accessible and also Fazio-designed, the resort’s 7,060-yard Country Club course winds around five lakes with extravagant views of the island’s leeward Platinum Coast. The golfing package is rounded out by the 3,345-yard, par-36 Old Nine which runs between some of the estate’s ritzier mansions, owned by the likes of Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Royal Westmoreland (royalwestmoreland.com) is another private estate and close neighbour

with an equally celebrity-packed clientele – a kind of tropical Vale do Lobo. One-time Masters winner and resident Ian Woosnam reckons the 7,045-yard Robert Trent Jones Jr course has some of the best par-3s he’s ever played. With limited tee times available to visitors, many actually rate this the preeminent golfing challenge on island – under the watchful eye of Greg Schofield, the course condition and service in the colonial-style clubhouse is absolutely immaculate. For an après-golf dinner, it has to be The Cliff in Holetown.

Good food, friendly people, five wonderful courses and several nine-holers make Barbados a resurgent golfing paradise – worth a trip soon before the masses arrive.



A bird's-eye view of the Robert Trent Jones Jr-built links at Royal Westmoreland