

GREAT PLACES TO PLAY 2018

Looking for inspiration for this year's golf break? From South Carolina to Scotland's Western Isles, Travel & Courses Editor Chris Bertram suggests 10 options that will get your pulse racing.

DESTINATION

Aberdeen, Scotland

There's never been a better time to visit a region that just might be Scotland's finest.

Word is slowly getting out about the strength in depth of Aberdeenshire. In addition to the three superstar courses we detail (right), there are also four further links – Murcar, Peterhead, Newburgh and Fraserburgh – in our Scottish Top 100... as well as two inland courses, Meldrum House and Newmachar. But what makes it even more appealing in addition to all this quality is the fact the area is now an even more attractive option in cost terms, with money stretching further as a result of local businesses reacting to the problems the oil industry is experiencing. There's never been a better time to head to an area that genuinely challenges East Lothian, Fife and Ayrshire as Scotland's finest.

WHERE TO STAY Trump International has high-end accommodation on site, or, head inland to Meldrum House – not least because it entitles you to play the Scottish Top 100-ranked course. Its accommodation is exquisite too.

3 MUST-PLAY COURSES



TRUMP ABERDEEN

The controversial links created by the US President is, like the man himself, brash, bold and difficult to ignore. The Martin Hawtree design flows through towering sand dunes and boasts unforgettable holes, especially on the back nine.



CRUDEN BAY

Has taken over from North Berwick as the quirky links people like to tout as their favourite. If you aren't entertained by its eccentricities, you are possibly trying to gain pleasure from the wrong past-time. Rarely anything less than fantastic fun.



ROYAL ABERDEEN

One of the finest front nines in golf starts with a bang – a tee shot from right under the clubhouse window sill down a fairway framed by the North Sea. But it's by no means the best hole of the half. This is an unmissable, high-calibre links course.



COURSE

Carya, Turkey

The continent's No.2-ranked resort keeps improving.

Designed by Thomson, Perrett and Lobb – the architecture firm led by the Open legend – this is a wonderful pine and heather-lined course with echoes of the Surrey heathlands. That might sound a bit fanciful, but is a suggestion that has genuine merit to it. White sand bunkers and velvet green fairways add to the dazzle of a statuesque course on Belek's golf Riviera. Thomson has retired now but Tim Lobb inherited the consultancy role and has made a fine job of rerouting the course to take account of the new hotel. Talking of which, the hotel is arguably the best in Belek, which is no mean achievement. You will leave this No.2-ranked resort in Continental Europe entirely satisfied in every respect.

WHY GO NOW?

It recently became our top-ranked course in Belek, jumping a huge 35 places after we were satisfied its conditioning matched its astute design. The five-star all-inclusive hotel, which opened in 2015, adds to its appeal.

WHY SO SPECIAL?

As early as the 1st hole, with a fantastic funky green complex, you know you are in for a memorable experience. It offers wonderful tranquility among the towering pines and is a course that could threaten the top 25 in continental Europe.



DESTINATION

Poland

A Top 100 entry and the best quality-cost ratio in Europe. Be prepared to be surprised.

Yes, Poland. We can guarantee the former Eastern Bloc country will surprise you if you follow our advice and head there for a break. The courses will surprise you, the weather will, too, and so will the fabulous accommodation. What may be more predictable is that it offers incredible value. That is not a reason on its own for going, since plenty of other destinations can offer cheap golf breaks. However not many, if any, can match Poland for its quality. The quality to cost ratio is better than anywhere we can think of.

WHERE TO STAY: All three courses have on-site accommodation. Modry Las has woodland cabins, Sand Valley has chic townhouses and Sierra has modern apartments. All are minimum four-star.

3 MUST-PLAY COURSES



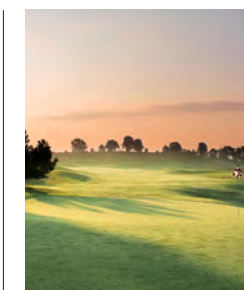
SAND VALLEY

Close to Gdansk, Sand Valley made it into our *Golf World* Continental Europe Top 100 last year and is the course that leads the way. The name gives away its nature, and the agronomy allows a fast-running heathland style course with funky greens. A course that gives modern architecture a good name.



SIERRA

Also close to Gdansk, Sierra is a fresh parkland course that you will find in exceptionally good condition. It is very playable indeed and, is the best options as an all-round venue. The greens are much flatter than at Sand Valley and in such good condition that you have no excuses not to putt well on them.



MODRY LAS

In complete contrast, Modry Las is located near Szczecin and has also been in the *Golf World* Continental Top 100. This Gary Player design enjoys a fabulous lakeside location and has been skilfully routed on characterful, rolling terrain. It has good on-site accommodation, too.

COURSE

Kiawah Island, USA

One of America's most spectacular and storied courses.

The host of the infamous 1991 Ryder Cup – dubbed 'The War on the Shore' – enjoys one of America's most breathtaking locations. Kiawah is a huge, sprawling residential and leisure resort in South Carolina, with five courses part of the myriad attractions that also include tennis, walking, fishing, swimming pools, a huge spa, bike rentals and an art studio. The premier track is undoubtedly the Ocean Course, though, and it lives up to its stellar and somewhat fearsome reputation with epic holes and a peerless setting.

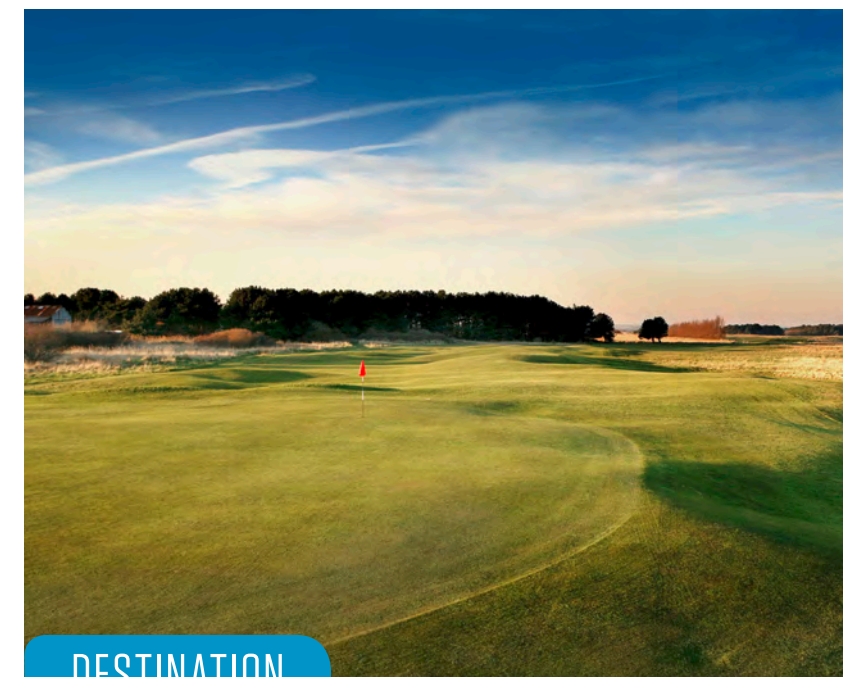


WHY GO NOW?

It hosted the 2012 PGA won by Rory and will do so again in 2021, so this is very much an in-vogue course in America. It is regularly ranked as one of the USA's elite 30 courses and is one if its few excellent coastal destinations. And it has superb year-round weather.

WHY SO SPECIAL?

The waves of the Atlantic ocean crashing against several of the holes, for a start. A sandy, salty, sunny experience that will leave you thinking about a return visit before you've even left. And the smell of the gill room wafting down the 18th is just so tantalisingly good.



DESTINATION

Sandwich, Kent

Raw, eccentric and rugged links at its very best

For all but the most local residents, getting to Sandwich can be a fiddly and time-consuming ordeal, but the payoff is that, once you arrive, you can play three championship quality golf courses without having to go near your car again for a few days. Despite Royal St. George's being a regular Open Championship host, this area remains one of the most underrated golf destinations in the country.

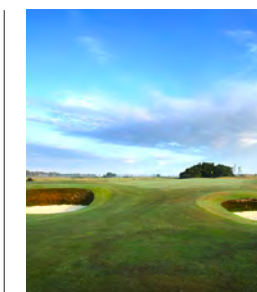
INFORMATION We recommend you stay at **The Lodge at Prince's**. There are 12 bedrooms on two floors and the suites, although fairly minimalist, are very spacious. There's an in-house bar and the choice of a relaxed or more formal restaurant. The up-and-coming town of Deal is only 10 minutes away too.

3 MUST-PLAY COURSES



ROYAL CINQUE PORTS

A bland start and finish bookend 16 epic holes. You don't visit for the vistas – towering dunes obstruct your views of the Channel going out while farm machinery is all there is to see coming in. You come for eccentric links golf – blind drives, bad bounces and a supreme test of ball-striking.



PRINCE'S GOLF CLUB

Although a more overtly commercial club than its two more traditional neighbours, Prince's still provides a pure links experience. The Shore starts out tight, tough and uncompromising while the Dunes gives you options to open your shoulders. It's more spacious than Deal but not as grand in scale as RSG.



ROYAL ST GEORGE'S

Expansive, majestic and engaging, Royal St. George's is the granddaddy of England's links courses. It's No.1 in our Top 100 England for a reason... several actually. The turf is majestic, the greens eccentric and imposing and the pacing constantly leaves you off balance. Love it or hate it, you have to play it.

COURSE

The Machrie, Scotland

The original was epic but the sequel may be better.

The fabled Scottish links was first laid out in 1891 but has been so comprehensively remodelled by DJ Russell that the old course was playable while the new one was constructed alongside the original. What started out as a renovation turned into essentially a new course... but the extra work was worthwhile. The Machrie, always known for its craziness even by the standards of a charming Scottish links, was close to unplayable in inclement weather but its new width now makes it so much more forgiving – without, crucially, losing the funkiness that appeals so much to the type of golfer who will make the long journey here.

WHY GO NOW?

The course is totally finished and has had a year to settle in under the watch of Dean Muir, former Muirfield assistant greenkeeper. The brand-new hotel that overlooks the 18th will be complete this summer.

WHY SO SPECIAL?

In time, The Machrie will become an essential pilgrimage, mixing a mystique – because of its remote and romantic location – with a links that ticks every box: views, playability, fun, variety, character and quiriness.



DESTINATION

Abu Dhabi, UAE

Perfect spot to start or end your year in.

The UAE enjoys perfect weather during exactly the period ours is at its worst, from October to March. April to September it is too hot, but for guaranteed winter sun within a seven-hour flight, get booking a last-minute now, or plan one for next winter. Abu Dhabi GC stages the Tour event, but the two most spectacular venues are by the coast, Yas Links and Saadiyat Beach. Add in flights that are cheaper than you think they will be and excellent accommodation in even three-star hotels, plus loads to do off the course, and you have the basis for an unforgettable trip.

WHERE TO STAY St Regis Saadiyat Beach overlooks the course and is seriously impressive. Yas Island is more lively in the evening though and there are lots of hotels available.

THE 3 TOP COURSES



YAS LINKS

A Kyle Phillips design that many believe is the top course in the UAE – and I wouldn't disagree with that sentiment. The front nine is full of solid holes... the back nine is basically crammed full of world-class ones. In superb condition and with a breathtaking location, it has plenty of bite so play off tees that suit your ability.



SAADIYAT BEACH

It mixes beachside holes (see below) with those that play between residences. The seaside holes, notably the 6th and 16th are two of the most spectacular in the Middle East. They are right up there with the likes of Vale do Lobo's famous beachside holes or those at Praia D'El Rey.



DESTINATION

The Opal Coast, France

Enjoy two of the highest risers in Top 100 history.

The Côte d'Opal area of Northern France offers the most accessible foreign golf break to all British golfers living in Leeds/Manchester and further south. Drive down to EuroTunnel at an off-peak period and you've got your car, clubs and sundries for the duration of your trip (and a vehicle to load up with duty free on the way back). The weather is just that bit better than ours, it is not prohibitively expensive and the courses are classy and varied in nature.

WHERE TO STAY Le Manoir hotel is yards from Le Touquet's swish new clubhouse, giving you 45 holes literally on your doorstep. Super food too.



THE 3 TOP COURSES



LE TOUQUET (LA MER)

This Harry Colt original has been restored by Frank Pont and his design associate Patrice Boissonnas, including fewer trees and a brilliant brand-new 16th. It rose 35 places in our 2017 Continental Top 100.



HARDELLOT (LES PINS)

That huge rise was however dwarfed by Les Pins' in 2015. It was on its way out of the Top 100 altogether but after a thorough overhaul by Pont and Boissonnas, it shot up 71 places. A wonderful inland experience.



WIMEREUX

Both Le Touquet and Hardelet have sister courses on-site and Belle Dune is a raunchy duneland course, but for a third option, consider this quaint and historic links – the first course you come to after Calais.

COURSE

Adare Manor, Ireland

Is this a future Ryder Cup venue?

This has been a *Golf World* GB&I Top 100 course and is always ranked as one of the top inland courses in our Irish Top 100 ranking. Now in the hands of billionaire JP McManus, it has been upgraded by the renowned American architect Tom Fazio with no expense spared. This classic parkland plays around a heroically handsome Manor House that has been transformed into an achingly swish hotel and features risk-reward holes that are guarded by water. Hundreds of mature trees have been transplanted at incredible cost to give it more definition in places.

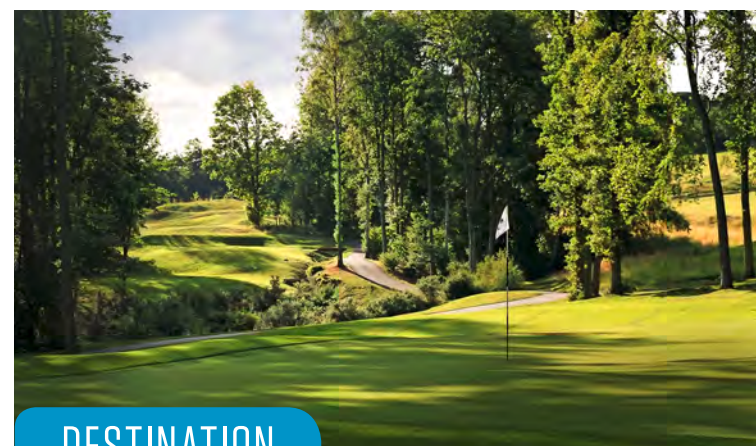


WHY SO SPECIAL?

The course and hotel are now opulence personified. The level of luxury is surpassed nowhere else. It comes at a price, of course, but this is now an epic resort. Combine it with a trip into neighbouring Co. Clare to play Lahinch and Doonbeg.

WHY GO NOW?

It's just been totally revamped...and it was seriously luxurious to start with. If McManus gets his way, you'll experience a course that will one day host the Ryder Cup.



DESTINATION

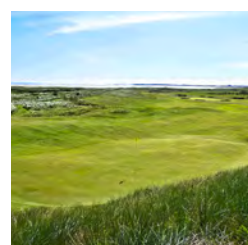
Northumberland

Immense variety of golf and terrific value for money.

When you take into account all the areas we could have chosen in England, or indeed Britain, this might seem a left-field selection. To that we'd reply you probably don't need to be told East Lothian, Southport or Ayrshire are great places to visit. You might not be so familiar with what Northumberland has to offer, though, and in two respects – the variety of course it boasts and the value it offers – it is overshadowed by very few regions.

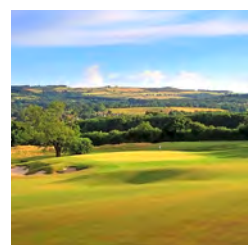
WHERE TO STAY Close House has limited but superlative accommodation. For more choice and terrific non-golf amenities, go for Slaley Hall. This Q Hotel has excellent leisure facilities and pursuits as well as two excellent 18-hole courses.

THE 3 TOP COURSES



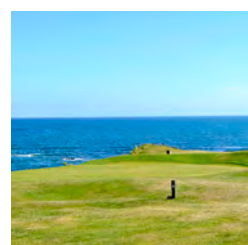
BERWICK (GOSWICK)

The most under-rated course in England? Memorable holes and brilliant green complexes abound. Fabulous turf and sea views are part of its extensive appeal.



CLOSE HOUSE

The Colt (there's also the Filly) hosted the British Masters last year was designed by Scott MacPherson, and makes good use of what was difficult inland terrain.



SEAHOUSES

Slaley Hall and Dunstanburgh Castle would be another fine options, but we love the clifftop holes on the back nine of this humble club. You'll rarely have your phone camera out of operation.

1 LOFOTEN LINKS

I ran up six of my 38 flights in 2017 to get to this Norwegian outpost... but it was worth the effort. I've been everywhere from Turnberry to Kiawah and Nefyn to Cape Kidnappers, but Lofoten beats them all for location. Hands down. An astonishing place, whose allure is probably enhanced by the epic journey required to get there.



2 SWEDEN

This ludicrous trip saw me play Falsterbo – long on my wish list as a proper links on the Continent (lived up to expectation) – then drive to Stockholm to play thrilling Bro Hof Slott. We started in Denmark with The Scandinavian's two courses then drove over the bridge to Sweden, to also play both at PGA National. A worryingly standard itinerary.



MY TOP 5 EXPERIENCES FROM 2017

Chris Bertram's favourites from his thousands of miles of travel research last year.

5 THE MACHRIE & ARDFIN

On Islay and Jura respectively – small, beautiful islands off the west coast of Scotland – the former has been comprehensively renovated by Seniors Tour player DJ Russell while the latter is a totally new course by Australian Bob Harrison. I visited both during construction 18 months previously and it was exciting to return (via ferry) to assess the finished articles. Neither disappointed and in different ways will be two of Britain's most talked-about courses for decades.

4 ROYAL BLEED

This Slovenian course sits on the outskirts of what must be one of Europe's most beautiful towns. It's a spellbinding place, and the course shares the glorious scenery despite being a mile outside the town. Recently renovated by British firm Swan Designs, it is now a course to match the setting too. And the accommodation and food in the clubhouse is world class.

3 GLENEAGLES

This place is utopia for golfers – and everyone else. Nowhere comes close to guaranteeing a brilliant golf break like Gleneagles. It's not cheap, but trust me when I say it is worth trying to stay and play here at least once. Not for nothing did it receive 99/100 in our inaugural GB&I Top 100 Resorts ranking – a mark that could so easily have been a perfect 100. Simply a very, very special place to spend time.

MY YEAR IN NUMBERS

31 TRIPS OF TWO OR MORE DAYS

18 COUNTRIES

38 FLIGHTS

22 HIRE CARS

6 FERRIES

1 SPEEDING TICKET