

Golf Streams

The Caribbean may not have invented the game, but it's developed some of the finest courses in the world.

Golf, at least the game as we know it, began on a big island at a northern latitude with very bad weather, which may explain why the Caribbean islands took so long to warm to it. Maybe they didn't think it was for them: If you can lie on a beach, why stand in a sand trap?

It's not that there wasn't any golf before, just that recently island golf is enjoying something of a boom. Some of this is due to increased investment aimed at expanding tourism and to the discovery of settings that lend themselves to good layouts. The innovation of paspalum, a grass that can tolerate the constant salt-filled sea breezes and keeps a lush green color year-round, has also helped. Some worn-out tracks have been renovated and new ones added, including in places that had little or no golf at all.

Several of the designs feature celebrity signatures, many of which are neither for the shy of heart nor the light of wallet. Notables who have put their John Hancocks on courses include Nicklaus, Player, Norman, Thomas McBroom, Fazio's Tom and Jim, Dye père and fils, and the Joneses, Trents and Rees. One reason, surely, is that their brands signal to hotel guests that the courses are high quality. They also increase real estate values in the numerous residential communities springing up around them.

The **Bahamas**, **Barbados** and **Puerto Rico** are all well-known and worthwhile golf destinations. Here are a few other pretty terrific picks:

The **Dominican Republic** is hot, and the pace of openings seems likely to establish the country as the region's choice golf destination. The course that has gotten the most attention recently is Punta Espada, the first at Cap



Could this be love? The White Witch is Jamaica's most challenging course.

Cana and a Jack Nicklaus signature, which opened last fall. The 7,382-yard route includes eight ocean-side holes and others that make use of the area's bluffs and beaches. In Punta Cana, Nick Faldo's Roco Ki Resort opens in 2007, as does Nick Price's Punta Blanca near the new Majestic Colonial Beach Resort. In 2008, Tom Fazio's Corales golf course, a private membership club at Punta Cana Resort & Club, and P.B. Dye's Hacienda, for hotel guests, both open while a second Nicklaus design, Las Iguanas Golf Course, is under construction, which will bring the number of D.R. courses to 22.

If you're more inclined to try a new course that's had a chance to mature, visit the Guavaberry Golf & Country Club, which opened in 2002 on the south coast. The Gary Player design routes over formations of coral rock, one of which rises on either side of a double green on the signature #13.

Swingin' in The Rain

➤ Rainy-day golfers take note: Sun Mountain's H2O Tech golf bag is built from waterproof nylon, with sealed seams and zippers to keep your wallet and cell phone dry while you're out getting soaked. \$230. www.sunmountain.com.



The only knock on the D.R. is that resorts tend to be spread out and not that accessible to one another, so the large number of courses suggests a more varied experience than most players are likely to have. That said, Casa de Campo has three outstanding designs within its 7,000-acre complex. The most famous is Teeth of the Dog, the Pete Dye course that has consistently been rated one of the world's best and which reopened in December 2005 after an extensive makeover. Dye's most recent Caribbean design is Dye Fore, which contours along the Chavón River, the location for parts of *Apocalypse Now*.

If it weren't overshadowed by Teeth, the 7,770-yard route would get more attention for its beauty and challenge. The neglected-sibling course is the Links, which is more forgiving than the other two but worthy of respect. (888) 374-6361, www.galominianrepublic.com.

Jamaica's golf scene goes back to the colonial era: The Manchester Country Club, a nine-hole layout in the south, was built by the Duke of Manchester in 1865; it's the oldest in the Caribbean and some say the Western Hemisphere. The newer and refurbished courses around Montego Bay are the reason to go, however: Three are clustered within about a driver and an iron of one another, including the Half Moon Golf Course, renovated in 2005; the White Witch, opened in 2000 by the Ritz-Carlton Golf & Spa Resort; and the Rose Hall Resort & Country Club, which was renovated in 2000.

In addition to the excellent quality of the courses, the variety of the terrain is surprising given how close they are to one another. The Half Moon is flat and tree-lined, set back from the sea; Rose Hall, formerly known as Cinnamon Hill, an allusion to Johnny Cash's house on the 14th hole, is a seaside links on the front nine that morphs into a mountain course on the back nine, with lots of jungle and ravines; the White Witch is a mountain course, all peaks and valleys, and it's said to be the island's toughest course. The Rose Hall Golf Association offers a "golf around" package that allows you



Pebble Beach-esque: the 17th at Roco Ki in the D.R.

to play all three for \$125 per course, including cart and caddy. www.visitjamaica.com and www.rosehallgolf.com.

The biggest change in the region, though, has been the emergence of courses on some of its smallest islands.

In **St. Kitts** and **Nevis**, which are so close they nearly connect, Marriott completed the opening of Royal St. Kitts in 2004. The Thomas McBroome course has 80 bunkers to go along with a dozen lakes, with three holes along the Atlantic Ocean and two fronting the Caribbean. Over on Nevis, the Four Seasons spent \$10 million to renovate its property. The golf course, a Robert Trent Jones II design that originally opened in 1991, has a monkey colony on its back nine, where the land elevates 400 feet to offer views of the 36-square-mile paradise. Four courses are planned on the islands, including an Ian Woosnam design scheduled for 2011. For Royal St. Kitts, (869) 466-2700, www.royalstkittsgolfclub.com; for Nevis, (869) 469-1111, www.fourseasons.com.

In **Anguilla** in the **British West Indies**, the Temenos Golf Club, a 7,200-yard Greg Norman design, opened last November; the St. Regis Resort & Residences opens in 2008. The 16-mile long, 3-mile-wide island, an hour's flight from San Juan or seven minutes from St. Martin, has very little room for development, which is its appeal for anyone who wants his golf stirred with natural beauty rather than shaken with casinos or cruise ships emitting hordes of shoppers. The course has an

Photographs, clockwise from top: Ron Reeves; courtesy of Roco Ki Resort; Ron Reeves



When nine holes does the trick: Grand Cayman's Greg Norman-designed Blue Tip

elevated first tee from which you can see St. Martin, then the fairway drops more than 40 feet to a green in the midst of a native waste area. The rest of the course routes through and along mangroves, salt marshes, dunes and salt pond, with elevations that offer sweeping views and steep drops for dramatic shots. (800) 567-1845, www.temenosanguilla.com.

On **Canouan Island**—one of the 32 islands and cays that make up **St. Vincent & the Grenadines** in the southeastern Caribbean—Trump International Golf Club at Raffles Resort is a Jim Fazio design that opened in November 2004 and last May inaugurated the first annual Trump Million Dollar Invitational, bringing a level of attention that the island's 1,100 people probably had never experienced before. The course itself has variety, with ocean views on holes one through ten, then five holes around a central reservoir with two streams cascading into the lake from a height of 100 feet. The par-five 13th is 840 feet above sea level, offering spectacular views. (877) 226-6826,

www.raffles-canouanisland.com.

Grand Cayman is going for the notion that quality trumps, as it were, quantity. Given that the offerings are limited, you're more likely to visit if you enjoy other activities too, especially water sports. Still, what golf there is has garnered favorable attention, notably Blue Tip. As the story goes, when Ritz-Carlton executives brought Greg Norman to the property, the Shark told them they had a fantastic piece of land—for a nine-hole course. Hence, the birth of a 3,516-yard, par-36 route, which opened last October. It fans out over 120 acres, with water on eight holes, including the 601-yard par-five 7th. Note: You have to stay at the Ritz-Carlton to play the course. The island has two other courses, including another championship nine-hole called Britannia, which can also be played as an 18-hole par-57 executive course. The other course, The Links at Safe Haven, sustained extensive damage during Hurricane Ivan and is open to members only as of this writing. (345) 943-9000, www.ritzcarlton.com. •