

The world's 30 best undiscovered destinations

Chris Bertram uncovers places around the globe that are far from the madding crowds. And he's not guessing here – he's been to almost all of them...



Westman Island,
Iceland

If you fancy a road trip down a spectacular coastline, we've got it for you here. If the idea of skiing in the morning and playing golf in the afternoon appeals, it's here. If you want Europe's best value-for-money break, everything you need to know is in the following pages. If you want the ultimate paradise island, we name it. If you want a new winter sun option on your radar, read on. If you seek jaw-dropping landscapes, you've come to the right place...

ICELAND

Its climate is less attractive than Britain's (which gives it a short golf season) and it is not cheap by any standards, but if you have an ounce of adventure in your body, Iceland should be high on your wishlist. Its courses are eccentric and an assault on the senses, and as a distinctive, almost other-worldly experience, I find it hard to believe it is surpassed by many countries as a memorable destination. There are – wait for it – 60 courses on the island! For a population of 300,000. But we have whittled the 60 down to 11 for you to choose from. If 11 sounds like a lot in even a week's holiday, note that some are just nine holes and all are short and fun. We split the 11 into three groups: must plays; Reykjavik extras; and ring road options (for the most intrepid).

The must-plays are led by Brautarholt, within an hour of the capital and a bewitching 12 holes set on cliffs. When you're not looking at the sea and rocks, you're firing towards gorgeous mountains. Local architect Edwin Roald made a fine job of maximising the site. More holes are being added, but to me 12 is perfect. In terms of beauty, I'd say it is surpassed only by Lofoten in Norway.

Westman Island, or Vestmannaeyjar to give it its local name, runs Brautarholt close for immense aesthetic appeal though. If someone said they felt it was even more beautiful, I couldn't disagree. Mountains that reach hundreds and hundreds of feet into the sky mix with classic seascapes of crashing waves, white spray and imposing black rocks. Unquestionably epic. You need a 30-minute ferry from the south of the island to get there.

Finally, Keilir's front nine runs through a lava field and is wonderful if tough. If you miss the fairway your ball is bouncing around on

the black treacle that lines the grass.

Reykjavik extras include two to play right out of the airport (or before your flight back if it's in the evening): Sudurnes, which darts back and forth on a gently sloping site down to the sea and includes an all-world 3rd to an infinity green; and Grindavik, bisected by a road and with seaside holes on one side and cool green complexes on the other.

'Ness', locally called Nesklubburinn, sits on a tiny peninsula 10 minutes from Reykjavik centre. It is set down in a triangle around the clubhouse, so you are playing alongside the sea for many holes. It won't win architectural awards, but it is absolutely dreamy.

Moving inland, Hveragerdi has a gorgeous mountain setting, with a real feel of Alpine golf. There are some modest holes but also some absolute beauties. It is close to Golden Circle attractions (the touristy things), as is Geysir – a fun nine holes in an another idyllic setting. A river bisects it and is used to good effect to add drama.

The ring road options are headlined by Siglo, right in the north (12 o'clock if you imagine Iceland as a clock face). It's laid out at the foot of mountains that surround the

'I FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE ICELAND IS SURPASSED BY MANY COUNTRIES'

course on all but one side, the other side giving views down to the town of Siglufjörður, where Netflix series *Trapped* was filmed.

Hornafjörður lies on rolling land on the edge of the sea, with spectacular views and shots to take on. Finally, Vik sits on the other side of the ring road from the iconic eponymous black sand beaches (6 o'clock). It's set down at the foot of the mountains, with greens cut into the slopes.

RAS AL KHAIMAH

An hour's drive from the hustle, hassle and expense of Dubai (and on the 'right' side of



Doha, Qatar

DXB airport) is this appealing northern emirate. Two courses to enjoy, as well as beachfront majesty at the Hilton (really superb), which is right next to the top golf attraction, Al Hamra, host of the European Tour. This is a beautifully manicured course with a really thrilling closing stretch.

It's backed up by Tower Links, which mixes stout par 4s with sporty affairs and concludes with a super par 5 with a moat guarding the green.

NORTH CYPRUS (KORINEUM)

Yes, yes, I know Cyprus is well known as a winter golf destination, but this is Northern Cyprus, which is very distinct from Aphrodite, Elea etc. This is the Turkish side, so to get to Korineum you ideally fly into Ercan via Istanbul – but you also can easily also do that via Paphos or even Larnaca and drive. Anyway, Korineum: if you've been to a better-value golf resort in Europe than this, I'd love to know about it. Nice hotel with uber spacious rooms, super pool, scenic golf course, wonderful buffet and all astonishingly priced. Perfect climate. I can't wait to go back!

SOUTH AFRICA'S EASTERN CAPE

The Garden Route is South Africa's most popular and recognised golf trip, but the Eastern Cape region – which borders the Garden Route – is our recommendation as an undiscovered destination.

Several excellent courses, plenty of diversity among them, and much less crowded and cheaper. The area has some of the best beaches in Africa and a wide choice of outstanding game reserves. Airports in Port Elizabeth and East London connect with all the major centres.

The Eastern Cape is twice the size of Ireland, but golf is concentrated in a relatively small area between East London in the east and St Francis Bay in the west.

There are a dozen 18-hole courses worth playing, including Humewood, St Francis

Links and East London which are in SA's top 20. Royal Port Alfred (one of the country's oldest existing courses, from the early years of the 20th century) and St Francis Bay are links-like layouts, while Olivewood is a pleasant new resort close to East London. Katberg is in the mountains about two hours from the coast. Port Elizabeth (or Gqeberha as it was recently renamed), the biggest city, has two other good courses, Wedgewood and PEGC, in addition to Humewood. A quirky course in the countryside north of Port Alfred is The Belmont. And close to Port Alfred is a 1980s Gary Player design, Fish River. East London has a second course, on a spectacular ocean front site, called West Bank.

ARGENTINA

Malbec. Iconic football teams and stadiums. Steak. Gorgeous summers during our winter. Rugby union. And a very impressive selection of exceptionally high-class courses – including designs by Alister Mackenzie. Need we say any more?

UMBRIA

Last month, in our Continental European Top 100, we mooted Antognolla as one of the continent's next big things. We suggested a top-50 entry in that list when its hotel – set within an ancient hilltop castle – is complete, because the course is already fabulous. In fact, top 50 was being cautious; it's more likely to be top 30. The course by Robert Trent Jones Jnr is an attraction on its own right now. It is on the cusp of Italy's top 10. Add in a round at Perugia GC and some wandering around the gorgeous cobbled streets of this wonderful city, and you have a European city break that's hard to beat.

QATAR

Fine, we accept that a sport with a bigger ball is in your mind where Qatar is concerned right now. But once the excitement of the football World Cup passes, its golf offering will endure much more persuasively.



Utrecht de Pan, Amsterdam

For a start, in our Middle East and North Africa courses ranking, Qatar's capital Doha had two entries in the top 20. Bear in mind all those courses you've heard of in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Morocco and Egypt are part of that ranking, so for Doha to have two in the top 20 is illustrative of how good they are.

They also offer something different to each other. The legacy course, Doha, is a Peter Harradine design from 'way back' in 1998. His excellent routing delightfully mixes exacting holes with scoring chances and the overall theme is of playability – helped by sandy waste areas that make finding your ball pleasingly easy.

You get plenty of classic Dubai-like city backdrops on what is one of the region's most playable yet entertaining courses – one that's been hosting the European Tour for decades. Education City gave Doha its second course and whereas Doha is all about width off the tee and a super routing, EC is characterised by impeccable conditioning and demanding tee shots. It was designed by Jose Maria Olazabal and has also hosted the European Tour's Qatar Masters. We can't emphasise the nick it is in; outstanding.

I don't have the space to describe in detail all the things you need to do when you visit Doha. But just make sure you: go on a desert tour in a 4x4, whose driver will take you

dune bashing, then to the inland sea, then to dinner at a desert camp; wander round Souq Waqif, the 'standing market, which gives you a sense of old Doha and is a chance to feast on fresh bread and kebabs from roaring ovens seemingly in every street; go to the National Museum of Qatar, breathtaking in every sense; take a trip on a dhow, a traditional wooden boat; chill out around Katara Cultural Village, a hipster's paradise and perfect for coffee and people watching or a meal in a water's edge restaurant.

AMSTERDAM

Royal Hague, The Kennemer and Noordwijkse are three outstanding seaside courses under an hour from the city centre. Then you have three heathlands, Utrecht de Pan (Europe's No.2), Hilversum and Rosendaelsche inland. All are in the Top 40 of our Continental 100. Plus, of course, Amsterdam. Have fun!

DENMARK

I could have had Sweden in this 30 because its depth of golf is staggeringly good, but it might just be a bit too well known for this feature. Denmark, I tend to think, probably isn't. But it should be. Start your trip by flying in to Copenhagen and playing its No.1 and 2, the two courses at The Scandinavian. Then



St Francis Links, South Africa

head north and take in Holstebro, The Great Northern, Lubker and Esbjerg before hopping over to play cute links Fano plus Budersand on Sylt. A lot of golf; a lot of extremely good continental golf.

BILBAO

I love this plan: ferry from Portsmouth to Bilbao, no hire clubs or hire car and a chance to ‘unwind’ on the boat over. Then a game at Neguri – a legendary course in architectural circles – and a game at Pedrena, which is the home of... well, you know. Imagine how special that would be. I reckon you’re looking at ferry timetables already.

JORDAN

There are several single-course destinations in the 30, but all have compelling yet distinct reasons for being selected. This is the first, and while the one course you play in Jordan is superb – Ayla – it’s the off-course attractions that make it unmissable. First there is the captivating city of Amman. Then there is Wadi Rum, an astonishing, eerie mountainous desert where films are set. And then there is Petra, one of the world’s most popular and epic tourist destinations. Finally on your way home, call at the Dead Sea.

Ayla is in Aqaba in the south and is a really, really good Greg Norman design that’s part of a high-calibre tourist development which, after your Wadi Rum and Petra adventuring, is absolutely perfect.

GEORGIA

Another single-course destination. Why? Because in April you can ski in the morning in Georgia then drive down and play golf at Tbilisi Hills – a super Lassi Pekka Tilander design overlooking the city that has been part of our continental Top 100 – in the afternoon. In the evening, to refuel after your twin exertions you’ll eat some of the greatest comfort food you’ve ever dreamt of and drink astonishingly good, cheap red wine.

SOUTH-WEST FRANCE

This is the closest to being out of place because the names we will mention will be known to many of you. But we’re including it because we’re really not sure enough people are going there, given how good it is. Two Top 100 courses at Golf du Medoc (one by Bill Coore), then inland to Saint Emillionais for a Tom Doak experience along with a night at stately Chateau des Vigiers. Follow that with a journey down the coast to Hossegor, Seignosse, Chiberta and Moliets and you’ve played six Top 100 courses, paddled in the Atlantic, possibly had a glass or two of claret and almost certainly eaten very well. What’s stopping everyone?

PORTO

If you think Lisbon is the Portuguese choice of the ‘golfer in the know’, think again. Eschewing the Algarve for the capital – as good as its three different golf areas are – is now old hat; now it’s all about Porto for the

hipsters in Portugal.

Just three key courses, but two that have genuine links characteristics... a rarity on the continent. Oporto and Estela are the seaside courses and both have been in Continental European Top 100s. The former has Royal North Devon vibes, the latter is like Montrose (sadly including the erosion). My trip’s third venue is the ideal base, Vidago Palace, a grand resort with echoes of Gleneagles.

Porto itself is absolutely fabulous – and also might pip Lisbon, which I repeat I /ove, off the course, too. A brilliant trip for couples or groups of same-sex golfers.

MOROCCO

You’ve heard all about Marrakesh’s 15 courses – and rightly so... Assoufid, Royal Palm, Royal Marrakesh et al are bursting with character and variety. But the real spirit of adventure can be found on the coast at Gary Player’s Mazagan Beach, nearby El Jadida by Cabell Robinson, another Player effort at Mogador near Essaouira, plus Tazegzout by Kyle Phillips. This coastal road trip at least matches most of what Europe can offer in terms of aesthetic, dramatic experiences.

‘MOROCCO AT LEAST MATCHES WHAT EUROPE CAN OFFER IN TERMS OF DRAMA’

AL AIN

What a brilliant find this was. Al Ain is 90 minutes’ drive inland from Abu Dhabi and is, excuse the cliché, an oasis of greenery and calm in the UAE. If Abu Dhabi is the less frenetic neighbour to Dubai, then Al Ain plays the same role to Abu Dhabi – and we mean that in the best possible way.

Driving through Al Ain feels like you’re touring through a medium-sized Mediterranean town because it so delightfully green and tranquil. You are looking at hanging baskets full of colourful flowers, not skyscrapers.

It’s lively enough though, in the hotel scene, with the Al Ain Rotana really coming alive at night with an appealing choice of restaurants on the beautifully lit terrace. You’ll enjoy a few drinks with your al fresco meal as you wonder what the course here is like.

Well, spoiling the surprise a bit, but it’s *really* good! When we refresh our Middle East ranking next year you’ll see it mixing with some very big names from the region – and it is up there in conditioning terms with the very best of them, Els Club and all.

The course is part of an incredibly comprehensive sports complex run by Stranraer native Tom Buchanan – and his cheery demeanour and expertise is felt through the whole operation.

Al Ain has a really good mix of holes with the common theme being playability. Yes, your ball may find a watery grave if you hit a bad shot at times, but mostly its layout is trying to get you to enjoy your round. You can make a birdie, or at least have a putt at one, and you won’t be searching for ages for a slightly wayward drive, but there is also plenty enough interesting challenge.

Just writing about it now makes me want to get back there ASAP!

MUNICH

What a brilliant city break this is, from the beer, food and culture of Munich to the plethora of really good golf in the city that surpassed all my expectations. The courses were consistently enjoyable.

Olching was probably my favourite and has a very British feel in its architecture. Golf Valley wants the Ryder Cup, so you can imagine how brawny and bold it is, while the greens of Egming are first class. Aschheim is a fun course carved through a former quarry, while Eichenried is a regular European Tour stop for the BMW International.

Off the course, you can surf the waves of Munich’s Eisbach (Ice Stream) river, swim in the beautifully restored baths of Müllersches Volksbad, watch top-class football (and go to the amazing museum) at Bayern, or savour the pork knuckle and legendary beer halls.

MALTA

Another one-course destination and this time the lure is its weather. It’s not the only attraction (as we will soon explain), but Malta’s climate is eye-poppingly good. It averages 12 hours of sunshine in summer and six in mid-winter. Summers are hot, dry and very sunny (yet with a sea breeze), but what really impresses are its mild winters (expect 21°C in November) and low annual rainfall (568mm). The reality is, this is as much a winter sun golf destination as Belek or North Africa. And its one course has serious pedigree, Royal Malta having been founded in 1888 by Lieutenant-General Sir Henry D’Oyley when he was the island’s Governor. It was refurbished around the time of its centenary and is a fun and quirky parkland.

You might think of Malta as a retreat for older travellers but trust me, it is very lively! St Julian’s, whether the streets of Paceville or Spinola Bay area, and Bugibba in the north are especially vibrant. But my pick is Sliema, an idyllic cliff-edge town with a wealth of tempting water’s edge restaurants to choose from. Malta offers wonderful snorkelling in its clear blue water, loads of pretty towns to browse around, a fascinating capital in Valetta that needs at least a full day to explore, plus bays and coves to swim in, lunch around and generally get the ‘glad to be alive’ feeling.

SEYCHELLES

OK, this is not a trip if you want 36 holes a day as there are actually only 27 holes on offer on the whole break. But what a break.



Tbilisi Hills, Georgia



Vidago Palace, Portugal



Mazagan, Morocco



Oporto, Portugal



Ayla, Jordan



Al Ain, UAE



Royal Malta, Malta

You start by flying in to the island of Mahe and have a couple of nights at Constance Ephelia, and from there play the delightful nine holes of Seychelles GC, with its tropical setting among palms and native vegetation.

That is the mere hors d'oeuvre though. Lemuria on Grand Anse (a short ferry journey away) is the main course.

If you've got a list of things that would represent your ultimate, once-in-a-lifetime paradise holiday, Lemuria will put a large tick in every box.

Stunning white sand beach? Check. Crystal blue water? Check. Breathtaking cove? Check (called Anse Georgette, it's actually regarded as one of the world's finest beaches). Gorgeous accommodation a few steps from the sand? Check. Instagrammable golf holes? Check. Water's edge restaurants?

Check. A general feeling of unadulterated happiness? Check.

Oh, and the rest of Grand Anse is fabulous too, and there are other nearby islands to explore that all have their own magical attractions.

KENTUCKY, USA

Playing golf in the US can be expensive and exclusive for the travelling golfer, but here's one option that definitely isn't. Kentucky State Park System is a brilliant trail of state-owned courses... and most are really good. This south-eastern state might be better known for its horse race and its bourbon, but its State Parks Golf Trail is changing that. There are 18 courses, mixing nine and 18-holers, and the trail stretches throughout the 'Bluegrass State', offering a huge variety

of holes. The quality is seriously good, with four courses – Pine Mountain, Dale Hollow, Yatesville Lake and Grayson Lake – having been named 'Best New Affordable Public Courses' in the US.

LAKE GARDA

Lake Como gets a bit of attention because Villa d'Este is our Italian No.1 and is part of a lovely little collection of courses around the iconic lake. But Garda is at least as good. Gardagolf is 16th in our Italian ranking while Palazzo Arzaga, which has 27 holes and a magnificent palace (the clue is in the name) is at 28. Franciacorta is 38 and pushing to be higher, while Chervo San Vigilio is at 41 and Bogliaco, one of Italy's elder statesmen, at 52.

Garda is a really, really, really good option... Oh, and there are lots of little towns surrounding the lake that will steal your heart, too. A fabulous couples' break.

VIETNAM

The diverse and jaw-dropping scenery of Vietnam has borne some epic courses, from Hoiana Shores – in our World Top 100 – to Bluffs Ho Tram Strip and Ba Na Hills to Danang (Norman), plus so many more. Greg Norman summed up the natural gifts of Vietnam when he said, while designing the latter: "You'd be doing a very poor job to make a boring course out of a site like this."

ISLE OF MAN

You may well have heard of Castletown

Links, because it is in our GB&I Top 100. And rightly it takes the headlines where the island's golf is concerned, because it is a course of rare drama and beauty as well as being very fun. But despite being just 32 miles long and 14 miles wide, there are also seven other courses on the island, so enough to plan a 36-hole-a-day extravaganza with your mates. Take your pick from Ramsey, Mount Murray, Rowany, King Edward Bay, Port St Mary, Douglas and especially the picturesque Peel.

CAIRO

Egypt is definitely discovered, but we eschew the touristy hotspots of Sharm and Hurghada and head to Cairo for this feature! The courses are seriously good, led by Newgiza, a course by Tim Lobb that opened in 2019 and has views of the Pyramids. There is also JW Marriott Mirage City – a great base – as well as the outstanding Allegría, a Greg Norman design, plus Katameya Dunes to the east. And obviously you do the classic sights of the Pyramids, the Nile, the souks, the bewildering museum and so on. Don't rule out a day trip (by plane) to Luxor, which has no golf but is truly epic. Great climate, too.

THE AZORES

The three courses on this archipelago of Portuguese islands in the Atlantic Ocean are a very attractive year-round option.

Batalha is the newer, but arguably finer, of Sao Miguel's two courses. There are three loops of nine, all beginning and ending within sight of a vast clubhouse whose restaurant and bar offer superb views across the verdant landscape down to the sea.

Furnas is 500m above sea level, with the original nine from 1936 designed by Turnberry's creator, Mackenzie Ross. That loop was extended by the Cameron Powell partnership in the early 1990s.

For a third round you hop on a boat and visit another of the nine volcanic islands that make up the archipelago, Ilha Terceira. Its course was established in 1954 by American golfers at Lajes Air Force Base but renovated in 2006 and in 2015 hosted the Azores Ladies Open.

AZERBAIJAN

The capital Baku is a fusion of gorgeous



Castletown, Isle of Man

ancient architecture alongside gleaming oil-and-gas-funded buildings. It's an intriguing city – its nightlife is legendary and there is so much to see. Cynthia Dye's Dreamland is the key course and it is top class; in great condition and full of really good holes. There is also a hotel on site and it is very convenient for the airport. But there's also Quba up in the lush hills of Azerbaijan for a bit of an adventure. Terrific climate, too.

ZANZIBAR

Sea Cliff resort is the reason for us nominating this Indian Ocean island. The golf and hotel are breathtaking and the island is spectacular in general terms.

The Peter Matkovich-designed course meanders through tropical bush framed by huge mango trees and palms. It borders a beautiful mangrove swamp and there is even a spell of holes among low coastal dunes.

The luxury 120-room resort, 20 minutes from the famous World Heritage site of Stone Town, has traditional 'makuti' thatched roofs and Arabic towers to mirror the authentic architecture of historic Zanzibar.

COUNTY CORK

Everyone has heard of Old Head of Kinsale and its allure (see below!), and you might know it is on the south coast of Ireland.

But it isn't part of the fabled Ring of Kerry. It's in County Cork, and I am willing to bet many aren't aware that there is some other really good golf there. Cork GC is that most

appealing of overseas gems, an Alister MacKenzie design. It sits on the edge of the harbour and is a beauty. Fota Island is a resort with lots of golf holes and some delightful accommodation.

HUNGARY

Zala Springs leads the way here, one of our Top 100 continental resorts, with a well-built course and a sparkling hotel, all overseen by IMG Prestige. Then add in Balaton, Hencse National, Old Lake and Pannonia – all dotted around the capital Budapest – and you have the makings of a fabulous weekend golf break, and it won't cost you the earth.

OMAN

Almouj is the No.2-ranked course in the Middle East – it could easily be top – and it mixes a spectacular ocean setting with the most enjoyable Greg Norman design I've played. You might think it is another single-course destination but it really isn't, because there is also Muscat Hills, Ras Al Hamra and Ghala.

Off the course, Oman blows you away: Wadi Shab (an amazing river canyon), Bimmah Sinkhole (an amazing well the size of a circus ring that you can swim in) and Jebel Akhdar (an amazing mountain range) were followed by a day trip to sub-tropical Samanah. You can snorkel in the famous Daymaniyat Islands or luxuriate in the fabulous Kempinski Al Mouj instead.



Lemuria, Seychelles



Newgiza, Egypt



Old Head, Co. Cork