



New Zealand's spectacular beauty makes it a charming golf destination

ZEAL

By Hal Quinn

for Golf

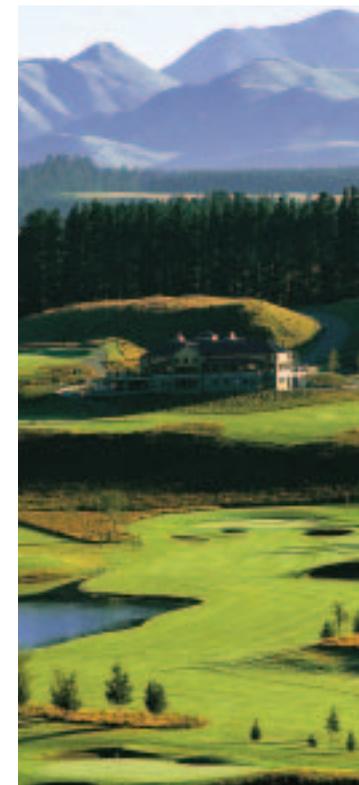
IT IS DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE A GOLF COURSE IN SUCH COMMAND OF ITS SURROUNDINGS THAT THE VIEWS FROM THE PRACTICE RANGE ARE SO BREATHTAKING THAT AS MANY PHOTOGRAPHERS FREQUENT IT AS GOLFERS. IT IS EVEN MORE DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE THAT SUCH A RANGE IS MERELY AN INTRODUCTION TO ONE OF THE NEWER COURSES IN AN ISLAND NATION WHERE PHOTO-OP VIEWS AND GREAT GOLF COURSES ARE SIMPLY PART OF THE EVERY DAY LANDSCAPE.

But on that range, on a morning just moments after the parrots, tuis, and piwakawakas heralded the coming dawn from their jungle-like aviary near the clubhouse, the slowly rising sun burned off just enough of the mist escaping from the beach to reveal the ragged cliffs that form the horizon at the end of the Kauri Cliffs practice fairway. The only tracks in the dew on the pristine tee above the target bunkers and greens were those of a ring-necked pheasant that lingered, perhaps captivated too by the majestic tapestry of cliffs and the surf of the South Pacific Ocean that

Wairakei (left) is considered to be one of New Zealand's best, must-see-and-play golf courses. Terrace Downs (right) is designed by Alberta-based Puddicombe and Assoc. It's located near Christchurch.

gradually appeared in the distance. Incredibly, as the day would prove, the views from the course were actually better than those from the practice range.

The remarkable beauty of the Pacific paradise New



Zealand — so dramatically captured in the *Lord of the Rings* Oscar-winning trilogy — attracts more than two million visitors each year. They come to both the North and South Islands for the unforgettable scenery, the rustic charm of the countryside and the unhurried energy of the modern cities, the snow skiing, the fabulous wines, the unrivalled outdoor recreations, and the phenomenal golf.

In a nation of just over four million souls, there are more than 400 courses — the highest number of courses per capita in the world — and they range from \$400 (not including cart) per round at ultra-exclusive resort layouts to \$15 (drop your fee in the 'honest' box before leaving) idyllic country courses and everything imaginable in between (all figures in NZ dollars). In NZ they say, in the vernacular, that golfers are



“spoilt for choice.” And indeed they are in this intensely beautiful, unspoiled island nation.

In fact, until just a couple of years ago the stunning views of the Bay of Islands from the Kauri (pronounced Kaw-Ree) Cliffs near the north eastern tip of the North Island were enjoyed mostly by dairy cattle and their minders. But the 4,000-acre station was purchased by Wall Street impresario Julian Robertson, Jr. (who virtually invented hedging with the Tiger Fund, thus earning a spot in Forbes 400). The vast majority of the rolling expanse remains the domain of the herds — they can be seen grazing on the hills and in the canyons alongside the inland holes — except for the spectacular course, the brilliantly understated clubhouse and guest lodges. With no plans for another course, let alone housing, the land and the nearby stand of Kauri trees (one estimated to be almost 2,000 years old) should remain unspoiled for some time to come.

Guests at Kauri Cliffs are indeed spoiled, and should be for \$990 per night per person in the suites (that includes breakfast, cocktails and five-star dinner, but not golf) and the \$400 green fee. (NZ dollars are worth about 90 cents Canadian; the rate and all else are explained by the genial

Millbrook Resort Golf Course is designed by New Zealander Bob Charles, the first left-hander to win a major.

general manager Daniel Reid, originally from Kingston, Ont.). But with 20 minutes between tee times, players feel unhurried as they enjoy the incomparable scenery, views of the Cavalli Islands in

Waiaui Bay, and the thoughtful course design by David Harmon, who for years worked with Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer. Not a view, or a dramatic shot opportunity, is wasted on the 7,119-yard, par-72 layout.

Kauri Cliffs opened in 2001 — 130 years after New Zealand’s first course, Balmacewan in Dunedin — and was quickly followed by Robertson’s next massive project, Cape Kidnappers. Again purchasing massive stretches of land (5,000 acres this time), Robertson applied his minimalist touch and his creative genius in hiring Tom Doak (Pacific Dunes, in Bandon, Ore.) to create a spikes-in-the-dirt golf course in otherworldly surroundings.

Cape Kidnappers, named for an old Captain Cook tale of which the Islands abound, is a six-hour drive south of Auckland or a scenic three-hour drive along the coast of



Hawke's Bay after a 45-minute flight from Auckland to Napier. The road up from the highway to the course, which reportedly took as long to construct as Doak's layout, and is the longest private road in NZ, is like a Jurassic-Park tour on the way to a links on a cliff. Still, it's not sufficient preparation.

From the first tee, the golfers in the group exalt; the others simply gasp. But once each and every one in the group challenges Doak's brilliant use of a series of finger cliffs — hanging 500 feet above the Pacific, especially the 650-yard 15th that plays fair — all will be fans of Doak and of Robertson for hiring him. The wind can howl on the top of the cliffs, but Doak has the longest holes playing downwind on this 7,137-yard, par-71 masterpiece. Whether out of film, gigabytes, or golf balls, by the 18th, Cape Kidnappers will have made off with your heart.

Until Robertson discovered New Zealand, the nation's best course was universally — and rightly — acknowledged to be Wairakei (pronounced Why-Wreck-Eee) settled about midway between Auckland and Wellington near Lake Taupo. A transported old-world classic designed in a collaborative effort by the late John Harris (Wentworth, Sunningdale), Michael Wolveridge and five-

Cape Kidnappers is named for an old Capt. Cook tale. The legend continues: the golf course is one of the best new layouts anywhere in the world.

time British Open champion Peter Thomson, Wairakei International GC opened in 1970. After a series of tumultuous ownerships, Wairakei is Kiwi-owned again. In 1997, Thomson and Wolveridge

refurbished the 6,470-metre (add 10 per cent for yardages), par-72 layout and it is now a modern classic. Each hole is a visual gem, the shot values are remarkable, and the 14th one of the best par-5 holes in the world.

Kauri Cliffs, Cape Kidnappers and Wairakei are the absolute must-plays in New Zealand, but throughout the rest of the North Island and the South Island there are literally hundreds of courses that will delight and challenge any visitor.

Just outside Auckland, where most international flights arrive, there is a true classic — Titirangi — designed in 1914 by the master Dr. Alister MacKenzie. By contrast, nearby there is the circa 1997 Robert Trent Jones, Jr.-designed Gulf Harbour and the 1998 Sir Bob Charles-designed Formosa.

The South Island is home to the winter and summer tourism capital (and birthplace of bungee jumping)



Queenstown, the beautiful harbour city of Christchurch, and great golf.

Barely a 10-minute drive from the Christchurch Airport is the sprawling Clearwater Resort set on 465 acres of lakes, wetlands and waterways. The course, which hosted this year's New Zealand PGA championship, was designed by John Darby and Charles, and incorporates a river, eight lakes and 66 bunkers over its 6,526 metres.

Less than an hour from Christchurch is the spectacular Terrace Downs High Country Resort course designed by David Cox with Alberta-based design company Sid Puddicombe and Assoc. The resort facilities — particularly the five-star restaurant — are as outstanding as the 6,439-metre course and its views of the Mount Hutt range of surrounding mountains.

The aptly named Remarkables Mountain range dominates the Queenstown landscape, as it seems to leap out of Lake Hayes. The mountains provide some of the best snow ski "fields" in the Southern Hemisphere.

Kauri Cliffs is one of the spectacular golf courses developed by mogul Julian Robertson Jr.

The Remarkables also form a dramatic backdrop to the Millbrook Resort Golf Course designed by the legendary lefty Charles. The par 3s are outstanding, especially from the back tees. The 10th plays

195 metres (216 yds) from an elevated tee to a green protected by a solitary pot bunker but with water on all sides but the front. The resort and grounds are as charming as they are inviting with turn-of-the-century stone buildings from the original mills beautifully incorporated.

But that's the way it is throughout this hauntingly beautiful country that offers an astounding array of landscapes, attractions and golf courses seemingly at every turn. Like most visitors, before leaving you'll find yourself entertaining thoughts of emigration, or at least planning your next trip to the Pacific paradise the Maori call the land of the long white cloud. ↓

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