

Go Play A Round

“Nothing contributes more to the popularity of golf than its almost endless variety. No two courses are the same, even though they may be similar in character; no two shots are alike, even though the same distance has to be accomplished.”

— John L. Low, 19th century
British golf authority

Mr. Low was right, of course, which is why American golfers spend in excess of \$26 billion a year traveling to an “endless variety” of courses.

“Golf is the peculiar game of a peculiar people. It is the pastime of the Scots,” Low also noted.

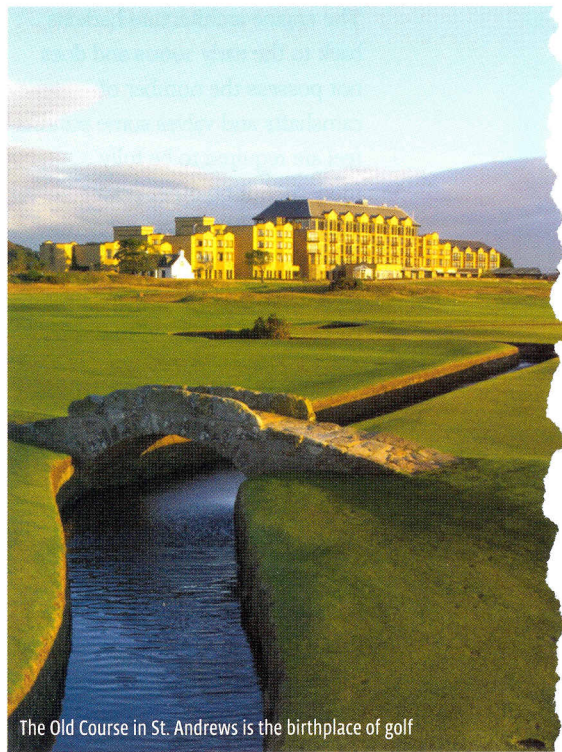
While this is no longer true — today the sport enjoys worldwide popularity — deep in the heart of

every enthusiast lies a desire to play The Old Course in St. Andrews, Scotland, the place where golf originated 600 years ago.

In fact, there are many courses in St. Andrews open for public play. The Old Course is unrivalled for its history and prestige and is synonymous with The British Open Championship. Public players enter a daily lottery for a tee time and, depending on the day, have approximately a 50/50 chance of success.

The Castle Course, overlooking the ancient town of St. Andrews, is set on a rugged cliff and combines breathtaking views with a memorable golfing challenge. The “New” Course was set out in 1895. The Jubilee Course, considered to be the toughest, is laid out on a narrow strip between the New Course

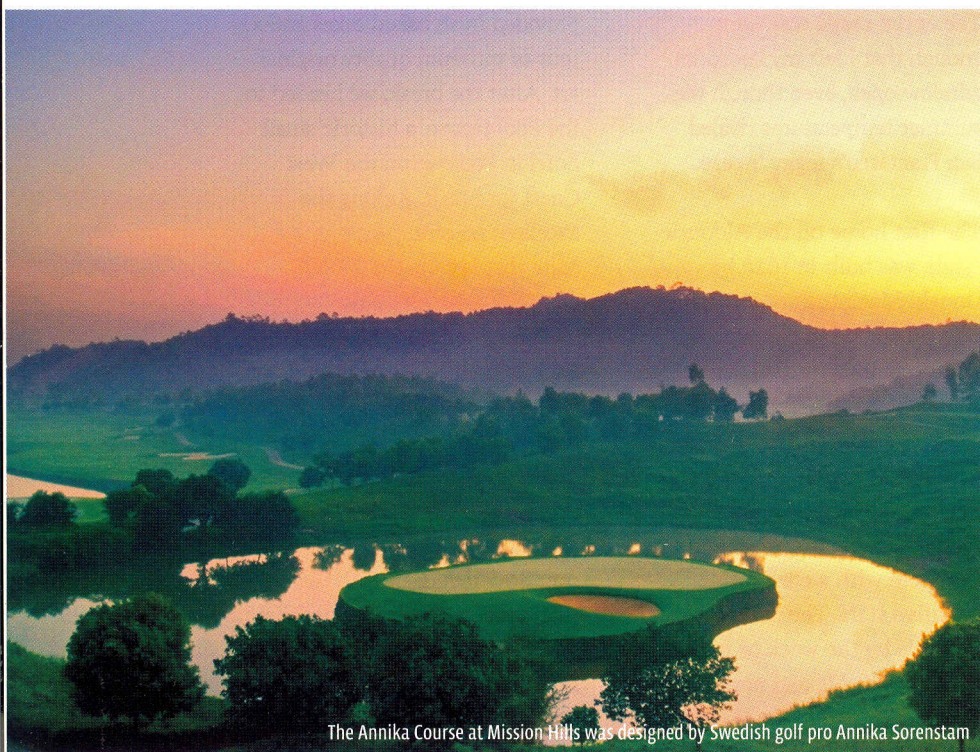
and the sea. The Eden, with a slightly lower yardage, challenges golfers with severe bunkering and



undulating greens. Strathtyrum and Balgove are suitable for more relaxed rounds or beginners and families. (www.standrews.org.uk)

The St. Andrews Links make up the largest public golf complex in Europe, but the world's largest is Mission Hills Golf Club in Shenzhen, China, 30 minutes north of Hong Kong. Here, 12 resort and championship courses were designed by Jack Nicklaus, Pete Dye, Greg Norman, Nick Faldo, Vijay Singh, David Leadbetter, and others. The complex also features four clubhouses, three spas, a five-star hotel, three golf academies, 51 tennis courts, and Asia's most exclusive residential community. (www.missionhillschina.com)

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The Annika Course at Mission Hills was designed by Swedish golf pro Annika Sorenstam

Today there are more 300 courses and 5 million golfers in China, with the golfing population growing at a rate of up to 50 percent annually.

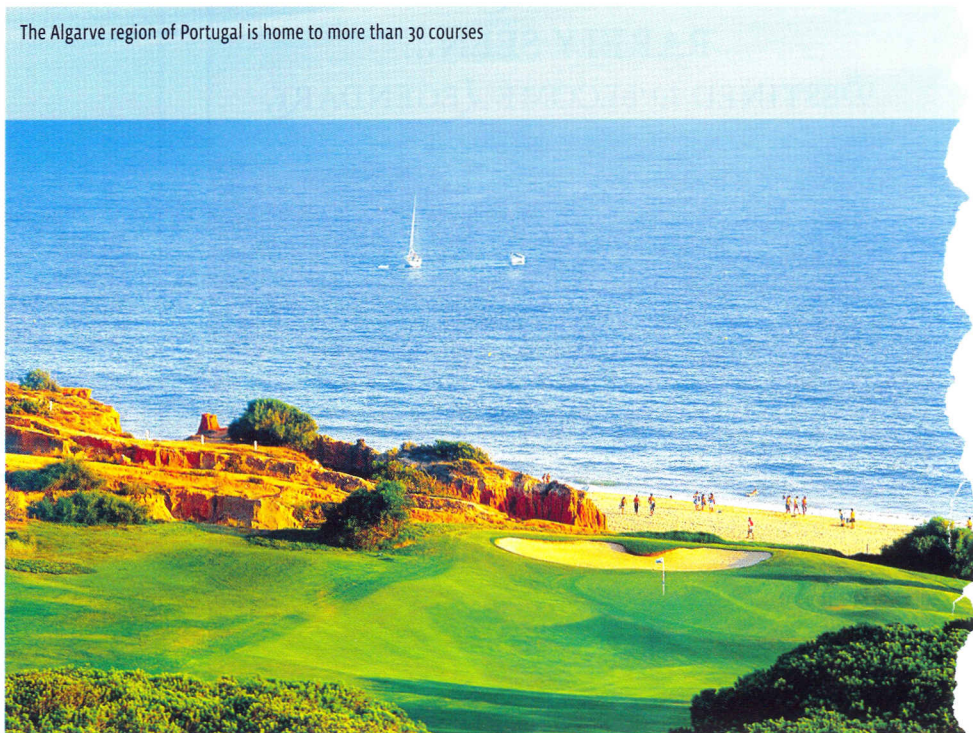
In fact, there are more golfers in China than the total population of New Zealand, but the two countries share an enthusiasm for the sport. Only Scotland has more courses per capita than New Zealand.

One of the best-known Kiwi courses is Wairakei International near Lake Taupo, where steam from underground geothermal activity sometimes wafts from vents on the fairways. The par-5 14th hole at Wairakei is one of the longest and most challenging in New Zealand. At 594 yards, this hole would be a serious test if it had a straight, open fairway with a large, friendly green, but instead it

At Kauri Cliffs Golf Course in New Zealand, 15 holes overlook the ocean



The Algarve region of Portugal is home to more than 30 courses



has an oversized pine tree in the middle that forces players to go right or left with their second shot. Once that is maneuvered, the third shot is to an elevated, kidney-shaped green protected in front by sand traps. Reaching this green in two is next to impossible, and for many who take on “The Rogue,” as this hole is called, reaching it in three is an accomplishment. (www.wairakeigolfcourse.co.nz)

Wairakei is the finest non-coastal course in the country, while Kauri Cliffs in the Bay of Islands region is renowned for its sea views. In fact, six holes are played along a cliff top that plunges into the sea, and a total of 15 holes overlook the ocean. The inland holes wind through marsh, forest, and farmland. (www.kauricliffs.com)

Kauri Cliffs is on *Golf Digest*'s list of “100 Best Courses In the World,” as is Monte Rei Golf Club, located in the Algarve region of Portugal. In total, the Algarve is home to more than

30 golf courses — some with luxury clubhouses, manicured greens, and flawless fairways — and all are open to visitors. Golf is played year-round in the region's mild climate.

The beautiful courses at Monte Rei, designed by Jack Nicklaus, include everything a player would expect. Laid out in rolling hills, each hole offers an attractive panorama and a combination of challenging factors. (www.monte-rei.com)

Scotland is the birthplace of golf and it's no surprise that former British colonies have the most courses per capita, but now the popularity of the sport has spread well beyond the English-speaking world.

I'm sure that today's “endless variety” of courses would please one Mr. John L. Low. For additional tips on destination golf courses, see www.ranchandcoast.com.

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