Cape Kidnappers: New Zealand

You don’t travel three-quarters of the way around the globe to play just one course, although getting on Cape Kidnappers or the ultra-private Tara Iti—both of them Tom Doak stumners—might suffice. No, you journey many, many hours to New Zealand to play everything from ritzy resort loops to a golf course with no bunkers, all the while drinking in the country’s staggering beauty, and perhaps a bit of its famous wine along the way. It all begins on page 94—with one seriously heartstopping leap of faith.

“Is the golf really that good? It is. The catch? It’s also really spread out. No 36-a-day here.”

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Percentage of U.S. golfers who bought at least one new golf club in 2018. Let’s up that this year! See p. 45

Rinse and repeat Honestly, in life there anything quite as perfect as golf and a can of soda? See p. 38
Kiwi Will Rock You

GETTING THERE MIGHT HAVE YOU THINKING TWICE ABOUT NEW ZEALAND, BUT IT'S FAR AND AWAY WORTH IT. EYES (INCLUDING QUEENSTOWN.)
By Tom Macklin

The muscular, twenty-something dude in a tank top tightened the rubber cord around my lower legs as I sat on a platform 141 feet above the Kawarau River, in Queenstown. It’s where a pair of Kiwi adventurers named A.J. Hackett and Henry van Asch originated commercial bungee jumping, in 1988.

“So, mate, what brings you to New Zealand?” he asked.

“I’m playing some golf courses around the country,” I answered.

“Well,” he said with a smile, “that’s harder than jumping off a bridge, isn’t it?”

Before I could respond, he had me stand up and gingerly shuffle to the platform’s edge. He encouraged me to

Tara 91, perhaps New Zealand’s toughest hole, is in Queenstown. Tom Macklin designed and one of GOLF’s Top 100 Courses in the World.
wave at the spectators watching from dry land on my left. He advised me to focus on another bridge a quarter mile down river. He told me not to look down. But I did. No, I’m not much of an introvert. I sat in silence. And then I jumped.

Tell people you’re going to New Zealand and the praise pour in faster than Cassie Champa’s downstreaming. From the country’s many fans, I heard stories about the people, the wine, the scenery, the food, the favorable exchange rate (the opposite season, and so on). You must go, they beseeched. You, too.

So I did. Twice in the past two years, to check out the gold landscape. Tauranga, New Zealand, is one of the few places that exceed the hype. You’ll be half of a long way to go for gold; 12 hours and change flying from San Francisco to Los Angeles to Auckland. Longer direct flights depart from Chicago and Houston. You land a day ago, and jet lag is fierce.

Is the gold really that good? Is it? The catch: It’s also really spread out, between the North and South Islands. Here, you’re not getting on a bus with your buddies for a week of 96.3 days. Instead, you need to get exceedingly familiar with Air New Zealand’s efficient flight schedule to move around in a timely manner. But the logistics fade away when you find yourself standing on the first tee at Arrowtown Golf Club, just north of Queenstown, on the South Island. The route in the course layout begins with a par 5. Even more over-7,000 yards without a single hole. American golf course architecture meets both these boxes. But it’s more than just the novelty, as I learned playing the low-key, last March with a New Zealand courses executive named Rene, and with Han SEUNG, a South Korean journalist who took the photos for this story. We’re in Arrowtown, New Zealand.

natural tourist: a candy bar known as Whitekula’s Peanut Slab. It was heavy and sweet, full of chocolate and peanut. Given that my breakfast at the hotel earlier was an “obviously good” sticky bun from Provisions Cafe, on Arrowtown’sThirty-first Street, it was a treat. I headed for the Slab for later and, while waiting for the greenest ideas, mentally reviewed the courses I’d already played.

In virtually every way, Arrowtown was the complete opposite of Tauranga North. In 2019, Arrowtown was the overall winner of the World Golf Tour, the official and most prestigious tournament in the world. The prize, a $50,000 check, is a stunning ashtray with gold leaves on it. I hung it on the wall as a reminder of all the hard work that goes into making sure the gold landscape is the best it can be.

Tell people you’re going to New Zealand and they’ll say, “Oh, it’s amazing! The scenery is gorgeous! The food is amazing! The people are friendly!” And then they’ll ask, “What’s your favorite thing to do?”

In New Zealand, the gold landscape is a must-see. From the country’s fans, I heard stories about the people, the wine, the scenery, the food, the favorable exchange rate (the opposite season, and so on). You must go, they beseeched. You, too.

For more information, visit GOLFD.com / March 2019.
package that includes golf, lunch and wine. The course stands on its own; throw in some fine New Zealand wine and it’s more than worth the splurge.

So, too, is a short helicopter ride to the top of Cecil Peak, looming almost 5,000 feet above Queenstown. The ride up there provides a birds-eye view of Jack’s Point, an 18-hole must-play with multiple holes overlooking Lake Wakatipu, the country’s third-largest lake. But it’s a one-holer—part of an “Over the Top” package offered by a local helicopter company—that reduced me to a giddy child, thanks to its vertigo-inducing tee boxes and hard-to-believe-its-real panoramic view. Landing a ball on the small, artificial-turf green situated on a rocky ledge 312 yards below is nearly impossible. But trying it was a blast.

At Arrowtown, our group walked off the 18th having caddied more laughs than pars and with more than a few scissored golf balls between us. In the clubhouse bar, tall glasses of cold pilsner lined the table. Even the heretofore taciturn Mr. Lee couldn’t stop smiling. “Beautiful course,” he said, in Korean. “Beautiful country.”

Yes, Mr. Lee, it is.

As for that bungee jump, it was over in four seconds. The falling part, that is. It was the ensuing, upside-down bouncing that got my stomach spinning. Should not have opened my eyes while that was going on. But I did. And all I could think of at that moment was that I’d rather be playing golf. Anywhere.

But especially in New Zealand. ☺