



W12

OFF DUTY



W4

STYLE | TRAVEL | FOOD | DRINK | DESIGN | GEAR | PROPERTY | CULTURE | SPORTS

Friday - Sunday, September 26 - 28, 2014

WSJ.com/lifestyle

FAIRWAYS TO HEAVEN

Five must-play golf courses around the world **W6**



Cape Kidnapers: Getty Images

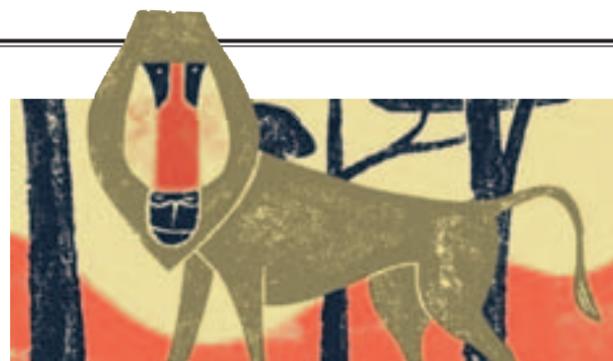
[INSIDE]



KITCHEN CONFIDENTIAL Jason Atherton at home **W3**



GO WILD Art inspires a fall display **W10**



GRAPE OF GOOD HOPE New African winemakers **W2**

SPORTS

ON PAR FOR GREATNES

From Wisconsin's Whistling Straits to Bhutan's Royal Thimphu, a golf lover's bucket list

BY JOHN PAUL NEWPORT

I WASN'T EXACTLY NERVOUS five years ago when I teed off for my one and only round at Augusta National. I was flustered with excitement. My brain and my body were so wired I didn't notice how chilly the April morning was—less than 10°C—until I started shivering a few holes later. Even then I didn't care.

One of the perils of playing an ultimate bucket-list course like Georgia's Augusta, site of the Masters tournament, is that gawking all too often overpowers the game. Ideally, you should play these super-special courses twice: once with camera in hand (and jaw in permanently dropped position), a second time with an eye toward actually taking on the holes' challenges.

In my case, it was unfortunate that we played Augusta's back nine first. That meant that holes 11 through 13, which constitute the legendary Amen Corner, were my second, third and fourth of the day. Any chance I had of playing well flew right out the window.

I can't recall every shot from my round—

You're there to experience the course, its atmosphere and traditions—not bring par to its knees

how could I, since I was scarcely aware of hitting them at the time?—but I do have some wonderfully vivid memories. One is standing on the tee box of the par-three 12th, waiting for the green to clear, and swapping famous stories about the hole. How Tom Weiskopf hit five balls into Rae's Creek there in the 1980 Masters and scored a 13. How Jack Nicklaus always aimed over the middle bunker on Sundays when the pin was

cut to the right, as it was the day I played.

I remember feeling helplessly over-matched by the downhill approach shot over water into the 15th green. (Splash!) And, most fondly, holing a six-meter twister for birdie on the ninth, our final hole of the day.

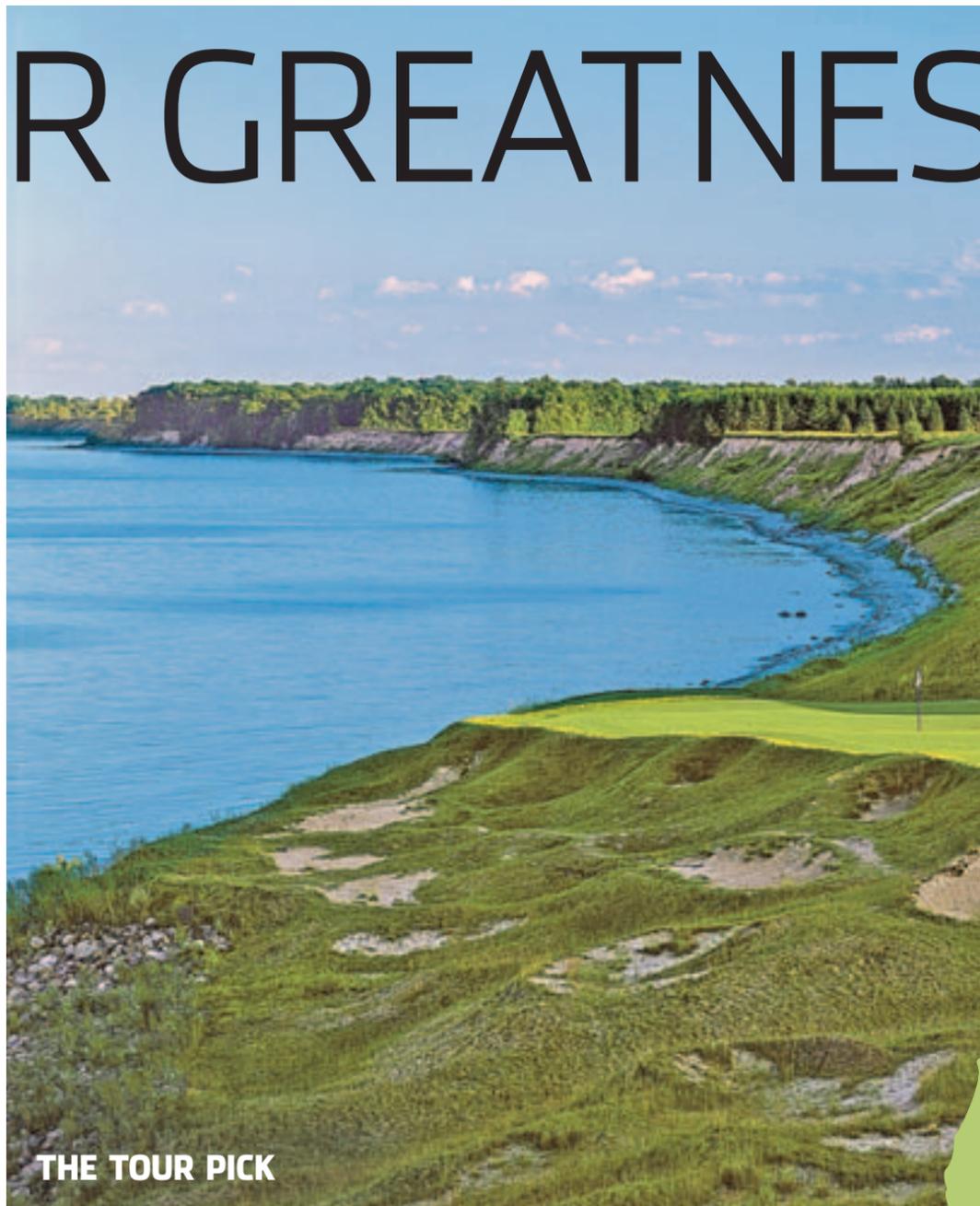
Augusta National is a special case. Golf fans world-wide feel like they know those 18 holes personally after watching broadcasts of the Masters every spring, when the dogwoods and azaleas are in full bloom and pent-up lust for golf is at its peak. Getting a spectator's badge to the annual tournament has become a competitive sport in its own right.

As a bucket-list course, it's also an extremely hard ticket. Like many of the other top courses in the U.S.—Pine Valley in New Jersey (No. 1 in the world on most magazine lists), Cypress Point in California and Shinnecock Hills in New York—Augusta is private. If you ever get an invitation to play, drop everything and go. (I got to tee off at Augusta as a benefit of my job, covering the tournament for this paper.)

Most people never will, of course. But no worry. There are many other courses around the world that are just as covetable but require only a little planning to play and, in some cases, a big dip into savings. It's almost always worth it, especially if you avoid the No. 1 pitfall of golf course trophy hunting: letting a bad round spoil the day.

Poor scoring is more likely to happen than not given the high expectations, innumerable distractions and your amped-up state. Accept that in advance. You're there to experience the course, its atmosphere and traditions—not bring par to its knees.

The best plan is to think of bagging a bucket-list course as an excuse for building a wonderful trip, not as the be-all-end-all for a trip. Go with your spouse and/or buddies. Make it a holiday. If you're like me, you'll return with great memories but still say that your home course is your favorite.



THE TOUR PICK

NOT EVERY COURSE that hosts PGA Tour events or even major championships is a sure thing for your bucket list. Commercial considerations often matter more to event organizers than pure golf quality. Gleneagles' PGA Centenary course, site of this week's Ryder Cup, would be few visitors' first choice in Scotland. Whistling Straits, however, is a treat. One of four courses at the American Club in Kohler, Wisconsin, it hosted the 2004 and 2010 PGA Championships. It will host next year's PGA, too, as well as the 2020 Ryder Cup. Playing Pete Dye's brutal, untamed design on the windswept shores of Lake Michigan, you could easily think you were seaside in Ireland rather than on the former site of an air base. Other splendid and accessible courses that host big tournaments are TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla., site of the annual Players Championship, Kiawah Island's Ocean Course in South Carolina, where Rory McIlroy won the 2012 PGA; and Pebble Beach in California, which has hosted five U.S. Opens.



THE DESTINATION

NEW ZEALAND

YOU WON'T FIND a more spectacular course to build a trip around than New Zealand's Cape Kidnappers. This 10-year-old miracle perches on fingerlike cliffs 140 meters above Hawke's Bay. The setting alone, amid a 2,400-hectare working sheep ranch and wildlife sanctuary, might be sufficient to justify the trip, but architect Tom Doak's minimalist design is a masterpiece. On hard, fast, tilting terrain, with wind always a factor, the fairways are wide but strategic. You need to be in the right place to approach the greens, especially those that appear to be on the edge of the earth. (Hang time to the ocean, should your ball overshoot the green: nearly 10 seconds.)

The remote resort has a small but luxurious, rustically themed lodge called The Farm, with great food, a wine cellar and spa. You'll feel like you own the place. The best time for golf in New Zealand is November-April. If you're going that far, plan a stay at Cape Kidnappers' sister resort, the tranquil Kauri Cliffs in Matakauri Bay, and then make a pilgrimage to the great courses of Australia. Royal Melbourne (West) and Kingston Heath, in the sand belt of the mainland, New South Wales near Sydney, and Barnbougle Dunes on Tasmania, not too far away, are all ranked in Golf Magazine's world top 50.



THE HOTSPOTS

SPORTS



UNITED STATES

POT

FOR GOLF ARCHITECTURE purists, the courses of the Caribbean may be a disappointment. But design critique isn't why we flock to the isles in midwinter. We go to get hot in the sun and luxuriate in golf for a few days. For that purpose, there's no better spot than Jamaica's Montego Bay, where the best course is the cascading White Witch associated with the Ritz-Carlton.

Named after a legendary 19th-century plantation mistress said to have disposed of three husbands, White Witch will certainly help you dispose of many golf balls. The opening tee shot, with a panoramic vista nearly 300 meters above the sea, drops 30 meters to a narrow fairway. Sixteen of the 18 holes, which jump gorges and border white limestone ledges, have views of the Caribbean. It's a blast to play. "Golf concierges" in white jump suits, assigned to each foursome, will spin local tales while helping you search for lost balls.

For an even more luxurious alternative, try One & Only's Ocean Club in the Bahamas, with its fine Tom Weiskopf course and rooms with assigned butlers.



JAMAICA



THE ADVENTURE

IN BHUTAN, WEALTH is measured in terms of gross national happiness, not gross national product. The main reason to put Royal Thimphu, the lone accessible golf course in this eastern Himalayan nation (the king is said to have a private one), on your list is simply to make the trip. Your scorecard should also include some mountain trekking and visits to Buddhist temples.

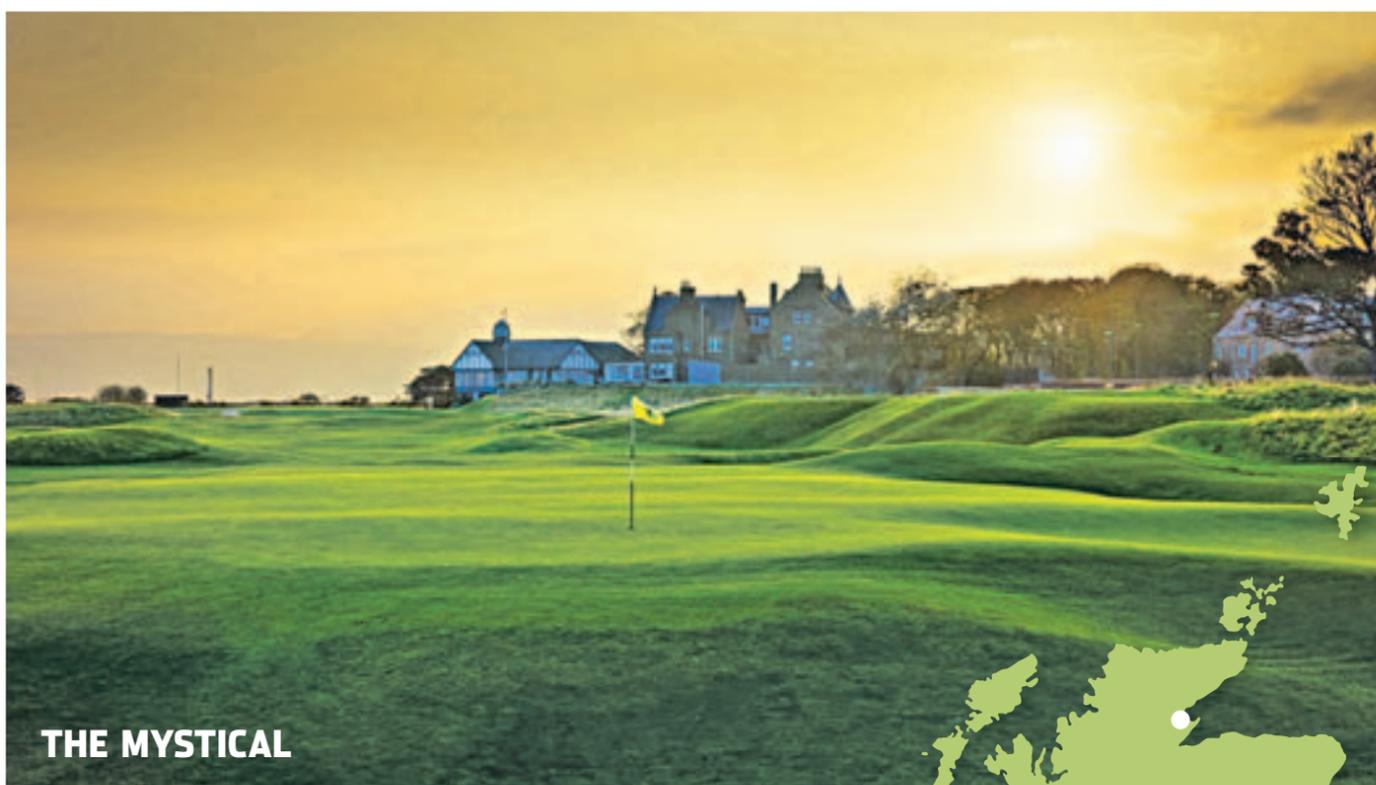
Tracking down exotic courses in exotic locales isn't primarily about the golf, it's an excuse for green-jacket-worthy adventure. Once, in Cuba, I succeeded in finding the course where the Havana Open was played in the 1950s. Today it's a music school—a chamber group was practicing in the bone-dry pool for acoustics—but you could still see the former tee boxes and greens scattered across the campus.

Architect Tom Doak recommends searching out Himalayan Golf Course near Pokhara, Nepal, built by a former British army major through a gorge-like valley at the base of the Annapurna mountains. One green is on an island in the middle of a river.

Only slightly less off the beaten track are Machrie, on the Isle of Islay in Scotland's Inner Hebrides, and Askernish, on South Uist in the Outer Hebrides. Both look exactly as they might have in the 19th century.



BHUTAN



THE MYSTICAL

THE JOURNEY TO Royal Dornoch sets the mood. The hourlong drive north from Inverness, which is already far north in Scotland, takes you across the Beaully Firth; along the Cromarty Firth, where the spare beauty of the Scottish Highlands really begins to work on you; past the Glenmorangie Scotch whisky distillery in Tain; and finally across the Dornoch Firth itself. Golf has been played here for 400 years. It's the birthplace of designer Donald Ross, Scotland's gift to America 100 years ago. And in midsummer, the best time to visit these parts, daylight lasts 20 hours.

The ancient links Championship course, ranked No. 1 in Scotland and No. 6 in the world by Golf Digest, is short by modern standards, at just 6,155 meters. But if you stay a week, it might not play the same way twice. The view from the third tee, of gorse-covered hills and the North Sea, is one of golf's most memorable and mystical. It's as if you're staring back in time. Lodging at the historic Dornoch Castle Hotel or any of the other small hostelries and B&Bs will make you an honorary townie.

In North America, the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge in Alberta, Canada, offers a similar, Northern Lights vibe. The long drive through Jasper National Park, past glaciers and blue-green lakes, is perfect prep for the serene and wonderful Stanley Thompson course.



SCOTLAND

Clockwise from main image, Kohler Co.; Getty Images; Clive Barber; Rose Hall; Relais & Châteaux