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Variety is the spice of a destination golfer's life

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Cabot Cliffs in Cape Breton concludes with a jaw-dropping 3-hole stretch along the ocean. *ANDREW PENNER / -*



One of the greatest aspects of golf is the variety of the courses — and great destinations — that are there for the picking.

Experiencing a new landscape, a new set of holes, a new culture, well, it's one of the most enjoyable elements of the game. And, thankfully, North America is full of awesome golf destinations.

The problem, if you can call it that, is choosing where and when to hit the links.

In winter, for example, the southern golf destinations will be calling. Places where you'll find palm trees, saguaro-studded deserts and azure seas that melt into the horizon will be on your radar. In summer, when the courses in Canada heat up, you'll most likely want to stay in the Great "Green" North. And, from the Pacific to the Atlantic, Canada is loaded with terrific places for a swingfest.

Here is a selection of six awesome places for a golf getaway — in both the bitter cold of winter and the heaven-sent heat of summer.

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Canadian Destinations (for Summer)

Cape Breton

With the addition of Cabot Cliffs — which will be ranked the best golf course in Canada for years to come — Cape Breton is now a heavy-hitter when it comes to great Canadian golf destinations.

But, Cape Breton's charms have been luring golfers for decades. In 1939 the great Stanley Thompson put his stamp on Cape Breton's storied landscape when he routed Highlands Links. An epic 18-hole crusade that rambles through a rugged seaside setting in Ingonish, Cape Breton Highlands Links is breathtaking in its own right.

But golfers visiting Cape Breton — and cruising around the famed Cabot Trail that rims the island — will want to spend the bulk of their time at Cabot Links. The original Links Course, designed by Alberta's Rod Whitman, is a testament to the Old World game. Its sandy, windswept setting, quirky holes, and world-class hotel serves up an unforgettable "Scottish" experience. And, of course Cabot Cliffs, a Coore & Crenshaw design that features eight amazing cliffside holes, is a bucket-list Canadian course, if there ever was one. www.golfcapebreton.com

Vancouver Island

Thanks to year-round golf, Vancouver Island isn't just a summer destination. The add-on experiences — such as Victoria's beautiful Inner Harbour, whale watching, and the delicious food and craft beer scene — always make it a memorable adventure.

In terms of the golf, the must-plays are Bear Mountain — which features two edge-of-your-seat mountainside courses by Nicklaus Design — Olympic View, Morningstar, Crown Isle, and Storey Creek. The Vancouver Island Golf Trail, which incorporates eight courses in four different regions, is definitely the way to go. Visiting golfers can custom-fit their golf adventure — including hotels, courses, and extra attractions — for discount prices. www.golfvancouverisland.ca



The par-4 8th on the Nicklaus-designed Valley Course at Bear Mountain on Vancouver Island. *ANDREW PENNER / -*

The Kootenay Rockies

For Albertans, the Kootenay Rockies are a no-brainer for a golf getaway. Stunning mountain courses such as Greywolf, Eagle Ranch, Golden, The Springs at Radium, Wildstone, Trickle Creek, and Kokanee Springs are just a few of the standouts. From Revelstoke to Rossland, and basically everywhere in between, there are over 30 top-notch courses in the region.

When you consider the après-golf options — such as natural hot springs, mountain biking, artisan galleries, beaches, and the laid-back mountain culture that permeates everything! — you've got a quick-and-easy golf destination that should be a yearly tradition. www.kootenayrockies.com

US/Mexico Destinations (for Winter)

Scottsdale

Desert golf — thanks to the heat, the cacti, and the hit-the-target-or-else motto — isn't exactly known to be a piece of cake. However, in Scottsdale, even if the scoring doesn't go quite as planned, the desert golf experience is always awesome...especially when the courses in Alberta are frozen hockey-puck solid.

While the upscale courses — like We-Ko-Pa, The Boulders, Grayhawk, and Troon — are certainly worth saving up your pennies to play, the lesser-knowns (the area is home to over 100 courses) can be just as rewarding. Papago, for example, is a city-owned course that offers rock-solid golf for under \$75. Other budget-friendly courses in the area to consider are Ak-Chin Southern Dunes and the Karsten Course at the Arizona State University. www.experiencescottsdale.com

Los Cabos

True, not many regions in the world are enjoying a golf boom. However, in Los Cabos, it's all systems go. In the past few years a number of notable courses have been built — Quivira, Puerto Los Cabos, and Diamante Dunes, to name a few — in this stunning desert-meets-sea region at the tip of the Baja.

The dramatic seaside flavour of the golf here is, perhaps, best exemplified by Jack Nicklaus' legendary Ocean Course at Cabo del Sol. This seaside crusade — it opened in 1994 — features incredible holes that career along the azure sea. The finishing run is one of the best in all of golf.

Regardless of where you play (the Tom Weiskopf-designed Desert Course at Cabo del Sol and Palmilla are other worthy stops), the typical daily schedule in Los Cabos goes like this: Golf. Beach. Eat. Sleep. Repeat. It works well.

Dominican Republic

For great golf in the tropics look no further than the Dominican Republic. The country boasts over 30 courses, many of which career along the wave-smashed shoreline. Not surprisingly, the hot spots — Puerto Plata, Punta Cana, and La Romana — are also lined with luxurious resorts that are framed by the turquoise sea and wonderful, white-sand beaches.



The Par 3 7th on Teeth of Dog in La Romana, Dominican Republic. *ANDREW PENNER / -*

With four Pete Dye courses, including the venerable "Teeth of the Dog," Casa de Campo in La Romana is a sweet retreat for swingers. However, the Punta Cana area (located just an hour away) is famous for its beaches and seaside holes. The two courses you really want to play — Punta Espada and Corales — might be the best one-two punch in the tropics. Combined, these courses have 15 holes so close to sea you might want to bring waterwings and a neoprene golf shirt.