Canada's best golf courses: from Banff to Bear Mountain, here's where to tee off in every province

Resorts across the country are doing brisk business – and international golfers are adding new Canadian entries to their bucket lists

ADAM STANLEY
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL
PUBLISHED 5 HOURS AGO
FOR SUBSCRIBERS

The Cabot Links golf course in Inverness, N.S., and the nearby Cabot Cliffs give a dramatic view of the Gulf of St. Lawrence.
JACOB LUCMAN

5 COMMENTS SHARE BOOKMARK GIVE THIS ARTICLE

The final stretch of holes at Cabot Cliffs on the rocky shores of the Gulf of St. Lawrence in Cape Breton is the closest golfers can get to heaven on Earth.

Coming around the corner on the 15th hole, a dramatic tumbling downhill that one caddy tells me is as spiritual an experience as any in the game. But then there's the 16th, one of the most photographed holes in Canadian golf and the anchor point from which the entire course was laid out. You've probably seen it. It was in a lottery commercial and became a source for aspiration and wonderment. And then there's the 17th, which, given its layout and design, is probably a better hole than the 16th. The par-five 18th hole is located high above the beach – its wide fairway and C-shaped green make it one of the most dramatic closers in the country.

When your round ends on this beatific course and the sky turns lurid shades of orange and pink, and there's a bagpiper standing on top of the starter's hut on Cabot Links, the other top-ranked course on the property, and you eat local oysters and drink a chilled rosé tasting of strawberry and lemonade, you start to wonder – how did I get so lucky?

Cabot Cliffs is ranked No. 13 in the world by Golf Digest (and No. 1 in Canada by ScoreGolf), that it's apparently not the only place that has caught the attention of golfers. Across the country, golf has never been better, and more people are discovering how great the Canadian game can be.

You might recognize Cabot Cliffs from an old Lotto 6/49 ad where it illustrated the things that wealthy winners could aspire to.
ADAM STANLEY

Golf Canada, the sport's governing body, released a report in May that showed Canadians played more than 74 million rounds of golf last year, an increase of more than 24 per cent from the last study in 2019.

The report noted golfer spending – including golf travel – ballooned to a high of $14.2 billion last year.

Canadians are keen to travel across the country to play – and international golfers are starting to circle Canadian destinations on their bucket lists because of the diversity of course settings and layouts.

T.J. Rule, the owner of Golf Away Tours, a boutique golf travel agency in Toronto, said he's fielding more requests but admits "Canadian golf is very underrated."

"The interest – in particular for B.C. and Nova Scotia – in Canadian golf trips has increased significantly since the pandemic," Rule said.

International travellers, he added, "don't realize how good our golf product is compared to other destinations in the world and they also don't understand how passionate Canadians are about the game."

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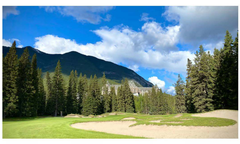

Fairmont Banff Springs is one of Golf Digest's top 100 courses, along with several other Canadian locations.
ADAM STANLEY

The Golf Digest top 100 list features 10 Canadian clubs, including the two Cabot layouts, Cape Breton Highland Links, Banff Springs and the now-closed Jasper Park Lodge course in Alberta.

Readers of Travel + Leisure just named their top five Canadian resorts, with three of the five (Fairmont Château Whistler, Fairmont Banff Springs and Cabot) featuring golf.

Andrew Harvie, founder of the digital golf media company Beyond the Contour, said the game can be a vehicle to explore the country.

"You could be playing golf in the Rocky Mountains in the West one week, then on the East Coast the other. The boreal forest or the Muskoka lakes are popular, but the unheralded red-sand beaches of Prince Edward Island or the wispy Prairie landforms in Saskatchewan or Manitoba are equally thrilling," Harvie said.

A lot of what international golfers do know about Canada is, however, thanks to Cabot Cape Breton. Cabot is one of the biggest names in the game with award-winning courses in Nova Scotia, newly opened resorts in St. Lucia and Florida, and more openings scheduled for Scotland (2025) and Revelstoke, B.C. (2026). It's also just taken over Golf du Médoc in Bordeaux, France.

"Cabot's courses are equal parts fun, invigorating and aesthetically beautiful," said Stephen Hennessey, deputy managing editor at Golf Digest. He added that Cabot founder, Toronto's Ben Cowan-Dewar, "has built a brand that golfers now instantly recognize and want to associate themselves with."

B.C.'s Bear Mountain has two 18-hole courses and verdant Vancouver Island scenery just outside Victoria.
ADAM STANLEY

Where to tee off in Canada

Canada's ScoreGolf magazine estimates the country is home to 2,400 courses. As a golf broadcaster and writer who travels more than 70 days in the golf season, I'm still making my way through them. Here's my list for great plays, with public access, across the country.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

The Vancouver Island Golf Trail is likely the only place in the country where you can play 12 months of the year. A personal favourite is the 36 holes at the Bear Mountain Resort near Victoria, with the Mountain Course a feast for the senses (and Instagram) while the Valley Course is a little friendlier – with wider fairways and larger greens. Also noteworthy: Sagebrush in Quilchena, Tobiano in Kamloops, and Greywolf in Panorama are all highly rated.

ALBERTA

I can't say enough great things about Fairmont Banff Springs golf course. It's an absolute stunner carved through the mountains about 90 minutes from Calgary. Incredible topography and just solid golf hole after solid golf hole.

SASKATCHEWAN

Dakota Dunes Golf Links is a good choice close to Saskatoon, but my favourite – and one worth the 2½-hour drive north from Saskatoon – is Waskesiu Golf Course in Prince Albert National Park. It's a funky layout with rumpled fairways and uneven ground prompting you to hit plenty of different shots. Rolling through mature trees, it's still very forgiving and is just pure fun.

Waskesiu golf course lies by a lake of the same name in Saskatchewan's Prince Albert National Park.
ADAM STANLEY

MANITOBA

Experts say Manitoba's best public layout is Clear Lake Golf Course, about three hours northwest from Winnipeg. It meanders through Riding Mountain National Park. The standout hole, according to Beyond the Contour's Harvie, is the short par-four ninth hole, featuring a downhill, dogleg right, blind tee shot.

ONTARIO

Canada's most populated province also has the most golf courses. It has everything you'd want but my favourite spot is TPC Toronto at Osprey Valley. The course has three unique layouts, the Hoot, Heathlands and North, that are always in tremendous shape. The Hoot features incredible vistas of the Caledon hills, the Heathlands is a rollicking links-style layout, and the North is a brute of a test that's set to play host to the 2025 RBC Canadian Open.

TPC Toronto at Osprey Valley offers three courses west of Ontario's Caledon village.
BRIAN DECKER/TPC TORONTO AT OSPREY VALLEY

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QUEBEC

Fairmont Le Manoir Richelieu in La Malbaie, Charlevoix, has one of the most picturesque first tee shots in Eastern Canada, while the Club de Golf Grand-Mère in Shawinigan may be the most underrated course in the country. It pays perfect homage to the early 1900s golden age of golf course architecture.

Fairmont Le Manoir Richelieu in La Malbaie lies in Quebec's picturesque Charlevoix region.
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PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

After fully recovering from Hurricane Fiona, the Links at Crowbush Cove is better than ever. The storm cleared out lots of trees and forced the club, about 35 minutes from Charlottetown, back to its original links-style design – in the best of ways. The holes along the ocean, the 16th and 17th, remain Canadian standouts.

NOVA SCOTIA

Cabot Cape Breton is a top choice but I'm also partial to Fox Harb'r Resort, about two hours north of Halifax. Its back nine boasts ocean views and its relatively wide-open design means it's playable for all skill levels. Fox Harb'r is set to get a new 18-hole ocean-facing course and 18-hole inland course over the next year or so.

NEW BRUNSWICK

In 2018, the province's best course, the Algonquin in St. Andrews-by-the-Sea, received a tidy overhaul. The seaside layout that overlooks the Passamaquoddy Bay now has a linksy feel on several holes with the course's connection to the ocean even more highlighted.

The Algonquin resort in St. Andrews-by-the-Sea, N.B., west of Saint John, got a makeover in 2018 to add more amenities for visitors.
SUPPLIED

NEWFOUNDLAND

On the West Coast of the island, the Humber Valley Resort is the top spot in the province, with the spectacular ninth hole showcasing an infinity green upon approach. Also worth mentioning, notes Harvie, is the par-three fifth hole, a fun, short play with views of the Upper Humber River.

THE NORTH

There's about a dozen courses across the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Yellowknife Golf Club, near the city's airport, is the most northern 18-hole course in Canada and plays host to an annual Midnight Classic event around the summer solstice. Eventually you'll want to head even farther north – to Inuvik, NWT – to play Ukalukatuk Golf Course, a nine-hole layout with artificial greens on the tundra.

The writer was a guest of Destination Cape Breton. It did not review or approve the story before publication.