



PHOTO Banff Springs Golf Course

Oh CANADA

A salute to our country's best golf courses from sea to sea and tee to tee.

By Anita Draycott

“Golf is deceptively simple and endlessly complicated,” the late Arnold Palmer once remarked. “It satisfies the soul and frustrates the intellect. It is at the same time rewarding and maddening — and it is without a doubt the greatest game mankind ever invented.”

I agree. And, on the occasion of Canada's 150th birthday, this proud Canuck is waving the Maple Leaf in honour of our country's long and storied golf heritage.

Golf was an Olympic sport at the 1900 and 1904 Summer Games. Ontario-born George Lyon won the Gold in 1904. Canada's victory remained uncontested until the sport returned to the 2016 Games in Rio de Janeiro. Also in 1904, The Canadian Open Championship was initiated making it the third oldest National Open championship in the world.

We are a nation of 5.7 million avid golfers and 2,300 courses. To celebrate “the greatest game mankind ever invented,” take a swing through some of Canada's best.

STANLEY THOMPSON'S LEGACY

The late Stanley Thompson was Canada's finest golf course architect. Between 1920 and 1953 he designed or remodeled 145 courses from coast to coast.

Known as the “Toronto Terror,” the florid-faced Thompson had a proclivity for fancy cars, thick steaks, fine cigars and Canadian rye whisky. His genius was in refusing to impose a course on its setting. He moved trees and rocks only if essential because he believed in preserving the natural beauty of the landscape. As a result, his courses unfold in sublime harmony with Mother Nature. He also believed that courses should be pleasurable to play by golfers of a wide range of abilities. Maybe that's why I have never met a Thompson course I didn't like. Some of his best are Banff Springs and Jasper in Alberta and Highlands Links on Cape Breton Island.



PHOTO Banff Springs Golf Course



PHOTOS ON THIS PAGE Banff Springs Golf Course



SWING BACK IN TIME IN THE CANADIAN ROCKIES

In 1928, Stanley Thompson was hired to design the Banff Springs Golf Course on the “roof of the world” in Alberta’s Rockies. Banff held the distinction of being the first track on the planet to cost more than one million dollars to construct.

Banff’s Heritage Golf Experience allows you to play the course as Thompson originally routed it — and with the appropriate equipment in tow. Your caddie, clad in plus-fours, will help you choose from a selection of hickory-shafted clubs, including a brassie, spoon, jigger, mashie and niblick. You’ll also get three balls pressed to replicate those gutta percha orbs used in the 1930s. To enhance your Heritage Experience, the distance from the tips has been reduced to compensate for the antique technology. You might want to bring along some vintage duds for a photo op.

Probably nowhere else in this country is the classic Hollywood image of the great Canadian west better portrayed than at the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge. You can almost picture a Mountie emerging from the forest with a distressed damsel in his arms.



Yet another masterpiece by Stanley Thompson, Jasper has consistently been ranked in Canada’s Top 10 by *SCORE* Golf magazine. Thompson’s wit and genius shine throughout. He named the par-three 9th Cleopatra because of its voluptuous mounds. Every fairway is aligned to frame the Rocky Mountain setting.

When you combine scenery that Teddy Roosevelt remarked, “would bankrupt the English language” with Thompson’s brilliance, it’s tough to top the Jasper experience.

GLEN ABBEY AND THE CANADIAN GOLF HALL OF FAME & MUSEUM

Glen Abbey in Oakville, Ontario has hosted the most Canadian Opens to date. The course was Jack Nicklaus’ first solo foray in golf design in 1976. Several historic sporting moments have occurred here, including what some consider to be Tiger Wood’s greatest hit. He blasted his second shot from a bunker on the par-five 18th and holed his third to score an eagle at the Canadian Open in 2000. For the 29th time this July (24 to 30), Glen Abbey will host the RBC Canadian Open.

On the same property, enthusiasts should visit the Canadian Golf Hall of Fame & Museum. Its unique artifacts include our crown jewel, the 1904 Olympic trophy donated by George Lyon’s family, plus several interactive displays.

ONTARIO’S COTTAGE COUNTRY

Though only minutes from the town of Gravenhurst, a round at the Muskoka Bay Club is a romp in the wilderness with fairways winding through mature forests and across majestic wetlands and beaver ponds that have been incorporated and preserved in the layout.

Canadian designer Doug Carrick elevated many of the five tee decks to give golfers extraordinary fairway views and eliminate blind shots. Imagine golf in a Group of Seven painting.



PHOTOS L-R Muskoka Bay Club

MARITIME GOLF IS BOOMING

While the golf industry has been in a bit of a slump since the economic meltdown of the 1980s, golf is thriving In the Maritimes.

The Algonquin Golf Course in St. Andrews-by-the-Sea, New Brunswick has a distinguished pedigree. First opened in 1894 with design input by legendary Donald Ross (of Pinehurst No. 2 fame), it was currently renovated by Canadian architect, Rod Whitman. The seaside tract overlooking the Bay of Fundy reopens August 2017 with eight new holes.



PHOTO The Algonquin Golf Course



PHOTOS L-R The Links at Brunello

Nowhere in Canada is the golf scene more exciting than Nova Scotia. Opened in 2015, The Links at Brunello, minutes from Halifax winds its way through stands of pines and over wetlands and rocky outcroppings. Big greens, wide fairways and only 38 bunkers are all part of the plan to make golf fun, fast and playable. Another innovation is the opportunity to play by the hole. If you don't have time for 18, you can play as little as one.

Sitting in the Cliff Dining Room overlooking the final fairways as the setting sun sinks into Northumberland Strait is a grand way to end a day on the links at Fox Harb'r. Ron Joyce, who built the hugely successful Tim Hortons franchise, is the visionary who created Fox Harb'r Golf Resort & Spa.

Canadian architect Graham Cooke has created two unique experiences. The front nine plays around meticulously manicured parkland with sheltered forests, extensive wetlands and lakes.

Head onto the back nine and you are transported to a Scottish links-like landscape with waving fescue and fairways hugging the rugged coast of the Northumberland Strait.

The grand finale begins on 14, a downhill dogleg right past the marina. Number 15 is a par three on the ocean requiring you to cross a shoreline trail appropriately called "The Foxtrot." The signature 16th is a drivable par-four and the 18th green offers grand vistas of the coast and perhaps a few frolicking seals.



PHOTOS MIDDLE AND BOTTOM Fox Harb'r Golf Resort & Spa



PHOTO Cabot Links

THE ULTIMATE CABOT EXPERIENCE

No celebration of Canadian golf would be complete without a nod to the tremendous success of Cabot Links and Cliffs in Inverness, Cape Breton.

When Cabot Links opened in 2012 it caused a sensation in the golf world as Canada's first and only true links course. When the sister course, Cabot Cliffs, opened officially to the public last summer, Golf Digest had already awarded it "Best New Course in (North) America" for 2015 and No. 19 on its list of the Top 100 Courses in the World!

Fairways tumble and twist down from a forested glade high above the sea. They meander up and over dunes, cross meadows and ravines and skirt ragged cliffs. There's an empathetic harmony between the design by Coore & Crenshaw and the rollicking terrain — an ebb and flow with endless sea views.



PHOTO Glenora Distillery in Cape Breton

There's a rhyme, a reason and a natural rhythm to this masterpiece.

Finish your day by tucking into some fabulous seafood in the Panorama restaurant, watching the sun slide into the St. Lawrence while the last golfers sink their putts on number 18. The folks at Cabot deliver golf as it was meant to be played and life as it was meant to be lived.

Fifteen minutes away, the Glenora Distillery names its "water of life" Canada Single Malt because only whisky distilled in Scotland can be called Scotch. Now this area of Cape Breton not only boasts Canada's only true links courses, but also North America's first single malt whisky distillery. Two more reasons to toast "our home and native land." ■