

Experts Take Questions on Golf Travel Destinations

DISCUSSION WITH BRIAN KENDALL AND LORNE RUBENSTEIN

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Longing to get away this winter? If golf's your game, you're in the right place.

Golf experts Brian Kendall and Lorne Rubenstein were online Thursday to take your questions on all things golf -- from the best travel destinations to where to find instructional schools to what to look out for in this winter's pro tournaments.

Toronto-based writer Brian Kendall does most of the golf travel writing for The Globe and Mail and contributes to golf and lifestyle magazines around the world. Mr. Kendall is also the author of six books, including Northern Links: Canada From Tee to Tee (RandomHouse), which describes his adventures in Canadian golf.

Lorne Rubenstein has written a golf column for The Globe and Mail since 1980. He has played golf since the early 1960s and was the Royal Canadian Golf Association's first curator of its museum and library at the Glen Abbey Golf Club in Oakville, Ontario. Mr. Rubenstein, who has written nine books on golf, was inducted into the Ontario Golf Hall of Fame in 2006 and the Canadian Golf Hall of Fame in June, 2007.

David Leeder, Sports Editor, Globesports.com: Hi Brian and Lorne. It looks like it's going to be a busy hour. Let's get right to the questions.

Bruce McCallum from Toronto writes: I am going to be in the Florida panhandle in a few weeks. I'm aware of the Hombre course at Panama City Beach. Are there any other notable courses in the area?

Lorne Rubenstein writes: Your best bet is probably to try the Bay Point resort. It has two courses, one that Jack Nicklaus designed, called, not surprisingly, the Nicklaus Course, and another course called The Meadows. The Nicklaus is the tougher of the two. Check the courses, and the resort, out at baypointgolf.com. Bay Dunes is another course in the area you might want to try. It's 6,600 yards long from the tips, and very playable. The website is baydunes.com. Have fun. And don't forget to spend some time on the beaches in the Panhandle.

Brian Kendall writes: Hi Bruce. Definitely worth checking out is the Bay Point Marriott Resort in Panama City Beach. The recently renovated Meadows Course is a strong Willard Byrd design dating from 1973. Better still is the Nicklaus Design Course, which opened in the fall of 2006. Both tracks are carved through the scrub oaks, pines and saltwater marshes unique to the Panhandle.

Patrick Dicerni from Toronto writes: Hi Brian and Lorne, I'm looking to plan an extended golf weekend in early April. In recent years I've been to Pinehurst and the Robert Trent Jones Gold Trail in Alabama. I'm hoping you can suggest some alternatives, I'm interested in quality courses - hoping you can help!

Brian Kendall writes: Hi Patrick: How about a long weekend in Austin, Texas? Great weather, superb Tex-Mex dining, a new international airport, and more than 50 courses within a 70-kilometre radius. Barton Creek Resort is a great place to hang your Stetson. The resort offers two Fazio-designed courses-- Fazio Foothills, and the even better Fazio Canyons, which weaves through a series of deep limestone canyons. Also on the property is Crenshaw Cliffside, a more traditional design by Ben Crenshaw. Other top local courses include the Golf Club at Star Ranch, ColoVista Country Club and Willie Nelson's Pedernales Golf Club.

Lorne Rubenstein writes: You can't go wrong by teeing it up within an hour north of West Palm Beach, or a short distance south. Fly into the terrific airport there and play the following courses, all of which are quality tracks.

Lots of places to stay in West Palm, Jupiter, Hobe Sound, Stuart Links at Madison Green; madisongreengolf.com. John Sanford designed this course. He should be better-known. The course is both challenging and has a lot of variety in the holes. A short drive south and west of West Palm.

Delray Beach Golf Club: delraybeachgolfclub.com A muni that Donald Ross designed in 1923. Lots of fun. Cool atmosphere around the clubhouse. Neat bar. Cheap and cheerful. Just south of West Palm.

Polo Trace Golf Club: polotracedgolf.com. Fairly swanky, always in great shape. Just south of West Palm off the Turnpike.

West Palm Beach Golf Course: wpalmbeachcountryclub.com. Dick Wilson designed the Royal Montreal Golf Club's Blue course and he did this as well. Also cheap and cheerful.

North Palm Beach Country Club; muni that Nicklaus redid. Big, rolling greens, plenty of chipping areas around the greens, right off U.S. 1. (561) 691.3433

Abacoa Golf Club, abacoagolfclub.com. In Jupiter, right off I-95 at Donald Ross Rd.-yup, a road named for the great architect. Joe Lee designed the course. Best greens around, plenty of instruction available from some super teachers. Fifteen minutes north of West Palm.

Champions Club at Summerfield, championsclubsummerfield.com, Stuart, 45 minutes north of West Palm. Excellent Tom Fazio course, tough, lots of wetlands.

Richard Emery from Calgary writes: Brian and Lorne: For spring break, we would like to do a family golf vacation with our 10-year old. I'd love to hear your thoughts and ideas on USA golf locations (for us in Alberta, Arizona or California are easy to get to) that are particularly good at catering to family golf vacations and yet, not have to each pay \$200 for a round. I've heard that some courses even have kid's tees in addition to the regular adult tees which makes it really fun for everyone.

Lorne Rubenstein writes: I'd look into We-Ko-Pa in Fort McDowell, Arizona, near Scottsdale. The resort has two really good courses. Scott Miller designed the first, called Cholla, while Ben Crenshaw and Bill Coore designed the second, Saguario, which opened in December 2006. They're both very good. I particularly like the Crenshaw/Coore course because of all the shot options that the holes present. There's a tremendous practice facility if you want to work on your game, and it's also a full family resort. Sure, there's a casino, but there's also tons more to do besides golf and gambling. I saw many families with kids when I was there.

Brian Kendall writes: Hi Richard: One South-west destination becoming increasingly popular with Canadian golfers is Tucson, Arizona, which is generally a little cheaper and less crowded than Scottsdale-Phoenix. Check out the stay- and-play packages offered by the Omni Tucson National Golf Resort and Spa.

The resort hosts an annual PGA Tour event on a lush parkland- style course designed by Robert Bruce Harris in 1960. Two other nines, including a new desert-style track by Tom Lehman, are found at a 167-room resort where golf and a 13,000-square-foot spa are twin attractions.

Andrew Wolch from Toronto writes: My friends and I are planning on going to Orlando in a few weeks for 4 intense days of golf. What courses are the 'must plays' and which ones offer fantastic value for money?

Lorne Rubenstein writes: Orlando is full of golf, as you know. I'd say that the must-plays include the courses at the Ginn Reunion Resort--and you can even book a session at Annika's Academy if you want to work out and work on your game. Then there's ChampionsGate, with two courses and the David Leadbetter Academy. You could stay there and golf, golf, golf. If you want to go a little ways out of Orlando, you couldn't go wrong with the Mission Inn Resort and its two courses in Howey in the Hills.

Brian Kendall writes: Hi Andrew: More than 30 courses have opened in the Orlando area in the past decade, making it difficult for golfers to keep up. But definitely make time for ChampionsGate. The 36-hole facility features two courses by Greg Norman, whose design work grows stronger with every outing. Another must-play is Grand Cypress Golf Club, a 45- hole, mostly links-style complex designed by Jack Nicklaus at the Hyatt Grand Cypress Resort.

Craig Cyr from the United States writes: My father is a golf nut and looking at places in Florida or Ariz to spend the Canadian winters golfing. I'm hoping to convince him to also consider non-US locations. Any suggestions?

Brian Kendall writes: Hi Craig: Your golf nut Dad might not want to stay the winter, but, among Caribbean destinations, it's hard to beat the Montego Bay area in Jamaica for superior golf. Located in an enclave of high-end resorts just east of Montego Bay are three courses that rank among the Caribbean's best: Three Palms Ocean Course, White Witch Golf Club, and Half Moon Golf Club. And a short drive to the west of the city is Tryall Golf Club, famous as the former home of the Johnnie Walker World Championship.

Lorne Rubenstein writes: Craig, so your father's a golf nut and he wants to get out of Canada. Send him to any of the many resorts around Orlando or Tampa--Ginn Reunion Resort, ChampionsGate, Disney World, Saddlebrook, Innisbrook. There's also course after course after course in and around Scottsdale, Arizona. Fly into Phoenix and go to the TPC Scottsdale where this week's PGA Tour events is being played. Or try the We-Ko-Pa resort in Fort McDowell, near Scottsdale.

I just recommended this to another Canadian. It's very good, with two courses. For something different, have him try two excellent par-three courses in south Florida. There's the Palm Beach par-three course, which plays between the Atlantic Ocean and the Intracoastal Waterway. Very cool.

Check it out at golfontheocean.com. Then there's the really good Jupiter Dunes par-three courses in Jupiter, Florida, a short iron from the ocean. He can walk both courses and get some exercise and fun golf that's also challenging, and he'll feel good in the ocean air at the same time.

D S from Toronto writes: What do you think of the PGA Golf Club (Tom Fazio and Pete Dye courses) at the PGA Village in Port St. Lucie, FL??

Lorne Rubenstein writes: DS, I like the PGA Golf Village. It's about an hour north of the West Palm Beach Airport, and has three solid courses. The Dye has coquina shells in the bunkers, but hey, you can play off them. Tons of tiny, strange bunkers as well. Entertaining, to say the least. You might also try the astonishing practice area--of course, this is a PGA place, right? It's gigantic, and you can hit balls all day for

a reasonable price. The practice area also has bunkers of different styles--pot bunkers, waste bunkers, conventional bunkers, and so on. Then there's the MATT system that you might want to try. That's Motion Analysis by TaylorMade. It's not cheap, but you'll learn everything you need to know about your swing as you're hooked up to computers while hitting balls in the indoor lab. I'm not saying you'll learn things you want to hear about your swing--I didn't like what I learned--but at least I came out a better-informed golfer knowing what I needed to work on.

And make sure you get into the nearby city of Stuart for meals super seafood everywhere you look.

Mike Aymer from Toronto writes: I'm thinking of a one week or so, golf vacation in February. I will be by myself, so booking tee times for a high handicap, single golfer could be a problem. I would consider a golf resort where I could get group or individual lessons. I would like to have the choice of walking the course, or taking a power cart. Looking for a mid-price resort, if possible, and not a 5 star resort. I haven't travelled to the states for 30 years, so I have no experience in any kind of travelling to speak of. Thinking of Arizona. Any suggestions? Any other good locations?

Lorne Rubenstein writes: Mike, this is a tough one, because you want the option to walk in Arizona or another resort somewhere. Unheard of. That's sad, isn't it? But most resorts in Arizona, Florida, California or elsewhere don't let you walk--at least not ones I know. Some allow you to walk after 2.

I'd say being a single golfer could be an asset. You should always be able to find a game, even just by showing up at the first tee. You should also be able to get on with a booking. If you're looking for a resort, so that you can say on property, you could look into the PGA Golf Village in Port St. Lucie, Florida (pgavillage.com).

Brian Kendall writes: Hi Mike: For a single guy on his own, I can't think of a more golf friendly -- or more beautiful -- destination than Pinehurst, North Carolina. Pinehurst Resort offers eight courses, including the famous No. 2 course designed by Donald Ross. But you'll probably get a better deal at the nearby sister resorts Pine Needles Lodge and Golf Club and Mid Pines Inn and Golf Club. Both feature gorgeous Ross-designed layouts. All told, there are more than 43 courses in the area, so you'll be able to shop around for cut-rate deals.

Johnyboy Frolix writes: Where is the best and easiest stay and play all-inclusive where they just let you play and play and eat and crash and play some more?? We are decent golfers who don't need a perfect golf course (i.e expensive) just a decent one.

Lorne Rubenstein writes: You're looking for all golf all the time, are you? You could go to the PGA Golf Village in Port St. Lucie, Florida. Three courses, hotel, Sam Snead Tavern, great practice facilities, West Palm Beach airport an hour south.

Innisbrook and Saddlebrook near Tampa will also give you what you want. I've suggested the Mission Inn Resort in Howey in the Hills, Florida, 90 minutes or so from Orlando. It's out in the country and it has two good courses and solid restaurants. Play, eat and crash--just what you want. If you want Arizona golf, I'd look into Ventana Canyon. A bit pricier, but two super Fazio courses in the canyons and arroyos, excellent practice facilities and nifty accommodations. Food's great, too. Look it up at thelodgeatventanacanyon.com

Peter Daly from Toronto writes: Hello Lorne and Brian. My group will be visiting Orlando the first week of April. We're staying at the Ginn Resort in Reunion and thinking about playing Harmony Preserve, Highland Reserve and Diamondback courses. Do you have any additional recommendations in that area that we may be able to get out on for \$50.00 /- each per round? Incidentally, do you think Ian Poulter's recent comments demonstrate the urgent need for comprehensive drug testing among golf professionals?

Lorne Rubenstein writes: Peter, I don't know of courses in the \$50 range in the Orlando area. That's not say they don't exist. I'm just not aware of them. I'd bet that your best chance would be municipal tracks, or maybe you can get some twilight rates at that number.

As for Poulter, well, he's an over the top guy who certainly has an exhibitionistic streak in him. I don't think that photo of him will sell many magazines, though. Then again...could become a collector's item.

Graham Hanlon from Brampton, Ont., writes: My questions are addressed to both writers: The marketing trend in the golf industry has been aimed at selling golfers the latest and greatest technology that money can buy. Considering that golf is close to a \$200b industry in North America, why isn't more of that money being spent on, or promoting lessons, to actually learn how to swing a golf club properly? Second, it's been my experience this last ten years, that fewer and fewer young people are taking up the sport of golf, due in part to other interests and the cost factor. Where, if anywhere, do you see the growth of golf coming from in the next few years?

Lorne Rubenstein writes: The equipment companies have the biggest marketing budgets, so that's why you're so aware of them. The PGA of America does a pretty good job of promoting the game with free lessons for a day in the U.S. at various times of the year. Golf publications also have a lot of information about golf schools and instruction. Publishers continue to put out instructional books. As far as juniors go, the trick is to get them out to courses. They don't need expensive clubs, and there are plenty of inexpensive courses away from major cities. But as you say, kids have a lot of other interests, and golf's a tough game to master. I don't know if the game will grow much in the next few years. That's a challenge, and maybe growth, if any, will come through more public player programs, kids getting into golf via some of the school programs, and, one would hope, an effort by towns and cities to maintain and build decent and affordable courses. They don't need to be 18-hole course, either.

David Leeder, Sports Editor, Globesports.com: Unfortunately, we've run out of time. Thanks to everyone who participated today. Let's leave the last question to Joel Price from Ottawa. He asks: "Value for money wise, what would you consider the best North American course and/or facility?"

Brian Kendall writes: Hi Joel: Last June I wrote an article for The Globe and Mail in which I listed several great golf bargains across Canada. I think it would be difficult to find a better deal anywhere than the \$56 weekend green fee at Newfoundland's Twin Rivers Golf Course. Situated at the southern end of Terra Nova National Park, 223 kilometres west of St. John's, Twin Rivers boasts a wild and woolly setting rivalled by only a handful of North American courses. Two whitewater salmon rivers define a 6,546-yard layout (designed by Robbie Robinson and Doug Carrick) that skirts the Atlantic Ocean before winding through a coniferous forest teeming with moose and bald eagles. Perfection!

Lorne Rubenstein writes: Joel, tough question. The best value for money will always be at one of the public/municipal courses. They're all over the place. I'm in South Florida as I write, and golfers down here love their public golf in West Palm Beach, Tampa, Miami, etc.

As far as the best value for money at a resort, well, I have to go for Bandon Dunes in Bandon, Oregon. It's not cheap, not by any stretch of the imagination. But if you're willing to chance golf out there in the winter--and the weather can be quite good then--you'll find three tremendous courses, fantastic practice facilities, lodges and cabins to stay in, some of the best grub I've ever eaten at a golf resort, and a get away from it all atmosphere on a remote part of the Oregon coast.