

Tee time

Sometimes life just keeps getting better, or at least that's how golfers will feel when they holiday in the West Indies.

Not only do they benefit from all the things that everybody else goes to the Caribbean for - the weather, the beaches, the laid-back vibe - they also get to play courses designed by some of the world's most gifted golf architects.

Some courses hug the coastline, others are set inland amid tropical flora; many are close to, or even in, the resort grounds; and whether your client is a scratch golfer or total newbie, there are suitable challenges to be had across this island chain.

► ON PAR IN THE DR

For serious golfers, suggest the Dominican Republic. In terms of both quality and quantity, it is the undisputed golfing capital of the Caribbean. Some 28 courses call these shores home, with the roll-call of celebrity designers including Pete Dye, Jack Nicklaus, Robert Trent Jones Senior, Gary Player, Tom Fazio, Nick Faldo and Greg Norman.

For a one-stop golfing experience, book them into Casa de Campo in the southeast of the country. This plush gated villa community occupies a

For those who see golf as a holiday essential, the Caribbean's fairways won't disappoint, writes Jo Cooke



RIGHT:
Sandals
Ochi,
Jamaica

FAR RIGHT:
Couples
Negril,
Jamaica

BELOW:
Casa de
Campo,
Dominican
Republic



ASK THE EXPERT



Edouard Des Fontaines, head of product worldwide at Golfbreaks.com
 "It's important to understand the level of the golfer and their handicap, to suggest the right course or resort. Golf is a niche market and often an addition to a standard package, so it's key to ensure clients understand what they're getting in their package. In the Dominican Republic courses often have a mandatory buggy policy, where clients are required to pay on site, so there can be hidden costs. We make clients aware of these at the enquiry level, and can pre-book and pre-pay the fees, so clients don't need to spend anything on site while on their holiday."

→ 7,000-acre swathe of land that rolls and dips down to the ocean. Prime landscape, then, for Pete Dye to create three distinct courses: the oceanside Links; Dye Fore, where holes lead players from clifftop to river valley; and Teeth of the Dog, with mean dog legs and tricky bunkers that make it a pilgrimage site for keen golfers.

Non-golfers are equally well catered for at Casa de Campo, with boutique shopping, beaches and pavement cafes by the marina, plus boat trips departing from here to *Robinson Crusoe*-style islands.

Clients based in the perennially popular resorts of Punta Cana and Puerto Plata are also well looked after. The latter has Playa Grande at the Amanera. Recently enhanced by Rees Jones, 10 of the holes stretch along the clifftop above the Atlantic Ocean. Around the coast in Punta Cana are the equally dramatic oceanside holes



The hub of Jamaica's golfing scene is Montego Bay – choose between three peachy 18-hole championship courses

of Punta Espada at Cap Cana, close to Eden Roc.

▶ OCEAN DRIVES IN JAMAICA

Jamaica's north coast tourist resorts all have courses to write home about. Tucked away in the hinterland of Negril is Negril Hills, an undulating course with tees that require strategic uphill and downhill play. Guests staying at either of the Couples resorts, Swept Away or Couples Negril, benefit from unlimited

transfers and complimentary green fees. Head east to Ocho Rios to find the attractive Jamaica Golf and Country Club, with narrow fairways edged by thickets of mature trees. It's owned and operated by Sandals, and guests at Sandals Ochi and Royal Plantation get unlimited complimentary green fees and transfers. High above the ocean in Upton, you'll glimpse villages, schools and churches en route.

The hub of Jamaica's golfing scene, though, is Montego Bay. Choose between three peachy 18-hole championship courses. Half Moon is suitable for beginners and comes complete with a golf academy run by a former European Tour player. Nearby Cinnamon Hill has a front nine overlooking the ocean and a back nine that plays into the hills. It also has a couple of claims to fame: Johnny Cash's former holiday home is in the grounds, and scenes for James





The Inspiring Travel Company offers a golf package at Sandy Lane, Barbados, from £3,819 based on two sharing an Orchid Room for a week with breakfast, flights, private transfers and airport lounge access, departing September 20. The package includes five days' golf at the Country Club, a daily round on the Old Nine or Green Monkey course (\$150 supplement for the latter), and a gift, lunch at the Country Club and \$700 resort credit. Each round on the Country Club course can be exchanged for a 60-minute full-body massage. inspiringtravelcompany.co.uk

Sandals offers seven nights' all-inclusive at Sandals Regency La Toc, Saint Lucia, from £2,085 in a Sunset Bluff Oceanview Club Level Room, including flights and resort transfers, departing July 1. sellingsandals.co.uk

PICTURE: AIDAN BRADLEY/SANDY LANE HOTEL CO



LEFT: Green Monkey, Sandy Lane, Barbados

➔ Bond movie Live and Let Die were shot by the waterfall. Finally, there's White Witch Golf Course. Set on an old sugar plantation, 16 of the holes offer views of the headland, ensuring the ocean breeze comes into play. Guests staying at the Hilton Rose Hall Resort & Spa can get preferential tee times at all three courses.

STAY TO PLAY IN BARBADOS

Tranquillity, elegance and barely another golfer in sight: if exclusivity is their bag, the Green Monkey at Sandy Lane is one for the bucket list. Only those staying at this iconic upscale resort get to indulge, with early morning tee times ensuring players are serenaded by bird song as they play pristine fairways hugged by the limestone rockface of a former quarry. This privileged pleasure comes with a price tag of about £390, with the cost of a caddie \$50, but these folk can read the greens like the back of their hand.

Clients should definitely end their visit to this 72-par, 7,343-yard Tom Fazio course with a Banks beer at the Clubhouse, which is full of old-school charm and boasts impeccable service.

Sandy Lane has two other courses, the Old Nine and the Country Club, both open to non-guests.

GRAND SLAM IN SAINT LUCIA

If they want to play a lot of golf for very little outlay, suggest Sandals in Saint Lucia. Guests staying at any of the three Sandals properties can enjoy complimentary green fees and transfers at two contrasting courses, including the Saint Lucia Golf and Country Club, which was acquired by the resort operator last year. Karl



Tranquillity, elegance and barely another golfer in sight: the Green Monkey at Sandy Lane is one for the bucket list

Thompson, UK managing director for Unique Vacations, says: "This par-71 is considered one of the most beautiful and demanding in the Caribbean, with the elevation changes and twisting fairways both entertaining and challenging. The nine-hole Sandals Golf Club, meanwhile, features narrow fairways and is ideal for guests looking to sharpen their golfing skills."

Best of the rest



Sandals Emerald Reef Golf Club, Great Exuma, Bahamas

Set on a rocky peninsula lapped by the turquoise ocean, the course has a remote, dramatic feel with holes alongside a mangrove.



Tierra del Sol, Aruba

This 18-hole Robert Trent Jones II design showcases the island's arid landscape, wending its way through cacti and sand dunes.



Ritz-Carlton Golf Club, Grand Cayman

Within the hotel grounds, this nine-hole delight was created by Greg Norman and plays over a saltwater lagoon.



Four Seasons Resort, Nevis

Players will also enjoy views across to St Kitts when they take on this 71-par course, etched into the verdant ground beneath Nevis Peak.

PICTURES: CHRISTIAN HORAN PHOTOGRAPHY; ARUBA TOURISM AUTHORITY; TOSHI TASAKI