

Bespoke Luxury Golf Experiences

Greece's Golfing Gem



Including:

Namibia, a Harsh but Beautiful Wilderness Discover La Gomera What It's Like To Play The Masters?



EDITORS LETTER SPRING 2021

'Travel Pioneers - into the future'

opportunity to escape the mundane and routine. It's hard to conceive that having opportunities and time to travel, such a precious commodity, was taken as a given pre Covid. The world has become a very different place for travellers and future travel experiences will need to really feel worth leaving home for. Travel pundits predict an increasing interest in experiences that offer adventure in isolated destinations, in wellness and restorative experiences, an increased desire for private villas, where visitors have control over their environment.

and a growing desire to support the environment

In this, the second edition of our in-house magazine we have brought together features that will inspire those of you who will be the new travellers of a future post Covid world. Discover the 'eco' paradise of Hotel Jardin Tecina on the Spanish island of La Gomera, which was declared an outstanding world biosphere reserve by UNESCO in 2012, read about the serenity of the wilderness of Namibia, and the wellness and restorative retreat of Greece's golfing gem Costa Navarino. Finally, be inspired by one of our teams experience of playing like at pro at Augusta! We are surely on the final stretch of the Covid marathon so read, be inspired and plan your escape from lockdown!!

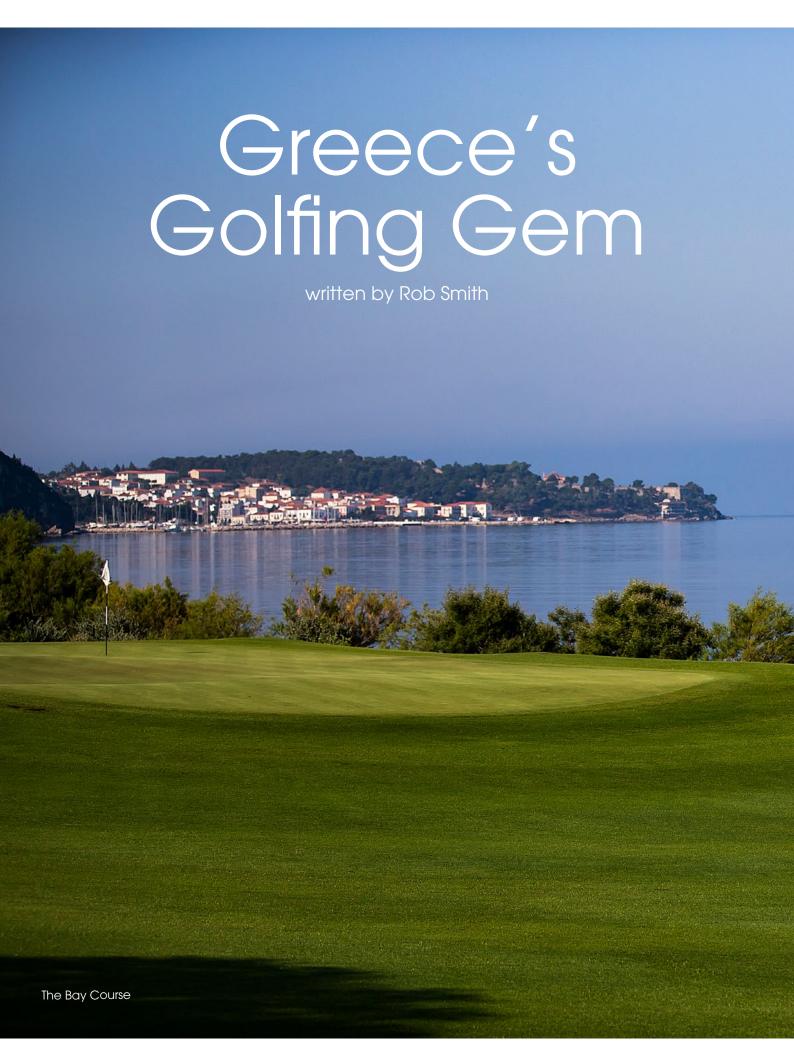
Editor Carolyn Scott
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Above Image: Costa Navarino Beach, Greece

Front cover image: The Bay Course, Costa Navarino, Greece



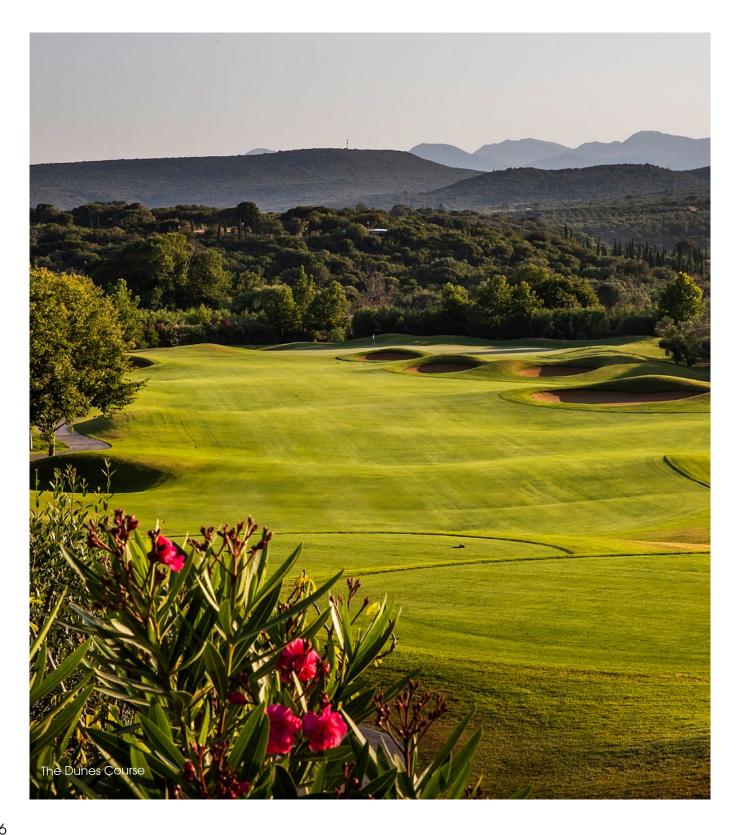




wealth of culture than Greece. Generally acknowledged as the birthplace of western civilisation and even democracy, it was home to many of the earliest and most influential philosophers, writers and academics. Surrounded by islands, it sits in the Mediterranean Sea in southern Europe and is blessed with a wonderful climate that makes it a year-round draw. At its extreme southsettlements, Mycenaean palaces, classical temples, Byzantine churches and medieval castles. COLUMN TO A STATE OF THE PARTY OF THE PARTY

Costa Navarino itself opened to great acclaim a decade ago, since then it has been carefully and tenderly grown into one of the finest destinations in Europe. There is a local airport at Kalamata that offers direct access with a 30-40 minute transfer, or you can drive over from Athens through the mountains on a fabulous new highway that offers spectacular views all the way and takes around three hours. A bonus of this route is the chance to stop off for a look at the Corinth Canal.

As the founder of the Olympic Games, Greece has sport in its blood. At the heart of the destination are currently two terrific courses, the Dunes and the Bay. More are on their way soon and each would be a draw on its own. Together with the hotels and other facilities, they offer something very special, something for everyone.





Navarino Dunes was the first golf course to open here and it was designed by former two-time Masters champion, Bernhard Langer. Langer is known for creating courses that offer far more than mere holiday golf; they are proper tests and this par 71 delight is no exception. Its strength is that rather than signature holes, it is consistently strong from start to finish. Each hole is a new and fresh challenge with demanding par 4s such as the first and fourth, attractive short holes such as the tenth and fourteenth, and sweeping par 5s such as the uphill seventh and lovely finishing hole that plays up to a beautifully-sited green below the welcoming clubhouse.









Adjacent to the course are two neighbouring but surprisingly different hotels, which border the Mediterranean. The Westin Costa Navarino has more than 400 rooms and suites and its design was inspired by old Messinian mansions. Most of the accommodation has unobstructed views of the Ionian Sea with almost all of the ground-floor units having individual infinity pools and a mixture of garden, golf and swimming pool views. Next-door is The Romanos, a Luxury Collection Resort, which has 321 airy rooms, suites and villas. Both delightful hotels open out into the Agora, an authentically recreated village centre where there are bars, restaurants, entertainment areas and shops.



The second course to open is a short drive to the south and provides a fabulous contrast running over more undulating land and designed by Robert Trent Jones Junior. The Bay Course has spectacular views out over historic Navarino Bay from many holes and is to my mind even more photogenic, offering breath-taking views from pretty much every hole. Rather than an absence of a signature hole, it arguably has eighteen. Two holes run right alongside the beach before the course heads up and down through the hills on a thrilling rollercoaster ride. There is risk and reward every inch of the way and the six-pack of short holes will each live long in the memory. As a combination of golfing test and scenic delight, the Bay Course is seriously hard to beat.

Aside from the golf, and for those who quite naturally want to spend more time in paradise, Costa Navarino is offering Navarino Residences, a limited collection of environmentally friendly villas, each with its own pool. Some are right on the beach, others are perched on the hillside surrounded by olive trees, and all offer sea views from their gardens that are guaranteed forever.

This magnificent destination is continuing to expand with work progressing well on the Navarino Hills development near the village of Kynigos, just minutes from Navarino Bay. When complete, it will be a true 'eco-deluxe' site adhering to the concept of giving guests and owners the best that is possible but at the same time as taking the environment, ecology and sustainability into account. There will be fabulous views of the town of Pylos, Navarino Dunes and Bay, and Sfaktiria Island beyond which guards the bay. It will be the only hillside location at Costa Navarino and not one but two 18-hole signature golf courses are already being built, due for completion in 2022. The site will also feature boutique hotels and the very finest facilities.

Guests at Costa Navarino can engage with every aspect of local history and culture through 'Messinian Authenticity', a comprehensive programme that includes activities such as philosophy walks, olive and wine harvesting, local cookery lessons and excursions to historic sites. As you would expect at such a perfect destination, all manner of sports are on offer such as tennis, biking, water-skiing, sailing and kite surfing.

Prices from £920* per person sharing the golf package.

For more details see page 36



Namibia, a harsh but beautiful wilderness

written by Simon Lacey

You're invited to join me on an exploration of Namibia over a series of three articles, following me on a recent road trip around this astounding country with my partner.

Let me set the scene. Finally independent having been run by Germany, the British Empire and most latterly South Africa within the last 100 years, Namibia is tucked in the far south west of Africa on the Atlantic Coast, just above South Africa. On a map it looks tiny compared to its neighbours but it's one and a half times the size of France! Flying between locations makes good sense timewise, but can be expensive and you fly over so much of interest – it's a time/cost equation; on this trip we drove.

The thing about Namibia is that whilst its neighbour Botswana is almost a pure safari destination - and what a destination - it has a relatively small number of incredible topographical features bar the likes of the Makgadikgadi Pans and the Okavango Delta. Namibia on the other hand is almost the polar opposite with its principal safari location being the saltpans of the Etosha National Park in the far north. What pulls visitors to Namibia are the vast open spaces of the Kalahari, its rugged mountain ranges and the wilderness of the Skeleton Coast. Its harshness is its beauty.

Having flown overnight via Johannesburg, we broke the journey in the capital city of Windhoek ('windy corner') where there are a number of good hotels but small privately owned guest houses abound and offer a more personalised service. We chose Galton House and would recommend it. I always like to head into town for the evening and our establishment of choice was Joe's Beerhouse. Packed with locals, which is always a good sign, this eclectic watering hole offers a great range of local beers whilst its house 'wine' is Jaegermeister, empty bottles of which seem to adorn every nook of Joe's! If you're a vegan, best to give the place a miss though. Namibians love their braais.

Namib balloon, Image courtsey of Wilderness Safaris





Early the next morning, whilst Roxy slept in before a tour of Windhoek southern, I was collected by Pieter, my local travel business partner, to experience my first round of golf in Namibia.

We were heading about a half hour drive north of Windhoek to Omeya Golf Club, part of the Omeya Residential Estate, which caters for young professional couples, families, retirees – and golfers. It is very much based on the model found in many South African gated communities.

The course designer, Peter Matkovich, is well known in this part of southern Africa having designed several well-known courses such as DeZalze, Arabella and Pinnacle Point. The Par 72, 6,500 yard course displays all the usual Matkovich traits, working the holes into the existing landscape, rather than the other way round; it's not over sculptured. The result is a course that challenges the good golfer looking for a low score but still allows the average golfer to enjoy the experience with some wide fairways to hit and areas to lay-up. And all set in the Namibian bush! I managed 30 points, which, with hired clubs, was a reasonable result.





Windhoek to Sossusvlei

Our adventure started the next morning on a 12-day, 5 location, 1,000 mile journey to some of the most amazing locations you will ever visit. Our first stop was in Sossusvlei, a 6-hour drive south west of Windhoek. The tarred roads in Namibia are generally well maintained, there are just not many of them given the size of the country. Thereafter you're on shale roads and average speeds reduce accordingly, allow for 40 mph tops. Sossusvlei is part of the Namib Desert, the oldest in the world and to my mind the most beautiful, being fringed by the Atlantic Ocean and topped with incredibly clear blue skies. It's worth spending at least two nights in this region, as there's plenty to see and do. We attempted to climb Dune 45, otherwise known as Big Daddy, but its height at over 1,000 feet and the 35C heat beat us and we had to be content at looking over the dried salt pan of Deadvlei and wondering whether our camera was good enough to capture the pure white of the pan with its petrified trees, contrasted by the deep golden hues of the dunes and that intense blue sky. We stayed at Little Kulala, a Wilderness Safaris' lodge sat on the edge of the great dune belt with its own private entrance to the reserve, staying in a private 'kulala', consisting of huge en-suite accommodation, a pool and 'star beds' on the roof, which just had to be tried. And what stars – you can almost touch the Milky Way.





The next morning we quad-biked to the launch site for our dawn balloon flight and watched in fascination as the multi coloured canopy was inflated against the backdrop of the first light of the day, piping hot coffee in hand. Within half an hour we were floating over our 'kulala' – we really should have made the star bed – and towards the seemingly endless belt of dunes which stretch some 200 miles to the coast. The region has a limited amount of fauna but we passed over ostriches, gemboks and a pair of black-backed jackals – all blissfully unaware that we were there. Our pilot was top class and dropped with balloon with inch perfect precision onto its trailer. Safely down a glass or two of South African 'bubbly' and a tasty brunch awaited before we returned to camp.

We relaxed by the pool for the rest of the day, breaking our travails for lunch and to visit the wine cellar to choose some wine for dinner.....



Images courtsey of Wilderness Safaris









Today's challenge was to cross the Namib-Naukluft National Park, which forms part of the Kalahari Desert, to the coastal town of Swakopmund. Taking a packed lunch and plenty of water we set out about 10:00, topping up with fuel at a service station aptly called Solitaire. This oasis is littered with the sunbleached bodies of old American cars, trucks and tractors and is famed (well in Namibia) for its Apple Strudel. It's also a great place to have the tyres on the car (ours was a Toyota Fortuner SUV) and its fluid levels checked. Shortly after leaving Solitaire, our SatNav advised us to turn left at the next junction; nothing unusual in that. But then it calmly, almost casually, announced that we should take the third exit at next roundabout in 230 kms!

I hope you'll join us next time, as we reach the marine rich Atlantic Coast and head north up the Skeleton Coast and Damaraland, home to the desert adapted Elephant.

Prices from £3,895 to £4,795 per person sharing

For more details see page 36





Accommodation and Dining

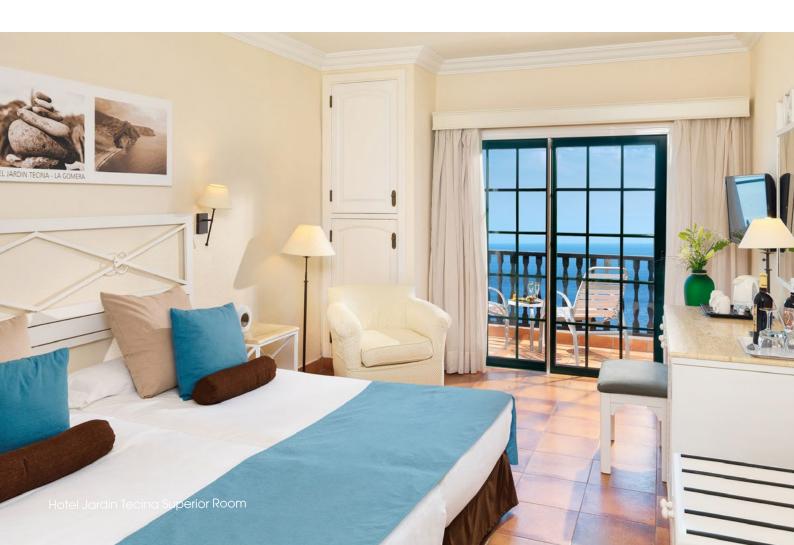
Hotel Jardin Tecina perches on a high cliff above the small town of Playa de Santiago, charmingly traditional in style, the reception, bars, restaurants and pools are at the highest point of the resort with rooms then arranged on terraces to ensure every room has a view, either of the beautiful gardens or the Atlantic below.

Our room (superior sea view) was decorated in a modest traditional style with a comfortable king size bed, and functional rather than luxurious bathroom, the highlight was the balcony overlooking the sea and it is definitely worth paying that little extra to get that view. The lateral rather than vertical arrangement of accommodation and facilities does mean there is a fair degree of walking to reach the restaurants, bars and the beach area but the advantage for golfers is the proximity of the golf club, probably only a 6 minute walk through banana groves. A quirky lift carved within the

rock takes you down to the beach area where giant beach pebbles and the imposing black cliff rising above, give a Jurassic feel.

The Beach Club Laurel pool and bar is a relaxing place for spending the afternoon after a morning of golf and a cocktail until the sun disappears behind the cliffs. You can move easily from the bar to the Trattoria Club Laurel for pizza cooked in a wood-fired oven, or a more formal dinner at El Laurel for meat and fresh fish cooked on a grill.

The main hotel restaurant offers a buffet, more functional than finesse but something to suit every taste, but for more gastronomic experiences try Tasca Fandango where typical Spanish foods are served with a Canary Islands slant or Gara Restaurant, which focuses on local foods and the best wines from the Canary Islands.







Golf

As the golf club mini bus drove us up, up and up again to the first tee I began to doubt the wisdom of choosing to walk with a trolley rather than use a buggy, however, my concerns were misplaced. The course is built on a former banana plantation and is unique in that Hole I is a couple of hundred meters up the hillside and you play down to the clubhouse.

The course is the result of an inspired vision by renowned course designer Donald Steel (in 2003) to see a course in the terrain that went only down (the only one in the world to do so). The course involves descending different terraces, and initially the terrain is sparse and barren with gorse and cacti filled rough. Notable on the front nine is the tough par 3, 4th hole which requires a shot over the Tapahuga

ravine from the back tee, and the difficult but spectacular 10th par 4 which appears to be floating in the air next to the ravine while the fairway is divided by a rough area of cacti 67 meters from the green, making you think carefully about your approach shot. After the 10th the terrain changes and as you progress further down the slop the vegetation increases and becomes gentler with wider fairways fringed by trees.

In summary Tecina Golf will offer a challenge for all levels of golfers, with spectacular views from all the holes, the warm Canary Island air, downwards slop and beautiful manicured fairways, it will be hard not to enjoy your round.

Prices from £575* per person sharing the golf package.

For more details see page 36







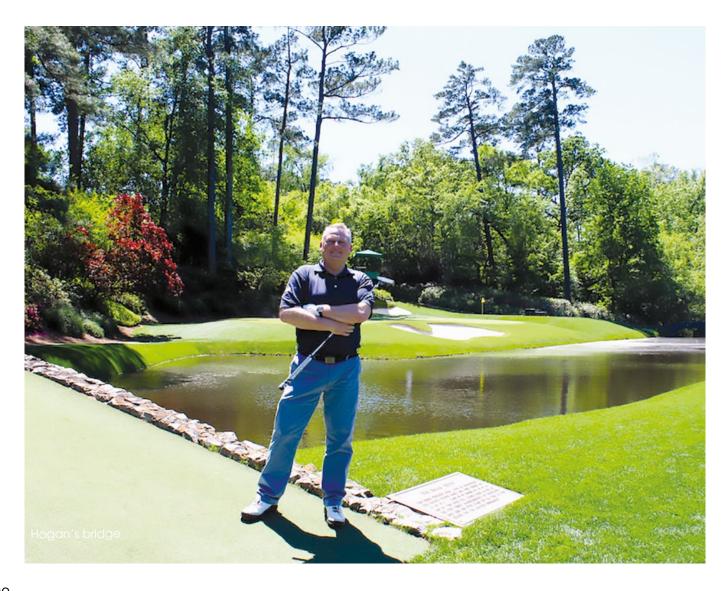


During the entire week at every Masters, hundreds of writers, photographers, journalists and reporters walk around the immaculately manicured grounds of Augusta National Golf Club guarding a flimsy one-inch-square slip of paper as though their lives, and the lives of their families, depend on it. The light green stub is rather ordinary – just like any other lottery or raffle ticket, in fact – but the winning prize for 28 of these tickets is very much extraordinary – the opportunity to play the coveted course the day after the tournament!

The Media Monday tradition comes with some prime touches. The course is prepared to the same final round condition, the pins are untouched from their traditional Sunday positions and the winners are treated to a "member for a day" experience – the opportunity to drive down Magnolia Lane,

access the Champions Locker Room, eat in the clubhouse and warm up on the expansive practice range. The club even provides a caddie... free of charge and with the tip included.

The draw takes place on the Saturday morning and the news of who is playing spreads like wildfire. Notification of a tee time at Augusta National reaches you almost instantly. As I walked in off the course at the end of the third round, two German journalists gave me a thumbs up from across the press centre auditorium, Sky Sports Golf's Keith Jackson, who was lucky enough to play Augusta a few years ago, tagged me in a good luck Facebook message. Friends, friends of friends, and friends of friends of friends knew I was playing long before I did.





Ever since my first Masters in 1994, my own clubs have accompanied me back and forth across the Atlantic in the hope and expectation of a Monday morning tee time, only to return with me untouched. With each passing year, I had managed to convince myself that I was destined to be unlucky. Typically, however, this was the one year I had decided to leave the sticks at home. I had just over 24 hours to find some playable clubs. Eventually, I secured a set of Nikes from a friend of an old business partner from my living in Atlanta days. Admitttedly, they wouldn't have been my first choice to take on one of the world's most iconic golf courses but if they were good enough to win Tiger several Green Jackets, who was I to complain...

My invitation instructed me to arrive one hour

ahead of my 11.10 tee time. After planning the three-hour drive from my airport hotel to the course with almost military-like precision, I pulled up to the security gate at 10.06. A gruff-looking sheriff in sunglasses peered in through the open driver's window and inspected my invitation. He advised that I was four minutes early and instructed me to exit the grounds. "Take a spin round the block," was his suggestion. There was nobody in the line behind me so I suggested to the sheriff that I should just wait in the car. "That won't be possible, sir," he retorted in his southern drawl. "But by the time I do that, it'll be 10.10," I protested. "Exactly, sir," was his response. He stood watching, hands on hips, a walkie-talkie affixed to his lips, as I spun the car around and pulled back out onto Washington Drive.



The front-nine, although not as well televised or recognisable as the famous back nine, boasts some great holes. The par-3 4th is one of the most difficult par 3s anywhere in the world. It's followed by a long, dog-leg par 4. It's not until you reach the elevated tee at the 165-yard par-3 6th that you face a shot that actually looks inviting. Of course, danger lurks everywhere. The back right pin is squeezed into a slither of green behind a steep false front. The very next hole is, at face value, a straight-forward par-4 but from the sunken fairway, a trio of

white bunkers prevent you from seeing the putting surface. With wide open fairways and generous recovery options from the manicured pine straw, Augusta National isn't punitive from the tee. Its main defence, as you may have already figured, is its greens. Huge swales and false fronts mean there are no-go danger zones on pretty much every hole – and those zones can change daily depending on the pins. The bunkers are mischievously used to tempt you into taking on a risky shot rather than as outright hazards.

All in all, Augusta National off the members' tees was eminently playable. As an 8-handicapper, I felt I had a chance of a par at every hole. With no double-bogeys on the card, I felt I coped well – the highlights being playing the four-hole stretch from 10 to 14 in just two-over par, and making a birdie at 16, the day after Tiger knocked in a two-footer for his. My putt was a little longer – a 20-footer with about 10 feet of break. I wouldn't have come anywhere close to holing it had my caddie not intervened and told me to double the amount of break I was playing!

Overall, I enjoyed the freedom of opening my shoulders on wide fairways and the opportunity to figure out the plentiful puzzles around the greens. With some spectacular chips, I saved pars from the left of the 5th green and the back of the 15th, while I scrambled a bagey at 13 with a smart pitch, having found the creek with my approach shot.







While Augusta National is not my favourite golf course, by any stretch of the imagination, just like the club itself, it is the course that has everything – beautiful scenery, variety, tranquillity, risk-reward, towering pines, grand elevation changes and just the right amount of water. A golf course architecture writer, far better versed in the subject than I, once wrote that

"Augusta National's greatest attribute is its ability to present the right type of challenge to each type of golfer." And who am I to argue with that? I loved it!

Prices from £2,995 per person sharing the golf package.

For more details see page 36







Golf Holiday - Greece, Southwest Peloponnese - 7 nights

Includes:

- 7 nights accommodation sharing a double Deluxe Garden View room
- Based on Bed & Breakfast
- Return transfers from Kalamata airport to The Westin Costa Navarino
- 4 rounds of golf (2 x The Dunes & 2 x The Bay course)

Prices from £920* per person sharing the golf package

(based on travel between 20 September to 31 October 2021)

* Price includes an early booking offer, when booked 120 or more days before travel.



Safari Holiday - Southern Namibian Experience - 9 days / 8 nights

Includes:

- Meet & greet on arrival into Windhoek Intl Airport
- Return light aircraft transfers from Windhoek Intl and between accommodation
- Accommodation at Little Kulula and Damaraland Camp includes all meals, local drinks, shared game viewing activities, park fees & laundry
- Accommodation at the Hansa Hotel includes breakfast

Prices from £3,895 to £4,795 per person sharing

(based on travel between 1 November 2021 and 31 March 2022)



Golf Holiday - La Gomera, Canary Islands, Spain - 7 nights

Includes:

- 7 nights accommodation sharing a double Standard room
- Based on Half Board
- Return ferry transfers from Los Cristianos (Tenerife) to San Sebastian (La Gomera)
- Return private taxi transfers from San Sebastian to Hotel Jardin Tecina
- 5 rounds of golf on Tecina Golf Course

Prices from £575* per person sharing the golf package

(based on travel between 1-30 September 2021)

*Price includes an early booking offer, when booked 31 May 2021



Golf Experience - The Masters, Augusta, Georgia, USA - 3 nights

Green Jacket Tour Includes:

- 3 nights 4* accommodation at The Hilton Columbia
- 1 round of golf
- Sunday Masters Badge
- Return Golf and Masters transfers
- Welcome pack
- 24 hour on the ground assistance

Price: April 2022 £2995 per person

Front 9 Travel have eight Masters packages to choose from or alternatively we can tailor make any arrangements to suit your requirements.

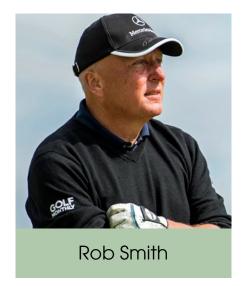
Front 9 Travel would like to thank the following contributors to the Spring issue.



Carolyn Scott

ROVOS RAIL STATION

Simon Lacey



Carolyn is an avid golfer and has spent many years visiting an array of luxury and unusual destinations around the world, and has consequently developed a discerning eye for what our clients at Front 9 Travel expect from our partner hotels and resorts.

She applies the same rigour of assessment and expectation of a quality client at the courses that she plays, appreciating that our clients expect the highest quality of accommodation and facilities, and to play excellent golf courses. At Front 9 Travel we are continually searching for new and exciting destinations to offer our clients and Carolyn is at the forefront of this, researching and writing our articles to give our clients a flavour of what is on offer.

Simon provides expertise for golfers travelling to Africa but not just limited to golf, as his 20 years of experience includes in depth knowledge on safaristhroughout Southern Africa and more general local travel. His passion for Africa dates back to 1997 when he first visited South Africa touring in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Africa got so deep under his skin in that one trip, that in June 2000 he bought the company that organised the holiday. Since then he has visited every country in Southern Africa (and a few in East Africa) - some like Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia on several occasions. In 2013 a golf tour operator bought out his company and he then added golf to his African repertoire. Since then he has played almost thirty of the top golf courses in South Africa from the Cape Provinces to KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga and has even popped over the border to Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) to play Royal Swazi.

Rob is a Contributing Editor for Golf Monthly, who specialises in courses and golf travel. Within this issue of the magazine he describes one of his all-time favourite destinations, Costa Navarino in Greece.

Rob moved into the golf industry 20 years ago from a career in IT, in order to pursue his joint passions of golf and travel. He is a member at Tandridge in Surrey, and has now played more than 1,100 courses in nearly 50 countries.

In 2019, prior to Covid-19, he played more than 80 courses in England, Ireland and Wales, as well as in Spain, Germany, Bulgaria, the Dominican Republic, Vietnam... and the Isle of Wight! Although he helps to oversee the biennial Top 100 Course rankings for Golf Monthly magazine, his personal preference is for scenic beauty and setting, rather than the strategic design of a course. He would far rather play an average course in a stunning location, than a technically great course in an uninspiring setting.

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