

DUBAI SUPERLATIVES INCLUDE WORLD-CLASS GOLF



By Michael Roney

Dubai has added to its collection of superlatives by becoming a world-class golf destination. And it's not just for the likes of top pros Tiger Woods, Rory McIlroy and Ernie Els, who have won its annual Dubai Desert Classic, but also for thousands of golf aficionados from around the globe who either plan a vacation here or carve out some extra time while visiting on business. Their goal: to explore Dubai's expanding collection of distinctive and challenging courses.

THE SPORTING CAPITAL OF THE MIDDLE EAST

This renowned emirate on the Arabian Gulf is one of the world's top business centers and home to the 2,717-foot tall Burj Khalifa office tower—the world's tallest man-made structure—as well as the striking, sail-like Burj Al Arab, the world's only seven-star hotel.

Dubai is also the sporting capital of the Middle East. Prestigious events such as the world's richest horse race, the Dubai World Cup, the Barclays Dubai Tennis Championship and the Dubai Marathon, to name just a few, complement golf's Desert Classic.

These events are amply supported by world-class facilities, year-round sunshine and Dubai's unsurpassed resort amenities—attributes that play especially well to savvy travelers who are taking full advantage of the emirate's international-quality golf.

“Dubai has really matured as a golf destination,” confirms Ben Cowan-Dewar, president of the Toronto-based travel company GolfTI, who took a number of U.S. club pros to Dubai last February. “Now more than ever, it's got a selection of superb courses. The business traveler who has an extra day really has a multitude of choices, and in the last year or two, it's achieved the status that will keep any player happy for a week.”

ON COURSE TO SUPERB GOLF

Of all of the fabulous links gracing Dubai, the most notable is the famed Majlis course at the Emirates Golf Club, host of

the Desert Classic. This lushly landscaped jewel is fulfilling in all respects.

“The Majlis certainly holds up as one of the top courses in the world,” notes Cowan-Dewar. “We played just after the tournament, so the conditions were excellent—what you'd expect from a place that hosted a prestigious European Tour event. It's got all of the challenge you'd want, and has always been at the leading edge of golf in Dubai.”

Other standout courses nearby include:

The Dubai Creek Golf and Yacht Club, host of the Desert Classic in 1999 and 2000, has undulating fairways lined with date and coconut trees.

The Els Club in Dubai Sports City was designed by three-time Desert Classic champion Ernie Els and features natural dunes and indigenous desert landscaping.

The Montgomerie was created by Desmond Muirhead and seven-time European Order of Merit winner Colin Montgomerie, and has links-style fairways and 14 lakes.

The Four Seasons incorporates the Al Badia golf course designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr.

The Arabian Ranches, a desert-themed course, was designed by Ian Baker-Finch.

Each course has its own personality, accompanied by elegant amenities that include cutting-edge golf academies and top international cuisine.

“The Els Club is an especially impressive recent effort,” says



Left: Dubai Creek Golf & Yacht Club and Park Hyatt Dubai
Far left and below: The Majlis, renowned course at the Emirates Golf Club

Cowan-Dewar. “Ernie Els came back to play there for a charity tournament, and it's pretty rare in this day and age to see a tournament pro return after opening day. That's a testament, I think, to how he feels about the course.”

WORLD-CLASS VENUES AND VIEWS

In the Dubai tradition, the conditioning and facilities at these remarkable clubs are world class, with backdrops that are different from what you may be used to seeing. “At The Montgomerie, The Els Club and the Majlis, you've got the burgeoning skyline as your backdrop, which is totally unique,” says Cowan-Dewar. “The desert element has been woven into the course at The Els Club, which makes it a little more distinctive.”

Even more choices are coming. Last November, Jumeirah Golf Estates opened its Earth course, designed by Greg Norman and set to host the Dubai World Championship from November 19 to 22 of this year. And, naturally, Earth is to be followed by three more courses at Jumeirah: Wind, Fire and Water.

Dubai's best restaurants are often affiliated with hotels or golf clubs, so the food and beverage options at each of the venues are top notch. Le Classique at the Emirates Golf Club happens to be one of the great restaurants in the city, and is just one of many standouts. “Its focus on the entire experience is part of the Dubai way,” says Cowan-Dewar. “If you have a world-class golf course, you've got to have world-class amenities, and they've certainly succeeded at that.”

YOUR PASSION FOR PLAYING

If you're in Dubai on business or just stopping over for a short stay, and you have time for only one round, you owe it to



yourself to hit the Majlis. If you have a few more days to spare, the diversity of courses now in Dubai will ensure that every day provides a memorable experience.

“Dubai...wow, what a place,” says Ian Dalzell, the club pro at New Jersey's acclaimed Hidden Creek Golf Club, and one of Cowan-Dewar's guests last February. “While I knew the buildings and amenities surrounding the courses would be first-class, I had no idea that the golf would be as good as it was. It exceeded my expectations. Honestly, it did—I was thoroughly impressed, and the golf got better and better as the trip went on.”

Find out more about golf and other enjoyable Dubai pursuits at www.definitelydubai.com.