

Sports News

Exotic vacation alternatives

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No better time than now to be thinking about your upcoming winter golf vacation and this year yet again we have found a couple of new gems to consider.

If your idea of travel is to combine the exotic with a few rounds of golf, a destination that might not immediately come to mind is Thailand. Something interesting seems to be happening there because despite the generally sluggish demand in global golf tourism, Southeast Asia's leading golf tour operator, Golfasian, recently reported an almost twenty-five per cent increase in turnover for 2009 and past October the Lonely Planet travel guide named Thailand as the "second best value destination in the world". Sure it's a long way to go, but sometimes the airplane journey can be part of the pleasure, and you can always add a short break in say, Hong Kong, for your first oriental lunch.

Looking more closely it came as a surprise to learn there are close on 100 golf courses in Thailand, more in development and daily round fees, caddies included, come with no sticker-shock whatsoever. For those who care to add culture to their golf, one travel company offers a unique regional trip that starts in Bangkok, heads up to Siem Reap in Cambodia, then on to Ha Long Bay in Vietnam, visiting at least one UNESCO world heritage site at each destination. Note that trips planned for June, July and August will catch Thailand's rainy season, but that also has one clear advantage — it never rains in the mornings!

Closer to home another destination that might not immediately occur as a prime golf opportunity is Honduras. Finally, with nine months of presidential uncertainty resolved in this Central American paradise, famed for clear turquoise waters and pristine beaches, time to consider visiting the recently completed international-level golf course located on the tropical island of Roatan.

Featuring a 200 hectare site this new Pete and Perry Dye design opens the first nine holes for play this month, the full eighteen by end-April. From all reports the par-72, 7,057-yard Black Pearl GC is on a level with all the best Dye courses around the world and features 14 holes with Caribbean views. Plus as you'd expect, a signature Dye island-green par 3. "This is unsurpassed visual beauty," Perry Dye told me in a recent interview. "I believe here we have achieved the perfect balance between a highly challenging layout for experts while at the same time providing sporting pleasure for the average player." Roatan Island is located 35 miles off the coast of Honduras and has an excellent new airport connecting directly with many international hubs.

Two exceptional and unique vacation ideas, each with plenty of additional activities for family members who do not want to spend every minute of the day on the course. Happy planning!