

Kenya: Perfect Climate and Excellent Variety

Typical rounds of golf in Kenya may, in fact, seem quite atypical. But then again, sometimes the more exotic the destination, the more rewarding the golf experience.

Imagine teeing it up on a lengthy course, surrounded by warm air and a plethora of nature. The course, designed for the walking golfer only, as is the country's norm, sits on the slopes of an extinct volcano.

After an exhausting round, you retire to one of Kenya's numerous peaceful beaches to stare into the heart of the blue ocean, preparing for the next trip around one of the country's 38 diverse golf courses, 11 of which are challenging enough to host championship events, and one that rests right on the equator.



“One of the most appealing features of golfing in Kenya is the variety,” says Tab Cohen owner of Tobs Kenya Golf Safaris. “From the beach clubs set among palms and casuarinas with stunning views of the sapphire Indian Ocean, to those dominated by the perennial snow-caps of Mount Kenya, there is a medley of courses each vying for priority as the most attractive location and interest.”

One of Kenya's most attractive attributes, and one of the characteristics that first convinced colonists to begin building courses, is the climate - perfect for year round golf. The temperature rarely cools, and in some parts, daylight spans up to 12 hours.

While April and November are the rainy season for Kenya, the majority of the precipitation comes before 10 am, and after 5 pm, still providing golfers with ample opportunities to get a round in.

Although vacationers and golfers are sure to find plenty of nice weather, they will not find golf carts,

anywhere. A trend that is losing favor in the United States, all of Kenya's clubs offer the services of experienced caddies, many of which are ready to lend a helping hand as golfers make their way around the difficult courses.



The golf industry in Kenya began when European colonists built the Royal Nairobi Golf Club, a 7,021-yard, par 72 course. And now, nearly a century later, the club remains one of the country's most popular, and hosts several prestigious events each year.

As opposed to the relatively flat but lengthy front nine, the backside at Royal Nairobi challenges all golfers with its rolling hills and uneven lies. With the Ngong Hills looming in the background, and various species of trees and flowers peppered across the course, it is one of Kenya's most aesthetically pleasing golf clubs.

Golf course construction in Kenya has not slowed much since Royal Nairobi opened in 1906, and many of Kenya's original courses are being lengthened to 18 holes. The Great Rift Valley Golf Club, one of the country's newest, is distinctively shorter than other area courses, but equally challenging all the way until the last putt falls on the massive, sloping 18th green.

Many of Kenya's courses sit at above-average altitudes, the most notable of which is the Sigona Golf Club, resting at 6,600 feet. The view from the elevated tees is one of hilly fairways and lush grass, kept green by the plentiful amount of rainfall in the Rift Valley.

Built at the edge of the Karura forest, the Muthaiga Golf Club is a regular stop of the European PGA tour as it hosts the Kenya Open Championship. Narrow fairways and water hazards make for treacherous tee shots, but it is the well-protected greens that are a golfer's worst enemy as they are often coined the fastest in East Africa.



From the forest to the water, Leisure Golf Club is the only golf course located on Kenya's south coast, but it is well worth the trip. American-style sand traps and marshy hazards populate the fairways, all setting the stage for the par-five, dogleg finishing hole complete with a water hazard, home to crocodiles, that will test a golfer's accuracy and wits.

The golf fanatic can spend weeks traveling around the country, visiting each of the courses, and experiencing something a little bit different each round. Those searching to perfect their iron play can look no further than the Mount Kenya Safari Club. Opened in 1959, the nine-hole, par-three course is as challenging as it is beautiful, combining a variety of wildlife and plants with water hazards and sloping greens.

And with several of the courses situated very near Nairobi, the capital, even the busiest of business travelers can find time to experience golf in Kenya.

"The opportunity to play your favorite game, to see wildlife, sometimes on the course, and to relax on the beautiful white sandy beaches all during the same holiday is unique," said Cohen.

Photo: Kenya-golf-safaris

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