

Beautiful and imposing, challenging yet playable—bucket list golf layouts are back on the agenda. // *By Larry Olmsted*

THE RETURN OF THE DESTINATION COURSE

AFTER NEARLY A DECADE in the doldrums, there's finally good news for golf fanatics—pilgrimage-worthy courses are back with a vengeance. This year features a heartwarming array of stunning debuts, all worth the journey to play, from the birthplace of golf in Scotland to the Pacific Rim to the Ozark Mountains of Missouri.

Tiger Woods stands out among a slew of more-established designers for his first public course in the United States, **Payne's Valley** at Big Cedar Lodge in Missouri (*bigcedar.com*). While some star players have had trouble understanding the skills of amateurs, Woods went all-in on fun and playability, and his stellar risk/reward holes focus more on the reward—there's tons of room to spray and few places to lose it, except the theme park-style aquatic features, tumbling creeks, waterfalls, and an island green. The entire course has a player-friendly, sometimes surreal and



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HEAVY METAL
Copper Rock is one of the courses putting Utah on the map as a golfing destination.



always fun feel; there's even a short par-3 19th hole to settle any outstanding wagers. Payne's Valley looks to debut at No. 1 in the state—repeating the achievement of the resort's last two courses, by Tom Fazio and the famed duo Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw, and giving Big Cedar a trio of reasons to visit.

In contrast to Woods' whimsy, Clive Clark chose a traditional approach—but on steroids. The just-opened **Dumbarnie Links** (dumbarnielinks.com) occupies the last great piece of coastal land in St. Andrews, the home of golf. Like acclaimed Kingsbarns just down the road, it is a high-end daily fee course with no membership, and it's become an instant must-play for Scottish golf travelers. The secret weapon is far more coastline than most links, studded with more than 600 dunes, and thanks to a unique two-tiered site on the Firth of Forth, stunning water views from every hole. "This rarely available site has 1.5 miles of waterfront and is one of the last available pieces of links land in Scotland,"

says Clark. "There are magnificent views from every hole—if one considers the courses on The Open Championship rota, many have little or no water views."

In similar fashion, Vietnam's brand new **Hoiana Shores Golf Club** (hoiana.com) by Robert Trent Jones II has a half dozen oceanfront holes, and also showcases towering dunes. It anchors the massive new Hoiana integrated resort, complete with Rosewood luxe lodging and a scattering of top-shelf restaurants. More jaw-dropping tropical views await in the Bahamas at the Ernie Els-designed **Albany** (albanybahamas.com), a 7,400-yard links-meets-desert-meets-island layout that is more coherent to play than it is to describe. The course, home to the Hero World Challenge, is not brand-new, but the chance for non-owners to readily play it is, with an array of just-opened and nearly finished residences throughout the private resort community—many available to rent for the night.

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GLOBAL REACH
From left: Sheep Ranch at Bandon Dunes is a little bit of New Zealand in Oregon; Rancho San Lucas offers a trio of challenging terrains.



In recent years the hotbed of North American resort golf has been Mexico's Los Cabos, but even by lofty local standards, Greg Norman's **Rancho San Lucas** (ranchosanlucas.com) course is special. It traverses three ecosystems, starting and finishing dramatically in oceanfront dunes, with a cactus forest and arroyo-slashed Sonoran Desert in between. Norman, who has designed and played in every corner of the globe, says, "This is the most spectacular piece of property I have seen in a long, long time."

Instead of coastal vistas, the design team behind the recently opened **Dubai Hills Golf Course by Jumeirah** (dubaihillsgolfclub.com) chose to frame the carved-from-desert routing with eye-popping views of downtown Dubai, just 15 minutes away, including the world's tallest building, the iconic Burj Khalifa. The captivating dichotomy between lush grass and modern skyline helped the course win World's Best New Golf Course 2019 at the prestigious World Golf Awards.

Back in the U.S., the trend led by Woods is toward world-class public courses. **Sheep Ranch** is the latest at the renowned Bandon Dunes resort (bandondunesgolf.com), the fifth 18-hole course here and the second by the famed design duo of Coore and Crenshaw. Like a little bit of New Zealand on the Oregon Coast, Sheep Ranch runs along bluffs atop jagged peninsulas. Roughly 700 miles away in the tiny hamlet of Hurricane, Utah, is the hidden gem of the new bumper crop, **Copper Rock** (copperrock.com). A little-known local architect named Dale Beddo has brought a dream to life with a bewitching array of contoured and bermed fairways, water features, and intricate bunkering carved through one of North America's most magnificent natural settings, the Southwest's red rock region. Its prominence should put the dozen other hidden gems in Utah's Greater Zion area on the map—giving the world yet another worthy golf destination.

- ✈ BRANSON AIRPORT TO BIG CEDAR LODGE: 12 miles
- LEUCHARS AIRPORT TO DUMBARNIE LINKS: 16 miles
- DA NANG AIRPORT TO HOIANA SHORES: 24 miles
- NASSAU AIRPORT TO ALBANY: 8 miles
- LOS CABOS AIRPORT TO RANCHO SAN LUCAS: 32 miles
- DUBAI AIRPORT TO DUBAI HILLS GOLF CLUB: 19 miles
- SOUTHWEST OREGON AIRPORT TO BANDON DUNES: 26 miles
- MCCARRAN AIRPORT TO COPPER ROCK: 150 miles

BRIAN OAR