



ADVENTURES IN GOLF

Spring 2009

News Update

Spring is around the corner and, despite all the gloom in the media, the green shoots of recovery are starting to peep out – on the golf courses at least. And one happy effect of the downturn has been that **hotels and golf clubs have taken stock of their prices!** Many good deals are out there to be had, and there's a general acknowledgement that rates should either hold or move back. Add to that the fact that the **US Dollar is at a fifteen year high against the Pound Sterling** and you'll be pleasantly surprised at the value for money you can get in 2009 compared to recent years.

Numbers travelling this year will inevitably be down, so that means more availability for those who do schedule trips. And you can bet on a warm welcome wherever you go!

Some exciting new developments are taking shape. For example, the **Vincent Hotel** opened its doors in June 2008 and has become the stylish boutique hotel that **Southport** always lacked. With 60 superb rooms including a penthouse suite over six floors, it occupies a prominent **location on Lord Street** right in the heart of Southport's

main downtown area, which has long been lauded for bars, shops, restaurants and nightlife, but until now, not for hotels. **It's only a mile or two from Royal Birkdale, Formby, Southport & Ainsdale** and the other famous links courses in the area and after golf you can walk to restaurants and bars.



The hotel has a snazzy, **street-level brasserie providing excellent food in a vibrant setting** which is popular with locals and residents alike. Insist on rooms facing Lord Street, a broad boulevard with gardens buffering the hotel from the traffic, as these are larger and brighter than rear-facing rooms.

Décor is modern and minimalist, yet very **high quality** and well-equipped bathrooms feature separate showers and Japanese-style baths (you sit rather than lie in these).

If you don't want the buzz of a town center location, then consider **Formby Hall Hotel & Golf Club** which is set in 135 acres **between Southport and Formby** and offers its own championship golf course, plus extensive practice facilities, along with 62 superb rooms, a spa and leisure complex, all in a peaceful setting just a short drive from all the courses.

Rooms here are **exceptionally spacious**, finished to a high standard and benefit from generous en-suite bathrooms. The course may not tempt you to miss out on **Royal Birkdale or Formby**, but its regular spot on a satellite golf tour is evidence of its quality and water featuring on all but two of the holes hints at the difficulty. Neatly revetted pot bunkers and PGA standard greens ensure presentation and technical excellence. There is also a fine 9 hole practice course, with water on seven of the nine holes and one island green to test your nerve, and their **academy**



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facility claims the broadest range of high-tech equipment in England.

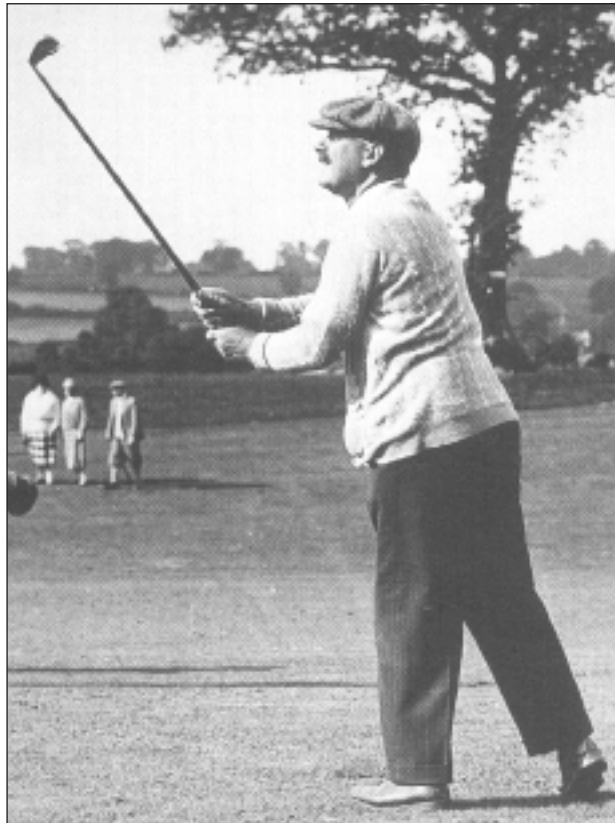
They can tell you not only how far you hit the ball and which way it is spinning, but quantify the angles of your posture and alignment, plus measure your hand speed, clubhead speed and weight distribution. If all that fails to solve your problems, then revert to old-fashioned teaching with a guide to pitch-and-run and pot-hole bunker escape shots from one of the friendly pros on the purpose-built practice area!

In Ireland, **Royal Portrush** is spending **£1million** on a new watering system for the course – this is to cope with repeated dry Springs. It is all being done very sensitively so that the tanks around the course and associated pipe work are all invisible! Also in response to slow winter growing conditions, **Ballyliffin** are protecting fairways by requiring golfers to play from the semi-rough in early Spring. That should ensure excellent playing conditions once the season gets underway. **County Sligo** has recently upgraded its clubhouse and now offers excellent facilities for ladies and gents – changing rooms include visitor lockers at no charge, excellent showers (towels available at the bar free of charge) and a drying room. There is even a private dining room for group lunches if required – prior booking is necessary. The **West of Ireland Amateur Open Championship** will be hosted here in April, an event won in 1994 by the then amateur **Padraig Harrington!**

Lough Erne Hotel and Golf Resort has a fabulous new **Nick Faldo championship course**, which is due to open in July. Only four miles north of **Enniskillen**, which is about two hours' drive from Dublin Airport, so Lough Erne represents a potential stop en-route to **Donegal** or **Sligo**. The course looks stunning. It has all been **built on**

twelve inches of sand to give a links feel to the turf and year round drainage. Every hole has five tees ranging from a modest test for the juniors and ladies stretching out to 7400 yards off the championship tees. There are five par 5's, five par 3's and eight par 4's. With some significant distances between greens and tees, the prediction is that most players will take carts.

In a sublime setting, the tone for the round is set by the scenic cart path to



the 1st tee, which is a long winding wooden carriageway across the lough (lake). Thereafter, the course sweeps through mature woodland, over open hillside and along the water's edge. **More than one green is built out into the lough and the signature 10th hole will remind you of the famous 17th at Sawgrass!** A half way house will respond to on-course telephone orders, and the building converts to a 34 cover fish restaurant in the evenings with diners given buggy transfers from the hotel. **It is claimed that the course has**

cost £11million and the overall development some £30million. The holes around the lough are reminiscent of Loch Lomond, which inspired the project for **owner Jim Treacey**. This may not be a links course, but it may well turn out to be Ireland's premier resort.

Bushmills Inn, always a **favorite of Adventures In Golf clients**, has major changes nearing completion for the 2009 season. **Nineteen large new bedrooms** and an extended **Garden Room Restaurant** are the principal changes, but internal adjustments include a new reception area and enlarged bar facilities. **The owners are anxious to preserve the authenticity and charm of the original inn**, however. The food here is extremely good and the staff are first rate – well trained and anxious to please.

South of Carrick-on-Shannon, **Lough Rynn Castle** evokes memories of **Skibo Castle** with wonderful, highly trained staff, fabulous rooms and great food. Once the home of the **Earls of Leitrim**, the house is surrounded by its estate and has two suites and several deluxe rooms with lough views. Further rooms with woodland views are sited at the rear. Plans exist to create a **health spa** near the courtyard to revive tired bodies, but appealing to those in search of less strenuous activities is the cellar bar in the main house - very atmospheric and with original arched ceilings. The hotel has no lift, but there is porter service. The **restaurant affords a fine dining experience** – it has **two AA rosettes** – and there is also a bar menu which is very good. Three lounge areas with period décor and peat or log fires provide the perfect place to relax before or after dinner. Around the lough, a **new Nick Faldo-designed course** is under construction,

which will have some scenic and testing holes. The clubhouse site is next to the hotel but hidden by trees. Buggies and caddies will be available and the project is scheduled for completion during 2009. All in all, it's a wonderful place to stay and the walled garden, complete with fountains, knot garden, fruit bushes, herbaceous borders and arboretum, is a bonus for plant lovers. Fishing on the lough is available, with ghillie if required. **Lough Rynn** is one hour's drive south of Sligo, just off N4 near Mohill.

The Mount Falcon Hotel near **Ballina** is back in favor after significant refurbishment. Some of the main house rooms are rather cramped, but the **new wing houses 26 superior rooms**, with huge bathrooms and an adjoining spa, complete with pool, sauna, steamroom, jacuzzi and beauty salon. The restaurant offers fine dining and the bar food is excellent. Two large lounge areas feature huge couches and roaring fires. A variety of woodland and lakeside lodges cater more for longer stays and the estate owns very good fishing on the River Moy, one of Ireland's premier salmon rivers. All equipment and ghillies can be supplied.

Located five minutes from Ballina, **Carne, Enniscrone** and **County Sligo** are commutable from here. For a glimpse of "Old Ireland" pop into **Paddy Jordan's Emporium** on Station Street in town – somewhat twee, but the Guinness is good, and so is the food. The pub walls are lined with Irish memorabilia and the back of the bar has a vast stock of whiskies!

In Scotland, **Archerfield** is a private members club near Dirleton in East Lothian with **two excellent golf courses**, named the **Dirleton Links** and the **Fidra Links**. The courses are not open for "pay & play" golf but non-members staying in accommodation on

the estate may book start times on either or both courses at a cost of £75 per person per round; they also have full



access to all practice facilities and to the magnificent modern clubhouse.

Accommodation on the estate starts with **Archerfield House**, a beautiful, fully-restored Georgian mansion house let on the basis of **exclusive-use**. Up to thirty guests can be accommodated in fifteen sumptuous double bedrooms while public rooms in the house include a grand entrance hall, board room, snooker room, two drawing rooms and a central upper hall. The bedrooms are large, luxurious and comfortable with superb en-suite bathrooms, most with separate bathtub and walk in shower. **One suite even has two bathrooms!** The package includes dinner and breakfast, all house wines, spirits, beers and soft drinks, plus the services of an events manager if required. The magnificent dining room seats up to fifty so extra dinner guests may be invited at an additional charge.

A number of other properties on the estate will suit smaller parties. **Pine Lodge** is a lovely Scandinavian style

lodge accommodating a maximum of 8 guests in 4 bedrooms, all with en-suite shower rooms. The bedrooms are on the ground floor along with a central hall, sauna, guest cloakroom and utility room. On the first floor is a magnificent open plan living space stretching the full width of the lodge, which opens onto a balcony overlooking the **Dirleton Course**. The fully fitted designer kitchen and dining area afford the option of privacy and seclusion (a chef and waitstaff can be provided) and the large comfortable lounge is the perfect place to relax after golf. Off the lounge is a small bar and guest cloakroom. Another spacious lounge with comfortable leather seating and TV ensures that those watching the game don't spoil someone else's nap in the main room.

Marine Villa is a stunning property sitting right at the **water's edge**, with amazing views over the **Firth of Forth**. There are four large "master" bedrooms (all of which may be set up as twins or king size doubles) and two smaller single bedrooms (large single beds). The **four main bedrooms** have large, luxurious en-suite bathrooms with separate bathtub and walk-in shower. The two smaller bedrooms on the first floor (accessed separately) share a ground floor shower room. Public areas include a cosy hall with seating, a dining room with bar, a large comfortable lounge, a small den and a study. There is a fully fitted **designer kitchen** for use by residents themselves or a chef, if guests prefer.

The Cottage, just a short walk from **Marine Villa** is a smaller property with two bedrooms, each with en-suite shower room, a lounge with comfortable seating, dining table and chairs, plus an enclosed kitchen pantry unit with fridge, kettle, toaster, etc. Finally, **12 pavilion suites** sit in wings on either side of the mansion house

drive and offer exceptionally well presented accommodation with twin beds or king size doubles. All suites have comfortable sofas and chairs, dining table and an enclosed kitchen pantry cupboard with all accessories. Each has an en-suite bathroom, and most have separate bathtub and walk-in shower (two have showers over the



baths).

Rates for all the properties are **highly competitive** when compared with similar rooms elsewhere, plus **Archerfield House** provides the opportunity for the ultimate house party on a **private** or **business** basis. Both courses have received plaudits from far and wide, and those who value leafy seclusion and home comforts will consider the estate the perfect base for their favourite **East Lothian** courses. **Muirfield** is less than two miles down the road in one direction and **North Berwick** is a similar distance the other way. A **free shuttle service** is provided on the estate between clubhouse and accommodations, yet the bars and restaurants of **Gullane** and **North Berwick** are just five minutes away by car for those wanting a change of scene.

We can vouch for the quality of the clubhouse food, which is provided in magnificent surroundings by friendly

young staff. Informality is the rule for guests, as owners **Kevin and June Doyle** strive to achieve excellence without pretension. They succeed in their aim. You could stay here for a week, play a different **championship course** each day and never have to commute more than ten minutes each way! And, given the secluded nature of the estate, a good night's sleep would be assured.

Designed by **Mark Parsinen** and **Gil Hanse**, **Castle Stuart Golf Links** is scheduled to open in **July** and will have a similar impact on the golfing world as that achieved by **Old Head** and **Kingsbarns**. Laid out on the shores of the **Moray Firth** the setting is spectacular with seven greens right by the water and all the others really close by. Every hole affords majestic views with those towards the **Kessock Bridge** and **Northern Highlands** being particularly memorable. **Chanonry Lighthouse** also provides a dramatic feature to the north and beyond that the **Black Isle** rears up atmospherically across the water. The **ancient Castle Stuart** itself is a stunning backdrop to the short 4th hole, but this is a championship course which oozes challenge and personality at every turn.

Clever use of the **existing topography**, along with sensitive mounding and landscaping, means that most holes feel secluded in terms of the rest of the course, but golfers on the course will rarely be aware of any of the buildings on the estate. Even the **charming clubhouse** has been designed to ensure that everyone within it has an uninterrupted view from all levels so far as is practicable. For example, **terraces** are set below their corresponding **room levels**

so those seated in the bar don't see those relaxing outside.

For tournament play the course can be extended to 7400 yards, but it still measures over 7000 yards from the black tees and is a testing 6857 yards from the medal tees (white). **When the wind blows**, which is most of the time, the examination is severe, yet the course is a fair one and it is always an enjoyable one to play. **Dr. Alister MacKenzie**, revered by **Parsinen and Hanse** in the manner of disciples, would have strongly approved of both their design and the course-building. He would have recognized many features in common use in his own era, too: **railway sleepers** framing paths and supporting banks, **revetted bunkers** to combat erosion or attrition, the use of irregular and extensive areas of sand to punish errant shots but sometimes to save them. **"Infinity edges"** define the **seaward side** of several greens, giving the impression that over-clubbing could send a ball into the water. However, some such edges, as at the 3rd, drop down to sandy areas which will save a running ball from reaching a watery grave.

The course is laid out on two levels with the first three, as well as the run from the 10th to the 12th all at the **water's edge**, while the remaining holes are perhaps **100 feet higher**. Although the





lower holes look frighteningly narrow from the upper level, they are in fact wider than they appear. The architects' use of perspective thus enhances the perceived difficulty. It also helps to **increase the feeling of solitude** as players meander from one hole to the next, largely screened from their fellow golfers on other parts of the course.

We start with a slight dog-leg par 4 of moderate length to a **waterside green** where the primary need is to avoid a sliced tee shot into the huge bunker on the right, whilst savouring the views towards **Kessock Bridge**. Three good shots are usually required to reach the long 2nd, where the green appears surrounded by a sea of sand, before the short par 4, 3rd hole which has a tiny green at the tip of the headland. A mid-iron off the tee would take the fairway bunkers out of play, but long hitters will want to try for glory - and the green - if conditions permit. All these holes face into the prevailing wind though, so a mid-iron down-wind to the short 4th may offer respite and the 5th, albeit over 400 yards, should be reachable downwind in regulation for most players.

The long 6th requires accuracy and length off the tee to allow an attempt to clear the cross bunker with the second shot before an approach to a well-defended green, while the 7th is a daunting par 4 of over 450 yards where long-hitters could run out of fairway at the angle of the dogleg. A large green

offers several options for pin placement so a two-putt is never a certainty here.

The 8th is the second of the short holes, and a gem it is, too. It measures over 200 yards from the medal tee, however, and will require a long iron or fairway wood, before a good straight drive must thread its way into the gentle dog-leg of the 9th.

Humps and swales, as well as bunkers, surround most of the greens, but the back nine, like the outward half, starts with the need for a decent carry off the tee to reach the fairway on the 10th. **Chanonry Lighthouse** provides a scenic backdrop to the short 11th where wind and club selection are all-important before the long 12th, which strikes a similar chord to **Old Head's 12th**. In both cases, the fairway drops sharply away on the left to the sea and at each hole the playable area narrows as you approach the green. Three strong par 4s follow, before the short par 4, 16th hole, where a sharp dog-leg requires accuracy and strategy from the tee. The round concludes with a long, straight par 3 followed by a very demanding par 5 finishing hole, both played back into the prevailing wind.

Development plans at Castle Stuart include 148 resort lodges and apartments due to open in 2010 and a 75 bedroom hotel for launch in 2012. A second seaside course is in the pipeline, but with no firm commitment as to dates. The detailed landscaping plan aims to ensure that only one of the lodges will be visible from the links, while the hotel will be carefully camouflaged into the dunes and the clubhouse will also blend into the terrain. This is definitely one course to include in your itinerary and makes a trio of virtuosity when linked with **Nairn** and **Royal Dornoch!**

BARGAIN HUNTERS

A number of clubs have announced special deals to help ease the pain of the economic downturn. **Royal Dublin**, for example, has reduced green fees by 20 percent across the board and many clubs have held prices at 2008 levels, representing a significant savings at a lower exchange rate. A fabulous offer from April to July allows you to play **Ballybunion, Tralee, and Waterville** over three consecutive days for just 290 Euros, a fraction of normal prices! And at Ballybunion, from April to July and in October visitors playing the **Old Course** receive a complimentary round on the **Cashen Course**.

In Scotland, the **Rusacks** and the **Fairmont in St Andrews**, as well as **Gleneagles**, are all offering four nights for the price of three (conditions apply), while Edinburgh's **Sheraton Grand** and **The Marine Hotel & Spa**, at North Berwick, are offering a fifty percent discount on a third night if you pay for two nights.

And, don't forget about New Zealand. Although their economy has not been overly impacted by the world financial climate, their currency is worth roughly 50% of the US Dollar. In other words, a \$6,000NZD trip is only \$3,200US!

Understandably, many of you are waiting to travel until the US economy improves. However, given the strong Dollar (against other currencies) and hotel & golf promotions - 2009 will be the most cost-effective year to travel in decades.





NEW ZEALAND TRIP -

A Personal Odyssey
By Ken Hamill

If one were to describe the perfect trip, it would be to **New Zealand.**

Nowhere is there any better combination of scenery, warm and friendly people, golf, accommodations, and outdoor activities, including: fly fishing for trophy brown and rainbow trout, deep sea fishing, nature hikes and private tours of the spectacular National Parks both inland and by the Sea.

Two things are “musts” to get the best of New Zealand. You must travel by land and see as much as possible from the air (helicopters are economical).

I began my trip on the **South Island** at **Queenstown.** The **Eichardt’s Private Hotel** offers unobstructed views of **Lake Wakatipu** and the lake suite is massive. For the golfers, historic **Arrowtown** (where I played with 3 members) is a classic and must not be missed. The new course at **Jack’s Point** is a well-designed links style course with magnificent mountain and lake views. But the highlight of this

portion of the trip was the helicopter ride over the **Southern Alps to Milford Sound** (a fiord of unsurpassed beauty) with a glacier landing, then on a remote beach accessible only by air, only to finish with a picnic lunch by a lovely trout stream. My pilot, Steve, was an amateur geologist who flew us over the area where the Australia and New Zealand “plates” meet, causing mini-earthquakes every 10 minutes, which are gradually causing a change in the landscape. For the adventurous, take a **jet boat trip** - reaching 60 knots/hour - up the **Dart River** is well worth the scenery alone.

Travelling to the northeast coast of South Island, I was able to observe **whales** and **dolphins** at **Kaikoura** by helicopter, and enjoyed lunch at the **Pegasus Bay Winery** on the return to the five-star **Otahuna Lodge** nestled in the hills below **Christchurch.**

Moving further north, I stopped at one of the world’s most beautiful fishing lodges - **Lake Rotoroa** (brilliantly managed with exceptional food). The fishing guides can guarantee you 4-8 pound **Brown Trout** on dry flies or

nymphs and offer river fishing by land or by helicopter. I cannot recall the last time I caught so many large trout – a memory to last me a lifetime!

Moving to the **North Island** - I stopped at **Hastings** to play the fine course at **Cape Kidnappers** - ranked 40th best in the world. But the highlight of this area was golf at **Bridge Pa**, which was built in 1898 and surrounded by ancient gum trees and native flora and fauna. My golfing companions were three octogenarian members, and the four of us played 18 holes walking in 3.5 hours. As many of our readers know, **The Farm at Cape Kidnappers** is a beautiful five-star property with a working farm, but the historic **Greenhill Lodge** was a personal favorite. The Lodge sits high on a hill surrounded by acres of vineyards with many grand hiking trails nearby.

From here I headed north by helicopter to my favorite destination of the trip - **Acacia Cliffs Lodge** overlooking Lake Taupo. **Rick and Linda Whitlock** recently opened this property with spectacular views and 4 outstanding rooms, who will quickly bring home to you the warmth of the New Zealand population. Rick is a member of the outstanding **Wairakei Golf Club** set among mountains and thick beautiful local shrubs, trees and giant ferns. It was truly a grand track. If you need more golf the new **Kinloch Course** is a respectable **Jack Nicklaus** design – one of his best efforts at a links layout. But if you fish, then a day or two with Chris Brennan as your guide ... will bring you “tight lines” with 6-



8 pound rainbow trout.

Sadly I left Taupo, but the journey north to the **Bay of Islands** resulted in a great day at the spectacular **Kauri Cliffs** golf course - the views alone would make a great day here on this world-ranked, well-designed course. However, to get the most from this area one must take the “Mac Attack” boat to see the **Hole in the Rock**, off **Cape Brett**, and the beautiful bay at **Paihia**. Finally, for the very best understanding of New Zealand trees and plants, I toured **Whangaroa Bay** and **National Park** by boat with naturalist **Tony Foster** - he wrote “Plant Heritage New Zealand”.

If you finish at **Auckland** (as I did) you must transfer from the Bay of Islands by helicopter to fully understand the magnificence of the Bay [of Islands] when seen by air. You can take a short **Air New Zealand** flight, which is more economical, but this helicopter journey almost surpassed my Milford Sound heli-trip and well worth the added expense!

For the golfer, a fitting end to the trip is a round at the **Auckland Golf Club** (you need to play with a member, which we can arrange). This historic course has some of the best-designed greens I have ever seen, and again local trees, shrubs and flowers surround the course. **Titirangi**, redesigned by **Alister MacKenzie**, is one the great man’s best and the “amen corner” at 12, 13, and 14 offers the golfer one of the game’s greatest challenges. I was again fortunate enough to play with 2 friendly members, who further added to my enjoyment at this fine layout.

The final attraction in Auckland is the Museum where you can see the grand artifacts of **Maori** culture including the 35-yard long war canoe, which is made entirely from one large native tree.

Photos of this canoe do not do it justice, as no lens is large enough to capture this massive, but functional work of Maori art.

Traveling by Air New Zealand is the preferred airline, which flies direct from either **San Francisco** or **Los Angeles** (approximately 13 hours to Auckland). And, please give yourself a minimum of 2-3 weeks to experience the best of this great country and it’s people. You’ll find that some companies offer New Zealand by sea, which sounds exotic, but after spending a month in NZ via roadway and air, I could not imagine spending any amount of time off the coast of such a beautiful and culturally friendly country. **Trust me – go by land and it will be your most memorable trip.**

Please note I have described the trip as best I can in words but to really understand New Zealand, go to my web site at <http://web.me.com/kenhamill/KensTrip/Home.html>

Note: due to the extensive number of photos, it may take some time for your web-browser to load each page.



Since 1977, Adventures In Golf has customized golfing itineraries for thousands of parties, large and small, with each program carefully designed to maximize the enjoyment of your dream trip – to Britain, Ireland, or other destinations.

Our key staff, with over 130 years of combined travel experience and offices in the United States, England, & Scotland, offer peerless service and in-depth knowledge of these historic countries and their golf courses. Additionally, we work closely with our hotel, transport, and golf partners to make certain you receive an exceptional vacationing experience. You state your objectives - we ensure they are met.

We are one of the few tour operators who can offer unparalleled access to St Andrews Old Course (as well as to many other famous courses, such as Ballybunion, Royal County Down, Old Head, and Royal Troon). To further enhance your St Andrews experience, a member of our Scottish staff will meet you at the Old Course with your personal caddy, and our local staff will be ready to assist you throughout your stay.

As your advisor, we will guide you through each stage of your trip. Determining the most appropriate accommodations, formulating the best transportation options and, best of all, securing tee times on the famous courses and hidden gems of your choice! As you might expect, we also assist you in the finer details, such as dinner reservations, sightseeing, fishing, shopping, and any other guidance you may need, making your experience that much more memorable.

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