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A Fair Wind To The Fairways
Vero Beach golfers set sail to exotic courses

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More and more local golfers are taking cruises to exotic fairways around the globe.

SETTING SAIL ON THE 19TH HOLE

BY JIM KERR



Long-time members of Bent Pine Country Club, Bob and Annie Smith took their first golf cruise in 1999 along the Danube aboard the *River Cloud*, pictured here. Since then, they have been on golf cruises to Hawaii, Italy, New Zealand and the UK. In 2003, they participated in a Rhine river golf cruise along with 30 other Vero Beach club members.

Henry “Buzz” Wurzer is not especially fond of cruise vacations, yet the John’s Island resident and his wife, Marilyn, have taken four of them since 2002. Highlights have included Venice and the Grand Canal at St. Marks, the 60th anniversary of D-Day in Normandy, sailing along the Riviera from Nice to Corsica, and the stunning landscapes of New Zealand. All were enlightening journeys into history, culture and scenery, but what hooked the Wurzers on cruising, and embedded in their psyches a driving desire for more, was the game of golf.

Like many links enthusiasts, including dozens from Vero Beach, the Wurzers have discovered the convenience, value and camaraderie of golf cruising. Their tour operator of choice is a company called Kalos Golf, based in Chapel Hill, N.C., which charters upscale vessels in Europe and New Zealand. “On our Mediterranean cruise along the Riviera in 2005, the entire passenger list of about 50 was from John’s Island,” says Buzz. “It was especially comfortable and congenial to be with people you know—like a history lesson with golf.”

Robert Connor Smith and his wife, Annie, were pioneers in this field. Long-time members of Bent Pine Country Club, they took their first golf cruise almost 10 years ago when they signed on for a Danube River trip aboard the river cruiser *River Cloud* in 1999. “We’re avid



While on the New Zealand cruise, the Smiths played eight courses, including famed Cape Kidnappers Bay, which is rated one of the top 100 courses in the world.

golfers,” says Smitty, a resident of Passage Island in Marbrisa. “We’re always looking for new golf packages, especially when they involve a cruise. For instance, you can fly to Scotland and travel around by land, packing and unpacking your suitcase four or five times, or you can sail around the entire British Isles and unpack once.”

After the Danube trip, the Smiths were hooked. In 2001 they took their clubs to Northern Italy on the *River Cloud II*, and in 2003 they corralled club pro Pat Gorman to travel along on a Rhine

River golf cruise with 30 other Vero Beach club members. They have all been great, Smitty says, but the most expansive “fairway cruising” blitz came last year, when the couple sailed around New Zealand on a ship chartered by Kalos.

While on board, they played eight courses, included the famed Cape Kidnappers Bay and Kauri Cliffs, with their magnificent coastal views and rankings among the top 100 courses in the world. By the end of the New Zealand adventure, the couple were “too pumped up” to sit on the long flight home, so they flew to Hawaii for a Thanksgiving golf cruise aboard Norwegian Cruise Line’s *Spirit of America*, which took them to six courses on several different islands in only a week. In total, the two cruises amounted to more than 250 holes of golf on 14 courses on several islands in less than three weeks. And the Smiths barely lifted a golf bag.

While Kalos Golf, established in 1994, is probably the most sophisticated and exclusive operator of golf cruises, a dozen cruise lines and more than 50 ships offer organized golf programs, and many others offer at least some degree of accommodation for golfers who want to play on their own. Special golf itineraries are featured in the Caribbean, Mexico, Hawaii, the Baltic, Mediterranean, British Isles, Central Europe, New England, Canada and even Alaska. As Kalos has shown, not even hinterland



destinations far from the sea are inaccessible to golf cruisers. Historic castles along the Danube and leafy, terraced vineyards along the Rhine now compete with legendary private club courses as points of passenger interest. Back home on the links with your regular foursome, the bragging rights are endless.

“Every trip has its own personality,” says Buzz Wurzer. “And it’s like your own country club at sea. In all fairness, you would probably come away from a two-week house stay in another country with a better feel for that country, but Kalos also offers both pre- and post-trips so you can get deeper into places like New Zealand and Australia.”

If you lugged your clubs aboard a cruise ship in the 1980s, the act usually provoked humor and a fellow-passenger was bound to snicker, “Is there a golf course aboard?” In the ’90s, the sight of clubs being carried to your cabin more likely resulted in rueful looks from golfers who had cruised before but had never thought of playing that great-looking desert layout in Aruba or the oceanside course they had cruised by in St. Kitts.

Kauri Cliffs is another spectacular New Zealand fairway visited by many cruise ships. Though golf cruises were practically unheard-of 20 years ago, more than 50 vessels now offer organized golf trips to destinations all over the world.

While specialized tour companies and incentive travel organizers understand the lure of golf travel, most retail travel agents still fail to make the connection between golf and cruising, mainly because the majority of their clients never ask about it. Yet, 17 million golfers spend \$26 billion a year on golf travel, according the National Golf



One of the elegant suites on board the Sea Cloud.



Foundation, and while agents are used to booking golf resort vacations to Myrtle Beach, Pinehurst and other U.S. meccas, they often do not associate sun, sea and sand with fairways, greens and sand traps.



Kalos Golf, founded in 1994, is one of the best-known organizers of golf tours. Among the vessels they charter are the sailing ships Sea Cloud, pictured top right, and Sea Cloud II, pictured above, which offer tours to the Caribbean during winter months and Europe in the summer.

For seaborne golfers, large and small ships each have their own advantages. Kalos charters the elegant *Sea Cloud* and *Sea Cloud II* sailing ships, and the luxury *River Cloud* and *River Cloud II* for European river, canal and coastal trips. "There are no casinos or shows aboard," says Kalos president and founder Jim Lamont. "But in Spain a flamenco group might perform on the ship, and the owner of the Valdarama Country Club might come aboard for dinner."

Larger ships offer more onboard golf facilities, such as practice cages, putting greens and golf simulators. Many provide golf clinics, lessons and an on-board pro. Golf celebrities often travel along, playing with passengers, mingling at social functions and giving insider lectures on the game and their experiences.

Major factors in deciding which golf cruise to take, however, often



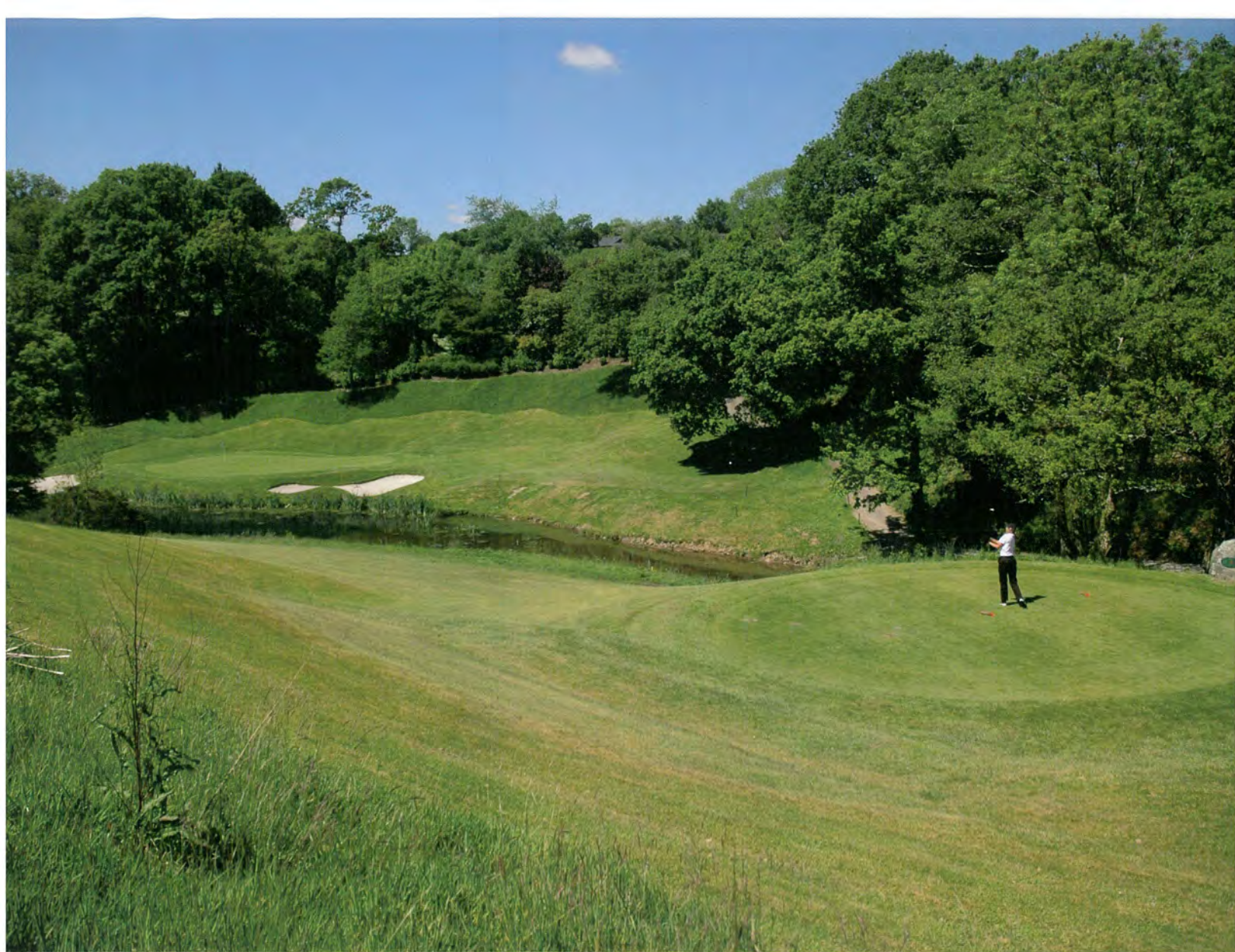
After introducing its golf cruises three years ago, Crystal Cruises is offering three itineraries in 2008 that will take golfers to several courses between Rome and London in April, to New England and Canada in September, and on a 12-day journey to Spain, Portugal and the Canary Islands in October. Pictured here is the 1,080-passenger Crystal Serenity while on a 10-day golf cruise around the British Isles in May 2006.

boil down to itinerary, ship and what the cruise includes for the costs involved. While a cruise staffer can arrange a tee time and transportation to a resort or public course, private courses are restricted to organized, pre-arranged outings. On the other hand, taking a taxi to Mahogany Run in St. Thomas for a \$100 round on your own is sometimes preferable to spending \$500 to tee off on Gleneagles in Scotland with a group.

There are many great golf venues available to cruisers. But keeping the above-mentioned factors in mind, here are a few golf cruise itineraries that will surely tantalize every golfer, from the fair weather weekend hacker to the consummate low handicapper who also carries the travel bug in his or her bag.



One of the courses visited during the Serenity's tour of the UK was spectacular Royal Dornach in Scotland. Other courses were located in England and Ireland.



A famous course visited during the *Crystal Serenity's* British Isles golf cruise was St. Mellion in Plymouth, England, just a few miles from the historic Mayflower Steps where the Pilgrim Fathers set sail for the New World in 1620.

Mediterranean: After three successful seasons, Crystal Cruises is expanding its golf-themed program to three voyages in 2008. The diverse itineraries will take Crystal ships to the Canary Islands, Spain and Portugal on a 12-day trip October 30, and through New England and Canada on an 11-day fall cruise on September 27. Both cruises will include play on many well-known private courses. But the *crème de la crème* may be the April 26 11-day voyage on the *Crystal Serenity* from Rome to London, with oceanview cabins from \$5,150 and balcony cabins at \$5,945. The cruise covers several of the world's most exclusive courses, including the Monte Carlo Club, a favorite with Prince Rainier and Sean Connery. Crystal is especially noted for luxury, spaciousness and multiple gourmet dining options, and is an excellent choice for casual golfers who enjoy cultural and

historic venues as well as terrific golf.

A couple of years ago, my wife Cathy, a non-golfer, and I sailed on the 1,080-passenger *Serenity* on a 10-day golf theme cruise around the British Isles. Courses included Gleneagles and Royal Dornach in Scotland, Royal Dublin and Mount Juliet in Waterford, Ireland, and St. Mellion in Plymouth, England.

While I played, Cathy enjoyed Loch Ness and Devonshire cream tea on two of the ship's shore excursions, and we both had plenty of time for castles, moors, cities, small town sidewalk cafes, museums, and the pastoral setting of Guernsey with its resident cows.

Hawaii: The 50th state has some of the most spectacular views from tee to green in the world, not to mention ideal weather and world-



Several major lines, including Holland America, Norwegian and Princess, offer golf cruises to Hawaii, with visits to courses on several of the islands, including Oahu, Maui, the Big Island of Hawaii and Kauai.

and Nawiliwili. Both of these cruises have eight days at sea, so there's plenty of time for playing bridge and relaxing. Fares run around \$4,000 per person for a veranda suite. While Holland America does not promote golf, help is always available in arranging tee times and transportation.

Bermuda: Bermuda may be a small island colony, but nine golf courses offer public, private and semi-private play to cruise passengers. Your best bet here is to bring your clubs and arrange your

class course design. But to play six courses on several islands in a week or 10 days without killing yourself, you'll need a ship.

Norwegian Cruise Lines has an extensive Hawaii golf program on its *Pride of Hawaii* and *Pride of America*, which Smitty and Annie of Vero Beach joined recently in Honolulu. The latter ship will offer 16 seven-day cruises from January through April round-trip from Honolulu with golf on the big island of Hawaii, Maui, Kona, Kauai and Oahu. The fares for a balcony stateroom run from \$1,300 to \$1,600 per person.

Princess Cruises' *Diamond Princess* also features 15-day cruises from Los Angeles to Hawaii from January to April, with golf at Kona Country Club, Ko'olau Golf Club in Honolulu, Kapalua Plantation on Lahaina and Kauai Lagoons Golf Club on Kauai.

A similar voyage with great golf potential is Holland America's M/S *Zaandam's* 15-day round trip from San Diego to Hawaii cruises, with seven departures from January to April taking in Hilo, Kona, Lahaina, Honolulu



This challenging course is located at Poipu, on the island of Kauai.



A group of Vero Beach golfers are pictured while participating in a Kalos golf cruise to New Zealand. From left: John and Jane Hind, John and Susie Hutchins, Bob and Annie Smith, Marilyn and Buzz Wurzer, Gail and Sam Murdough.

own golf, either through the cruise director or by calling or going online yourself.

There are dozens of week-long cruises from May through October, running about \$1,300 per person double for a balcony stateroom, sailing round trip from Norfolk, Philadelphia, Bayonne, NJ, New York and Boston. Celebrity Cruises, Royal Caribbean, NCL and Carnival form the Bermuda seasonal armada. However, if you have the time and recreational funds, the best Bermuda option of the year is the five-star Regent Seven Seas *Navigator's* 11-night cruise departing April 7 round trip from Fort Lauderdale. Ports of call, all with great golf potential, include Port Canaveral, Savannah and Charleston in the U.S., Hamilton and St. George in Bermuda, and Nassau in the Bahamas, with fares around \$5,000 per person for a balcony stateroom.

In any event, pick a ship that stops at both St. George and Hamilton for convenient taxi, bus or ferry transportation to the various courses. Mid Ocean in Tuckers Town is considered the best course in Bermuda, designed in 1921 and played by countless celebrities over the decades. It's private, and while you technically need an invitation from a member, you can usually be accommodated

through your own club.

The best public course, and the island's longest and toughest, is Port Royal, designed ages ago by Robert Trent Jones. It's popular, inexpensive, and tee times are required. Cruise ship passengers are also welcome at one of my favorite courses, Riddells Bay, an old Bermuda country club which winds along a peninsula with great views of tranquil harbors and Bermuda's famous pastel homes with their whitewashed tile roofs.

Mexico: Dozens of cruise ships sail both coasts of Mexico, a country where quality golf has come a long way in the last 20 years. My recommendation is the west coast, which includes both the Baja Peninsula and the so-called Mexican Riviera. Kalos Golf may be the most upscale (and expensive) golf cruise operator, but Elite Golf Cruises, based in Sunrise, Fla., is the top marketer and provider of packaged golf for more than a half-dozen lines with more than 40 ships, including all 17 operated by Carnival Cruise Lines.

This is the line you might want to share (at least partially) with the grandkids. Carnival, like many lines, does an excellent job of keeping the kids busy on their "fun" ships,



and while you might join them and their parents on a shore excursion or two, grandpa and grandma have the option of slipping off for 18 holes.

On *Carnival Pride's* seven-day cruises, departing Sundays from Los Angeles, you can play the Cabo del Sol Desert course in Cabo San Lucas, El Tigre Golf Club, Puerto Vallarta's newest championship layout, and El Cid Country Club in Mazatlan. On your own with a full day, it might also be worth the hour-long taxi ride up to the Four Seasons at Punta Mita, which has a spectacular seaside layout. Whether you play golf or not, the family can travel on this cruise for less than the two of you would spend on a Kalos Golf cruise. However, while a balcony cabin can be less than \$800 per person for the week, a smorgasbord of extra costs are involved, from shore excursions and golf to soft drinks and, of course, blackjack in the casino.

Baltic: When golfers think of exciting world-class golf destinations, Denmark, Sweden and frosty Finland don't usually come to mind. The Baltic, however, is a hot cruise destination where cities and small towns offer not only castles, cafés and UNESCO World Heritage Sites from the Middle Ages, but challenging and sometimes unusual golf as well.

Bent Pine and Riomar club members George and Sara Chandler are among many Vero Beach golfers who have taken one of the Baltic golf cruises that include visits to such cities as Tallinn in Estonia, pictured here, Copenhagen, Helsinki, St. Petersburg and Stockholm.

The sun barely sets here in July, and 54 holes of golf is not out of the question, especially when you can tee up the last 18 holes at 10 p.m. and later.

"It rained a lot, but it was a fabulous trip anyway," says George Chandler, a Vero Beach resident and member of both the Riomar and Bent Pine Golf Clubs. He and his wife, Sara, also a golfer, sailed in the Baltic with a Kalos Golf



group on the *Sea Cloud II* last summer. “There were 45 couples,” he continues, “and when you get together with a bunch of people from all over the country who have similar interests, you’re going to have a good time. It was also the best organized trip I’ve ever been on.”

While space is tight this summer, Smitty and Annie Connor of Vero are hoping to get on the July 14-25 Baltic trip aboard *Sea Cloud II*, a regal sailing ship chartered by Kalos. Among the courses will be Copenhagen’s Helsingor Club, four courses in Sweden, including Barseback Club at Landskrona, Ljunghusens Golfklubb at Malmo, Visny Golfklubb at Gotland Island and Ullna Golf Club in Stockholm. After a round on Finland’s Sarfvik Golf Club near Helsinki, the ship heads for stops in Tallinn in Estonia and St. Petersburg, Russia. Fares for the inclusive, 12-day trip run from \$8,965 per person for a superior stateroom to \$12,735 for a junior suite.

Caribbean: It all started here back in the 1980s, when Royal Caribbean Cruise Line started a “Golf Ahoy” program. But that was long ago. Many courses were in bad shape, tee times were difficult to secure, and the welcome mat was not out at private clubs. Eventually, cruise lines went to work, convincing both public and private club golf directors that hosting groups of cruise passengers for four or five hours not only required little effort on their part but was also quite profitable. Today, there are many new and renovated courses, and a wide variety of ships from half-a-dozen lines, including Silversea, Seabourn, Celebrity, Princess and Carnival, offer golf,

Golf cruising began in the Caribbean back in the '80s, and the area remains a favorite with local golfers. Among the most popular island destinations is St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Isles, where the 13th hole at Mahogany Run is one of three consecutive holes collectively known as the Devil’s Triangle (above). Other favorite Caribbean golfing destinations include Barbados, the Dominican Republic and St. Kitts.

primarily coordinated by Florida-based Elite Golf. On *Carnival Destiny*, for example, Elite offers a golf program on seven-day cruises round trip from Barbados that includes Mahogany Run in St. Thomas, the Barbados Golf Club, the rebuilt Royal St. Kitts Golf Club and golf course architect Pete Dye’s spectacular Teeth of the Dog layout at La Romana in the Dominican Republic. Fares run around \$850 per person for an oceanview cabin. ❁