



There are plenty of hazards at Durban Country Club

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# How Far Would You Go?

The first winner of our Writing Contest made a last-minute decision to travel halfway around the world and discovered a unique course where the past and present meet **by John Sabino**

OVER THE YEARS I HAVE GONE TO ELABORATE LENGTHS TO avoid spending extended periods with my in-laws. My latest escape was a “conveniently timed” trip to play Durban Country Club in South Africa coinciding with their scheduled arrival over the holidays in 2007.

Traveling a long way to play golf is nothing new for me. For the past eight years, two friends and I have been on a quest to play the top 100 courses in the world. (Since the lists are constantly evolving, we decided to use the one from when we began the endeavor.)

The trip to South Africa was a spur-of-the-moment decision, and I booked it about two weeks ahead of time, just after finding out about my in-laws’ visit. After an exhausting 24-hour journey, I arrived at Durban Country Club, located along the KwaZulu-Natal coast, about a two-hour flight from Cape Town.

Playing Durban transports you to a different era. The golf course, like both the country and continent, is full of contradictions. It is an unusual combination of modernity mixed with remnants of colonial-era Africa. This juxtaposition between the old and new is what makes the Durban experience. The course is hemmed in by a highway on one side and a massive rugby stadium on the other, but as far as the golfer is concerned, you are at times far removed from civilization.

The course is routed so skillfully through the dunes that there are moments when you feel you are deep in the bush. The 512-yard 3rd hole is a good illustration of what makes Durban regularly rank among the top 100 courses in the world. It starts from an elevated tee, with a dramatic view of both downtown Durban and the Indian Ocean, and proceeds through a narrow valley surrounded on both sides by thick bush.

As you walk down the fairway, the absence of any external noises is noticeable. The only sounds come from the wildlife,

which is so rich that the club allows bird-watchers to tour the course.

While playing the 417-yard 16th, I had the quintessential Durban Country Club experience. I hit my tee shot into the left rough, near the bush and under a tree. As I walked over to assess my lie, a monkey dropped from the tree to look over both the ball and me (see inset, above). She did not seem particularly impressed with either. I ended up making double bogey, or as it is called in South Africa, a “double drop.” In my defense, it is hard to concentrate with a monkey standing nervously a few feet away from you.

Overall, it was a five-day trip, including two days of flying. In addition to playing two rounds at Durban, a private club that allows outside play, I did some sightseeing in Cape Town and South Africa’s noted wine country.

Is 8,000 miles a bit far to go to get away from one’s mother-in-law? Perhaps, but the greater the distance I travel when she is around, the better the relationship seems to get. I’m already looking at the possibility of doing a similar trip next year.

If I’m not mistaken, Barnbougle Dunes is in Tasmania. **P**



Reader John Sabino has played 81 of the top 100 courses in the world.