



TOP 100 COURSES in ASIA-PACIFIC

OUR COURSE RATERS POP THE LID ON GOLF'S FIRST-EVER RANKING OF MUST-PLAY TRACKS BEYOND THE COMFY CONFINES OF NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE. WHAT THEY FOUND IS PURE MAGIC.

By Ran Morrisett,
Architecture Editor

▶ **GOLF magazine's inaugural ranking** of the finest courses in Asia-Pacific is long overdue. Not only does the region boast an eclectic mix of architecture, it's also home to some of the finest tracks built this century. To say the course-building business in the lands where the sun rises first is booming would be an understatement.

Australia scored big, placing 38 courses in our ranking. And no surprise that the West Course at Royal Melbourne finished in the top spot—it has, after all, held the top spot in the Southern Hemisphere ever since we started doing world rankings four decades ago. Having said that, its margin





Rank: 1
Royal Melbourne
(West)
Black Rock,
Australia



Rank: 4
Hirono
Miki-Chi, Japan



Rank: 12
The Club at
Nine Bridges
Jeju Island,
South Korea

of victory over Kingston Heath (No. 2), a world-class course in its own right, was impressive, as it finished more than six points (!) higher than its Aussie counterpart. To put that in perspective, Pine Valley, in our last ranking of Top 100 Courses in the U.S., beat out runner-up Cypress Point by less than two points.

Regardless of whatever metrics you value when judging design, Royal Melbourne nails it. Like Shinnecock Hills, Melbourne's closest equivalent here in the States, it's a marvel for how effortlessly it flows across its landscape. The gift of time is a luxury rarely afforded modern architects, but it allowed Royal Melbourne, carved out over several years using "horse-drawn plough and scoop," to emerge harmoniously from its sandy, scrubby environs. It's the rarest of rare: a course with no faults.

Six courses in Oz made the top 10. Royal Melbourne, Kingston Heath, the East Course at Royal Melbourne (No. 8) and Victoria (No. 9) all are situated in Australia's famed Sandbelt region. For those who like to travel to great courses that are clustered together, there are few—if any—better areas in the world to head to than here.

Such was the experience of GOLF panelist Pete Phipps, a North Carolina resident who made his first trip to Australia and New Zealand in January of this year. He toured 15 courses in 12 days. In addition to noting how the architects had taken full advantage of the region's sandy soil, he came away mightily impressed by Australia's golf culture, writing, "You go days without seeing a cart. You can carry your own bag everywhere, though most members prefer a trolley. The pace of play is steady. The clubhouses and locker rooms are done with great taste. While the Sandbelt courses show off amazing architecture and history, they do it without the pretentiousness or stuffiness that you experience at elite clubs in other countries."

Having lived in Australia for six years, I fully agree with Pete's glowing assessment. Back then, most weekends at my home club of Newcastle GC (No. 29), two hours north of Sydney, we played the Stableford format, a scoring system that keeps play moving at a fine pace. Trust me: There's a commonsense approach to golf in Australia you don't often see. Although it may take a 13-hour flight to get there, a trip Down Under is worth the effort for the complete playing experience.

Rank: 73
Stone Valley
Hai Ninh,
Vietnam



Rank: 14
South Cape
Owners Club
Namhae-gun,
South Korea





► The Land of the Rising Sun

Japan had the second most courses in our Top 100 ranking with 15. Its Big Five—Hirono (No. 4), the Fuji Course at Kawana (No. 6), Tokyo GC (No. 19), Naruo (No. 21) and the West Course at Yokohama (No. 26)—are the cornerstone for one of the game’s epic trips. True, you need to take a bullet train southwest to Osaka to play Hirono and Naruo and south from Tokyo to enjoy Kawana, but time, like the train, flies.

Similar to Australia, where Alister MacKenzie played such an outsize role in defining what constitutes great architecture, another Brit, C.H. Alison, played a pivotal role in the 1930s in shaping golf in Japan. His works at the country’s two best courses (Hirono and Kawana) influenced future Japanese architects such as Koymo Ohtani, who went on to build today’s version of Tokyo GC. Gil Hanse and Neil Cameron’s fantastic renovations at Tokyo a few years ago included work on the course’s famous greens. There are two per hole, originally one with warm-weather grass and the other built to survive in cooler temps. Advances in agronomy over the past 80 years has rendered this approach moot. The two-green model remains at Tokyo GC, asking wildly different—and fun—questions of the player.



Rank: 30
Lanhai Int'l
(Yangtze Dunes)
Chongming Island,
China

TOP 100 COURSES BY COUNTRY

Australia	38
Japan	15
New Zealand	10
China	10
Vietnam	8
South Korea	7
Thailand	6
Indonesia	1
Malaysia	1
Myanmar	1
Nepal	1
Singapore	1
Sri Lanka	1

► Kiwi Kindness

Alex Russell, the famed Australian architect who assisted Alister MacKenzie at Royal Melbourne before building other gems of his own, designed Paraparaumu Beach (No. 17) in 1948, which held the mantle as New Zealand’s finest course throughout the last century. It remains a delight, played over some of the game’s most lusciously rumpled land. And with a green fee of \$120, it’s a fabulous bargain.

Drive 100 miles north from Paraparaumu up the west coast and you’ll find Waverley GC (No. 82). An honesty box is sometimes the only option you have for paying the roughly \$20 green fee. Known colloquially as a “country course,” its greens crew includes sheep that roam the jumbled landforms. “Turf heads,” focused mainly on perfectly manicured conditions, need not visit, but for those who view small-town golf as integral to the fabric of the sport, Waverley is a reaffirmation that golf need not be expensive to be exhilarating.

Elsewhere on the North Island, two American business titans, Julian Robertson and Ric Kayne, have put New Zealand front and center for the best golf built this century. Kauri Cliffs (No. 34), which opened in 2000, is as pretty a setting as I’ve ever seen. Robertson quickly followed its success with Tom Doak’s Cape Kidnappers (No. 11) in 2004, where holes cling to the cliffs some 460 feet above the Pacific.

Like Robertson, Kayne became bewitched by New Zealand’s impossible beauty and had Tom

Doak build Tara Iti (No. 3) in 2015. Pictures of its green fairways twisting through white, sandy dunes instantly captivated golfers worldwide. New Zealand's seasons are reversed from North America's, meaning that when you poke your nose out and see nothing but snow in January in Minneapolis, the allure of Tara Iti, bathed in bright sunshine and warmth, becomes especially acute.

Given Tara Iti's resounding success, Kayne subsequently hired Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw—and Doak again—to build a pair of public-access courses four miles south down the coast from the private Tara Iti. The Doak course opens in October but the Coore & Crenshaw's Te Arai South (No. 7) opened last year to rave reviews. Based on its finish here, we expect it to be a strong contender for inclusion in our 2023 World Top 100 due out in November.

► In Other Parts of Asia

While Australia, Japan and New Zealand courses comprise nearly two thirds of our ranking, exciting builds are percolating all across Asia. Vietnam's coastline, in particular, is being put to fantastic use. Panelist Paul Rudovsky, who has played over 1,500 courses, was smitten by his time in Vietnam and its people. Rudovsky is our resident course statistician and, citing a study by the R&A, writes, "Vietnam has grown from 78 courses in 2018 to 86 in 2020, and there are an additional 27 new courses that will have opened by year end 2025. So in seven years, Vietnam is projected to go from 78 to 113 courses—a growth of 45 percent!"

Similar to Paul's sentiments on the Vietnamese, I was mightily impressed on my one visit to South Korea. For sure, Koreans embrace golf almost spiritually. You can see it in how neatly they present their courses and work with nature. Though we only rank courses themselves, if you're into design in general, the architecture of the clubhouses at the finest courses in South Korea, including Nine Bridges (No. 12), South Cape (No. 14) and Whistling Rock (No. 37), will knock your socks off.

Course construction in China is a bit different—it tends to ebb and flow with the government's desires. At the pinnacle stands Coore & Crenshaw's Shanqin Bay on the island of Hainan. While its original 17th hole—one of the best on property—was removed a few years ago, a permanent replacement has now taken hold. The

addition helped this coastal stunner move into 13th place on our list.

In terms of genuine outpost golf, try Himalayan GC (No. 23) in Nepal. Major Ram Gurung, a Gurkha who served in the British Army for 30 years, designed it in 1994. As he told my brother, "My main theme when laying out the course was simply to flow with nature and where possible bring into play a golfer's senses by the sound and sight of rivers and canyon edges." The roar of the Bijayapur River that runs through the canyon is thunderous as it carries snowmelt from the Annapurna range from several hundred feet above on the rim of the canyon. Take care when crossing this river in several spots—this is "adventure golf" of the highest order.

► The More Things Change...

As in the States, titans of architecture—from Alister MacKenzie to C.H. Alison to Tom Doak, Jack Nicklaus, Coore & Crenshaw—dominate this ranking. To appreciate the global design empire that Jack Nicklaus built over six decades, 10 original designs are featured here, the most by any architect. Aussie Mike Clayton (with varied partners) and Arizona-based Brian Curley (who has flown across the Pacific more than 500 times) are two other architects found frequently throughout this ranking.

Restorations, like our titans, play a big role in this ranking too. MacKenzie's and Ebert's work at Hirono directly led to its top-five finish, and the West Course at Yokohama might have been a hundred spots lower if not for what Coore & Crenshaw did there in 2015. MacKenzie's Titi-rangi (No. 52) has been allowed to open up and breathe thanks to work by Clyde Johnson.

As evidenced by the photographs on these pages, Asia-Pacific is a gorgeous part of the world and its golf offerings are as diverse as its landscape. Talented architects have been taking advantage of what's here for the better part of a century. You need to as well.

The ease of modern travel makes this region more attainable than ever. We trust that this ranking will help with future trips. Akin to golf in the United Kingdom, a proper letter of introduction gains you access to a majority of the region's finest courses, which makes this ranking even more meaningful and practical. It's a long flight, but you'll return with lifetime memories. What are you waiting for? 🍷



Rank: 7
Te Arai (South)
Tomarata,
New Zealand



TOP 100 COURSES IN ASIA-PACIFIC 2023 / 24

RANK	COURSE NAME, LOCATION ARCHITECT, YEAR	AVERAGE SCORE	RANK	COURSE NAME, LOCATION ARCHITECT, YEAR	AVERAGE SCORE
1	ROYAL MELBOURNE (WEST) BLACK ROCK, AUSTRALIA ALISTER MACKENZIE, 1926	98.25	26	Yokohama (West) YOKOHAMA, JAPAN TAKEO AIYAMA, 1958; BILL COORE/BEN CRENSHAW, 2016	66.36
2	KINGSTON HEATH CHELTENHAM, AUSTRALIA DAN SOUTAR, 1925; ALISTER MACKENZIE, 1926	92.17	27	The National (Gunnamatta) CAPE SCHANCK, AUSTRALIA THOMSON WOLVERIDGE & PERRETT, 2000; TOM DOAK, 2019	65.28
3	TARA ITI TE ARAI, NEW ZEALAND TOM DOAK, 2015	91.09	28	Kasumigaseki (East) KAWAGOE, JAPAN KINYA FUJITA/SHIRO AKABOSHI, 1929; TOM FAZIO/LOGAN FAZIO, 2016	62.35
4	HIRONO MIKI-CHI, JAPAN C.H. ALISON/CHOZU ITO, 1932; MARTIN EBERT, 2019	89.25	29	Newcastle FERN BAY, AUSTRALIA FRED POPPLEWELL SR., 1915; ERIC APPERLY, 1932	61.00
5	BARNBOUGLE DUNES BRIDPORT, AUSTRALIA TOM DOAK/MIKE CLAYTON, 2004	86.38	30	Lanhai Int'l (Yangtze Dunes) CHONGMING ISLAND, CHINA JACK NICKLAUS, 2011; OGILVY CLAYTON COCKING & MEAD, 2018	60.50
6	KAWANA (FUJI) ITO-SHI, JAPAN C.H. ALISON/KOMYO OHTANI/KINYA FUJITA, 1936	80.60	31	Metropolitan SOUTH OAKLEIGH, AUSTRALIA J.B. MACKENZIE, 1908; DICK WILSON, 1960	60.45
7	TE ARAI (SOUTH) TOMARATA, NEW ZEALAND BILL COORE/BEN CRENSHAW, 2022	77.50	32	Ono ONO, JAPAN OSAMU UEDA, 1961	60.20
8	ROYAL MELBOURNE (EAST) BLACK ROCK, AUSTRALIA ALEX RUSSELL/MICK MORCOM, 1932	77.26	33	Hoiana Shores QUANG NAM, VIETNAM ROBERT TRENT JONES JR., 2020	59.97
9	VICTORIA CHELTENHAM, AUSTRALIA ALISTER MACKENZIE, 1927; OGILVY CLAYTON COCKING & MEAD, 2019	76.41	34	Kauri Cliffs MATAURI BAY, NEW ZEALAND DAVID HARMAN, 2000	59.68
10	NEW SOUTH WALES LA PEROUSE, AUSTRALIA ALISTER MACKENZIE/ERIC APPERLY, 1947	76.29	35	Abiko ABIKO, JAPAN ROKURO & SHIRO AKABOSHI, 1931; BRIAN SILVA/KYE GOALBY, 2013	58.75
11	Cape Kidnappers TE AWANGA, NEW ZEALAND TOM DOAK, 2004	76.25	36	Lake Karrinyup KARRINYUP, AUSTRALIA ALEX RUSSELL, 1928; MIKE CLAYTON, 2007	57.08
12	The Club at Nine Bridges JEJU ISLAND, SOUTH KOREA RON FREAM/DAVID DALE, 2001	75.12	37	Whistling Rock (Temple/Cocoon) CHUNCHEON, SOUTH KOREA TED ROBINSON JR., 2011; ERIC IVERSON, 2017	56.96
13	Shanqin Bay HAINAN, CHINA BILL COORE/BEN CRENSHAW, 2012	75.03	38	Ayodhya BOH TALO, THAILAND THOMSON & PERRETT, 2007; PITAK INTRAWITYANUNT, 2012	56.67
14	South Cape Owners Club NAMHAE-GUN, SOUTH KOREA KYLE PHILLIPS, 2013	74.97	39	Ocean Dunes KING ISLAND, AUSTRALIA GRAEME GRANT, 2016	56.58
15	Cape Wickham KING ISLAND, AUSTRALIA MIKE DEVRIES/DARIUS OLIVER, 2015	74.74	40	Osaka MISAKI, JAPAN OSAMU UEDA, 1937	56.43
16	Barnbogle Lost Farm BRIDPORT, AUSTRALIA BILL COORE/BEN CRENSHAW, 2010	73.05	41	Woodlands MORDIALLOC, AUSTRALIA J.D.H. SCOTT, 1919	55.71
17	Paraparaumu Beach PARAPARAUMU BEACH, NEW ZEALAND ALEX RUSSELL, 1949	71.89	42	Mission Hills (Blackstone) HAIKOU, CHINA BRIAN CURLEY, 2010	55.56
18	Ellerston HUNTER VALLEY, AUSTRALIA GREG NORMAN/BOB HARRISON, 2001	71.56	43	Kooyonga LOCKLEYS, AUSTRALIA HERBERT RYMILL, 1923; NEIL CRAFTER/PAUL MOGFORD, 2012	55.45
19	Tokyo SAYAMA CITY, JAPAN KOMYO OHTANI, 1940; GIL HANSE, 2018	71.10	44	Yarra Yarra BENTLEIGH, AUSTRALIA ALEX RUSSELL, 1929; TOM DOAK, 2021	55.20
20	Royal Adelaide ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA H. RYMILL/C. GARDNER, 1906; ALISTER MACKENZIE, 1926	69.62	45	Nikko NIKKO, JAPAN SEIICHI INOUE, 1955; TAIZO KAWATA, 2001	55.00
21	Naruo KAWANISHI, JAPAN JOE CRANE/HARRY CRANE/BERTIE CRANE, 1930; C.H. ALISON, 1931	69.37	46	Peninsula Kingswood (South) FRANKSTON, AUSTRALIA SLOAN MORPETH, 1965; OGILVY CLAYTON COCKING & MEAD, 2018	54.17
22	Peninsula Kingswood (North) FRANKSTON, AUSTRALIA SLOAN MORPETH, 1965; OGILVY CLAYTON COCKING & MEAD, 2018	69.33	47	Stonehill SAM KHOK, THAILAND KYLE PHILLIPS, 2022	54.04
23	Himalayan POKHARA, NEPAL R.B. GURUNG, 1994	68.12	48	Commonwealth OAKLEIGH SOUTH, AUSTRALIA SAM BENNETT, 1921; CHARLES LANE, 1927; SLOAN MORPETH, 1938	53.65
24	St. Andrews Beach ST. ANDREWS BEACH, AUSTRALIA TOM DOAK/MIKE CLAYTON, 2004	68.10	49	FLC Quang Binh (Forest Dunes) HAI NINH, VIETNAM BRIAN CURLEY, 2018	53.54
25	The National (Moonah) CAPE SCHANCK, AUSTRALIA GREG NORMAN/BOB HARRISON, 2000	66.46	50	Pine Beach (Pine/Beach) HAENAM, SOUTH KOREA G.R. BAIRD/DAVID DALE, 2009	53.33

Figs. 82-83: Gary Lisbon; Nate Gardner; Taku Miyamoto; Pgs. 84-85: Joann Dost; Nick Wall; Brian Curley; Previous page: Gary Lisbon

RANK	COURSE NAME, LOCATION ARCHITECT, YEAR	AVERAGE SCORE	RANK	COURSE NAME, LOCATION ARCHITECT, YEAR	AVERAGE SCORE
51	Ballyshear TAMBON BANG BO, THAILAND GIL HANSE, 2022	53.00	77	Victoria DIGANA, SRI LANKA DONALD STEEL/MARTIN EBERT, 1999	47.50
52	Titirangi AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND ALISTER MACKENZIE, 1927	52.83	78	The National (Old) CAPE SCHANCK, AUSTRALIA ROBERT TRENT JONES JR., 1988	47.11
53	Sentosa (Serapong) SINGAPORE, SINGAPORE RONALD FREAM, 1982	52.52	79	The Dunes RYE, AUSTRALIA TONY CASHMORE, 1995	47.08
54	Kinloch KINLOCH, NEW ZEALAND JACK NICKLAUS, 2007	52.50	80	Hokkaido Classic ABIRA, JAPAN JACK NICKLAUS, 1991	47.00
55	FLC Quy Nhon (Ocean-Nicklaus) BINH DINH, VIETNAM JACK NICKLAUS, 2016	51.67	81	13th Beach (Beach) BARWON HEADS, AUSTRALIA TONY CASHMORE, 2001	46.75
56	Jack's Point QUEENSTOWN, NEW ZEALAND JOHN DARBY, 2008	51.64	82	Waverley WAVERLEY, NEW ZEALAND ERNIE SOUTHERDEN, 1965	46.63
57	The Bluffs Grand at Ho Tram BA RIA-VUNG TAU, VIETNAM GREG NORMAN, 2010	51.59	83	Cathedral Lodge THORNTON, AUSTRALIA GREG NORMAN, 2017	46.42
58	Barwon Heads BARWON HEADS, AUSTRALIA VICTOR EAST, 1921; NEIL CRAFTER/ PAUL MOGFORD, 2005	51.25	84	Lonsdale Links POINT LONSDALE, AUSTRALIA OGILVY COCKING & MEAD, 2020	46.27
59	BRG Da Nang (Nicklaus) DA NANG, VIETNAM JACK NICKLAUS, 2020	50.58	85	Kasumigaseki (West) KAWAGOE, JAPAN KINYA FUJITA/SEIICHI INOUE, 1932; TAIZO KAWATA, 1994	46.25
60	Royal Canberra YARRALUMLA, AUSTRALIA JOHN HARRIS, 1961; OGILVY CLAYTON COCKING & MEAD, 2016	50.56	86	Saujana (Palm) PETALING JAYA, MALAYSIA RON FREAM, 1986	46.01
61	Dunes at Shenzhou East WANNING, CHINA TOM WEISKOPF/PHIL SMITH, 2012	50.18	87	Laguna Lang Co THUA THIEN HUE, VIETNAM NICK FALDO, 2013	45.71
62	Grange (West) GRANGE, AUSTRALIA HERBERT RYMILL, 1927; VERN MORCOM, 1965; MIKE CLAYTON, 2008	50.16	88	Haesley Nine Bridges YEOJU-GUN, SOUTH KOREA DAVID DALE, 2009	45.59
63	Mission Hills (Hainan Lava Fields) HAIKOU, HAINAN, CHINA BRIAN CURLEY, 2011	50.15	89	Dunes at Shenzhou West WANNING, CHINA TOM WEISKOPF/PHIL SMITH, 2010	45.56
64	Lake Malaren (Masters) SHANGHAI, CHINA JACK NICKLAUS, 2011	50.12	90	Blue Canyon (Canyon) TAMBON MAI KHAO, THAILAND YOSHIKAZU KATO, 1991	45.38
65	Jagorawi (Old) GUNUNG PUTRI, INDONESIA THOMSON & WOLVERIDGE, 1979	49.99	91	Royal Hong Kong (Composite) SHEUNG SHUI, CHINA EDEN: L.S. GREENHILL, 1931; JOHN HOPKINS/PETER THOMSON, 1968; NEW: JOHN HOPKINS/PETER THOMPSON/ MICHAEL WOLVERIDGE, 1970	45.31
66	Shanghai Links SHANGHAI, CHINA JACK NICKLAUS, 1999	49.93	92	Glenelg NOVAR GARDENS, AUSTRALIA HERBERT RYMILL, 1927; VERN MORCOM, 1954; NEIL CRAFTER/BOB TUOHY, 1998	45.05
67	Koga KOGA, JAPAN OSAMU UEDA, 1953; SHOICHI SUZUKI, 1996; KO TANIHIRA, 2005	49.87	93	Port Fairy PORT FAIRY, AUSTRALIA MEMBERS, 1963; KEVIN HARTLEY, 1985; MIKE CLAYTON, 2002	44.98
68	Oarai OARAI, JAPAN SEIICHI INOUE, 1953	49.84	94	Nicklaus Club Beijing BEIJING, CHINA JACK NICKLAUS, 2014	44.91
69	Arrowtown ARROWTOWN, NEW ZEALAND REG ROMANS/B.V. RIGHT, 1936; B.V. RIGHT, 1971	49.77	95	Royal Queensland BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA CARNEGIE CLARK, 1921; MIKE CLAYTON, 2005	44.88
70	Shimonoseki AHIMONOSEKI, JAPAN OSAMU UEDA, 1956	49.68	96	The Australian ROSEBERY, AUSTRALIA JACK NICKLAUS, 1976, 2013	44.61
71	FLC Quang Binh (Ocean Dunes) HAI NINH, VIETNAM BRIAN CURLEY, 2019	49.61	97	Anyang GUNPO-SI, SOUTH KOREA CHOHEI MIYAZAWA, 1968; ROBERT TRENT JONES, JR., 1997	44.27
72	Myotha National SAGAING, MYANMAR LEE SCHMIDT/BRIAN CURLEY, 2018	49.55	98	Joondalup (Quarry/Dune) CONNOLLY, AUSTRALIA ROBERT TRENT JONES JR., 1985	43.93
73	Stone Valley HAI NINH, VIETNAM BRIAN CURLEY, 2018	49.15	99	Siam (Old) TAMBON PONG, THAILAND ICHISUKE IZUMI, 1971; LEE SCHMIDT, 2007	43.79
74	Jack Nicklaus GC INCHEON, SOUTH KOREA JACK NICKLAUS, 2010	48.18	100	Portsea PORTSEA, AUSTRALIA JOCK YOUNG, 1926; SLOAN MORPETH/JACK HOWARD, 1960; MIKE CLAYTON, 2000	43.76
75	The Lakes EASTLAKES, AUSTRALIA VON HAGGE/BRUCE DEVLIN, 1968; MIKE CLAYTON, 2007	47.78			
76	Amata Spring TAMBON NONG MAI DAENG, THAILAND LEE SCHMIDT/BRIAN CURLEY, 2005	47.73			