

# NEW ZEALAND'S TOP 25 COURSES

New Zealand is home to more than 400 golf courses, which is the highest number per capita in the world.

Just like the landscape, the range of courses is diverse and the locations are among some of the world's most memorable with snowy mountain ranges, glassy lakes and cliff-top ocean views often providing stunning backdrops.

From traditional regional gems like Poverty Bay, New Plymouth and Oreti Sands to world-renowned courses including Cape Kidnappers, Kinloch, The Hills, Jack's Point and Kauri Cliffs, all offering a smorgasbord of golfing experiences.

*Golf Australia* editor Brendan James has travelled the length and breadth of New Zealand in recent times, compiling stories for this magazine as well as researching his book, *120 Great Golf Courses of Australia And New Zealand*. From the Karikari Peninsula in the north, to Invercargill in the south, he has visited nearly 50 Kiwi courses and here he presents his list of the top-25 courses in the 'Shaky Isles'.

"In putting the list together I used the same criteria we use for ranking Australian courses – design is the primary focus, then conditioning and the overall experience," James said. "I'm not suggesting this is the definitive list of New Zealand courses. It is a subjective, but unbiased, list based on my observations from several visits to New Zealand and does vary from what has been compiled previously by the Kiwis (you can see that list on page 116).

"It is the first time an Australian golf magazine has presented such an extensive ranking of New Zealand courses. But, given the increasing number of golfers travelling across the Tasman to play golf, the time seemed right to present a ranking of the courses every visiting Aussie should consider putting on their itinerary."

Enjoy!



## 1 CAPE KIDNAPPERS

• Hawkes Bay, North Island • Tom Doak (2004) • 6,510 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$328 (until Sept 30, 2012),  
**CONTACT:** +64 6 873 1018,  
[www.capekidnappers.com](http://www.capekidnappers.com)

**COMMENT:** Cape Kidnappers is one of the most memorable and spectacular courses built anywhere in the world during the past 50 years. Created by designer Tom Doak (who is also responsible for Barnbougle Dunes in Tasmania), Cape Kidnappers

is not a true links layout but its position on high cliffs above the sea still provides seaside golf at its very best.

Faced with having to route the course along, and across, fingers of land surrounded by jagged cliffs that tower 500 feet above the Pacific Ocean, Doak's minimalist creation is not only playable but a whole lot of fun to play. ▶



**2 KINLOCH**  
 • Taupo, North Island • Jack Nicklaus (2007) • 6,734 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$235 (until Oct 31, 2012).  
**CONTACT:** +64 7 3778 484,  
 www.kinloch-golf.com  
**COMMENT:** Jack Nicklaus has been designing golf courses for more than four decades, with nearly 280 courses across 34 countries in his portfolio. Kinloch surely must rate as some of his best work. With Kinloch, Nicklaus aimed to create a Scottish links. The bunkering is rugged

and varies greatly in shape, depth and size, while the rolling fairways of the front nine become more dramatic in their movement on the inward half. New Zealand's most successful player and 1963 Open Champion, Sir Bob Charles, recently visited the course for the first time and commented: "For those unable to play the great links courses of Scotland, Kinloch compares with the best of them." I agree.



**3 PARAPARAUMU BEACH GC**  
 • Paraparaumu, North Island • Alex Russell (1949) • 6,014 metres, par-71

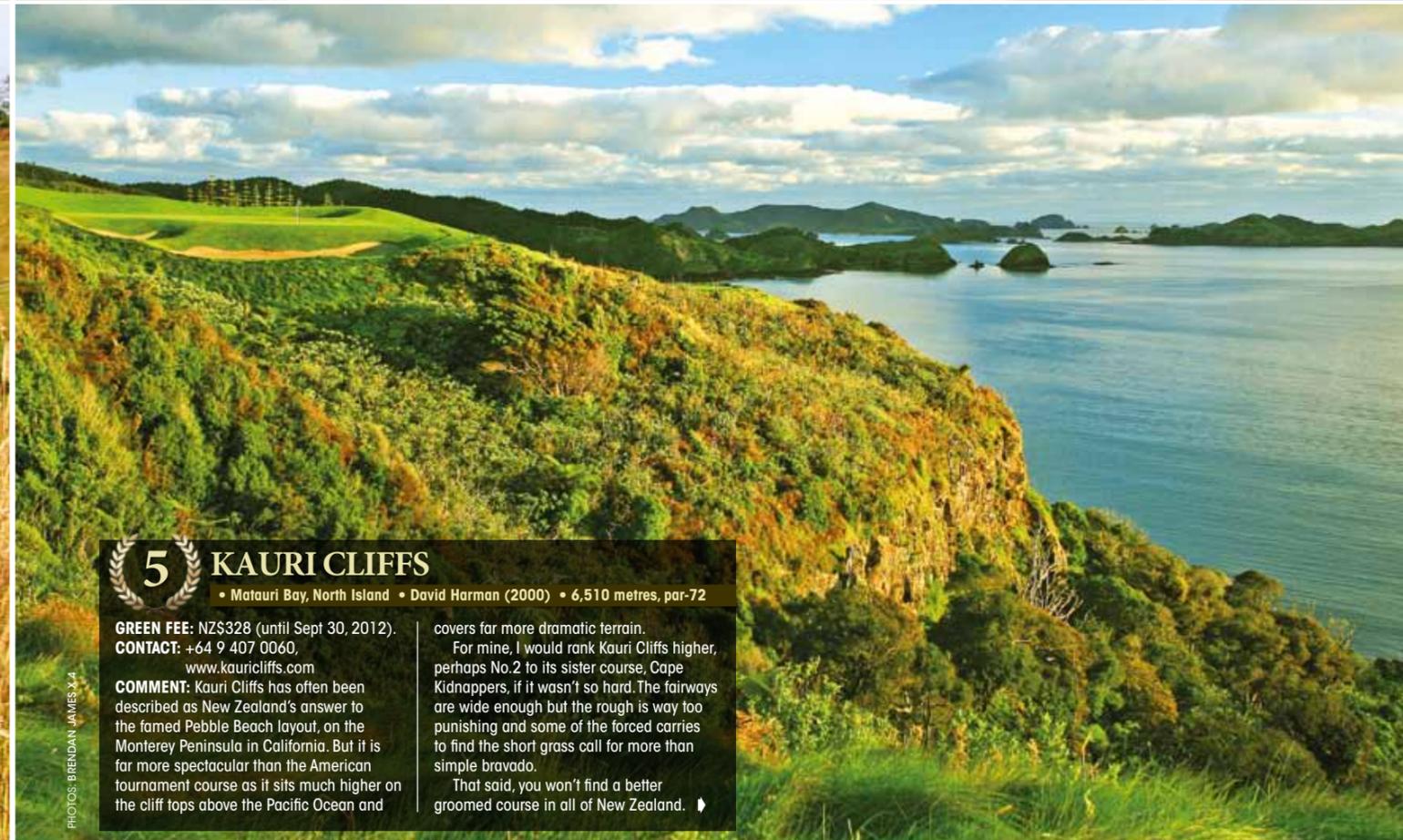
**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$150.  
**CONTACT:** +64 4 902 8200,  
 www.paraparaumu-beach-golf-club.co.nz  
**COMMENT:** Superior presentation and changes to the set up of Paraparaumu Beach in recent years has seen it recapture the links character and best elements of Russell's design. Course superintendent Leo Barber has overseen the set up changes with green surrounds

now being closely shaved to place a premium on greater accuracy on approach shots. These tight-cropped areas drop steeply off the edge of elevated greens that now play firm and fast, just like the fairways. Several deep bunkers across the course have been revetted and modelled on the most treacherous of the St Andrews bunkers and are the most formidable of hazards.

**4 JACK'S POINT**  
 • Queenstown, South Island • John Darby (2009) • 6,388 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$175  
 (closed June 1 to August 31).  
**CONTACT:** +64 3 450 2050,  
 www.jackspoint.com  
**COMMENT:** Wedged between the 2,300-metre high Remarkables mountain range and the cliff tops above picturesque Lake Wakatipu, Jack's Point is a spectacular golf course set in equally spectacular surrounds.

The layout covers a rugged terrain dotted with large alpine boulders and rocky outcrops peaking through the slopes of mounds and steep banks. It is testament to Darby's work that he could create such a playable and enjoyable layout without altering too much of the wild character this site obviously offered when it was just a blank canvas of alpine landscape.



**5 KAURI CLIFFS**  
 • Matauri Bay, North Island • David Harman (2000) • 6,510 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$328 (until Sept 30, 2012).  
**CONTACT:** +64 9 407 0060,  
 www.kauricliffs.com  
**COMMENT:** Kauri Cliffs has often been described as New Zealand's answer to the famed Pebble Beach layout, on the Monterey Peninsula in California. But it is far more spectacular than the American tournament course as it sits much higher on the cliff tops above the Pacific Ocean and

covers far more dramatic terrain. For mine, I would rank Kauri Cliffs higher, perhaps No.2 to its sister course, Cape Kidnappers, if it wasn't so hard. The fairways are wide enough but the rough is way too punishing and some of the forced carries to find the short grass call for more than simple bravado. That said, you won't find a better groomed course in all of New Zealand. ▶

PHOTOS: BRENDAN JAMES SA



## 6 WAIRAKEI GOLF & SANCTUARY

• Taupo, North Island • Commander John Harris, Peter Thomson & Mike Wolveridge (1970)  
• 6,444 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$150 (must be a member of an Australian golf club).

**CONTACT:** +64 7 374 8152

[www.wairakeigolfcourse.co.nz](http://www.wairakeigolfcourse.co.nz)

**COMMENT:** After several years under Japanese ownership, Wairakei was sold to a syndicate of Kiwi businessmen back in 1997 and the course has gone from strength-to-strength ever since. Thomson and Wolveridge were asked to remodel the course the way they had originally planned, which included adding new bunkers and turning ugly grassed gullies into the water hazards they were meant to be.

Set in a valley surrounded by pine forest-covered mountains, the layout, which also doubles as a wildlife sanctuary, is immaculately presented and complements a superb design across varied and interesting terrain.



## 7 THE HILLS GC

• Arrowtown, South Island • John Darby (2007)  
• 6,596 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** Available on tee time request.

**CONTACT:** +64 3 409 8290, [www.thehills.co.nz](http://www.thehills.co.nz)

**COMMENT:** The Hills is an expansive privately-owned layout set in a glacial valley with stunning mountain ranges on three sides creating a beautifully natural amphitheatre.

The breathtaking scenery aside, The Hills offers a memorable golf experience as rolling terrain and gentle doglegging holes – punctuated by smart bunkering and the occasional pond – give way to dramatic elevation changes and formidable holes late in the round. The closing six holes cover the most turbulent ground and, therefore, offer the most exhilarating moments in a round. They, alone, are worth the high asking price to play here.



## 8 PEGASUS GOLF & SPORTS CLUB

• Christchurch, South Island • Kristine Kerr (2009) • 6,324 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$90.

**CONTACT:** +64 3 920 3300,

[www.pegasusgolfcourse.co.nz](http://www.pegasusgolfcourse.co.nz)

**COMMENT:** It's not often you get a touring professional offering unsolicited compliments about golf courses but Australian touring pro Lindsey Wright did just that during an interview with this magazine recently.

"Pegasus is beautifully presented but it's

the kind of course where you have to really think about your playing options, which I really like." Wright said of the venue for her 2012 Women's New Zealand Open victory.

I have to agree with her. Pegasus is an impressive newcomer to the New Zealand golf scene and after two growing seasons it is offering the kind of playing surfaces you might expect at a course where the green fee is twice the price.

## 9 MILLBROOK RESORT (CORONET/ARROW COURSE)

• Queenstown, South Island  
• Sir Bob Charles & John Darby (1993); Greg Turner & Scott Macpherson (2010) • 6,362 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$65 (low season); \$145 (shoulder season); \$180 (high season).

**CONTACT:** +64 3 441 7010, [www.millbrook.co.nz](http://www.millbrook.co.nz)

**COMMENT:** Millbrook is laid out across 'Lord Of The Rings' country and boasts 27 holes scattered throughout the resort. The new nine, named after the mountain peak that shadows the course, was designed by former Tour player Greg Turner and has won wide acclaim in its first two years. Turner also oversaw the redesign of several holes on the Arrow nine of the original Charles/Darby layout, and these blend quite well with his Coronet routing of holes, which is first class.

On Coronet, Turner left a lot of the landscape untouched and incorporated rocky outcrops and meandering streams into his creation. The sequence of holes from the par-5 6th to the dogleg right 9th, is one of the most enjoyable on the South Island.



## 10 TITIRANGI GOLF CLUB

• Auckland, North Island  
• Dr Alister MacKenzie (1927); Chris Pitman (1998-2009) • 6,026 metres, par-70

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$150; \$75 (Australian golf club members).

**CONTACT:** +64 9 8275749, [www.titirangigolf.co.nz](http://www.titirangigolf.co.nz)

**COMMENT:** Nearly 70 years after Alister MacKenzie created Titirangi, it was overgrown and rundown.

Designer Chris Pitman was then commissioned to remodel the layout and over an 11-year period, and using MacKenzie's original sketches, he brought the course back to the way the Good Doctor had foreseen it.

Pitman did not change the routing of the green sites. The major changes came in the form of modifying greens and bunkers as well as the removal of overgrown and ageing pine trees that intruded onto the playing lines. The result is a fine layout that really punches above its weight in terms of challenges during a round.

Titirangi rounds out the top-10 here because it is a course every golfer, no matter how good or bad, will find fun to play.



## 11 ROYAL AUCKLAND GC

• Auckland, North Island  
• F.G Hood (1910); Peter Thomson (1980 and ongoing)  
• 6,206 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** Private club. Member's guests and reciprocal rights holders only.

**CONTACT:** +64 9 276 6149, [www.aucklandgolfclub.co.nz](http://www.aucklandgolfclub.co.nz)

**COMMENT:** Long stands of tall pine trees dominate much of the well-manicured rolling landscape at Royal Auckland GC, which has been significantly changed since 2004, the year after it last hosted the New Zealand Open. Most of the Poa Annua grass greens have since been reshaped and each fairway converted to couch grass. All of the bunkers were rebuilt in 2008.

Royal Auckland's strong point, for mine, is the quality of its short holes. The 103-metre par-3 10th and the 249-metre par-4 11th are classically-designed offerings that appear to be a push over on the scorecard but are far from it.



12

**CARRINGTON RESORT**

- Karikari Peninsula, North Island
- Matt Dye (2003) • 6,417 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$135.

**CONTACT:** +64 9 408 7222,

[www.heritagehotels.co.nz/carrington-resort](http://www.heritagehotels.co.nz/carrington-resort)

**COMMENT:** The third-generation member of the world acclaimed Dye family of golf course designers, Matt Dye created a gem on the Karikari Peninsula, which probably doesn't receive the acclaim that it should.

The course lies on wonderful golfing terrain that twists and turns up, down and around the dunes that lie beneath the immaculately presented playing surfaces.

I played this course twice in a day, in similar conditions, and wasn't faced with the same shot from one round to the other. Instead, each hole presented a variety of playing options, which says something about the quality of the design.



13

**GULF HARBOUR COUNTRY CLUB**

- Whangaparaoa Peninsula, North Island
- Robert Trent Jones Jr (1997)
- 6,409 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$180; \$115 (Australian golf club members).

**CONTACT:** +64 9 428 1380,

[www.gulflharbourcountryclub.co.nz](http://www.gulflharbourcountryclub.co.nz)

**COMMENT:** It is only three years ago that it looked like Gulf Harbour might be forced to close its doors for good as the club went into receivership. But a member-led buyout of the club from the receivers was successful and today the club is flourishing again.

Gulf Harbour is a quality Jones design that climaxes late in the round at the sharp dogleg right par-4 16th hole, where the sloping fairway is bordered by cliffs to the right. If you like Jones' work in Australia (Joondalup, Meadow Springs, Hyatt Cooloom and The National) you will certainly enjoy Gulf Harbour.



14

**CLEARWATER GOLF CLUB**

- Christchurch, South Island
- John Darby and Sir Bob Charles (2002)
- 6,526 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$135; \$80 (Australian golf club members).

**CONTACT:** +64 3 360 2146, [www.clearwatergolf.co.nz](http://www.clearwatergolf.co.nz)

**COMMENT:** Hosting professional golf tournaments was never far from the minds of the designers as they stretched this layout to 6,526 metres across relatively flat terrain and excavated ten man-made lakes to use the fill in creating a better landscape profile while adding watery hazards to the line of play.

Since opening a decade ago, the course has hosted the New Zealand PGA and is the current home of the New Zealand Open.

Water and wind are the two major influences to play at Clearwater. To that end, the fairways are generously wide and the greens are large with subtle undulations.



15

**CHRISTCHURCH GOLF CLUB**

- Christchurch, South Island
- Founding members (1900 & 1910); Peter Thomson & Mike Wolveridge (1993) • 6,309 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$150.

**CONTACT:** +64 3 385 9506, [www.christchurchgolf.co.nz](http://www.christchurchgolf.co.nz)

**COMMENT:** Christchurch Golf Club is the second oldest in New Zealand, dating back to 1873, and has been on the present site in various forms since 1900.

The most recent major changes to the layout came in the '90s when Thomson and Wolveridge remodelled bunkering and rebuilt the 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th holes.

The course is still recovering from damage caused by the earthquake that hit Christchurch in February last year, when seven holes suffered liquefaction and part of the 85-year-old clubhouse collapsed. That said, the home course of Sir Bob Charles is fighting back and the layout remains one of the best tests of golf in the country.



16

**ARROWTOWN GOLF CLUB**

- Arrowtown, South Island • B.V Wright, Reg Romans (1936); B.V Wright (1971) • 5,409 metres, par-71

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$65.

**CONTACT:** +64 3 442 1719, [www.arrowtowngolf.co.nz](http://www.arrowtowngolf.co.nz)

**COMMENT:** Arrowtown is an amazing layout that is unlike any course appearing on this list. There are no bunkers on this course ... it doesn't need them because its equivalent hazard are rocks. Big rocks, small rocks and schist outcrops that have been beautifully incorporated into the design of many holes are what make this layout extraordinary.

This course that can be easily enjoyed by every golfer – professional, amateur, young, old, man or woman. The landscape is dramatic and memorable and the golf at Arrowtown is no different.

PHOTOS: BRENDAN JAMES X 4; SUPPLIED (CHRISTCHURCH)



## 17 HASTINGS GOLF CLUB

- Bridge Pa, South Island
- Founding members (1898, 1912); Members (1970).
- 6,281 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$65.

**CONTACT:** +64 6 879 7206, [www.hastingsgolfclub.co.nz](http://www.hastingsgolfclub.co.nz)

**COMMENT:** More commonly known as Bridge Pa, Hastings is widely regarded as one of the best presented layouts in NZ. Unlike most of the courses alongside in this ranking, it doesn't cover a dramatic landscape or have a breathtaking backdrop. But Hastings' tree-lined holes dogleg left and right across easy-walking terrain with relatively flat greens offering subtle breaks, which is thankful as the putting surfaces are generally slick here.

The short par-4s here are superb, with the 331-metre 15th the best of them, where the tee shot needs to be threaded through a long chute to find the fairway and leave an approach to a two-tiered, elevated green.



## 18 NEW PLYMOUTH (NGAMOTU) GC

- New Plymouth, North Island
- Founding members (1913); C.H Redhead (1933).
- 6,086 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$60.

**CONTACT:** +64 6 755 1349, [www.newplymouthgolf.co.nz](http://www.newplymouthgolf.co.nz)

**COMMENT:** Routed in two loops away from the clubhouse toward the ocean, New Plymouth offers a mix of tree-lined fairways and links-like holes.

While much of the layout dates back to Redhead's design from the early '30s, all the greens and some holes have been remodelled at different stages over the decades. The highlight of any round, for mine, is the quality of the par-3s, which not only vary in length but they also play in differing directions. This places a premium on judging the ever-present wind and making a correct club selection. The 186-metre 12th hole is the best of them with bunkers on both sides of a putting surface cut into the side of a hill.



## 19 ROYAL WELLINGTON GC

- Heretaunga, North Island
- Founding members (1908); Sir Bob Charles (1972); Greg Turner & Scott Macpherson (2011 & ongoing).
- 6,117 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$150.

**CONTACT:** +64 4 528 4590, [www.rwgc.co.nz](http://www.rwgc.co.nz)

**COMMENT:** While the club dates back to 1895, golf has been played on the current site since 1908. But its second major change in a century is now underway.

The Turner / Macpherson design team is now in the middle of the first phase of a dramatic reconstruction of the Royal Wellington layout, which is expected to take three years to complete. The work will see all greens, tees and bunkers rebuilt while some length will be added to the course. The team says the course will feel new as some holes have been reversed, while others are part of the existing layout.

Given the previous works by Turner / Macpherson, you can expect Royal Wellington will rank much higher in the future.

## 20 ORETI SANDS LINKS

- Invercargill, South Island
- Sloan Morpeth (1971); Greg Turner & Scott Macpherson (2009 & ongoing).
- 6,400 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$60.

**CONTACT:** +64 3 213 0208,

[www.nzgolfcourses.co.nz/users/web22\\_southland/index.htm](http://www.nzgolfcourses.co.nz/users/web22_southland/index.htm)

**COMMENT:** Oreti Sands is the home of the Southland Golf Club and like many modern links courses it takes a good GPS to find it. It is remote. In fact it's the world's southernmost links course.

Sloan Morpeth, who decades earlier completely redesigned Melbourne's Commonwealth course, surveyed the land in 1970 and provided a masterplan, which has since been modified by Turner / Macpherson with four excellent links holes added and several more remodelled.

Oreti Sands is a course prepared on a slim budget but there is no denying the quality of the interesting and challenging holes that appear one after another during a round.



## 21 MURIWAI GOLF CLUB

- Muriwai, North Island
- Harold Babbage (1956); John Bourke & Alex Glasgow (1996 & 2003).
- 6,186 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$50 (weekdays); \$65 (weekends).

**CONTACT:** +64 9 411 8454, [www.muriwaigolfclub.co.nz](http://www.muriwaigolfclub.co.nz)

**COMMENT:** Muriwai is a links course of two contrasting nines. The outward half is sparse, with wide fairways framed by long, wispy wild grasses.

The more undulating back nine features outcrops of ti-tree and long stands of pine trees that really narrow the fairways. Laid across sand dunes, the inward half is Muriwai at its best with pot bunkers, mounds and hollows dotting the landscape.

There is plenty to like about this links layout, which is raw and not much to look at from first glance but really delivers an enjoyable golfing experience.



## 22 HAMILTON GOLF CLUB

- Hamilton, North Island
- H.T Gillies, F.G Hood & Arthur Duncan (1913).
- 6,179 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$50.

**CONTACT:** +64 7 849 2069, www.standrews.co.nz

**COMMENT:** When the Hamilton course was first constructed nearly a century ago it may well have resembled a Scottish links course, given one of its creators was moved to name it St Andrews. Today, dozens of varieties of trees line every fairway and it more closely resembles an English heathland layout.

A highlight of the course comes early in the round at the 438-metre par-5 4th, which follows the edge of the Waikato River as it bends gradually from left-to-right and favours the player who approaches the dramatically tilted green from close to the river's edge.

'St Andrews' has really stood the test of time and its old world charm truly adds to the enjoyment.



## 23 POVERTY BAY GOLF CLUB

- Gisborne, North Island
- Founding members (1913).
- 6,115 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$45.

**CONTACT:** +64 6 867 4402, www.gisbornegolf.co.nz

**COMMENT:** While the club was formed in 1893, Poverty Bay moved to its current location in 1913 to play on what is known locally as the Awapuni links – a par-72 laid out over, and between, sand dunes and features several holes running parallel to the nearby beach.

Perhaps my favourite hole here is the 497-metre par-5 12th, which features out-of-bounds all down the right edge of the fairway and deep rough to the left. It is a genuine three-shooter with the green hidden behind a dense stand of pine trees and protected by bunkers.

In terms of value for money, Poverty Bay is not expensive (compared to other courses ranked here) but it punches well above its weight in presentation and the enjoyment it provides.

## ANOTHER LIST TO JUDGE

In 2011, New Zealand professional Andrew Whiley oversaw a ranking of Kiwi courses with a panel of 47 judges, including *Golf Australia* editor, Brendan James. That ranking appears below.

1. Kauri Cliffs	(22.87)
2. Wairakei Golf & Sanctuary	(21.73)
3. Kinloch	(21.26)
4. Cape Kidnappers	(21.14)
5. Paraparaumu Beach GC	(19.89)
6. Jack's Point	(19.49)
7. The Hills	(18.54)
8. Titirangi GC	(15.36)
9. Royal Auckland GC	(15.26)
10. Millbrook Resort	(14.34)
11. Clearwater GC Resort	(14.16)
12. Christchurch GC	(13.74)
13. Terrace Downs Resort	(13.46)
14. Muriwai GC	(13.1)
15. Hastings GC	(12.75)
16. The Lakes Resort	(12.48)
17. Pegasus Golf Resort	(12.27)
18. Royal Wellington GC	(12.05)
19. Gulf Harbour CC	(11.77)
20. Oreiti Sands Links	(11.53)
21. Chisholm Park	(11.13)
22. Rotorua GC	(10.67)
23. Wanganui GC	(10.06)
24. Arrowtown GC	(8.81)
25. Queenstown GC	(8.5)

## 24 QUEENSTOWN GOLF CLUB

- Queenstown, South Island
- Hylton Hensman & John Grant (1974).
- 6,103 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$95; \$85 (Australian club members).

**CONTACT:** +64 3 442 9169, www.queenstowngolf.co.nz

**COMMENT:** Keen golfer and millionaire businessman Hylton Hensman thought Queenstown needed a quality golf course and he found a spectacular piece of land on the Kelvin Peninsula, offering 360-degree views across Lake Wakatipu to Frankton, Queenstown and the Remarkables mountain range.

The picturesque location gives rise to plenty of memorable holes that wind across and over an undulating terrain where each shot is accompanied with a breathtaking view.

Keeping in mind this course was primarily built by Hensman and a farmer, neither with any course design experience, the quality of the holes here are first class.



## 25 TERRACE DOWNS RESORT

- Darfield, South Island
- David Cox & Sid Puddicombe (1993).
- 6,440 metres, par-72

**GREEN FEE:** NZ\$105 (Australian club members); \$70 (low season).

**CONTACT:** +64 3 318 6943, www.terracedowns.co.nz

**COMMENT:** Set against the stunning Southern Alps and impressive Mt Hutt, Terrace Downs offers everything you might imagine from a New Zealand high country resort.

The 6,440-metre layout is nestled on the edge of the Rakaia River Gorge, which adds to the postcard setting.

For mine, the one hole that stands above all others here is the 130-metre par-3 16th, which brings the gorge into play. Your tee shot needs to be fired across the edge of the gorge to the green, which lies just a few metres left of a 150-metre drop to the river below.

