

Nine Unsung—But Must-Play—Canadian Courses

Canadian Golf Traveller

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Alpine vistas, a towering forest of fir trees, and a glacial river set the stage at Canmore Golf and Curling Club. (Image: Canmore Golf and Curling Club)

From the forests of Newfoundland to the mountain valleys of British Columbia, a survey of unjustly overlooked golf courses offering bargain green fees, less crowded fairways and jaw-dropping scenery.

Of Canada's nearly 2,100 public courses, only about 25 enjoy national renown. These marquee layouts dominate the various course rankings, and golfers eagerly pay top dollar for the satisfaction of striking them off their must-play lists.

Yet, throughout our wildly varied golf landscape, there are courses just as gorgeous and brilliantly designed that go largely overlooked. Sometimes they're handicapped by isolated locations, making it difficult for golfers to get to them. When they are in popular destinations, glamorous new neighbours may have grabbed the spotlight by recruiting famous architects and spending lavishly on promotion.

“Part of the fun of being a golfer is discovering these underappreciated gems,” says top Canadian architect Doug Carrick. “One of the most spectacularly scenic projects I’ve ever worked on is Twin Rivers Golf Course in Newfoundland. But because it’s hidden away in Terra Nova National Park, a two-and-a-half hour drive from St. John’s, few golfers have heard of it.”

A significant advantage to playing lower profile courses, especially for golfers on tight budgets, is the bargain green fees they usually offer. The \$67 prime-time rate at Twin Rivers, for instance, is less than a third of what is demanded by the best-known public tracks.

Even in peak season, there’s almost never a problem booking a tee time at the nine courses described here. From the forests of Newfoundland to the mountains of British Columbia, the thrill of discovery awaits.

Twin Rivers Golf Course, Newfoundland



Two whitewater salmon rivers and the Atlantic shoreline define Twin Rivers Golf Course in Newfoundland. (Image: Twin Rivers Golf Course)

The remote splendor of its location is both the great strength of Newfoundland’s **Twin Rivers Golf Course** and the fatal flaw that has kept this dramatic

oceanfront layout from national prominence.

Situated at the southern end of **Terra Nova National Park**, 223 kilometres west of St. John’s, Twin Rivers boasts a wild and woolly natural setting rivaled by only a handful of Canadian courses. Two whitewater salmon rivers define a 6,546-yard layout that skirts the Atlantic Ocean before winding through a coniferous forest teeming with moose, bald eagles and other wildlife.

Designed by the late Robbie Robinson and Doug Carrick, who each contributed nine holes, Twin Rivers presents golfers with one idyllic vista after another. Especially unforgettable is the 18th, a 175-yard par three played through the mist rising above a waterfall to a small green nestled in the forest.

Eagle Creek, a short nine-hole course designed by Newfoundlander Robert Walsh, and the 82-room **Terra Nova Park Lodge** are also found on the property.

The Pines Resort Golf Course, Nova Scotia

Given Stanley Thompson's status as Canada's greatest golf architect, it's difficult to believe that his **Pines Resort Golf Course** in the Nova Scotia town of Digby once teetered on the brink of obscurity.

Owned by the provincial government, Thompson's now 82-year-old layout too often went begging for the funds needed to properly maintain a championship course. But a decade-long restoration has the Annapolis Valley beauty back on top of its game.

Designed in the classic style, with tight fairways and small, subtly undulating greens open at the front, the 6,222-yard parkland design places a premium on accuracy. One of the toughest par threes Thompson ever built is the 213-yard 14th hole, where swirling crosswinds can drop even well struck balls like lead.

Each hole at the Pines, just as at all Thompson's best courses, has an appearance and personality entirely its own.

Fairmont Le Manoir Richelieu Golf Club, Quebec

Spectacularly situated on cliffs overlooking the mighty St. Lawrence River, the 27-hole **Fairmont Le Manoir Richelieu Golf Club** is unknown to most golfers outside of Quebec because of its remote location 140 kilometres east of Quebec City in the ruggedly beautiful **Charlevoix** region.



Nine superb new holes have been added to the Fairmont Le Manoir Richelieu Golf Club. (Image: Fairmont Hotels)

Nine superb new holes, several of them affording commanding views of the river, were added several years ago during a \$14-million expansion, which also saw the restoration of the original 18-hole course and the opening of a new practice facility. Also added was a stunning cliff-top clubhouse, from which diners can sometimes view whales frolicking in the water far below.

Nearby is the **Fairmont Le Manoir Richelieu**, a chateau-style grand hotel opened in 1929 that offers 405 guest rooms and a lively casino.

South Muskoka Golf and Curling Club, Ontario

Located in the heart of Ontario's popular **Muskoka Lakes** tourist district, **South Muskoka Golf and Curling Club** has long been overshadowed by a growing local lineup of high-end courses by Tom McBroom, Doug Carrick, Ron Garl, Nick Faldo and other top architects.

But the recently restored Robbie Robinson valley design in the town of Bracebridge is nobody's poor relation. Robinson, who began his career in 1929 as an assistant to the legendary Stanley Thompson, built drama and challenge with a series of sharp doglegs through mature forests. Distance off the tee is secondary to pinpoint accuracy throughout a tricky 6,427-yard layout featuring nasty bunkers and wearying uphill climbs.

By far South Muskoka's most difficult hole is the 16th, a par four featuring a long approach over a ball-hungry gully to a tiered green.

Whitewater Golf Club, Ontario



Whitewater Golf Club is routed through and around dramatic plateaus, ravines and wetlands. (Image: Whitewater Golf Club)

Architect Tom McBroom's **Whitewater Golf Club** perfectly captures the wild beauty of a Northern Ontario river valley with its rough-and-tumble routing through and around dramatic plateaus, steep cliffs, ravines and

wetlands.

McBroom makes strategic use of the Kaministiquia River throughout the 7,293-yard layout just west of Thunder Bay's city limits. Golfers get their first look at the river from the elevated tee of the par-four fourth hole, which doglegs sharply before a tricky approach to a green carved into the side of a ridge. But by far the most dramatic river hole — and surely one of Ontario's prettiest par threes — is the 13th, a nerve-rattling 176-yard shot from an elevated tee to a green set at the river's edge.

Moose, bear, deer and lynx are frequent visitors to a property whose impressive clubhouse is furnished with beaver pelts, paddles and other antiques recalling the area's fur-trading past.

The Links at Quarry Oaks, Manitoba

One of the most eclectic golf properties in Canada, [The Links at Quarry Oaks](#), 60 kilometres southeast of Winnipeg near the town of Steinbach, presents golfers with a choice of three nine-hole courses, each with its own unique flavour and appearance.

The Oak Nine, which opened together with the Quarry Nine in 1992, is a forgiving parkland-style design cut through stands of oak, poplars and aspens. The tougher Quarry Nine, which tumbles across the stark landscape of an abandoned quarry, features large waste areas, grass mounds and other links-style features. Opened in 1998, the Desert Nine, as the name suggests, offers even more waste areas and gravel ridges.

But perhaps the most unique feature of these three stunning prairie designs by Les Furber, who more than any other modern architect has put his stamp on golf in Western Canada, is the abundance of water. Five man-made lakes, covering 12 hectares, loom large on several memorable holes, including the Quarry Nine's sixth, a diabolical 184-yard par three with an island green.

Deer Valley Golf and Estates, Saskatchewan

Sometimes a single golf hole can capture the character of the game in a particular region of the country. One such iconic hole is the par-three second at the [Deer Valley Golf and Estates](#) course just north of Regina.

From the elevated back tee, golfers hit across snaking Wascana Creek into an unforgettable vista of valley dunes and stands of aspen against an endless northern sky.

Designed by Calgary-based ProGolf Design Ltd. and opened in 2001, the challenging yet always fair 6,777-yard layout rolls seamlessly through the beautiful Qu'Appelle Valley. Mature beyond its years, Deer Valley offers no tricks or gimmicks, just pure prairie golf.

Canmore Golf and Curling Club, Alberta

Alpine vistas, a meandering glacial river, towering forests of fir trees — [Canmore Golf and Curling Club](#) offers many of the same mountain golf experiences as the nearby Banff Springs and Stewart Creek courses at about half the cost.

Established in 1926, the club moved to its current location in the heart of booming Canmore in 1961, first as a nine-hole course before expanding to 18 holes in 1981.

At least two holes rank among the most scenic in the Alberta Rockies. At the par-four fifth, the surging Bow River runs the length of a fairway offering uninterrupted views of the snow-capped Rundle mountain range. Just as pretty is the eighth, a lush and secluded 172-yard par three requiring a precision tee shot over a tranquil pond.

Salmon Arm Golf Club, British Columbia



Salmon Arm Golf Club winds through roller-coaster terrain at the base of Mount Ida. (Image: Salmon Arm Golf Club)

Blessedly free of the fairway homes and condos often seen at B.C. courses, [Salmon Arm Golf Club](#) offers mountain golf at its unspoiled best.

Course management is the key on narrow pine tree-lined fairways that wind through roller-coaster terrain at the base of looming Mount Ida, just outside the town of Salmon Arm in the Thompson Okanagan region. Designed by Les Furber, the 6,738-yard layout offers jaw-dropping views of the Shuswap Mountains with every shot.

The sense of isolation is almost eerie as golfers stroll fairways cut through the boreal forest. Each hole is invisible from the next, and other golfers are glimpsed like phantoms through the branches.

Like all superior courses, Salmon Arm ends with a wallop. The 18th is a thrilling 504-yard par five, reachable in two for those with the nerve and skill to carry their approach shot over a large pond fronting a well-bunkered green.