

DESTINATION GREECE:
Costa Navarino

Costa Navarino is rapidly becoming a top global golfing destination, with sweeping views, world-class courses and a rich cultural landscape, drawing golfers from around the world.

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There are few places in the world that intrepid golfers won't find or travel to in pursuit of unique and exceptional golf experiences. From the remote corners of eastern Canada to our own King Island in Bass Strait, global golf can be summed up as: "If you build it, they will most definitely come."

Greece and golf, however, have not historically been names synonymous with each other. The climate has always been perfect for the game, but due to factors like culture, land, desire, and lifestyle, golf has enjoyed only a brief glimmer of recognition among the ancient land's residents.

Thankfully, this is a landscape that is slowly but surely changing from a global awareness perspective.

Many years ago, at the conclusion of a Greek island holiday, I sneaked in a round at the Glyfada Golf Club - site of the 1979 World Cup - on the 'Athens Riviera,' just

down the coast from the bustling city. At the time, you could literally count the number of 18-hole courses in Greece on a wood chopper's hand, numbering just four in total. With Temes' impressive development of the superb Costa Navarino Resort, it's encouraging to see that you now need at least both hands to count them.

And there could be no more spectacular location for Greece's rise on the global golf scene than this historic region on the south-west coast of the Peloponnese. The resort's first course opened in 2010, in this culturally significant area, with the Battle of Pylos taking place in Navarino Bay during the Peloponnesian Wars in 427 BC. In 1827, Greece's independence was won in the same waters with the Battle of Navarino, when Allied forces defeated Ottoman and Egyptian advances.

Dotted along the coast from Methoni in the south, in nearby Pylos, and beyond ▶



GOLFERS AT NAVARINO BAY ENJOY A CHALLENGING GAME WITH WATERFRONT HOLES AND DRAMATIC LANDSCAPES.



THE HILLS COURSE OFFERS BREATHTAKING PANORAMIC VIEWS OF NAVARINO BAY AND THE IONIAN SEA.



PYLOS HARBOUR IS A STUNNING BACKDROP TO THE BAY COURSE.

“THE ROBERT TRENT JONES JNR BAY COURSE OPENED FOR PLAY ON A PIECE OF LAND THAT TUMBLES UP, ACROSS AND DOWN THE INCLINE TO THE SHORES OF THE CRYSTAL-CLEAR WATERS OF THE BAY.”

are well-preserved remains of impressive castles, fortresses, and archaeological sites begging for exploration between rounds. Equally impressive are the natural waterways, stunning beaches like Voidokilia that beggar belief, and close proximity to inland waterfalls and the Nemea and Messenia wine regions.

As part of their vision to maximize the potential of the location and to grow the sport of golf in Greece, the developers enlisted the talents of a famed course designer and two giants of European golf to create three of the four courses currently in operation.

It all started back in 2010 with two-time Masters champion and Champions Tour legend Bernhard Langer's Dunes course. This is the most northerly of the resort's layouts, located near Romanos, beyond the Gialova Lagoon.

Just a year later, Robert Trent Jones Jr.'s Bay course opened for play on land that tumbles up, across, and down the incline to the shores of the crystal-clear waters of the bay. Some of the waterfront holes are among the most impressive across all the layouts. The course was one of two used to host the 2024 Costa Navarino Legends Tour Classic, to glowing reviews from the players.

Winner Clark Dennis raved, "It's probably the best venue the Legends Tour has been to since I've been on Tour, and that's eight years now." 2005 U.S. Open champion Michael Campbell echoed these sentiments, saying, "The destination and the facilities are just fantastic, and you look around and you just can't beat the beautiful views."

Even film star Bill Murray, who played in the pro-am, commented, "I have never been to any place like this... the owners take crazy good care of Costa Navarino, and the people of the region are so proud of it."

After a decade of operation, two courses became four when the creations of fellow two-time Masters champion José María Olazábal – The Hills and International Olympic Academy courses – opened just two years ago. Olazábal had an expanse of property perched high in the hills at his disposal, with panoramic views of the bay and unspoiled, rolling hills to the east.

Those familiar with Hamilton Island's ▶





VOIDOKILIA BEACH, ONE OF GREECE'S MOST BEAUTIFUL AND UNSPOILT STRETCHES.

stunning outlook over the Whitsunday Islands in Queensland would appreciate the similarities between the vistas across Navarino Bay and the Ionian Sea. Likewise, the scrub-brush surroundings remind of some elements of courses on the Mornington Peninsula, while sections of iron-rich soils recall Kalgoorlie.

The dazzling views from the two Olazábal courses and their sprawling practice and short-game facilities, some 500 meters above sea level, ensure the camera is close at hand – the 15th club – during every round.

Many of the holes are carved between low-scrub brush, across natural ravines, and framed by the ubiquitous olive trees for which the broader Kalamata region is universally renowned. The trees ensure Costa Navarino has an annual source of products sold under their own brand and used in the clubhouse and restaurant menus.

Purists will love that, from a playing perspective, bent-grass greens and plenty of short grass surrounds are featured on each course. Costa Navarino invested heavily in their own reservoirs and an eco-friendly approach to water usage, which has allowed them to maintain flawless playing surfaces despite the region's limited rainfall.

Visitors to Costa Navarino have a variety of accommodation options to choose from, including five-star partners such as the Mandarin Oriental, The Romanos – a Luxury Collection Resort, W Costa Navarino, and The Westin Resort Costa Navarino. Golfers staying in the surrounding towns and villages

can also book tee times to access each course.

However, no discussion about the success of Costa Navarino would be complete without acknowledging the heartwarming achievements in growing participation among locals from the wider Messenia region. From the opening year, a Golf Academy was established to offer tuition, opportunity, and exposure to the game for young residents. The academy has continued to build momentum year by year, currently engaging between 40-50 young people.

Many of its graduates are now members, employed in various roles across the Resort, and a number are forging paths to professional tours across Europe. The caddy master showing me around proudly pointed to a playing lesson being conducted on an adjoining fairway. Turns out the young professional administering the lesson, Kostantinos Kotsovos, is himself a graduate from the academy program, having started as a young child.

As expected, UK and European golfers have had this magical golfing destination on their radar for over a decade. And why wouldn't they? With short, direct flights into nearby Kalamata Airport or connections via Athens, the region is accessible. Each golf course, the putting green, and clubhouse buzz with players speaking a mix of different languages, all drawn together by the common love of the sport and the impossibly idyllic surroundings. It can only be a matter of time before golfers from further afield flock to experience this amazing destination. ●



THE NEARBY AND STUNNING NAVARINO BAY.

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THE COURSES AT COSTA NAVARINO ARE FRAMED BY OLIVE TREES, ICONIC TO THE REGION AND OFFERING A UNIQUE PLAYING EXPERIENCE.