

Sweet spots

With a stunning array of world-class courses and luxurious hotels, travelling golfers will feel right at home in Cairns, Charleston, Chengdu and Paris, writes **Michael Stoneman**

CAIRNS

While Cairns is renowned as the gateway to Australia's spectacular Great Barrier Reef – offering all manner of cruises, snorkelling trips and island escapes – the Tropical North Queensland city also boasts an excellent golf scene, with a plethora of top-class courses on its doorstep. Paradise Palms, located 20 minutes north of Cairns, is possibly the pick of the bunch. This tough championship layout was designed by Graham Marsh and Ross Watson, and first opened for play in 1990. With undulating fairways and large, testing greens – not to mention six large lakes and almost 100 sand traps – the course provides a stern examination of skills, while its bordering rainforest delivers a dramatic and unique backdrop to each of the memorable holes.

Thanks to an abundance of surrounding natural beauty, Cairns receives large numbers of visitors each year and is therefore well-equipped for tourists. The Shangri-La Hotel stands out among the

numerous luxury resort options thanks to its excellent location on the city's marina, with each of the property's 255 spacious rooms featuring a private balcony from which to enjoy the view.

Paradise Palms

Tel: +61 7 4059 9901
paradisepalms.com.au
Shangri-La Hotel,
The Marina, Cairns
 Tel: +61 7 4031 1411
shangri-la.com

CHENGDU

The ancient city of Chengdu, capital of China's Sichuan province, is one of the fastest growing urban areas in the world, with a population in excess of 10 million and an annual growth of more than 3%. The city's sports scene is expanding at a similarly impressive rate, with a new ATP Tennis Tour event hosted for the first time in October last year, and major table

tennis, snooker and horse racing events already part of Chengdu's annual sporting calendar. In 2011, the city's Luxehills International Country Club also played host to the European Tour's China Open, which was won by big-hitting Belgian Nicolas Colsaerts, and the course remains a big draw for any golfers visiting Chengdu. Designed by lead architect Mark Hollinger and open for play since 2005, the course sits within a luxury residential development, with upmarket houses linking many of the fairways. Water is in play on many of the holes, including three spectacular par-threes, which each require an accurate tee shot over a hazard, and the intimidating par-five 18th; a dogleg to the right that holes out on a picture-perfect island green.

For a convenient base, the Sofitel Wanda Chengdu luxury hotel is conveniently located in the centre of the city on the picturesque Jinjiang River, just 2km from the popular Chunxi Road shopping street, and 3km from the serene People's Park.

Luxehills International Country Club

Tel: +86 28 8568 6363
luxehillsgolf.com

Sofitel Wanda Chengdu

Tel: +86 28 6666 9999
sofitel.com

CHARLESTON

Bursting with Southern charm and hospitality, the historic city of Charleston is proving more popular with visitors than ever before, recently receiving the 'World's Best City' accolade from readers of *Travel + Leisure* magazine, and the number one small city destination in the US in the 2016 *Condé Nast Traveler* Readers' Choice Awards. With its waterfront setting, historic architecture, friendly locals and renowned cuisine, it's easy to see why Charleston is ►

Main: Paradise Palms in Cairns, Australia; a golfer's dream just a short iron from one of the world's natural wonders



attracting the buzz – and there's plenty for golfers to enjoy too. In an area boasting more than 24 famed courses, the most renowned are undoubtedly found on Kiawah Island, approximately 25 miles (40km) southwest of Charleston, which is widely hailed as one of the premier golf destinations in North America. The island features seven award-winning golf courses designed by the likes of Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player and Tom Fazio, as well as the Pete Dye masterpiece that is the Ocean Course. Home to the infamous 'War on the Shore' 1991 Ryder Cup, and the 2012 US PGA Championship, the 7,873-yard layout has the highest difficulty rating of all US courses, according to the United States Golf Association. With 10 holes running just a skewed iron from the Atlantic Ocean, and all 18 exposed to the brisk and unpredictable sea breeze, it's tough out there. For those that survive the challenge, the Wentworth Mansion is a grand historic hotel in downtown Charleston that exemplifies Southern splendour with Italian crystal chandeliers, hand-carved marble fireplaces, gracious hospitality and luxurious amenities.

Kiawah Island Golf Resort

Tel: +1 843 768 2121

kiawahresort.com

Wentworth Mansion

Tel: +1 877 912 2529

wentworthmansion.com

PARIS

France will host its first Ryder Cup in 2018, with the Albatros course at Le Golf National – on Paris' outskirts – staging the biennial battle between Europe and the USA. The 7,300-yard layout opened for play in 1990 and has hosted the European Tour's Open de France in all but two of the years since. Past champions include Graeme McDowell, Martin Kaymer, Miguel Ángel Jiménez and Colin Montgomerie. Since being awarded the Ryder Cup, Ross McMurray from European Golf Design has been recruited to oversee modifications to the course, including reworking the greens on the 1st and 16th

holes, rebunkering the 4th and 5th holes, and installing a water hazard at the front of the 11th green. The Hubert Chesneau and Robert von Hagge-designed course remains a firm but fair test, with slick greens, vast undulating fairways and numerous links-style bunkers. It is sure to provide a superb venue when the likes of Rory McIlroy and Patrick Reed resume their enthralling trans-Atlantic rivalry in 2018.

The course is approximately 45 minutes southwest of Paris, making it easily accessible from the French capital, where the Mandarin Oriental – in the city's fashionable 1st Arrondissement – provides a perfect base for any

Above: The daunting first fairway at the Kiawah Island Ocean Course **Below: A private view of Paris' skyline from the Mandarin Oriental**

purpose. The hotel's 98 opulent rooms combine chic modern style with art deco details and Oriental touches, with the luxurious suites also offering stunning views of the Eiffel Tower and the iconic Paris skyline from private balconies.

Le Golf National

Tel: +33 1 30 43 36 00

golf-national.com

Mandarin Oriental

Tel: +33 1 70 98 78 88

mandarinoriental.com

