

SHORT & SWEET

With so many championship and spectacular 18-hole courses dotted around South Africa, the lesser known 9-hole courses are sometimes overlooked

BY BEN KARPINSKI

Although quite literally smaller in offering, the character of some of South Africa's 9-hole courses are often larger than life in many ways. Something we are excited to unpack here for you this month, and do so via a selection of categories.

PICK OF THE BUNCH

Like all courses, there are simply those that stand out from the rest, those that lead the category and get people to take notice.

Bosch Hoek Golf and Lodge in the KZN Midlands and Kambaku Golf Club (main image) close to the Mozambique border on the Crocodile River are the two established front runners. Speak to anyone who has played either of these courses, and you will receive animated descriptions of both the quality of the courses and the unique settings which add to an incredible overall experience.

Mooinooi Golf Club is the only 9 holer to have hosted a Sunshine Tour event, offering a wonderful tree lined layout with superb greens just outside of Brits in the North West province. A true locals course, with a clubhouse experience that is worth the visit alone.

The Metropolitan Golf Club in Cape Town is a picture-perfect shorter format course with 14 greens which are adapted into an 18-hole experience. Starting from the original double story clubhouse which gives the club its celebrated identity, the course has been brilliantly redesigned since the building of the DHL Stadium for the 2010 Fifa World Cup. And with its location on the Atlantic Seaboard in Cape Town, peak summer rounds roll deeper into the evening than anywhere else in the country.



The Boschenmeer 9 holes – which essentially makes the Paarl Golf Club a 27 hole offering – isn't really seen as a 9-hole course. But if you were to consider it in isolation, it is a superb run of 9 holes that have to be considered among the best of the best category.

Newest to the list of 9 holes in SA, The Links Experience is Fancourt's own offering in this field of play. Picking up the pieces from the original Bramble Hill course, which closed in 2008, it is a terrific test for all levels of golfer. With tee boxes available to also make it a pure par-3 course, there are some simply breathtaking views on this layout and elaborate greens complexes to further add to its charm.





SMALL TOWN GEMS

The 9-hole courses around South Africa are often attached to small towns where resources may not be as abundant as they are in major centres.

The Cullinan Golf Club is a fine example of this. Taking pride of place in the famed old mining town where the Cullinan Diamond was discovered, this classic parkland course is a 'must play' if you are in the area, or via a small day trip from nearby Pretoria.

The Sabie Country Club is certainly not a course that gets a lot of airtime, but in the meandering mountain passes of Mpumalanga, it's a delightful offering in a crisp and scenic forest setting.

Another small-town gem, which in its own way has also become a coastal classic, is the Kleinmond Golf Club (below) – although technically a 10-hole course with the 1st and 12th only played once for those opting for 18-holes. The quintessential holiday course, or a place for a wonderful laid-back golf experience, you get ocean views and a selection of memorable holes winding through the local vegetation.

Sitting above one of the oldest towns in the Western Cape, the Swellendam Golf Club is a tree-lined layout with striking mountain views synonymous with the area. A small but dedicated team are the driving force behind this unique 9 holer, with terrific bentgrass greens providing playing surfaces you may not expect from such a rural setting.



UNIQUE AND MEMORABLE

There are many that can fit into this category, but two courses in particular deserve mention. Cathedral Peak Golf Club is famous for its majestic mountain views and superb variety of holes. Very much off the beaten track, but every bit worth the drive and experience once you are there.

Then to wrap things up it is no surprise that we include the Skukuza Golf Club in the Kruger National Park. Also known as as the 'wildest' and even 'most dangerous' course in the world, location aside it's a decent 9 hole layout that has recently seen some pleasing upgrades. When paired with some other small-town gems in the region, the growing appeal of Skukuza is fast making it a golf tour destination to consider.



EMBRACING CHANGING - ZWARTKOP

In 2023, the iconic old Zwartkop Country Club made the bold decision to reopen as a 9-hole golf course. After continued struggles against a rampant river and constant maintenance against annual flooding, it was a necessary call, but not one that was seen as a negative for the club.

Sure, the club has a storied history, having hosted the 1955 SA Open along with high profile exhibition matches back in the day. This change though didn't mean losing that, but more embracing the future opportunities for the club.

By going to 9 holes, they are able to maintain a consistent quality selection of holes for members and guests all year round. With the remaining areas of the course they have made it a haven for those looking to learn or improve their games. The expanded and user-friendly practice area flows brilliantly from the clubhouse area with a covered Toptrack Range powered by Trackman.

There are also now padel courts adjacent to the driving range, and even a frisbee golf layout and trail running routes, which makes the club's evolution all the more unique.

Golf and how people participate and engage with it continues to change. So perhaps there is more value nowadays in the '9 holer' in certain regions, and perhaps a reality that some clubs may need to consider in future like Zwartkop.