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The 6 Top Modern Golf Courses in Scotland

By Erik Matuszewski



Kingsbarns (Photo by Kevin Murray)

The game of golf, at least as we know it, was born on the links land of eastern Scotland over 500 years ago. While it's now played by tens of millions of golfers around the world, Scotland is still widely known as the home of golf. It is home to iconic Old Course at St Andrews and the R&A, the site of the first Open Championship back in 1860, and the birthplace of Old and Young Tom Morris.

It's still hard for me to believe that in all my golf travels, I've yet to make the pilgrimage to tee it up in Scotland. There's no question I want to play historic links layouts like St Andrews, Muirfield, North Berwick, Carnoustie, Royal Aberdeen and others. But during my research, I also found myself wondering about the modern Scottish courses I'd most like to play. With a wealth of courses dating back hundreds of years, I considered "modern" to be anything that was built and opened since 1970.

There are 537 golf facilities in Scotland, according to the National Golf Foundation's database, and approximately 90 of those were built within the past 50 years. There are some particularly good ones among them, especially those built in the past two decades or so that meld modern design touches and timeless Scottish architecture. These are my top to-dos among those relative newcomers:

Machrihanish Dunes (2009)

More than 100 years after Machrihanish Golf Club was laid out by Old Tom Morris, David McLay Kidd built Machrihanish Dunes on neighboring dunescape that shares the same breathtaking views of the Atlantic Ocean along Scotland's west coast. Flocks of sheep roam this rough-around-the-edges, no-frills course, which is built on pristine linksland protected by the Scottish government. Kidd's design encourages thought, creativity and imagination.



Machrihanish Dunes

Other top modern Scottish courses worthy of consideration: The Castle Course at St Andrews (2008), Dundonald (2005), King Robert the Bruce – Trump Turnberry (2017), The Duke's at St Andrews (1995), Skibo Castle – Carnegie Club (1995) and Archerfield – Fidra (2004).