

GOLF COURSES & RESORTS

Can These Scenic Golf Courses Really Pass for Pebble Beach?

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Let's get this out of the way right now:

There is only ONE Pebble Beach Golf Links.

It is one of our favorite golf courses in the world, and to say that it deserves to be at or near the top of your golf bucket list is probably blindingly obvious.



The combination of Pebble Beach's beauty and history lends a mystical charm to the place that is practically impossible to replicate. (Evan Schiller)

And because Pebble Beach is so iconic – because it occupies a unique spot at the intersection of golf's most scenic courses and its most historic venues – that means that its fame is something other golf courses aspire to. As a result, many courses have tried to market themselves as "The Pebble Beach of [wherever they are]"...even if that comparison sometimes falls short of expectations.

And because practically every golfer on the planet has heard of Pebble Beach, whenever golfers get together and compare notes on the most spectacular courses they've played, it's inevitable that someone will describe a particularly scenic course as "The Pebble Beach of [wherever they are]."

For example, I grew up hearing a Myrtle Beach course called Tidewater Plantation call itself "The Pebble Beach of the East." And while it's a fun course with some cool marsh views, it doesn't have the stirring cliffs, the crashing ocean waves, or the history of Pebble Beach. Is it a fun, worthy golf course? yes. Is it "The Pebble Beach Of the East"? Not so much.

From our perspective, in order to draw even general comparisons to that vaunted California destination, other aspiring bucket-list courses need to satisfy a few minimum requirements:

- Amazing views, specifically of an ocean, sea or other massive (i.e. hard or impossible to see to the other side) body of water, and preferably with the most stunning holes perched atop cliffs.
- Not just views, for that matter, but holes where those cliffs and that huge body of water form a real hazard that might claim your golf ball.
- A reputation as a place of luxury and/or interesting history.

With these factors in mind, we decided to put together a list of "Pebble Beaches of..." for you. Do any of these courses fall woefully short of the comparison to the great Pebble Beach? Did we miss any you think should be on the list? Let us know in the comments!

The Americas & The Caribbean

The Pebble Beach of South Carolina: Kiawah Island – Ocean Course



(Kiawah Island Resort)

The site of the all-time-great “War By The Shore” 1991 Ryder Cup and Rory McIlroy’s convincing 2012 PGA Championship triumph is one of the most important courses built in the last 30 years, and along with TPC Sawgrass’ Stadium Course, represents the greatest work of ageless architect Pete Dye. The closing stretch from hole 14 to the clubhouse, with the Atlantic Ocean at the golfer’s right, is one of the most memorable anywhere. There aren’t cliffs here in the South Carolina Lowcountry, but the ocean views are stunning all the same.

The Pebble Beach of Wisconsin: Whistling Straits



(Destination Kohler/The American Club)

Whistling Straits is becoming known as one of the modern golf world’s most successful major championship venues, and will be adding a Ryder Cup in 2020 to its trio of PGA Championship stagings. Another Pete Dye masterpiece, Whistling Straits’ cliff-hanging perch above Lake Michigan was completely manufactured out of flat fields, as were its thousand-plus bunkers.

The Pebble Beach of Michigan: Arcadia Bluffs



(Sean Ogle/BreakingEighty.com)

Arcadia Bluffs, originally designed by Rick Smith (better known as Phil Mickelson's longtime teacher prior to Butch Harmon), only has a couple cliffside holes, but much of the rest of the course affords wonderful views of Lake Michigan's blue expanse. It's somewhat remote, but worth the effort if you are planning a trip based in and around the Traverse City area.

The Pebble Beach of Puerto Rico: Royal Isabela



(Royal Isabela)

Puerto Rico is a U.S. Territory, and Royal Isabela is arguably its best golf course, though few have heard of it or the surrounding quiet, stunning, luxurious resort developed by brothers Charlie and Stanley Pasarell. The golf course rambles over the Puerto Rican hillside before emerging onto the coast with a quartet of holes overlooking 200-foot tall cliffs above the ocean.

The Pebble Beach(es) of the Dominican Republic: Casa de Campo – Teeth of the Dog, Corales Golf Club, Playa Grande Golf Club



(Casa De Campo)

Pete Dye's Teeth of the Dog brandishes seven oceanside holes, including three par threes. The cliffs aren't as high as at Pebble Beach, but the weather is warmer and the water is bluer – not a bad tradeoff. Across the D.R., The Tom Fazio-designed course at Corales has four cliff-hugging holes, and the recently redesigned Playa Grande course at the ultra-luxe Amanera Resort on the country's northern coast devotes fully half the golf course to the shoreline.

The Pebble Beaches of Canada: Cabot Cliffs, Victoria Golf Club



(The Henebrys)

One of the most anticipated new course openings in recent memory, the Coore-&-Crenshaw-designed Cabot Cliffs is true to its name, with the finishing holes clinging to the Nova Scotia coastline above the Gulf of St. Lawrence, including the par-3 16th, which has drawn comparisons to its counterpart at Cypress Point Club in California. The course will “officially” open tomorrow, but has hosted preview play since last year. The reviews have been overwhelmingly positive. Bottom line: your bucket-list just got one course longer (and, by the way, Cabot Cliffs’ sister course Cabot Links is no slouch, either).

Some 2,800 miles west of Nova Scotia, in coastal British Columbia, Victoria Golf Club is one of Canada’s oldest and finest courses, with parts of at least six holes skirting the cliffs above the Strait of San Juan de Fuca. Though nominally private, members of other clubs are generally able to arrange access via a pro-to-pro call.

The Pebble Beach of Mexico: Quivira Los Cabos, Cabo Del Sol – Ocean Course



(Quivira Los Cabos)

Quivira is the new kid on the block in the Cabo area, a Jack Nicklaus Signature design with some quirk built into its cliffside front-nine stretch. The fifth is a controversial (but stunning) short par four to a green that seems to be falling into the sea, and the sixth is a challenging par three. A second breathtaking one-shotter comes later in the round. Cabo Del Sol's Ocean Course is another Nicklaus gem, with holes 6, 7, 16, 17 and 18 supplying all the drama and scenery.

Europe

The Pebble Beaches of England: Thurlestone Golf Club, Axe Cliff Golf Club, Seahouses Golf Club



(Thurlestone Golf Club)

As many seaside courses as there are in England, finding a “close-enough” analog for Pebble Beach is somewhat tricky, as England’s craggiest coastline sports relatively few golf courses. Located in the southern part of the country, Thurlestone and Axe Cliff are both relatively unknown to non-locals, but are both fine layouts where a wayward shot at the wrong time could send your ball down onto the rocks and into the water. Perhaps equally unknown, Seahouses is in the extreme northeastern corner of England in Northumberland, and has four clifftop and seaside holes. You can play it for £34 or less.

The Pebble Beach of Scotland: Trump Turnberry Golf Links – Ailsa Course



(Courtesy of Trump Turnberry Resort)

The occasional Open Championship host has recently been made even better and more spectacular, with the firm of Mackenzie & Ebert having moved the course's showcase stretch of holes nine through 11 even closer to the shore than they previously sat. To add further to the ambiance, a halfway house has been set up in the outbuildings of the iconic Turnberry Lighthouse, and makes for a perfect spot to take in the scene before beginning the course's inward nine. Turnberry is far from the only spectacular seaside layout in Scotland, of course, but we deem it the most Pebble Beach-like of them all.

The Pebble Beach of Ireland: Old Head Golf Links



(Global Golf Links)

Old Head occupies perhaps the most comprehensively clifftop setting in the golf world. situated as it is on jaggedly circular spit of land connected to the rest of Ireland by a slim ridge. Cliffs in the area rise as much as 300 feet. As a result, the crashing waves of the Celtic Sea threaten the swing on eight holes of the Ron Kirby-designed course, and the water is visible from even the “inland” holes. To lovers of Old Head, the word “spellbinding” doesn’t even come close to articulating the dramatic, edge-of-the-world scenery of the place.

The Pebble Beach of Wales: Nefyn & District



(Nefyn & District Golf Club)

All other courses on this list demand relatively high green fees, but Nefyn & District, which dates back more than a century and has an incredible stretch of holes perched on a narrow finger of land above the Irish Sea, can be played for as little as £55 on a summer's weekend. The course is actually a 27-holer, and it can be the case that the nine with the most breathtaking holes, called "The Point," could be off-limits in bad weather, such as the 100-mph winds that buffeted the course one day a couple years ago. But if you are able to play this unforgettable stretch of golf, while playing the second cliffside hole, you can look down and to your right on the village of Porthdinllaen. It is home to the Ty Coch Inn, one of the world's most scenic pubs. A pint there is a must during your visit to Nefyn and District.

The Pebble Beach of France: Golf de Sperone



(PhotosCorse.fr)

Located on the very southern tip of the island of Corsica, the Robert Trent Jones design at Sperone is one of Europe's most scenic courses, with four holes perched above the Mediterranean Sea. And with high-season green fees topping out below 100 euros, it is one of the more reasonable, spectacular oceanside golf experiences you are likely to find.

The Pebble Beach of Italy: Verdura Resort



(Sardatur Holidays)

Sicily is not often thought of as a golf destination, but with three well-regarded Kyle Phillips-designed courses – two 18s and a nine-hole par-3 course – Verdura seeks to change all that. On the two “big” courses, the East and West, a combined six holes play along the blue waters of the Mediterranean, with many more enjoying views of the water. The “cliffs” are pretty low, but given that the resort’s website defines the coastline as such, who are we to argue?

The Pebble Beach of Bulgaria: Thracian Cliffs



(Thracian Cliffs)

“Bulgaria” and “golf” don’t seem an obvious pair, and yet Thracian Cliffs, a recent Gary Player design terraced above the Black Sea has become one of Europe’s most talked-about courses. With eight holes where the sea comes into play below massive cliffs, the host of the Volvo World Match Play in 2013 is highlighted by the par-3 sixth, which drops more than 100 feet from a clifftop tee to a green perched on the edge of the continent.

Rest Of The World

The Pebble Beach of South Korea: South Cape Owners Club



(Joann Dost)

This course occupies a peninsula on Namhae Island off the southern coast of South Korea, and is one of the most spectacular golf venues in all of Asia. Designed by underrated architect Kyle Phillips (who built Scotland's Kingsbarns Golf Links, as well as two other facilities on this list), South Cape takes incredible advantage of its landscape, with three of its four par threes bringing cliffs, rocks and the waters of the Sea of Japan into play. The course is part of a \$350 million luxury resort project developed by South Korean clothing magnate Jung Jae-bong. Green fees top out at around \$300 per person, while rooms push past \$500 per night, depending on the Dollar/Won exchange rate.

The Pebble Beach of Japan: Kawana Resort – Fuji Course



(Kawana Resort)

Among classic golf course architects, Charles Alison is not exactly a household name in the United States. But he is big in Japan, having designed many of the country's best courses, including the ultra-exclusive Hirono Golf Club, Tokyo Golf Club and Naruo Golf Club. But his course at Kawana is accessible, and spectacular, with a number of holes perched on cliffs with the Sagami-nada Sea on one side and views all the way to sacred Mount Fuji in the other direction. It is a breathtaking place for a round of golf.

The Pebble Beaches of China: Shanqin Bay Golf Club, Golden Pebble Beach Golf Club



(Shanqin Bay Golf Club)

China has its share of seaside courses, but Shanqin Bay, a Bill Coore/Ben Crenshaw masterpiece on Hainan Island (pictured above) that very few people know about, may be the country's best course. Unfortunately, it is nearly impossible to get on.

However, Dalian Golden Pebble Beach Golf Club, which sits on a peninsula just outside the large northeastern city of Dalian, is more accessible. It has two courses: the Jinying Course and the Divine Tortoise Course. Cliffs and the Yellow Sea below come into play on a total of eight of the 36 holes on property.

The Pebble Beach(es) of New Zealand: Cape Kidnappers, Kauri Cliffs, Chisholm Links



(Youtube)

The first two members of this trio are well-known to many traveling golfers, and really need no introduction: both Cape Kidnappers and Kauri Cliffs are rightful must-play courses on any spare-no-expense tour of New Zealand's best golf. But many visitors miss Chisholm (pictured above), and that's a pity. Located in the small city of Dunedin on New Zealand's South Island, the 6,300-yard course plays along St. Kilda Beach, and the ninth hole hangs on the cliffs of Lawyer's Head above the South Pacific.

The Pebble Beach of Mainland Australia: New South Wales Golf Club



(New South Wales Golf Club)

The Alister Mackenzie-designed New South Wales Golf Club is home to one of the most stunning reveals in the golf world. After a linksy first four holes, the player crests a hill after the tee shot on the par-5 fifth (pictured above) and looks down on the green, with rocky shoreline and Cruwee Cove's blue waters beyond. It is an unforgettable sight that stirs the soul of any lover of the game. Much of the rest of coastal mainland Australia is awash in cliffs but, like England, there are not very many golf holes perched atop them.

The Pebble Beaches of Tasmania: Cape Wickham Golf Course, Ocean Dunes Golf Course



(PlanetGolf/Darius Oliver)

If Cabot Cliffs represents the most significant new courses opening of 2016 in the Northern Hemisphere, then Cape Wickham and Ocean Links take the title for the Southern Hemisphere. They are located on remote King Island, about halfway between Tasmania and the Australian mainland. Cape Wickham was designed by Mike DeVries, who is best known to Michigan golf lovers for his designs at Greywalls on the state's Upper Peninsula, and the private, national-membership Kingsley Club near Traverse City. Cape Wickham is his crowning achievement to date, with a layout that begins along the jagged cliffs and returns periodically, before a mesmerizing closing four-hole stretch around Victoria Cove.

Ocean Dunes is located about 25 miles south of Cape Wickham, and likewise clings to the eastern edge of King Island. Designed by Graeme Grant, who previously served as Superintendent at Kingston Heath, one of Melbourne's famed "Sandbelt" courses, Ocean Dunes sports a half dozen cliffhanging holes of its own, with similarly stunning views to its counterpart up the coast. It seems a certainty that the relative merits of these great courses will be a source of 19th-hole debates for years to come.

The Pebble Beach of South Africa: Pinnacle Point Beach & Golf Estate



(Golf Buddies South Africa)

Located due east of Cape Town, the decade-old Pinnacle Point is South Africa's foremost seagoing layout, with eight holes set on the cliffs above the Indian Ocean. Designed by Peter Matkovich, the routing is not as intimate or walkable as Pebble Beach, but it is a worthy destination for any golfer visiting the area all the same.

The Pebble Beach of the United Arab Emirates: Yas Links



(Yas Links/Kevin Murray)

Dubai gets most of the attention for its recent golf boom, but Abu Dhabi is home to the emirate's closest analog to Pebble Beach. Architect Kyle Phillips laid out Yas Links on a narrow piece of the manmade Yas Island, and maximized the course's exposure to the "coastline," with water bordering nine holes. The water views aren't as uninterrupted as at the other courses on this list, but they are spectacular and fascinating in their unique U.A.E. way. Yas Links happens to be the top course in the Middle East, according to *Golf Digest*.

The Pebble Beach of Oman: Almouj Golf



(Almouj Golf)

You may have had no idea golf existed in Oman, but it does, and Almouj is one of a handful of courses in the country. It's a Greg Norman design, no less, which *Golf Digest* has ranked as the #2 course in the Middle East, behind the aforementioned Yas Links. The "cliffs" aren't very high, but the views of the Gulf of Aden, which comes into play on four holes, are stunning. Almouj redefines the term "off the beaten path," but it is worth the journey.

Did we overlook any countries or "Pebble Beaches of..." that you've played? Do any of these courses fall drastically short? Let us know below in the comments!