



{ SCOTTISH STUNNERS }

NORTHERN STARS

Aberdeenshire's courses have been shining brightly... long before moneybags American Donald Trump arrived on the scene...

WORDS DAVID J WHYTE

The Aberdeen area has been in the news a lot of late due to a lot of trumpeting about the 'best golf course in the world' currently under construction just a few miles north of the Granite City.

Donald Trump's chosen land certainly is a magnificent stretch of links and lends itself well to such lofty aspirations. However, this area has long presented golfers with great links options. Cruden Bay and Royal Aberdeen are two of the best known but there is a plethora of top-value tracks worthy of your indulgence.

And every course is different; natural tracks that have been built with the lie of the land as their guide. From Aberdeen to Fraserburgh there are miles of coastal dunes, some of the best in the world in fact and ideal for threading a tasty piece of golf links into. Inland you'll find sumptuous, heather-lined heaths or stark moorland.

At its centre is Aberdeen itself, Scotland's version of Houston and Dallas rolled into one! Aberdonians are as down to earth as you can get but oil has had an impact. Thirty years of 'black' economy

has lent a sophisticated air to the place with some excellent restaurants and outstanding evening entertainment. So the area really does lend itself to a four or five-day break where you can enjoy yourself as much off the course as you can on it.

The city can be expensive for accommodation through the business week but there's likely to be some great weekend deals on offer.

Venture out of town a little and take advantage of better hotel prices and such niceties as the Malt Whisky Trail, the perfect blend with a few days golf in the area which is a major 2-FORE!-1 'player.'

Besides the must-play big guns, big bucks links of Royal Aberdeen and Cruden Bay – naturally so popular with well-heeled Americans – offer some quality budget golf too. In fact nearly 20 courses belong to 2-FORE!-1 and they include the likes of Ballater and Royal Tarlair which both feature in the brand new Top 100 2-FORE!-1 Courses.

For more information on the area visit www.aberdeen-grampian.com or call 01224 288800.

1. CRUDEN BAY Par 70, 6,287 yards

Cruden Bay is a striking course that feels like it's been designed by Mother Nature herself.

Dunes stand like protective barricades between the course and North Sea with deep, velvet valleys inbetween.

The course does come with its own unique character: hidden greens, 'blind' drives, dramatic drops and serpentine burns. It's a rollercoaster ride!

The first three holes follow the natural flow of the land, but once turning seaward, you play the delightful, par-3 4th.

Memorable holes come thick and fast and certainly include the 7th – with two sandy pillars guarding the entrance to the lofted green – and the 9th which offers stunning views from both ends. From the tee you see the 16th and the scimitar sweep of Cruden Bay where almost a thousand years ago, Viking raiders fought and lost a fierce battle on the site of the course.

VITAL STATISTICS

Location: 22 miles NE of Aberdeen (A90).
Contact: 01779 812285 or www.crudenbaygolfclub.co.uk
Green fees: Mon-Fri: £70 (day). Sat-Sun: £75 (round).



COURSE PLANNER
Royal Aberdeen and Murcar are closest to the Granite City. Newmachar and Cruden Bay require short drives while Duff House Royal and Fraserburgh are within an hour or so.

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DATA BANK

▶ OFF-COURSE

- Avoid being the 'designated driver' when you take to Aberdeen & Grampian's Malt Whisky Trail, a string of Scotland's most flavoursome distilleries such as Glen Grant, Glenfiddich, Benromach and many more. Prices range from free to £5.
 - For the more cultured, Aberdeen & Grampian's Castle Trail offers 13 fortified bastions worth assailing. Two of the best are Craigievar near Alford and Dunnotar Castle south of Stonehaven. Prices vary but expect to pay up to £8.50.
 - There are various entertainment options in Aberdeen. The Lemon Tree, His Majesty's Theatre and The Music Hall should be near the top of the list (www.boxofficeaberdeen.com).
 - If you're a fan of the Trawlermen TV series, you can see a 'live' performance at Peterhead Harbour, still Britain's busiest white fish harbour.
 - Scotland's North East is heaven for salmon fishing on the rivers Spey, Dee, Don and Deveron. The River Don also offers some superb brown trout fishing.
 - The Braemar Gathering is the best Highland Games in Scotland and is held on the first Saturday in September (www.braemargathering.org).
- ### ▶ DID YOU KNOW?
- Aberdeen has 231 pubs, 55 clubs, 52 restaurants, and 45 hotels.
 - Craigievar was the model for Walt Disney's fairytale castles.
 - Slains Castle in Cruden Bay was the inspiration for Bram Stoker's 'Dracula'.
 - In the summer of 1881, Robert Louis Stevenson wrote Treasure Island while staying in Braemar.



Royal Aberdeen is what true links golf is all about – a true stunner!

Duff House has impressive views and very testing, fast greens.

Newmachar is very popular and has a much more parkland feel to it.

2. ROYAL ABERDEEN *Par 71, 6,861 yards*

Royal Aberdeen is a links legend – it's the sixth oldest golf club in the world – and rightly returns to the big time in September when it stages the Walker Cup, the amateur version of the Ryder Cup.

It guarantees a memorable round of golf from the word go. The 1st presents a reasonable challenge, being slightly downhill and dipping into a concealed hollow before rising to a forward sloping green.

After the 1st, the next eight holes make up the most unaffected, unpretentious, unfathomable piece of golf terrain you're ever likely to play. The back nine is where you've got to 'play golf' rather than just enjoy the views. The 12th to the 15th holes each feature hazards; their names say it all - Blind, Dyke and Well.

▶ VITAL STATISTICS

Location: North of Aberdeen (A92), take first right after Bridge of Don.
Contact: 01224 702221 or visit www.royalaberdeengolf.com
Green fees: Mon-Fri: £100 a round, £150 a day. Sat-Sun: £120 a round.

3. NEWMACHAR *Par 72, 6,623 yards*

Newmachar's Hawkshill course has hosted the Scottish Seniors Championship several times and is a firm favourite of the north east.

Although designed by true Brit Dave Thomas, there's an American flavour to some of the holes but the majority are quintessentially Scottish.

The 5th hole stands out with its plateau tee to the corner of a dog-leg leaving a short second shot to a raised green. The 13th is a toughie at 399 yards – a par 4 with a large lake on the right and a bunker at driving distance. Water comes into play on several other holes, most notably the 17th. At 432 yards, you have to nail it off the tee to be able to take on the carry over a significant body of water.

Newmachar offers a second course, the younger Swailend.

▶ VITAL STATISTICS

Location: 12 miles north of Aberdeen and just north of Dyce (A947).
Contact: 01651 863002 or visit www.newmachargolfclub.co.uk
Green fees: Mon-Fri: £50 a round & £70 a day. Sat-Sun: £70 a round.

4. DUFF HOUSE ROYAL *Par 68, 6,161 yards*

Across the seven-arched Deveron Bridge is Duff House Royal GC.

Set so close to the sea, it's surprising that Duff House is pure parkland. The River Deveron has more to do with the course's topography than the Moray Firth on the other side of the bridge.

Set on the river's plain, the course is flat and an easy stroll. Lush fairways and large bunkers define the course's defences but it is the huge greens that stand out. Designer Dr Alister MacKenzie has made putting tough. It is often better to play short and chip up to the hole rather than leave lengthy, risky putts.

The par-5 12th is the best long hole with a testing green and the 16th is a great, 242-yard, par 3.

▶ VITAL STATISTICS

Location: On the A947, easily seen from Banff's road going east.
Contact: 01261 812062 or visit www.theduffhousegolfclub.co.uk
Green fees: Mon-Fri: £30 a round & £40 a day. Sat-Sun: £36/£50.
2-FORE-1: Mon-Fri & Sun.

Murcar is a classic links with lumps, bumps and gnarly knolls all over the place.

'MURCAR IS NO MONSTER IN LENGTH BUT ON MOST DAYS YOU ARE DRIVING WITH OR AGAINST, THROUGH OR UNDER, THE WIND'

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5. MURCAR LINKS

Par 71, 6,516 yards

Murcar is no monster in length but on most days it is all about driving the ball with or against, through or underneath, the wind.

At the 1st, in a stiff south-westerly, the boomerang shot that reaches towards the practice ground is not uncommon. Turning into the folds of dunes at the 3rd adds another troublesome element and for those not used to such unabashed links, it can be a bit of a shock. Volcanic bumps and grizzly gorse bushes pepper the next few holes.

One of many star holes is the 7th where you hit from a raised tee looking over to the sea with two burns crossing the fairway down below, both within driving reach. Keep it straight off the tee and you could score well here.

VITAL STATISTICS

Location: Four miles north of Aberdeen on the A90.

Contact: 01224 704354 or visit www.murcarlinks.com

Green fees: Mon-Fri: £75 a round & £95 a day. Sat-Sun: £90 a round.

MORE MUST-PLAYS

● **Peterhead**
Factfile: Par 70, 6,173 yards. Green fees: Mon-Fri: £40. Sat-Sun: £50. Tel: 01779 472149.

● **Braemar**
Factfile: Par 64, 4,916 yards. Green fees: All week: £25. 2-FORE-1: All week in high season. Tel: 01339 741618.

● **Oldmeldrum**
Factfile: Par 70, 5,683 yards. Green fees: Mon-Fri: £30. Sat-Sun: £35. 2-FORE-1: All week. Tel: 01651 872648.

● **Stonehaven**
Factfile: Par 66, 5,103 yards. Green fees: All week: £30. Tel: 01569 762124.

6. FRASERBURGH

Par 70, 6,308 yards

Little known Fraserburgh is actually the seventh oldest links in the world and is an excellent stretch of rumpled, rolling links. This ancient course has languished in relative obscurity, probably due to its geographic position sitting on Aberdeenshire's north-east shoulder.

James Braid created much of the present course although records show that the club goes back as far as 1780. And Parish records mention golf here much earlier than that.

Short on the card, in a wind Fraserburgh can be a lively test, especially its short holes. The rough can be a nightmare – thick, tangled and usually too close for comfort. Pick of the holes is the 4th – a short par 4 of 325 yards, usually played into the 'breeze'.

VITAL STATISTICS

Location: One mile south-east of Aberdeen (B9033).

Contact: 01346 516616 or visit www.fraserburghgolfclub.org

Green fees: Mon-Fri: £38 a round & £48 a day. Sat-Sun: £46/£56.

BIG DEALS

Great stay & play offers...



DEAL #1

Aberdeen Links Golf Trail. Three nights' B&B (twin room share) in a four-star, city centre hotel and three rounds of golf (choose from Royal Aberdeen, Murcar, Newburgh-on-Ythan, Cruden Bay and Fraserburgh) for £379 per person based on four golfers travelling together. Visit www.scottishgolftrails.co.uk

DEAL #2

Two nights' dinner and B&B in an executive room (twin or double) at Meldrum House with a round of golf at Cruden Bay, Murcar Links & Meldrum House for £345 per person (based on two people sharing). Call 01651 872294, e-mail enquiries@meldrumhouse.com or visit www.meldrumhouse.com