



Chapelco Golf Course

BUENAS DIAS BUENOS AIRES!

Argentina is fast becoming the hottest new destination for travelling Irish golfers

Diego Maradona might be considered Argentina's greatest individual sporting export of modern times as the often troubled soccer star never failed to entertain when in full flow with a ball at his feet. Maradona's status is iconic, no question, but golf in Argentina has also thrown up its share of legendary sporting figures through the years.

Roberto de Vicenzo is undoubtedly the father figure Argentinian golf. Pioneering ways led the Buenos Aires native to winning a staggering 230 tournaments worldwide, his most celebrated triumph coming in the 1967 British Open at Hoylake. He is also remembered for what he lost. A careless mistake cost him the 1968 Masters after signing an incorrect

scorecard that had him down for par and not a birdie on the 17th hole on the final day. His immortal quote afterwards, "What a stupid I am" will never be forgotten.

De Vicenzo was awarded the Bobby Jones Award in 1970 and inducted to golf's Hall of Fame in 1989. He is often mentioned in the same circles as Maradona, Guillermo Vilas, Juan Manuel Fangio or Carlos Monzon, whose sporting prowess elevated Argentina the world over as a proud sporting nation.

The rich golfing thread from players such as Jose Jurado to De Vicenzo continues through to this day with names such as Eduardo or Anders Romero picking up the mantle. The free-flowing and entertaining style of Anders almost saw the young Argentine crowned Open champion at Carnoustie last year.

And all this before we mention Angel Cabrera, the reigning US Open champion, whose humble beginnings began as a caddy in his home town of Cordoba where Eduardo Romero was attached. In the early days Romero mentored and financially backed Cabrera and now El Pato (The Duck), as he is affectionately known by his peers for his distinctive gait, is one of the most exciting and successful players in the game.

With such strong role models, it's no surprise to find in excess of 100,000 amateurs playing golf in Argentina today. There are over 275 courses to play, a number which will soon rise to over 300 as new developments continue to come on stream.

Across such an expansive country, Buenos Aires and Patagonia are the two most famous



Llao Llao Golf Course

golf destinations in Argentina. Both offer completely different surrounds and aesthetics, yet share a common theme of first rate golf venues in idyllic and enviable surrounds.

This South American destination has yet to fully capture the imagination of the Irish market but the word is quickly spreading.

“There are many different areas to enjoy golf in Argentina but far and away the two most famous places are Buenos Aires and Patagonia,” explains Jorge Peralto, director of Patagonia Golf.

“Buenos Aires is an excellent overall tourist destination and most of the traditional courses are based around the capital. There are a number of great courses around this very cosmopolitan city where strong influences from its founding ancestors in Italy, France and Spain are evident.”

The Jockey Club in Buenos Aires is surely the most prestigious golf club in Argentina. Founded in 1882, it originally began as an organisation to control horse racing. Golf wasn't considered until the 1920s when the club had the foresight to contact Augusta National designer Alister Mackenzie to create two courses of equal stature when over 300 hectares of new land was bought in 1925 just outside Buenos Aires. The Red (Colorada) and Blue (Azul) courses are both frequently mentioned in the top 100 courses in the world.

Situated in San Isidro, the Jockey Club carries all the traditions of an exclusive member club where affluent types from the city escape to play. Angel Cabrera won his first European Tour event there when he secured the Abierto de Argentina (Argentina Open) in 2001.

A seamless move takes us to San Andres Golf Club, the oldest club in Argentina dating back to 1892, which takes its name from St Andrews. The Scottish ties don't end there for Scottish pro Mungo Park was responsible for the design.

“You could say San Andres is 100 per cent British and still maintains all the old traditions,” says Peralto, noting how so many of the early courses in Argentina were built near the railways at a time when the country's infrastructure was being enhanced.

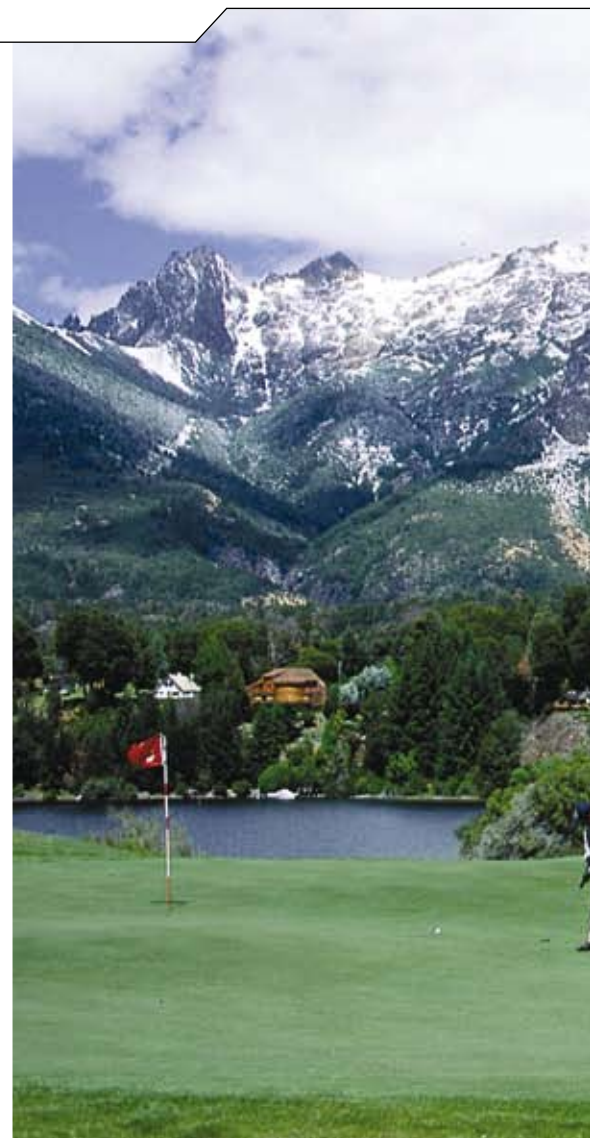
Amid all this wonderful golfing splendour, time really should be taken to explore beyond the fairways. For example, when discovering Patagonia, why not go that extra mile leading to the Tierra del Fuego and the southernmost city in the world called Ushuaia.

“When the British and particularly the Scottish came, they built golf courses when progress and communication was made through the railway.”

San Andres was also a founding member of the Argentine Golf Association in 1926. The Argentina Open is one of the oldest national opens in the world (1905) and has been staged there 17 times. Honorary member De Vicenzo won two of his nine national titles at this venue (1952 and 1967).

Some 25 miles north of Buenos Aires is Olivos Golf Club where 27 holes await. Yet again Olivos was inspired by work on the railway infrastructure and was founded in 1926. This is another traditional course where narrow fairways are closely protected by towering trees. Factor in the cleverly thought bunkering, water hazards and out of bounds and intrepid golfers must carefully plot their way round.

Considering the tradition of courses mentioned, Pilar Golf Club is an altogether more modern creation, having opened in 1993. It is still very much an exclusive member club and in keeping with how many clubs are in Argentina. At 7221 yards from the back tees Pilar is a long test with an America-style feel to it. Large manicured greens, man-made ponds and wide fairways are the tell-tales signs of much bulldozer work in creating a test of golf which is in stark contrast to the traditional



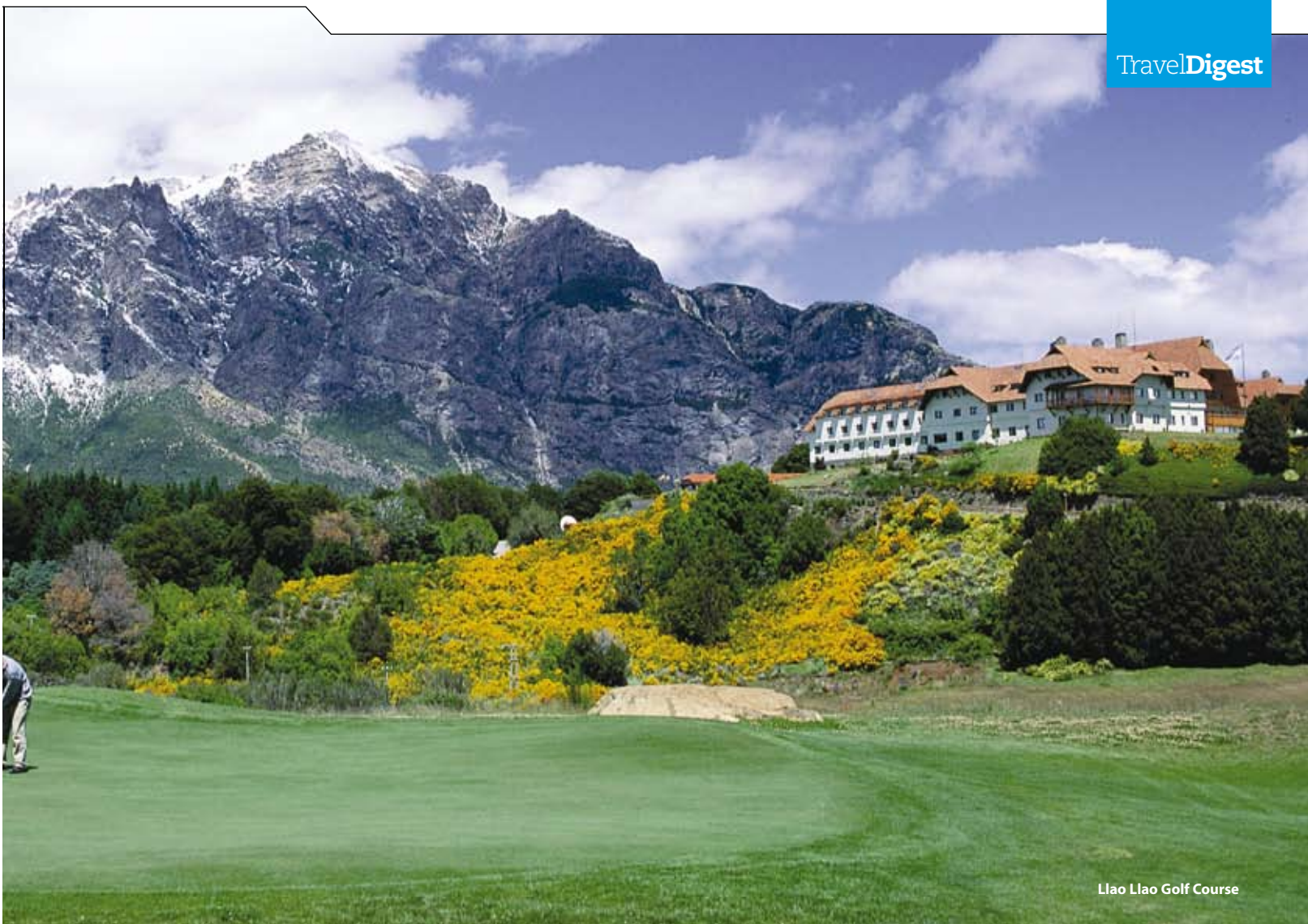
layouts around the capital.

Pilar introduced a further nine holes and is one of the few venues where buggies are used. The typical practice at many golf clubs in Argentina is to use local caddies.

In 1994, Buenos Aires Golf Club opened and in a relatively short period is considered one of the best courses in the world, let alone Argentina. The 27-hole venue was placed in the global shop window in 2000 when the WGC-World Cup was staged there. A thrilling week of golf saw world number one Tiger Woods, playing alongside David Duval, pushed all they way by home favourites Eduardo Romero and Angel Cabrera. In the end the Americans won with a 34-under aggregate, three shots ahead of the Argentine pair. Ireland, the 1997 winners, (Padraig Harrington and Paul McGinley) tied 10th in Buenos Aires.

“Although Buenos Aires is not an old course, it is definitely in my top three around the capital with only the Jockey Club and Olivos ahead of it,” notes Peralto, who finds overseas visitors want to play the best courses after travelling so far.

“When golfers make such a long trip to get here, they want to play best courses, but that doesn't mean it's expensive. For example I can take my clients to play my favourite top three for around \$100 (€65 approx). Many other courses cost as little as \$50 (€33), so green fees



Llao Llao Golf Course

aren't expensive."

By changing tack, it's time to leave the bright lights and tango ways of city life in Buenos Aires to highlight a number of must-see golf destinations in Patagonia. A two hour flight south of the capital will take visitors to San Carlos de Bariloche, the gateway city to Patagonia.

"The landscape across the Patagonia frontier is nothing short of stunning," beams Peralta. "The terrain could be described as a mix between Montana and Switzerland, incorporating the Andes Mountains, combined with beautiful unspoilt lakes and forests. Patagonia is breathtaking."

The Llao Llao Hotel and Golf Resort in Bariloche is the ultimate in 5-star luxury with a challenging and wonderfully scenic golf course to be enjoyed. Mature trees and doglegs means accuracy is needed to score well here. Lake Nahuel Huapi is never far from sight as are the snow-peaked Andean Mountains in the distance.

Luxury rest and relaxation comes by way of the hotel, a building which dates back to 1940 but was completely refurbished to the highest standard in 1993 and is now part of the exclusive 'Leading Hotels of the World' group.

Arelauquen Golf and Country Club is an equally impressive resort where mountains, forests, lakes and rivers form the perfect natural



Jockey Golf Course

canvas. The course was designed by Vicente Fernandez and plays through the valley along the Gutierrez Lake. Due to the climate, golf can generally be played all year round but during the winter months Patagonia also makes for a great skiing destination, not to mention many other outdoor pursuits such as horse-riding or paragliding, to name just a few.

Accommodation and the opportunity to sample some of Argentina's renowned cuisine - particularly their steaks - is found at the 5-star lodge. This truly is the perfect retreat after time spent on the fairways or the slopes, depending on the time of year.

Last but by no means least this journey signs-off at the majestic Chapelco Golf and Resort,

venue for the first Jack Nicklaus design in South America. In keeping with the natural terrain, the designer was sensitive to the environment he worked in. The end product is a wonderful 7163yard par 72 championship layout on land which was originally called Estancia Chapelco, the farm belonging to the Taylor family.

However, the original industry of sheep breeding has been replaced as Jorge Taylor called upon the services of Nicklaus to create a world class golf resort which first opened in February 2006.

Amid all this wonderful golfing splendour, time really should be taken to explore beyond the fairways. For example, when discovering Patagonia, why not go that extra mile leading to the Tierra del Fuego and the southernmost city in the world called Ushuaia. To the north of Buenos Aires, the Iguazu Falls along the River Iguazu is another must-see destination.

To get the best out of a trip to Argentina, it will come as no surprise that the recommended method is to book with the experts. By either making contacts through the tourist board or using a company like Peralta's Patagonia Golf (www.patagoniagolf.com) will ensure the best results.

In the end, sometimes words alone aren't sufficient to portray natural beauty that only the eye can see and fully appreciate. This notion certainly applies to Argentina.