



## Ryder Cup Cometh

The spectacular, 45-hole Le Golf National lies about 20 miles southwest of central Paris in Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines. You'll want to play its crown jewel, the par-72, 7,321-yard **Albatros Course**, but keep in mind the course will be closed to the public all September. Designed by architects Hubert Chesneau and Robert von Hagge, the course has hosted the French Open for 25 years and will host both the Ryder Cup this year and the Olympic golf competition in 2024.

During a round, the Albatros is at times a Parisian homage to classic links design and, at others, a sparkling representation of French parkland golf. What it is not — at any time — is easy. Paul Armitage, the resort's general manager and a proficient player with a single-digit handicap, warns me of this before my round. "If you come back and say after your round that you didn't like the course, you'd be one of the very few," he says. "If you come back and say, 'I lost 12 golf balls,' you'd be the millionth person."



He's right, though fortunately not about the fate of my dozen Titleists. The layout features a combination of gradual and aggressive changes in elevation, which the designers manually constructed from a flat stretch of terrain during the course's three-year construction span in the late 1980s. The French Golf Federation selected the resort's location and chose to manipulate the Albatros' topography (many holes play through shallow valleys) to create a stadiumlike venue that would provide copious viewing areas for spectators and media.

By taking control of the land, Chesneau and von Hagge created a dramatic series of holes, almost half of which incorporate striking water hazards. Three of the final four holes require golfers to navigate around or over water, which will inject additional drama into the Ryder Cup matches. Many holes, especially the ones devoid of water, prove deceptively difficult off the tee, too. Hit your ball into the first cut of rough a few yards left or right of the fairway, and your next shot will be challenging, though playable. An errant shot that lands in the far more penal second cut of rough a few paces farther away will require you to hack your ball back onto the fairway; that is, assuming you can find the ball. Things don't get any easier on the fast-rolling greens, thanks to significant contours and bold ridges.

Despite its immense difficulty, the Albatros asserts itself as a must-play for golfers of all ability levels. As long as you temper your expectations for low scores, you'll be rewarded with an unforgettable round of golf.

# French Tees

As a dramatic, demanding golf course near Paris prepares to host the Ryder Cup, writer **Shaun Tolson** uncovers exceptional golf experiences across the country

THIS FALL, during the final six days of September, golfers all around the world will set their sights on the outskirts of Paris as the French host the **2018 Ryder Cup**. The U.S. vs. Europe duel returns to continental Europe for only the second time since the illustrious event's parameters changed in 1979 — a modification that opened up the Great Britain and Ireland team to all European golfers. On the one previous occasion when the Ryder Cup competition unfolded on the continent at Spain's Valderrama Golf Club in 1997, the destination seemed an obvious choice: Spaniard Seve Ballesteros, whose successful playing career over the previous two decades had permanently linked the country and the sport, captained the European team.

France can't claim a champion golfer of that caliber, a major reason it's often not perceived as a premier golf destination. Yet the country holds a rich golf tradition and

sports more than 550 courses and golf resorts, some exceptional. One such extraordinary example — **Le Golf National** — will be on display as the Ryder Cup's French home.

If you plan to attend this year's showdown, don't leave all the swing play to the pros while in France. The country's world-class golf experiences appeal to amateurs of all ability levels, and you won't be disappointed. Here, we spotlight five must-play courses and a teaching facility, from a centuries-old beauty tucked on the edge of a coastal resort town to a links-style layout that meanders through one of the country's most heralded wine-producing regions. We also chronicle the unique experiences that a round on this year's Ryder Cup course serves up.

**LAY OF THE LAND:** Absorb the grandeur of the Albatros Course's second hole at Le Golf National.

STEVE CARR (COURSE), FRANCK FEJAF/GETTY IMAGES (FLAG)





International Training Center and Golf Course of Ibarritz

## A Golf Paradise in Basque Country

The resort town of Biarritz, on the Basque coast in southwestern France, has attracted discerning globetrotters since European royals first began vacationing there about 130 years ago. Impassioned golfers have visited the city and its surrounding areas for nearly the same length of time.

The mere sight of the **International Training Center and Golf Course of Ibarritz**, set on the coast just south of the city limits, telegraphs the destination's allegiance to the sport. The sprawling practice center and golf academy features a nine-hole executive-length course and a massive 360-degree driving range with 14 stations, so you can practice shots of all lengths in diverse wind conditions.

Those varied practice scenarios are all valuable and immediately put to the test, since 16 distinct courses lie within an hour's drive of downtown Biarritz. "You can go from old and traditional golf courses to modern," says Claude Rousseau, director of **Biarritz Le Phare**, one of the country's oldest golf courses. "You can go from the seashore to inland courses with

mountain views, and you can go from large golf courses to small, tricky ones."

A golf getaway to Biarritz would be incomplete without a round at Rousseau's charming Le Phare, which sits about a mile northeast of the city's center plaza. That metropolitan location reflects a bygone era during which the course was built — Tom and William Dunn designed its holes in 1888. The layout also reflects the course's age, as holes most often double back on one another. Despite its short length of 5,908 yards (another indicator of its age), Biarritz Le Phare, which plays to par 69, challenges even low handicappers with narrow, tree-lined fairways and small greens.

At **Seignosse Golf Club**, 15 miles to the north, the opening hole — although equally



Biarritz Le Phare

narrow and tree-lined as the first at Biarritz Le Phare — looks and feels altogether different thanks to a pronounced downslope from tee to green. The hole, a long par 4, also previews what's to come, as the par-73 course stretches to almost 7,000 yards in length and trundles over and around steep hillsides. A medley of elevated tee shots with downhill and uphill approaches into the greens — along with some strategically placed water hazards that will challenge you — assures a dynamic round of golf punctuated by many memorable holes.

Like No. 1, length defines Seignosse's 18th hole. Although more forgiving

off the tee, the serpentine-shaped green, which plays as France's first par 6 from the championship tees, is demanding. Following two well-struck shots — a straight driver off the tee and a 2-wood that fades around the corner to the middle of the fairway — I'm left with a full 8-iron to the elevated green, which, like many of the putting surfaces on the course, is large and boldly contoured. The hole encapsulates all of the challenges that the course presents throughout a player's round. It also explains why some of France's most famous golf pros visit Seignosse to prepare for their professional tournaments.



Hole No. 2 at Seignosse Golf Club



Hole No. 8 on Golf du Medoc's Châteaux Course



## From Tee to Green Among the Vines

By golf standards, Paris dazzles visitors with a world-class golf resort born from a quest to reshape the earth; Biarritz shines for its eclectic — and in some cases historic — courses. Bordeaux? It radiates thanks to a duo of golf destinations that, in distinct and divergent ways, reflect the region's rich, wine-producing history.

To the uninformed, the holes of the Châteaux Course at the **Golf du Medoc** resort appear to be named. In much the same way that most of the holes at Spyglass Hill Golf Course in Pebble Beach, Calif., reference a character or place in Robert Louis Stevenson's novel *Treasure Island*, each hole of this Bill Coore-designed championship course, about 10 miles northwest of Bordeaux, appropriately showcases a wine-producing château of the region. Some are acclaimed premier grand crus, while others are lesser-known producers of exceptional vintages. But unlike the monikers firmly attached to the Spyglass Hill holes, the château associations at Golf du Medoc can change every couple of years. That's an important distinction, especially given a long-standing tradition at the resort. As general manager Vincent Paris explains, if a foreign player records a birdie, custom

suggests — though by no means requires — he or she purchase a bottle of wine produced by the château associated with the respective hole.

"Choose your hole wisely," says Paris. "Some bottles are 20 euros. Others are 500 euros."

The links-style course can provide its fair share of birdie chances, as its greens average 10,700 square feet in area. That means even a wayward approach shot can sometimes end up on the putting surface. By comparison, the Augusta National greens that have long challenged PGA Tour players because of their size average slightly less than 6,500 square feet in area.

Understandably, you would do well to spend a fair amount of your pre-round warm-up time dialing in the speed of your putts on the course's almost 11,000-square-foot practice green. The 7,192-yard, par-71 layout is mostly forgiving off the tee, but thanks to those massive putting surfaces, your scores can grow large in a hurry as your round's putt tally escalates.

Having hit a number of good iron shots into those greens during the first half of my round — but with just three pars and no birdies to show for them — I step to the tee box of the 163-yard, par-3 eighth hole feeling relaxed

and confident, emotions that seem out of place given the broad water hazard that wraps itself around the green's front and left portions.

Ignoring as best I can the possible calamities that await, I take a smooth swing and hit a crisp 6-iron. The ball launches high but never wavers off line. When it lands, it bounces once just short of the flagstick and abruptly stops. It looks, at least from this vantage point, to be very close to the hole.

"I guess we know who's buying the first bottle of wine," says one of my playing partners.

In the chance that he's right, I check the tee marker, which displays the label for Château de Camensac. I don't recognize the name, but the label is branded Grand Cru Classe en 1855, a designation for superior Bordeaux wines celebrated by Emperor Napoléon III during a prestigious international exposition held in Paris in 1855.

I fear I may not have chosen my hole wisely.

Up at the green, after making the short, 12-inch putt that awaits me, I have my first birdie of the round. Upon my return home, I seek out a bottle of Château de Camensac. At \$40, the wine is more affordable than I expected, so I buy two bottles: the ready-to-enjoy 2010 vintage and the





2014 vintage with cellaring potential. The latter I decide to save to commemorate a memorable birdie or two in the future.

Forty miles east of the Golf du Medoc resort, the youthful **Grand Saint-Emilionnais Golf Club** reminds players of its Bordeaux roots with a location tucked among surrounding vineyards. It showcases its designer's philosophy to build courses that preserve their natural topography.

Tom Doak achieved celebrity status as a golf course architect when his Pacific Dunes opened at the Bandon Dunes resort in Bandon, Ore., in 2001, and he returned to the resort almost a decade later to design Old Macdonald Golf Links. Those two courses inspired the Mourgue d'Algue family to hire him to create the layout of its Bordeaux course, which opened in 2015. Although the family is steeped in golf tradition — the patriarch, Gaetan, won the French amateur title numerous times earlier in his life — the potential of the family's property, not their golf heritage, convinced Doak to tackle the job.

Kristel Lawton-Mourgue d'Algue, the club's co-owner, commends Doak for creating courses that foster a sense of place. At the 6,765-yard, par-72 Grand Saint-Emilionnais, two holes best encapsulate the course's romantic location: the fifth hole abuts a nearby château's vineyards, while the 16th offers views of a 12th-century church that looks down over the countryside from a distant hillside beyond the green.

According to Lawton-Mourgue d'Algue, Doak's use of the land's gently rolling hills creates a natural, comfortable rhythm for a golfer's round, though she acknowledges that the 16th evolved shortly after the course opened. The 481-yard dogleg right initially played as a long par 4 but it was transformed into a more approachable par 5 to protect player morale during a round's final few holes.

"We want people to enjoy," she says, "and every now and then, you can make a birdie."

Such is also true, I've learned, at Bordeaux's other established golf resort. Only there, scores under par can lead to commemorative — and sometimes costly — wine purchases. ■



Hole No. 5 at Grand Saint-Emilionnais Golf Club



Lutetia



Atelier des Lumières

## What's New in Paris

**If you plan to visit Paris this summer or during the Ryder Cup, here are the latest hotels, attractions, and other developments to check out. Although the City of Light may be timeless, it's also constantly changing, giving visitors a reason to return again and again.**

**SLEEP:** The **Lutetia**, a 108-year-old Left Bank landmark hotel in the city's fashionable 6th arrondissement, has just been restored to its former glory, with original art deco and art nouveau details blending seamlessly with contemporary design. Its 184 rooms include two penthouse suites boasting sprawling terraces with panoramic city views. From \$1,040. [hotellutetia.com](http://hotellutetia.com)

→ The highlight of the boutique 48-room **Relais Christine** — inside an impeccably renovated, antique-filled 17th-century manse in the heart of St-Germain-des-Prés — may well be its Guerlain Spa, whose vaulted ceilings and stone walls are remnants of an ancient Augustinian monastery. From \$395. [relais-christine.com](http://relais-christine.com)



Relais Christine

→ Over on the Right Bank, in the buzzy 9th arrondissement, the sleek and modern **Hôtel Parister** offers 45 retro-style rooms and suites, plus a 60-foot indoor pool, mosaic-tiled hammam, and a host of wellness classes from boxing to boot camp. From \$308. [hotelparister.com](http://hotelparister.com)

**SEE:** Haute shopping mecca Galeries Lafayette just launched its arts foundation, **Lafayette Anticipations**, in Le Marais, in a 19th-century industrial building strikingly redesigned by Rem Koolhaas. Exhibitions encompass contemporary art, design, and fashion. [lafayetteanticipations.com](http://lafayetteanticipations.com)

→ Experience fine art in a novel way at **Atelier des Lumières**, the city's first digital art center, with digitized works by the likes of Gustav Klimt projected onto the 33-foot-high walls of a restored iron foundry in the 11th arrondissement, a short walk from the Père Lachaise Cemetery. [atelier-lumieres.com](http://atelier-lumieres.com)



Giovanni Passerini

**EAT:** Tucked in a concealed alley in the 2nd arrondissement, on the ground floor of the new boutique property from the hip Experimental Group, the **Hotel des Grands Boulevards Restaurant** puts a creative spin on French and Italian classics, with a menu masterminded by pasta guru Giovanni Passerini. [grandsboulevardshotel.com](http://grandsboulevardshotel.com)

→ This summer, three-Michelin-star Marseilles chef Gérald Passadat brings his deft touch with Mediterranean cooking to **Lutetia Brasserie**, the reimaged Lutetia hotel's signature restaurant. [hotellutetia.com](http://hotellutetia.com)

**DRINK:** The Eiffel Tower serves as your backdrop at **La Girafe**, a swanky terraced hot spot from nightlife king Laurent de Gourcuff, set atop the roof of Paris' architectural heritage museum, Cité de l'Architecture & du Patrimoine, in the Trocadéro gardens.

**IN THE WORKS:** After sitting empty for nearly two decades, legendary 19th-century music hall and 1930s art deco cinema **La Scala Paris**, on the Boulevard de Strasbourg in the 10th arrondissement, is scheduled to open in September with a restored 550-seat state-of-the-art theater devoted to live performances and film screenings. [lascalaparis.com](http://lascalaparis.com)

— JENNIFER CEASER