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## Golfing at the First Tropical Links Course

It's the middle of December 2005, the temperature in New York is in the teens, and here we are, basking in the tropical sunshine, surrounded by the lush beauty of the Bahamas, and getting ready to play a round of golf on the first Scottish-style tropical links course.



[The Abaco Club on Winding Bay](#) in Abaco, Bahamas opened on December 23, 2004, and less than one year later, it's 18-hole championship Scottish-style tropical links course, designed by acclaimed golf course architects, Donald Steel and Tom Mackenzie, has already been rated as one of the top 100 golf courses in the world.



For those not familiar with the term "links course," a links course does not refer to any relatively treeless golf course, although it has come into frequent use as such; an authentic links course refers to a course that is built along a narrow stretch of land close to the sea that is shaped by the wind, is firm and fast running, has a sandy soil base, with long spiky grass in the rough, making it often difficult to get a good lie, and a true links course also has undulating greens, rolling fairways, and deep bunkers to prevent the sand from being blown away. The golf course at The Abaco Club on Winding Bay is all that and more, with its sandy base, tiered and undulating greens, rolling fairways, deep bunkers and extraordinary "can't take your

eyes off of the view" scenery.



It is the type of course that attracts the best golfers in the world, including Ernie Ells, rated as the # 3 golfer in the world, who came to visit The Abaco Club on Winding Bay and decided to become a member. Sir Sean Connery also came to visit and played golf four times over the course of a weekend, and remarked that what he liked best about the course was that each time it played differently from morning to evening, taking into account the ocean breezes, etc.

What did we enjoy about the golf course? Everything! First of all, the staff is first rate, and the course is an amazing combination of challenge and beauty. We played golf our first day with Head Golf Professional Kenny Gargiulo, who explained the course to us, and attempted to keep our eyes trained on the greens, although our eyes kept straying to the majestic tourmaline blues of the Atlantic Ocean. Holes 4, 5, 6, 7, 17 and 18 run along the ocean, and it was difficult not to watch the equestrians riding along the beach. There are fabulous ocean views from Holes 8, 9, 15 and 16, and the spectacular vistas can easily add to your handicap, we know that the vistas certainly did not help ours!



As we set up our tee shots on Hole 5, we not only could hear the crash of the waves, we also felt the spray of saltwater on our faces; and Hole 15 with its high elevation, provided an inspiring view of the golf course. Playing golf in the late afternoon at The Abaco Club on Winding Bay was truly like playing in paradise; the cumulous clouds were radiantly backlit by the sun, the greens were the rich color of money, the vegetation was an artist's color palate of varying tones of greens and grays, and the ocean was an intense blend of shades of turquoise, azure, and teal. We ended our round of golf contented, knowing that we would be playing again the following morning on this truly spectacular golf course.

The next morning, the sky was dark and gray, and just as we arrived at the Pro Shop, it began to rain, not a

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slight drizzle, but a solid downpour, so we stayed in the Pro Shop and enjoyed a great conversation with the Assistant Golf Pro, while we waited out the tropical shower.



Fortunately, the rain ended quickly, and we decided to test out their putting green before heading out on the course. Today, the course was playing completely different than the day before, as the course started out wet and then with the prevailing sun and winds, started to dry out. What shots worked well yesterday, were of no advantage today, but luckily what didn't work yesterday, worked well today, so it all evened out in the end.

The golf course, designed to be eco-friendly, uses Seashore Paspalum grass on the greens, tees and fairways, a grass that actually is compatible with seawater and duplicates traditional links turf conditions. Native Paspalum grass is used in the rough, and it can be a bit tricky to find your ball, let alone hit a decent shot out of the tall, spiky, grass, which we found out by trial and error. The deep bunkers are another challenge, and our best advice is to just avoid them, unless you are part mountain goat, or really appreciate playing golf "the hard way."



The closing four holes may be four of the most spectacular and challenging finishing holes in the world, starting off with two par 4's at the 15th and 16th holes, which are rated a 7 and 9 handicap respectively, followed by the deceiving par 3, 204-yard 17th, and culminating with the 18th hole, which is a mere 572-yard par 5, and is rated a 9 handicap. The bunkers come into play prominently on 17 and 18, with 18 holding two groups of bunkers, one group on the fairway making you think about holding up or trying to carry the bunker, and a group of bunkers lining the right side of the green. Besides the challenges on the course, the closing holes are located on a breathtaking piece of landscape that runs along the ocean on one side and Winding Bay on the other, so maintaining your concentration becomes a critical and rewarding part of your game. The course is a par 72 with an equal split of 36 out and 36 in; the course length runs 7123 yards from the gold tees, down to 5395 off the red tees, providing a little something for everyone.



Luxury Experience sat down with Head Golf Professional Kenny Gargiulo to discuss his challenges both on and off the golf course. Kenny's focus, when not being challenged by the golf course, is showcasing the experience of playing this fantastic course, maintaining a 5-star course experience from the practice facility, to the Pro shop and throughout the course, and lastly Kenny is working his network as he markets and promotes the golfing experience found only at The Abaco Club on Winding Bay. Graduating from college with a degree in history, Kenny found that his opportunities were limited, so he listened to his heart and pursued his love of golf. Starting from the ground floor, he pulled bags and caddied his way into the pro shop, paying his dues along the way. The time, energy and perseverance paid off for Kenny, and as he stated, "Enjoy what you are playing, not just that you are playing."

**The Abaco Club on Winding Bay**

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