

# JACK'S KIWI THRILLER

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NICKLAUS-DESIGNED  
GOLF COURSES  
AROUND THE WORLD,  
THE KINLOCH CLUB  
NEAR TAUPO HOLDS  
A SPECIAL PLACE IN  
THE GOLDEN BEAR'S  
HEART. IT'S EASY  
TO SEE WHY.

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Sixty years on from the first of Jack Nicklaus' forays into golf course architecture with Pete Dye and Desmond Muirhead, the list of both Jack Nicklaus-designed golf courses – and their global reach – is beyond immense. More than 400 courses in dozens of countries represent a colossal body of work, with many hosting annual Tour events, Ryder and Presidents Cup competitions and major championships.

Perhaps the best known of all these courses is Muirfield Village, and it's no doubt the most personal to Jack himself, having built the golf course with Muirhead in his hometown of Columbus, Ohio. Named for the site of his first Open Championship victory at Muirfield in Scotland, Nicklaus has continued to toy with the golf course almost year on year, striving to improve and refresh the challenge presented annually at the Memorial Tournament he has hosted since 1974.



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However, the list of 'notables' includes Harbour Town, Valhalla, Shoal Creek, Glen Abbey, The Bear's Club and the marvelous Sebonack on New York's Long Island, all equally well known as either collaborations with other designers or as exclusive Jack Nicklaus 'Signature' layouts.

And of those courses and regions where his design footprint has extended beyond the United States, the Taupo area is one for which

the Golden Bear had long expressed a soft spot, having previously enjoyed its natural beauty and serenity on multiple fishing trips.

New Zealand's sole Jack Nicklaus Signature layout remains The Kinloch Club, laid out on former pastoral land leading down towards the north shore of Lake Taupo. Nicklaus was no doubt thrilled to get the call from the owners when the idea of a golf course was floated, leaving no one under any illusion about his feelings for the country.

"It occurred to me that in an increasingly tumultuous world, this peaceful haven offers a timeless way of life and values," Nicklaus said in Kinloch's formative years.

"If I had to move outside the United States, New Zealand is the first place I'd come."

Nicklaus was present to open the first nine holes in 2007, not long after completing work at Sebonack alongside Tom Doak. The terrain at each location features open, unwooded

expanses, wild grasses and landforms that would ultimately inspire crumpled fairways, jagged bunkering, exciting angles of play and daring green complexes and settings.

Indeed, anyone picturing a 'Nicklaus course' in their mind's eye, based on the manicured state of many of those listed above – or at Lakelands, Heritage and The Australian Golf Club across the Ditch – will be shocked to the core on their arrival at Kinloch.



Jack Nicklaus







The course has, for most of its life, been described as a links. But the backdrop of steep hillsides, elevation changes, the prevalence of water on several holes, and a location 200 kilometres from the ocean, make it impossible to rank as a pure links.

The great Peter Thomson might have described Kinloch as “links-like” in appearance, but the fact that Nicklaus built a golf course requiring, almost without exception, forced carries into each green also distinguishes the layout from the ‘ground game’ strategy that players have the option to employ on a pure links.

The Kinloch Club’s long-time professional, Tom Long, is one of the few to have tamed the layout, holding the course record of seven-under 65 off the black tees – and, perhaps even more incredibly, once shooting a two-over 74 with just a 6-iron. Long has been at Kinloch from day one and continues to be thrilled with what’s ahead of him each time he steps on the tee.

“I’ve never played a golf course like it. You get a completely different game of golf every time you play it. The wind is going to be different; your lie will be different. It keeps you interested, and you continually learn,” Long said.

“It’s more of a hybrid between links and parkland, with most of the trouble coming short of the green. I always tell people that, if in doubt, miss long at Kinloch, as you’ll generally have an easier up and down and hurt your score less than if you come up short.”

The test of golf is exhilarating, to say the least. The par-3s on the back nine alone certainly make you sit up and pay attention, not simply for the beauty of the backdrops but for the variations in the parcels of land you need to carry to reach each putting surface.

Long’s “don’t be short” advice should be ringing in your ears at the 15th and 17th holes, where a tee shot missed short could result in a lost ball – or at the very least, a hurried search down a steep slope of tall fescues.

Although not a links, the homage paid to the traditional style of the game won’t be lost on golfers as they tour the inland layout. Few trees come into play, and it’s rare to find a perfectly flat lie on the fairways. Then there’s the rugged bunkering style and thicker, rough grasses beyond the playing corridors that would align more closely with an Open Championship setup.

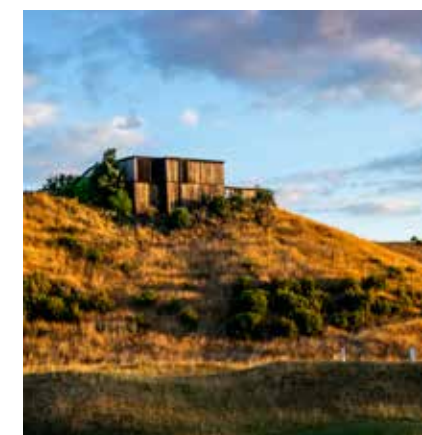
And to suggest Kinloch’s fairways are ‘undulating’ would be an understatement. There are stretches of fairway that more closely resemble a mogul ski run, and on occasions I was concerned about the prospect of flipping a golf cart by getting an angle wrong or driving too quickly.

Kinloch’s golf manager, Mike West, echoed Long’s sentiments about the course and made mention of the different sets of tees that are available for players, stretching back to the Black tees at 6,600 metres. Nicklaus himself said the course was meant to be “sporty”, and playing from more forward tees would ensure people had fun, while West said the recent introduction of a ‘Combo’

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Staying over at Kinloch Manor & Villas (above) allows guests to enjoy some of the many other activities in the Taupo region, such as geothermal hot pools, sailing, fishing, mountain biking, hiking, skydiving, white-water rafting and more.

course – with a selection of holes from the Blue and White tees – had proven very popular.

Long continued, “Many of the greens are wider than they are deep, so picking the right tees here, so you can go into the green with some elevation, is key.

“The undulations on and around the greens also demand that you have an array of short-game shots. You can’t just pull out a lob wedge before you even get to your golf ball; you also need to have the 7-iron bump-and-run, or maybe even chipping with a hybrid, to create a shot.”

Whether you visit Kinloch just to play golf or choose to spend a night or two in one of the magnificently appointed

on-course villas around the Lodge, an afternoon tee time will allow you the opportunity of some post-round refreshments ahead of a twilight setting to be savoured.

With the sunset dipping over the broad expanse of Lake Taupo and nearby mountains, there are few more tranquil places to take in the view than from your villa balcony or the Lodge verandas, high on the bluff that splits the two nines. The fescue roughs are enveloped in a warm sea of gold that contrasts magically with the rich green of the fairways and the shimmer on the lake, dragging golfers and guests forward in a desperate attempt to capture the scene for posterity.

It’s easy to see what drew Jack Nicklaus to this area many times over, joining all those who have enjoyed the beauty and serenity of Kinloch. ■



[www.kinlochgolf.co.nz](http://www.kinlochgolf.co.nz)