

# GOLF VACATIONS

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*Life Luxuriated*

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# JAPAN AND THE SCOTTY CAMERON CUP

*One man's journey into golf in the Far East and a unique  
bespoke experience from a western craftsman. BY DARRYL WEE*

ALL IMAGES ON THIS SPREAD: River Fuji  
Country Club in Shizuoka Prefecture.

I first learnt about the Scotty Cameron Cup from my Japanese buddy while he was based in Singapore. Little did I realize that Japan was one of Scotty's key markets outside North America, and a number of years ago, a Scotty Cameron Museum was built at the Hamamatsu Seaside Golf Club in Shizuoka Prefecture, also the site of the annual Scotty Cameron Cup.

I decided to visit this mystifying event but instead of just visiting for the weekend, we were to spend a week in Japan with three rounds of golf to make this a proper golf vacation.

The first course we visited was the very exclusive 300 Club in Chigasaki, Kanagawa Prefecture. This club has only 300 members and it includes in its membership captains of industry, government officials and politicians. This club is so well-known that when we were asking for information on going there by train, the Japan Rail staff asked if we were golf professionals as not everyone would be allowed to play there.

The golf course is approximately an hour outside Tokyo by train. From Shinagawa, where we were staying, the cost was ¥970 for a normal ticket; however I would highly recommend that you purchase a Green Car ticket which provides you a reserved seat and more space. For those thinking of taking a cab, the estimated cost from Tokyo to the club one-way is estimated to be \$5400, so taking the train is the most cost and time effective way to go.

The day we were playing, we received an apology from the staff that the course would be a little busy. When we enquired how many flights would be playing in the afternoon, we were told that there were 15 flights playing that day, as compared to a normal day where the course would have an average of only five to eight flights!

I found the clubhouse a lovely property that seemed to have changed very little over time. Many of the facilities were upgraded in the changing rooms, but the dining room and bar seemed to have been preserved in time, eliciting a lodge-like feel from the 1960s. There was a large moose head as the centerpiece over the fireplace with other animals proudly displayed on the walls. The club is very particular about dress code - men are required to wear a jacket and no jeans or shorts are permitted.

Playing 6,875 yards from the Champions tees, this course was probably the best groomed of the three that we will play in Japan. Though not as long, it makes up for it with its tight tree-lined fairways. In fact, in the front nine, eight of the nine holes had Out-of-Bounds on the left. I would recommend walking this course, as it is not very undulating. The front nine was a nice way to gently get to know the course, and the first few holes were relatively straightforward with mild changes in elevation. I particularly found the par 5, 570-yard 9th hole a wonderful way to finish off the front nine. The tee off demanded an accurate shot, and the second sets you up for an uphill third shot to a green that is framed by the clubhouse in the background.

The back nine offers significantly more challenges but is also



*“This club is so well-known that when we were asking for information on going there by train, the Japan Rail staff asked if we were golf professionals as not everyone would be allowed to play there.”*

more picturesque. The par 4, 440-yard 10th hole has elevated tees, which enables us to see the green clearly in the distance. Many holes on this golf course clearly show the lay of both green and hazards.

Another hole worthy of mention is the par 4, 410 yards 14th hole. This was one of the narrowest holes I have ever played, and it requires players to thread a driver or 3-wood between two bunkers with a slight draw. In fact, this was also one of the few holes where you cannot see the green. However, as you walk up to take the second shot, the green is slowly revealed to you and it is only then do you realize how important the tee shot is for this hole.

The next course we played was the River Fuji Country Club in Shizuoka Prefecture. This course was by far the most beautiful and as the name suggests, it has Mount Fuji as the backdrop for many of the holes. Made up of three 9-hole courses, the course sat on the side

of a mountain with the Fuji River at the foothills.

The clubhouse was also the largest of the three but its design was a little dated. While all the facilities were relatively modern, do not expect private showers after golf, as the bathing facilities are traditionally Japanese – think communal showers. If you can overcome your shyness, then you’ll enjoy taking your shower seated on wooden stools, then hopping into the warm baths (or onsen) to soothe those aching muscles. One other custom to note is that golfers are expected to stop after nine holes for lunch, and the Katsu Curry at River Fuji is the best golfing lunch I had during the entire trip.

We started at the par 36 Fuji course, which measures 3,094 yards. Although this course was the shorter of the two, it made up for its length by being the significantly tighter course. One of the features of this nine is the breathtaking view of Mount Fuji, which can be



CLOCKWISE FROM EXTREME LEFT: The very exclusive 300 Club in Chigasaki, Kanagawa Prefecture; Caddy at 300 Club; Scotty Cameron putter covers; Japanese caddy on a segway at Hamamatsu Seaside Course; Novelty prizes at the Scotty Cameron Cup; Darryl Wee and Collidear Li with flight mates at the Scotty Cameron Cup.

quite a distraction if you are not careful.

One of my favourite holes on this nine was the par 3, 175-yard 2nd hole. The green is protected by a pond, which beautifully reflects the landscape around the green, and the majestic Mount Fuji that sits in the background watching over all manner of tee shots. A rather unique feature here is that all holes have dual greens for different weather conditions, so make sure you know which green you are playing to.

The Fuji course also bears the consequence of being the toughest of the three, each offering a different challenge and forcing players to shape shots to stay in contention (with par). The par 5, 5th in particular is breathtaking from start to end. At 513 yards, it requires an accurate drive to a narrow fairway, the following shots require your full concentration as the terrain changes and Mount Fuji looms large behind the green.

For our back nine, we played the Kai Course, a par 36 measuring 3,318 yards. The style of this nine was significantly different from the Fuji; it used its length to its full advantage, however, it does have wider fairways. This course is mountainous in nature and players will need to adjust to elevation changes on a number of their shots. The par 5, 530-yard 6th hole is scenic with an elevated tee. The complete hole in its entire splendour is on display, and all one needs is to keep the ball on the fairway to enjoy it.

Then came Hamamatsu Seaside Golf Course, the venue for the annual Scotty Cameron Cup and the location of the Scotty Cameron

Museum. This museum not only displays items and personal belongings from the putter maestro, it also has a whole array of putters from tour players including those used to win major championships. The museum is not large and can be walked about within the hour.

A good museum always comes with a museum shop, and this is where one can end up spending a lot of time and money, especially if you are a serious Scotty Cameron fan. On sale are tour issue and limited edition putters with unique custom Scotty accessories. Visitors will not find production putters here or things on the cheap. If you were looking for something that your buddies do not have back home, this would be the place to find it.

One of the key events the museum organizes annually is the Scotty Cameron Cup, and this is the 8th iteration for this event in Japan. The objective of this event is for serious collectors and fans of Scotty Cameron putters to meet and network. Cameron himself makes time to attend this yearly weekend event, which starts with a dinner on Saturday. It is at dinner where the American introduces some of his new products and shares his design thoughts on the latest products he is releasing; it is also this evening that the museum releases new tour and limited edition putters to attendees and you

can see how enthusiastic the collectors are, picking up not just one, but multiple putters priced at US\$10,000 per piece at the minimum.

On Sunday morning, the golfing event commences at 8.30am and runs into the mid afternoon. It was lovely to arrive at the event, to see the flags representing the countries of all participants. Upon checking in, all competitors of this amateur jaunt are further teased with the various prizes that Cameron will be handing out for the novelty games, and to the winners of the event. There were 96 competitors from over 10 countries registered this year.

The Hamamatsu Seaside Course was the most open of all the courses we played during our trip. However, the designers took advantage of its location by the sea and wind was its natural line of defense. Often, the wind is blowing so strongly that we need to add to more than two clubs. The fairways are also lined with mature Pine trees, which camouflaged the effects of the wind, making club selection difficult.

An interesting feature of the cup was the novelty prizes featured on every hole. We had club staff on their Segway helping players along, but also rewarding them if they were able to meet the challenge. Winners of these novelty holes received coupons to be exchanged for prizes when we completed our round.

Both nines were very different in terms of feel: the front nine features several holes played around a large lake and the back boasts larger fairways with water hazards featuring regularly on each hole that make accurate tee shots very important. I think one of the prettiest holes on this course was the par 4, 382 yards 7th hole that features a 90-degree dogleg to the left. For longer hitters, going for the green was an option, as long as the wind is in your favour.

The par 3, 172-yard 8th hole also takes advantage of the lake and is picturesque. One interesting feature we notice as we play during the day, is the use of feature trees to block direct approaches to the green, playable only to the deftest of wedge players.

The event concludes with a lovely luncheon buffet and prize-giving ceremony. After several rounds of Roshambo (Japanese for the game rock-paper-scissors) and all the official prizes given out, Scotty Cameron sat for an autograph signing session for participants who bought items during the event. Although the prize presentation finished at 4pm, I only got my items signed by him at 7pm, being 39th in line. I must say, I really did enjoy meeting the man, and throughout the day he was very approachable and extremely friendly to all participants. Judging from this year's experience at the event, the Scotty Cameron Cup will be added to my golfing calendar for next year. 🍀

## MOVING GOLF CLUBS IN JAPAN

One thing that worried me the most about traveling in Japan was lugging my clubs around, and I also had my wife's set to deal with. However, we discovered how easy it was to travel with golf clubs in Japan with the assistance of their amazing logistics companies. When we landed in Haneda Airport, we went to the transportation counter, located just outside the arrival hall. There, we gave the address of the golf course we were playing at, and the clubs were taken off our hands only to reappear when we arrived at the course a few days later. The cost for transporting both sets of clubs was less than ¥3,500 which is about \$20 per set. I found out that clubs could be transported between golf courses within 24 hours if it is within a 300km radius. This meant that we were able to ship our clubs from course to course and finally back to the airport when we were done, making life significantly easier for transportation, and on my back.

[www.scottycameron.com](http://www.scottycameron.com)

