

This Girl's Golf Diary

Felicity Enjoys the Southern Cape

By Felicity Shiba



KNYSNA....A GOLFERS PARADISE.

Four days, Three nights, Three days of golf, 54 holes, 13km on just the one course alone. This is what I call #ParadiseBucketListing. For some reason the fact that I had not played any of the courses in Knysna came as a surprise to most of my golfing friends when I mentioned I would be there for the first time. Even with knowing the reasons, I too thought it was odd and way overdue.

When you talk about golfing in George with golfers who have played there, the one thing that everyone is sure to point out is the weather, the elements involved when you factor in Mother Nature with her ocean and the winds. So my natural instinct was to go there expecting the worst weather conditions plus, it is winter after all. You can imagine my surprise when I arrived to blue sky's and the warm winter sun. Taking advantage of this weather, I drove straight to Simola Country Club for a 12:30pm tee off time. Driving through George towards Knysna, one cannot help but notice the rebuilding happening from last years devastating fires. I marvel at the regeneration the earth has done in such a short space of time. The green is slowly resurfacing in spite of some evident dead forest trees. There's a freshness about the earth's natural process that is comforting.

SIMOLA GOLF AND COUNTRY ESTATE

Placed at the top of a mountain is the incredibly beautiful Jack Nicklaus Signature course, Simola Golf and Country Estate. The stylishly decorated clubhouse looms over the course and overlooks the lagoon and town at the bottom of the valley. This is the best view I have seen in a while. It's winter and coming from playing some dusty winter golf in Johannesburg, Simola was a lovely green surprise, just the beginning of my beautiful Knysna golf experience. The course is an 18 hole championship course and it lets you know this from time to time. The tee boxes, fairways and putting greens are lush and green and such a pleasure to putt on. It had some intimidating tee shots with spectacular views and no shortage of bunkers. True to my game, I landed in most of them but even the bunkers were a pleasure to play out of or maybe I was just way too happy to be there. The abundance of par 5's and par 3's could make this course a favourite with us amateurs, easy point making holes. At that moment I realised, there was not one Jack Nicklaus golf course design I have not loved so far. This is definitely going on my Top 10 courses. I played a decent round of golf that was topped off by a pretty and tasty cocktail, plus watching a breathtaking sunset from the 19th. I am, without a doubt, coming back here. Somehow I feel I might even enjoy it more the second time around.

One down, two to go....as I head back to George where Fancourt Golf Estate awaits...

FANCOURT GOLF ESTATE

Arriving at Fancourt just in time to check in and freshen up for a wonderful dinner at the elegant La Cantina. If you ever make it out there, make sure to ask the barman for their signature Aperol Spritz, which is now my ALL TIME favourite drink thanks to my wonderful host, Fancourts CEO Georgie Davidson. Dinner was delicious and as always, I ate way more than was required.

Still tentative about the weather, lest it interferes with my golf schedule, the first thing I did when I woke up was open the curtains to find a view of the driving range before me, beautiful blue sky's and not a single cloud in sight. George was showing off and I was there for it. A 1pm tee time gave me enough time to have a leisurely breakfast and a chance to take in my surroundings. I can not believe it has taken me so long to come here. Everything about Fancourt will make you want to pack up where ever you live and relocate. My love for mountains was being nurtured by the Outeniqua Mountains that are Fancourts backdrop. This made me even more excited to go out and challenge the gorgeous Outeniqua Golf Course, the course for the day. Ranked number 14 in South Africa, the Parkland course designed by Gary Player and named after the mountains. Outeniqua is pristine, opulently so. Its fairways are like a luxurious carpet. Beautifully manicured tee boxes make one feel bad for damaging them with a divot. The all white Cape Dutch architecture background of the houses finds itself at home with all the mountains around it and the simplicity of the white and thatch was appealing to me... of course there was nothing simple about the houses. I was officially calculating what it would take for me to move out here. The course itself is not too difficult, an absolute pleasure to play if your game is semi decent. Unfortunately my game was off that day and my wonderful caddy was so nice to remind me that I was playing at sea level and I should not feel too bad but I really just think it was my game. A bad day on such a dream course, my heart was broken. I had just under 24 hours to lick my wounds, get over it and erase that game because tomorrow I was playing the big league, the master of all, the ULTIMATE BUCKET LISTER, the Number 1 course in the country.

THE LINKS

If I told you I was in heaven would you believe me? Well, in the golf world, I pretty much died and went to heaven for a day. It is a gorgeous day out, perfect weather with a few clouds over the mountains but the sun is shining and I was told this was excellent weather for George. THE LINKS is a private golf club and play is restricted to its members and guests. I was honoured and privileged for the invite to play there. It is currently the number 1 golf course in the country and I was about to find out why. After my game the day before, I don't want to lie I was scared and intimidated. The warm welcome by Peter Dros and his team was pleasant and welcoming enough to ease my nerves a little. I was quick to put out a disclaimer Peter's way so he did not think I was an absolute tool out there, after all he would be stuck with me for the next few hours. We made our way to the range and practice green for a quick warm up where we were met by our caddies. 11am tee off time and on the 1st tee waiting, was the most iconic welcome on a course I had ever experienced. The caddy master met us with shots of whiskey, which I soon appreciated for the calming of the nerves. For a non whiskey drinking person, that shot went straight to the system. Also at the table were some snacks, water, energy bars, apples, tees, scorecards, pencils and placard of a guide on the attitude one must have when playing The Links by Gerald Micklem when he was referring to St Andrews but should apply to all Links..."You must never get mad at

The Links. You must be willing to accept exactly what you get....' Boy was I happy with what I got. The intimidating 1st tee and the wind took my lovely tee shot far right and that would be the 1st ball gone. It was going to be a long walk through these Links. The caddies, caddy master and my playing partners all agreed that that deserved a mulligan and I took it. My second attempt found the middle of the fairway and we were off.

I am not even sure that my words can actually sum up the feeling of walking that course at that moment. I quickly got over that overwhelming intimidating feeling and replaced it with gratitude. Only then did I start to fully take in and enjoy my surroundings. This course is magnificent, an insanely beautiful monster, its undulating layout typical to Links is not for the faint hearted and I was going to make the best of it. The views of the majestic Outeniqua mountains are astoundingly exquisite. The fairways are green and rich but don't you dare make your way to the rough, I say rough in the nicest possible way because once you are in, YOU ARE IN IT. My caddy, a 8 handicapper himself quickly figured my game out and we became team unstoppable. My game came to play that day and I was more than happy with the pars and bogeys. The quaint halfway house really did make my day, I doubt you will find a more charming halfway house this side of the world. I spent more time taking pictures than eating. The halfway house only sits four people, restaurant style setting complete with silver cloches and a set table. Halfway fine dining, what is this place?



The highlight on the course was me almost getting that par on hole 12, the Par 4 Stroke 1 otherwise known as "Sheer Murrdr". The wind had picked up just before the turn which required a different kind of game. I hit my irons low off the tee and managed to avoid the wind, which gave me a shot at par on the short holes, but my short game is always my downfall and that led to a lot of bogeys and doubles. Totally impressed with myself for playing with the same ball through nine, I was not prepared for that back nine and the wind. The good news is it was coming from behind and it worked as an assist, the bad news is that meant that balls were being carried either left or right depending on your poison...hook, pull, slice, fade or push. This game was changing fast but I was still in it, determined and loving every minute. The 17th is a Par 3 stroke 9, 103m and on the day it was 96m to the flag. With the wind now howling, my caddy gave me a sand wedge and it was the perfect club....or so we thought. It pitched perfectly on the green and rolled off into the rough, I was IN IT. Pretty sure we all had seen my ball go in and knew where it was, we confidently looked for it for 5 minutes before giving up. How had we lost that ball? The clouds had come in and a chill settled in, for the first time, I was a little cold in George but very grateful the weather held up. A total of 3 balls lost on just the back nine and a total of 13km walked. The strikingly grand clubhouse was a welcome sight because I could feel the fatigue creeping in. It was a physical, mental and rather welcome emotional fatigue. A perfect day out on a course that can only amplify ones love for the game. We were met at the clubhouse with a glass of sherry and that was the cherry on that cake.

Taking some time to have a look at the Pro Shop is always one of my favourite things to do and I was not about to miss that shop. Somehow I had the feeling that one would be quite an experience and boy was I right. THE LINKS Pro Shop is set up like a luxury boutique, no, it is a luxury boutique. The store is warm and inviting, perfectly lit and smells incredible. I can't quite remember the smell but I appreciated it. There's a subtle and elegant sophistication with the merchandising which eludes most Pro Shops I've visited. The colour coordination on garments was thoughtful and fashionably done. It is spot on, on both the men's and the ladies sections. The Fashion Designer in me is beaming and I'm pretty sure I don't want to leave this place. What a treat.

My stay was topped of with a delicious mouthwatering dinner at the very fine Henry Whites - Fancourts classic fine dining restaurant. A gem. If you are considering planning a holiday that involves golfing, the beach and mountains, then don't look too far because you might miss the perfect destination right under your nose. I am looking forward to going back and exploring the

other courses in Knysna.

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