

DIVINE

9

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The midway point in our fantasy round is nigh and the 9th hole invariably offers an opportunity for salvation, albeit of the risk-reward variety. The temptation, nay the need, to attack might be paramount for those who have fallen by the wayside over the first eight holes, while those who have made a solid or even stellar start to the round will be faced with a choice—keep going for broke or start pulling in the horns. The majority of the 9th holes from around the world showcased in this article will lead the player back to the clubhouse, and perhaps some much-needed refreshments. A few though are located at the farthest extremity of the course with no immediate respite. However, there is no question that playing the 9th hole is a landmark moment in any round of golf. Readers—enjoy!

#1

Par-4, 361 yards

Blackwolf Run (River), Kohler, Wisconsin

This might appear an innocuous start, but appearances can be deceptive—especially as the architect in question is the infamous Pete Dye, who laid out Blackwolf Run for Herb Kohler's American Club back in 1988. In general, the extraordinary and seductive 9th hole on the River Course, known as Cathedral Spires, commands the utmost reverence. Faced with a lengthy carry across a thin strip of land flanked by water, most players will aim a long-iron or fairway metal from the tee to the left of a prominent thicket of trees and short of the well-positioned fairway bunkers that guard the approach to the green. Anyone who decides to go for the green, though, must aim over the trees and through a narrow gap between two large traps. This requires about 300 yards of carry, but anything pushed into or right of the green could fall foul of its front-to-back, left-to-right gradient that slithers inexorably toward the river.

#2

Par-4, 460 yards

Augusta National, Augusta, Georgia

Known as Carolina Cherry, for a small, native, evergreen tree that bears prolific clusters of white flowers in April followed by black berries popular with birds, this hole's trademark is a green that slopes treacherously from back to front. With the hole stretching gradually in length over the years, players at the Masters make an increasing point of trying to drive down the right side of the downhill fairway as anything 'hooked' will likely result in a 'stymie' behind a tree. The line from the right is also desirable because it takes the two wide bunkers that eat into the front left of the green out of play. Nowadays, the longer hitters manage to propel their tee shots all the way to the pedestrian walkway at around 350 yards. The green has a prodigious false front and anything short of the top of the slope will invariably trickle back down the fairway, often, in the case of a pitch shot, to the player's feet.



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#3

Par-5, 636 yards

Congressional Country Club (Blue), Bethesda, Maryland

The Blue Course, scene of Rory McIlroy's eight-shot triumph in the 2011 U.S. Open, has staged four Majors since it opened in 1924. The original design by Devereux Emmet has since been updated by both Robert Trent Jones, Sr., and his son Rees Jones. Known for its rolling terrain, tree-lined fairways, wide greens and ubiquitous water hazards, it has been the home club of seven Presidents, including Dwight D. Eisenhower, and such luminaries of the American way of life as J.C. Penney, Harvey Firestone, Walter Chrysler, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and William Randolph Hearst. The 9th hole on the Blue is scenic, tough, and almost never should be attempted in two shots. It has a straight, flat fairway and the bunkers on both sides are nearly 300 yards from the tee. Second shots should finish near the end of the fairway, leaving a pitch of 100 yards or so across a giant ravine to a three-tier green surrounded by five bunkers.

#4

Par-3, 236 yards

Merion (East), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Hugh Wilson's masterpiece in a northwest suburb of Philadelphia hosted its fifth U.S. Open last year and, despite its lack of length, served up a memorable championship and a searching examination of the skills of the world's best players. Certainly, Justin Rose's one-over-par winning total of 281 reflected the degree of difficulty that the field faced at virtually every hole on the East Course at Merion. Typically, the 9th, a downhill par-3, offers a multitude of challenges depending on the tee placement, the location of the hole and the wind direction. Most players will hit a long-iron if the pin is at the front, a deceptively tough shot due to the water hazard that sits in front and to the right of the green. Meanwhile, hybrids are required more often than not to carry the left bunker if the pin is positioned at the back of this angled green. Whatever, there are always far more bogeys than birdies here.

#5

Par-3, 199 yards

Royal Dar-es-Salaam (Red), Rabat, Morocco

Robert Trent Jones, Sr., was commissioned by King Hassan II to build North Africa's premier course back in 1971, and he did not disappoint his autocratic client. The Red at Royal Dar-es-Salaam has hosted numerous European Tour events since then and remains a popular stopover. The highlight of this outstanding layout is the 9th, a daunting par-3 that measures nearly 200 yards and requires a long-iron or rescue club into an island green across water that is teeming with ducks, geese, flamingos and water lilies. A semi-circle of cork trees and other eye-catching flora frames a green that slants gently from left to right and from back to front. Caddies are recommended on the Red Course and nowhere are they more likely to prove useful than on the 9th tee, where subtle breezes can play havoc with club selection, and on the 9th green, where the breaks and grain invariably need to be interpreted with extreme care.

#6

Par-4, 380 yards

Innsbruck Resort & Golf Club, Helen, Georgia

Laid out by Bill Watts, the golf course at Innsbruck in the Blue Ridge Mountains of northeast Georgia opened in 1987. The town of Helen is a replica of the retreats often found in the Alps of southern Germany and the scenery surrounding the course is appropriately atmospheric and colorful. The line off the tee at the par-4 9th is Mount Yonah, the scenic centerpiece of Chattahoochee National Forest in the middle distance. The ideal landing area is either the center or left half of the fairway in order to keep the pond that encroaches from the right out of play. From the fairway, it's important to check the wind and your yardage because approaches to a shallow green need to be precise. If you miss, then you must miss to the right because a sizeable lake comes into play on the left. The green is also protected by a wide bunker front-left and is overlooked by a delightful Bavarian-style clubhouse.

#7

Par-4, 486 yards

Royal County Down (Championship Links), Newcastle, Northern Ireland

With a gorse-ridden graveyard lurking in front of the tee and both the seaside town of Newcastle and the Mountains of Mourne providing the backdrop, this is, unsurprisingly, one of golf's most photographed scenes. But its breathtaking setting should not detract from its towering strengths as a golf hole. A par-4 despite its length, the 9th is played from beside a huge mound down to a fairway some 60 feet below. Ideally, the tee shot, mainly blind, needs to hug the large dune on the left of the fairway to set up the best approach to the green. There is more room to the right for the shorter hitters, although this is not the best line for the second shot with two well-placed cross-bunkers some 50 yards short of the green augmented by a greenside trap on the right and two pot bunkers on the left. The sharply undulating green also requires particular care on putts from back to front.

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#8

Par-4, 414 yards

Royal Birkdale, Southport, Lancashire, England

This demanding links was the scene of Arnold Palmer's first victory in the [British] Open back in 1961. The 9th hole, another left-to-right dogleg, is a classic example of how tough the course can play. The tee shot, which is blind, needs to find the left half of the fairway and, ideally, run out to about 270 yards. The wind often comes from the right and can blow the ball too far left into some nasty rough. Before changes were made prior to the 2008 Open, many players used to take the elbow on. But now, in all probability, they will be gobbled up by the new mounding and it will be hard for them to reach the green. The putting surface is slightly elevated, almost a plateau, thus placing a premium on club selection. Anything short is likely to be gathered by one of the two bunkers at the front but there's also plenty of trouble, in the shape of deep rough, over the back.

#9

Par-5, 564 yards

Gleneagles Hotel (PGA Centenary), Perthshire, Scotland

Currently under preparation to stage the 40th Ryder Cup matches in September, the Jack Nicklaus-designed PGA Centenary Course at Gleneagles in the heart of Scotland's whisky belt first opened two decades ago. The resort also has two much older courses on site, the King's and Queen's, and dates back originally to the mid-1920s. The surrounding countryside is spectacular, the Grampians in the distance blending hauntingly with the purple-clad slopes of Ben Vorlich and the Trossachs. Known as Crook O' Moss, the long 9th is an opportunity for players to steal a march on their opponents or perhaps claw back a hole. The drive should bisect the fairway between the attendant ponds and bunkers, but the carry to the green is still long and dangerous with further water lurking down the right. Most will aim the second shot left to leave an easy pitch up the length of a long, narrow green that falls away to the left.

#10

Par-5, 501 yards

The Jeremy Golf & Country Club, Park City, Utah

Ever since this Arnold Palmer and Ed Seay design opened in 1981, golfers have fallen in love with its charm. No matter what handicap they play to, players of all abilities tend to agree on one thing: The Jeremy enjoys one of the game's most beautiful settings, in the high foothills of the Wasatch Mountains. Using the meandering East Canyon Creek as a companion and, occasionally, as an adversary, this gently rolling layout offers a diverse challenge. The 9th, a relatively short par-5 by today's standards, is perhaps the finest risk-reward hole on the entire property. The drive needs to be both accurate and long to cross the creek and avoid a pair of sentinel bunkers both right and left. The hole then doglegs almost 90 degrees to the right. Going for the green in two involves not only clearing water once again but also judging the distance correctly in order to hold the putting surface rather than skip toward two further traps just through the back.

#11

Par-3, 190 yards

Pinehurst Resort (No.2), Pinehurst, North Carolina

Donald Ross's pride and joy, Pinehurst No.2 is the centerpiece of one of the world's biggest and most historic golf resorts. Later this year, it will become the first layout to serve as host to the U.S. Open and U.S. Women's Open in consecutive weeks. Opened in 1907, No.2 was conceived, and constantly updated over the next four decades, by Ross who called it "the fairest test of championship golf I have ever designed." No.2 is best known for the strategic choices Ross presents with his core design and also for its crowned, undulating green complexes. In 2010, Ben Crenshaw and Bill Coore were engaged to restore the essence of his original vision. The 9th is the shortest hole on the course but nonetheless can cause problems. Club selection is essential, since most of the trouble, in the form of scrubland and sand, lies to the left and behind the putting surface. The two-tiered green, sloping from left to right, is wide and shallow.

#12

Par-4, 410 yards

Shadow Glen, Olathe, Kansas

Designed by Tom Watson, Tom Weiskopf and Jay Morrish, Shadow Glen opened in 1989 and was named Best New Private Course in America the following year by Golf Digest. Flowing gracefully along rocky ridges and through tree-lined valleys, it is part of the gated community of Cedar Creek in the fast-growing Midwest town of Olathe. Shadow Glen was conceived to meet the highest golfing standards whilst capturing and preserving the innate beauty of the locality's rolling, wooded terrain. In a nutshell, this alluring layout wraps itself around hills and bluffs as though it has always been here. The fairway on the downhill par-4 9th should yield significant distance to a well-struck tee shot, though there is a danger that bunkers to the left and right will snaffle anything partially misdirected. The approach shot is the key to the hole as it must carry a creek and avoid the lake left and greenside bunkers short, right and beyond.



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#13

Par-4, 364 yards

Castle Stuart Golf Links, Inverness, Scotland

Created by Gil Hanse, currently working on the 2016 Olympic Games course in Rio de Janeiro, Castle Stuart is less than five years old even though it looks as if it has hugged the Moray Firth coastline for centuries. It has already staged three Scottish Opens, the most recent won by Phil Mickelson, and entertains ambitions to host the [British] Open. There's no doubting the quality of this fledgling layout or the exciting challenge it poses. The 9th is a genuine risk-reward hole—drivable for many players downwind—but the line must be down the right where the fairway contours plus a right-to-left ball flight can lead to the back portion of the green. Less solid strikes that leave the ball in the fairway hollow short and right of the green result in awkward, blind pitches to an unreceptive green. Left of the green is an open sandy area, so the safe tee shot is a lay-up into the wide part of the fairway.

#14

Par-3, 148 yards

Ocean Dunes, Phan Thiet, Vietnam

This Nick Faldo design was sculpted in 1996 from the dunes that run alongside Vietnam's southeast seaboard, about 125 miles east of Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon). The coastal breezes determine how this open, links-like course will play each day, but it is generally an engaging experience for players of all standards. The 9th is by common consent Ocean Dunes' outstanding moment—indeed, it has been rated one of the best 500 golf holes in the world by Golf Magazine. A short par-3, it provides a stirring finish to the front nine. With the resort's private beach visible to the right and a gentle, refreshing wind whistling through the attendant casuarina evergreens, it's easy to lose concentration. The shallow, elevated, back-to-front sloping green is partially hidden by a dune and trees to the right and a grassy mound to the left, so the tee shot in effect must be threaded blind through a narrow slot to reach its target.

Par-4, 447 yards

TPC River's Bend, Maineville, Ohio

Arnold Palmer was once asked what his choice would be for the signature hole at this course, and he replied that River's Bend might well have 18 such holes. While TPC River's Bend, about 25 miles northeast of Cincinnati, has many trademark Palmer features, it also has so many undulations that the course itself has an almost Scottish feel. But if there's one hole that could be classified as extra special, it is the 9th. This hole feeds to the right round a large bunker on the elbow of the dogleg and is somewhat reminiscent of the 18th hole on the Championship Course at Bay Hill with a large lake guarding the front right of a wide but shallow green. And it can be just as destructive to a scorecard. In the 2002 Kroger Senior Classic, Palmer recorded a nine on this hole. "I don't swear," Palmer told a reporter as he came off the green. "But I exhaled all right."

#15

Courtesy of Golf Club Images





#16

Par-4, 481 yards

Pebble Beach Golf Links, Monterey Peninsula, California

There can be few stretches of holes more majestic or intimidating than the run from 7-10 at Pebble Beach. Following the dramas of the cliff-top, ocean-defying 8th, the 9th is just as difficult, if not more so, though perhaps a little more conventional in construction. From the tee, the ideal line is left center of the fairway, just inside the bunker that sits approximately 245 yards out. Certainly anything left of the trap will be in trouble—consigned to an extremely awkward lie, probably in thick rough. Side-hill fairway lies are the norm for the second shot, which might be executed either with a long-iron or fairway metal, so beware the mighty Pacific to the right. That said, there's a deep, bunkered gully left and short of the green that will punish a timid approach. And the green, only 24 yards deep and sloping from back left to front right toward the ocean, is not exactly the biggest target on the course.

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#17

Par-4, 485 yards

Laurel Valley, Ligonier, Pennsylvania

Built in 1959 by Dick Wilson and redesigned by Arnold Palmer in 1988, Laurel Valley staged the 1965 PGA Championship (won by Dave Marr) and the 1975 Ryder Cup when Palmer led the U.S. to a resounding victory over GB & Ireland. The 9th, a long, uphill par-4 played into the prevailing wind with the clubhouse overlooking beyond, is consistently the toughest hole on the course. Even though the fairway is relatively wide and straight (the purist's line is slightly right), the elevation makes it difficult to see the green when playing the second shot. About 100 yards out the small stream that runs down the right side of the hole cuts across and can easily come into play. In addition, some big pines nearer the green, also on the right, should be given a wide berth. The difficulties don't end there because the green has two tiers and three putts are a distinct possibility for anyone on the wrong level.

#18

Par-5, 725 yards

The Gallery at Dove Mountain (North), Marana, Arizona

Now for our grandstand finish—one of the world's longest holes! Jointly designed by Tom Lehman and John Fought, the North Course offers sweeping views of the surrounding Sonoran desert as it meanders through two rugged canyons. Given that the ball flies further at altitude, Lehman was determined the 9th should be an authentic three-shotter while remaining a birdie opportunity. The tee shot is downhill to a generous landing area devoid of trouble apart from one fairway bunker on the right. The second shot, again downhill, offers several options since there's a matrix of five bunkers spread across the fairway and a lake encroaching from the right. Playing safe down the right center of the fairway leaves a long third shot so, to finish closer to the green, longer hitters flirt with the bunker left and perhaps pull level with the lake on the right. A waste area crosses the fairway 40 yards short of the green while three more bunkers guard the entrance.