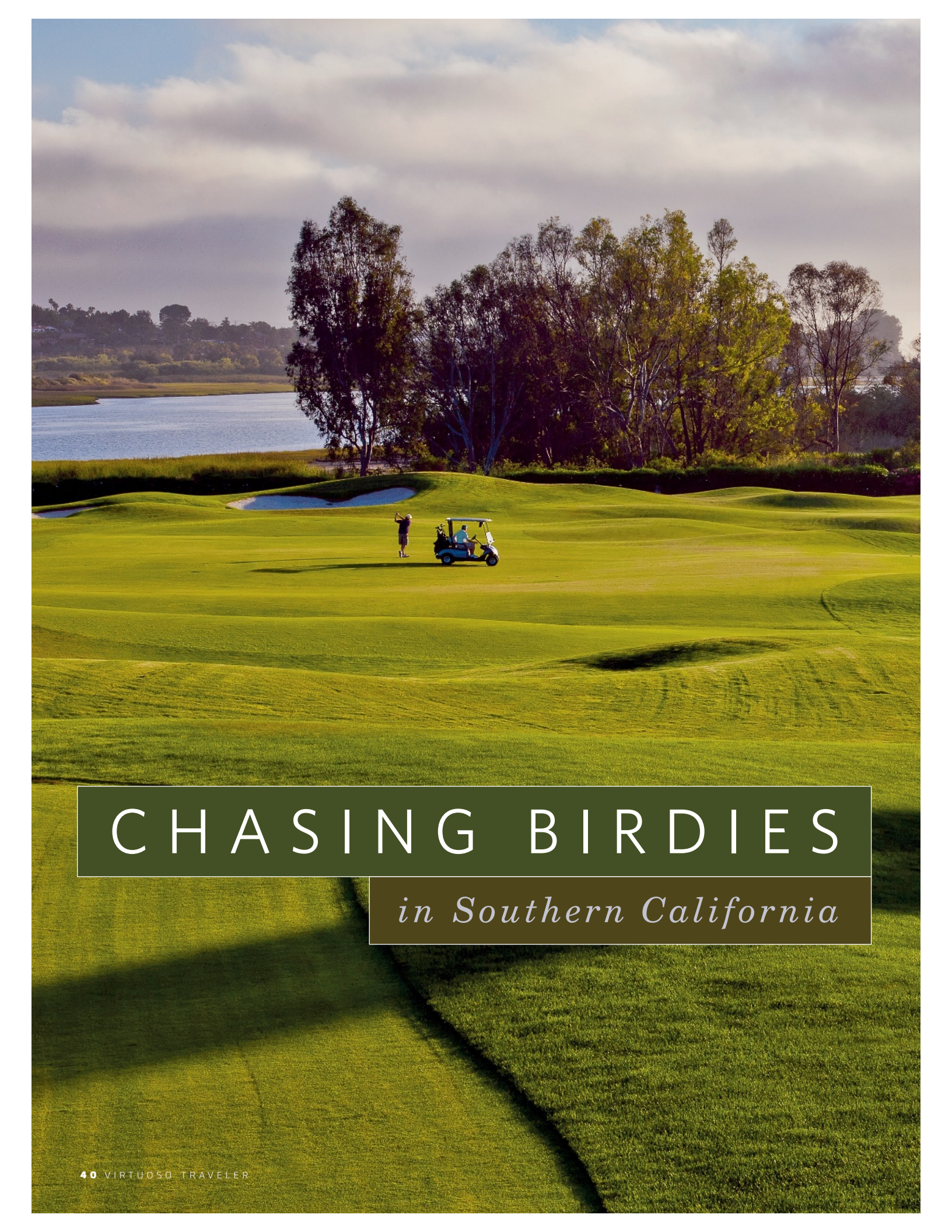
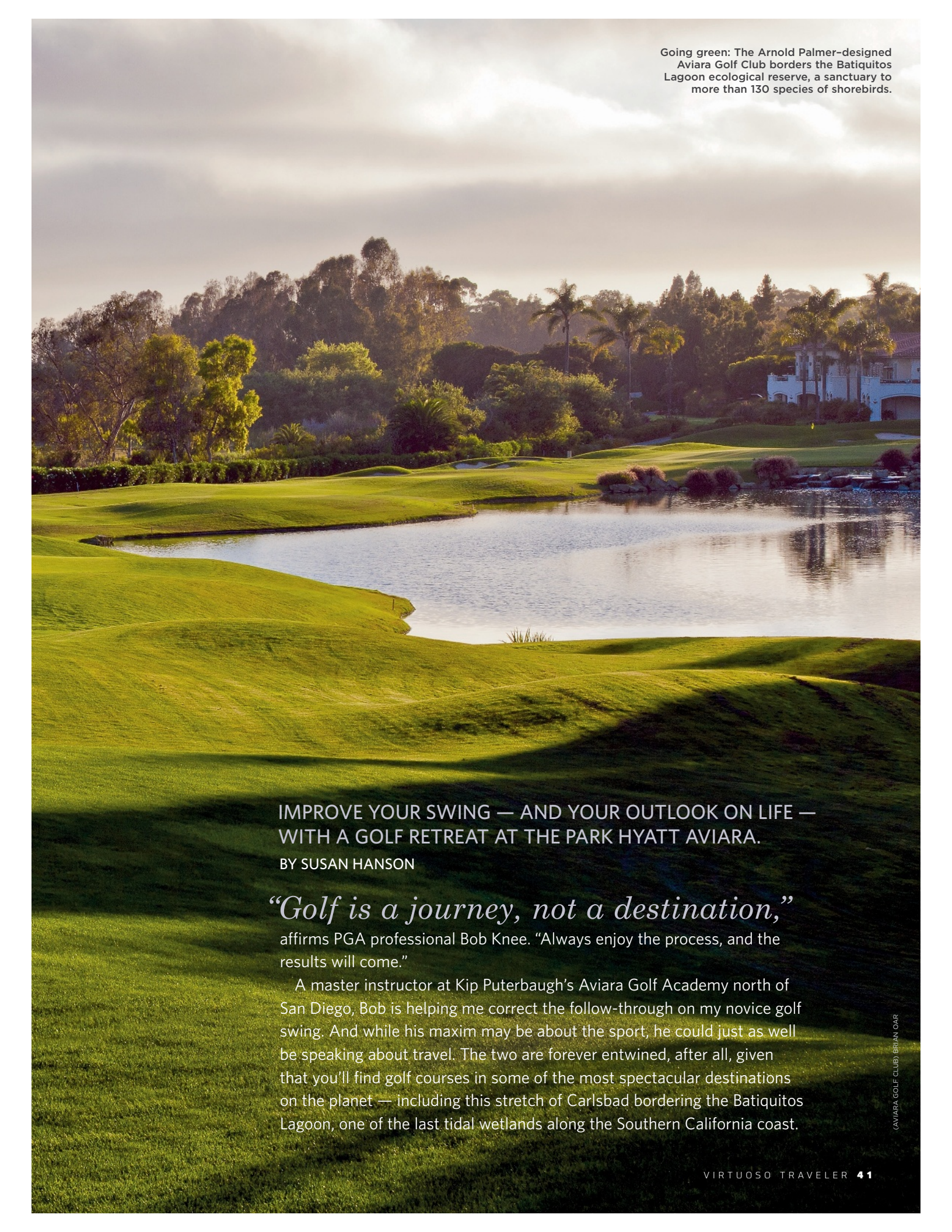




CHASING BIRDIES

in Southern California



Going green: The Arnold Palmer-designed Aviara Golf Club borders the Batiquitos Lagoon ecological reserve, a sanctuary to more than 130 species of shorebirds.

IMPROVE YOUR SWING — AND YOUR OUTLOOK ON LIFE —
WITH A GOLF RETREAT AT THE PARK HYATT AVIARA.

BY SUSAN HANSON

“Golf is a journey, not a destination,”

affirms PGA professional Bob Knee. “Always enjoy the process, and the results will come.”

A master instructor at Kip Puterbaugh’s Aviara Golf Academy north of San Diego, Bob is helping me correct the follow-through on my novice golf swing. And while his maxim may be about the sport, he could just as well be speaking about travel. The two are forever entwined, after all, given that you’ll find golf courses in some of the most spectacular destinations on the planet — including this stretch of Carlsbad bordering the Batiquitos Lagoon, one of the last tidal wetlands along the Southern California coast.

(AVIARA GOLF CLUB) BRIAN OAR

The longest-operating golf school in the Western U.S.,

the Aviara Golf Academy is located at the Park Hyatt Aviara Resort — which just happens to be home to the Arnold Palmer-designed Aviara Golf Club. Named one of the country's best resort courses by *Golf Digest* and *GOLF Magazine*, these gorgeous 18 holes take full advantage of the dramatic panorama and native wildflowers that, when in bloom, distract even the most dedicated players. The 329-room hotel is equally well conceived, feeling more like an inviting manor home standing guard over its grand estate. Guest-room renovations, due for completion this spring, will give the property a softer, more sophisticated edge.

Golf Digest also named the academy one of its top U.S. golf schools and listed five of its instructors — including Knee — among California's top 20. I understand why as, within minutes on the driving range, he notes at least a half dozen needed corrections. I see for myself as he videotapes my swing, placing me split-screen alongside Tiger and other champions. By the end of the lesson, my shots are flying straight and floating high.

Also on-site is the first-ever TaylorMade Performance Lab. Dubbed "Golf's Ultimate Fitting Experience," the lab uses motion-capture technology — like that utilized in animated films and games — to match the perfect club for your individual swing. Master fitting professional Robert Assman adorns me literally from head to toe in reflective markers, which are also placed on the golf club; my swing motion is then captured from every direction on nine different cameras. In 3-D animation, golfers can see exactly how their bodies address the ball, their driver face impacts the ball, and their weight transfers at impact. After analyzing all the data, Assman recommends an aerodynamic club that adds noticeable distance to my drives. Better still, the lab discounts its fee with the purchase of a custom-fitted TaylorMade set.

Such thorough instruction can result in some overly worked muscles — so I use my Virtuoso resort credit for a Golfers Massage at the Aviara Spa. Both locker rooms feature their own whirlpool, sauna, and steam room, and I take full advantage before relaxing with a cup of green tea in the solarium lounge. For the next hour, a therapist proceeds to loosen and stretch my back, hips, shoulders, neck, and even wrists during the treatment that, while not guaranteed to improve your game,

definitely enhances your sense of well-being.

Feeling renewed, it's time for dinner at Vivace, where chef de cuisine Jesse Paul has been earning raves for his innovative, seasonal Italian fare. The atmospheric restaurant is recognized as one of the area's finest for such signature, farm-to-fork dishes as lobster risotto and fettuccine Bolognese made with shredded short rib meat — an absolute must for any foodie. (Tip: Order half portions, so you can sample more.) The evening ends with cocktails in the cozy Lobby Lounge and billiards on one of two tables in the game room.

After breakfast on my fifth-floor balcony — which offers vistas across the golf course and nature preserve — it's time for another lesson. As I practice my putting, Knee assures me that only half of one percent of golfers ever shoot par or better on a championship course, so I should just relax and have fun. He sends me off with a take-home DVD of our sessions and more

pearls of wisdom: "Always reinforce your good shots, and put the bad ones into your mental trash can. Learn from them, but let them go."

Now, it's time to test my newly honed skills with nine holes on the Aviara course. With its rolling hills and ample water hazards, this 7,007-yard beauty is a challenge for the most serious golfers; yet the sun is shining as it does so often in Southern California, and it's a delight to be out on these fairways visited by many of the 130 bird

species that call the Batiquitos Lagoon home. On the ninth hole, I hit my best drive of the day, followed by a six-iron shot that carries all the way to the green. Here it is: My first chance for that elusive birdie — but as the golf gods would have it, my nerves overwhelm me and I end up three-putting.

Recalling my instructor's sage words, I laugh it off and focus on that ball hovering against the clear skies while sitting down to dinner at The Argyle Steakhouse. This elegantly relaxed restaurant, which overlooks the 18th hole, prepares only organic meats with a choice of sauces, crusts, and rubs to enhance and personalize your meal. Nearly half of the clientele here are local residents, a testament to its reputation for serving some of the best cuts of beef in Greater San Diego.

Contentedly nibbling at an Idaho Wagyu filet mignon in a Cognac-peppercorn sauce — which is tender enough to cut with a butter knife — I slightly adapt Knee's initial maxim: Some destinations, such as the Park Hyatt Aviara, are definitely worth the journey.

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FOREVER ENTWINED, GIVEN
THAT YOU'LL FIND
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DESTINATIONS ON THE PLANET.



Par for the course at Park Hyatt Aviara (clockwise from top): putting paradise, the 3,200-square-foot pool, and creative cuisine.

Get into the Swing of Things

Hit the greens at the **Park Hyatt Aviara Resort**, home to the acclaimed Aviara Golf Academy and the only Arnold Palmer–designed course in Greater San Diego. Between rounds, explore the Batiquitos Lagoon ecological reserve. Virtuoso clients receive a room upgrade upon arrival, if available; buffet breakfast daily for two; a \$100 resort credit, once per stay; and early check-in and late checkout, if available. *From \$295 per room, per night.*

(ALL PHOTOS) JOHN RUSSO

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Taking Flight on Maui

Give your game some loft with lessons at the Kapalua Golf Academy, recognized as Hawaii's most complete golf school and practice facility. The 463-room **Ritz-Carlton, Kapalua** also claims two of Hawaii's best courses — the Plantation Course, host to the Hyundai Tournament of Champions, and the Bay Course, the first in the U.S. to achieve Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary status. Virtuoso clients receive a room upgrade upon arrival, if available; buffet breakfast daily for two; and a \$100 resort credit. *From \$409 per room, per night.*

Back Nine over Newport Beach

Several holes on the Ocean North Course overhang the cliffs above the Southern California coast — and that's just one of two Tom Fazio-designed courses at the 332-room **Resort at Pelican Hill**. Experience a new level of play with a professional forecaddie, ready to rake bunkers and read greens. Enjoy a room upgrade upon arrival, if available; continental breakfast daily for two; and a \$100 credit toward golf or spa services. *From \$395 per room, per night.*

Arizona's Ace

Consider them your personal golf concierge: The Leisure Services Team at the 649-room **Fairmont Scottsdale Princess** can secure preferred tee times at any of the area's courses. The team can also arrange lessons from the PGA Tour Academy at the adjacent TPC Stadium Course. Virtuoso clients enjoy a room upgrade upon arrival, if available; complimentary golf storage; continental breakfast daily for two; daily access to Willow Stream spa; and more. *From \$143 per room, per night.*

Swinging Woods in Wisconsin

Boasting four championship courses designed by renowned architect Pete Dye, the 240-room **American Club Resort** is also home to the Kohler Golf Academy; get year-round instruction at its Indoor Studio. Enjoy a room upgrade at time of booking, if available; full breakfast daily for two; a welcome gift of Wisconsin cheeses and white wine in room; and a \$100 resort credit. *From \$319 per room, per night.*



From top:
The Mesa rooftop pool and gourmet fare highlight après-golf amenities at the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess.



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Florida Fore

Learn from some of the world's best at the David Leadbetter Golf Academy, located at the 189-room **LaPlaya Beach & Golf Resort** in Naples. After a round, pamper yourself with a deep-tissue sports massage at the beachfront SpaTerre. Virtuoso clients enjoy a room upgrade upon arrival, if available; full breakfast daily for two; a special welcome amenity; a \$75 resort credit; and complimentary valet parking. *From \$269 per room, per night.*

On Real Bermuda Grass

Take a lesson at the Turtle Hill Golf Course located at The Fairmont Southampton, a challenging executive course noted for its stunning seaside location. Guests of the 410-room **Fairmont Hamilton Princess** also enjoy privileges at Riddell's Bay Golf & Country Club, Bermuda's oldest course. Receive a room upgrade upon arrival, if available; full breakfast daily for two; and a \$100 food-and-beverage credit. *From \$259 per room, per night.*

Bahamian Bunkers

Get tips from a pro at the Ocean Club Golf Academy before playing its namesake course, ranked among the Caribbean's best. Afterward, return to one of 600 sophisticated suites at **The Cove Atlantis** before dining at Bobby Flay's much-touted Mesa Grill. Enjoy a room upgrade upon arrival, if available; continental breakfast daily for two; and a \$100 food-and-beverage credit. *From \$580 per room, per night.*

Putting on the Yucatán Peninsula

Guests at the 128-suite **Rosewood Mayakoba** enjoy complimentary transportation to El Camaleón, the first course in Mexico to host a PGA Tour event. Have your swing analyzed at the country's top-ranked Jim McLean Golf School at Mayakoba. Virtuoso clients receive a room upgrade upon arrival, if available; buffet breakfast daily for two; and a \$100 spa services credit. *From \$750 per room, per night. VT*



From top:
El Camaleón, beachside
pools, and Sense spa at
Rosewood Mayakoba.

(EL CAMALEÓN, POOL, AND SPA) ROSEWOOD MAYAKOBA