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Sports

Golf, of Course

Eleven challenging courses now make the Mexican Caribbean a world-class golf destination. But just a dozen years ago, few players would have considered Riviera Maya as the place for a great golf vacation.

Today, 10 luxurious courses with 18 holes or more, plus one with nine holes, lure *golfistas* to the Mexican Caribbean with perennially balmy weather and perfectly sculpted designs by PB Dye, Robert von Hagge, Jack Nicklaus and Greg Norman. In 2009/10, the destination expects to debut two more amazing facilities to make it Mexico's undisputed leader in golf.

The PGA Tour discovered the destination in 2007 — its first time south of the border — when it played El Camaleón Golf de Mayakoba, just north of charming Playa del Carmen. “The quality of the field has increased every year, this year easily being our strongest ever,” says Douglas Goubault, director of golf at Mayakoba.

In this, the third year of the Mayakoba Golf Classic, which climaxed in March 2009, big-name players included Chad Campbell, Brian Gay, Charles Howell III, Tom Lehman, Corey Pavin and Bob Tway. Mark Wilson won the tournament, the \$648,000 prize and the 50-pound stone chameleon. After lifting his trophy, the 145-pound Wilson assured fans, “It's not going to fly away.” Previous winners were Fred Funk in 2007 and Brian Gay in 2008.

Lorena Ochoa has done as much as anyone to promote golf in Mexico. Before the young Mexican star of the LPGA burst onto the scene, few locals had much interest, despite the exciting layouts and great conditions here. But after she

headlined for the University of Arizona, turning pro in 2002, Mexican kids started flocking to the game, and golfers started flocking to Mexico.

“Golf is really growing in Mexico,” Ochoa observes. “The weather is beautiful, and there are so many wonderful resorts and golf courses close to the water in Riviera Maya. Play golf. Have some fun. Go to a beautiful resort. It’s a great combination: everything you need to relax and have a family vacation or honeymoon; and the beaches here are the best!”

For details on the golf here, contact the Mexican Caribbean Golf Association (52.998.886.2850/984.206.3088, cancungolf.org).