

Travel

MY HOLS DARREN CLARKE

The golfer has got into the swing of exotic travel and loves Japan, but returns to Co Antrim for the game and the Guinness

“ I’m a creature of habit. I went to the Abaco Club, in the Bahamas, in 2005, and since then I’ve had no interest in going anywhere else. It’s where I truly relax. The golf course is off the charts, the beach is incredible, there are turquoise-blue waters and it has some of the best saltwater fly-fishing in the world. I’m not much of a beach guy, as I get bored, but I do like the Flippers beach bar at the club for a beer or a sea breeze. I’ve enjoyed a family Christmas in Dubai, we’ve been on safaris and I like the St Regis hotel in Bangkok, but the club is the one place that keeps me coming back. I even got married there. Every time I leave the Bahamas, I can’t wait to return.

One of the privileges of being a professional golfer is the far-flung places it allows you to visit. As a child, I never imagined I’d go to Japan, and now I love it. There’s little that beats eating the most unbelievable melt-in-the-mouth Kobe beef. I last ate it in Miyazaki, when I was there



with my fellow golfer Lee Westwood. The Japanese are so polite and the food is fantastic, especially washed down with an Asahi Super Dry.

I always remember a man I met called Hutoshi – he’d be in his eighties now. He would travel 400 miles every year to watch us play. I didn’t speak Japanese and he didn’t speak English, so we used sign language to communicate. It struck me how he’d travel this immense distance just to watch the match and say hello.

I’m from Northern Ireland, but family holidays were to Dunfanaghy and Portnablagh, in Co Donegal, on the wild coast of Ireland. It’s beautiful – I have happy memories of spending time there as a kid, messing around on the beach contentedly. And I’d play golf, naturally.

There were always sheep roaming the course, so there was a fence round every green. I’d keep hitting the posts and had to replay my shots hundreds of times.

As I grew older, holidays didn’t exist, because I didn’t have any time – my life was always golf. I started travelling the



TEE TIME The golf course and Whiterocks Beach at Portrush, Co Antrim

The golfer Darren Clarke, 50, was born in Dungannon, Northern Ireland. He won the Open in 2011 at Royal St George’s, Kent, and captained Europe’s Ryder Cup team in 2016. He is married to Alison Campbell, and has two sons with his late wife, Heather. He is an ambassador for Elegant Golf Resorts, which offers golf holidays around the world (elegantgolfresorts.com)

world from the age of 13 with Irish teams and my caddie. Travel wasn’t as comfortable as it is now, but it never bothered me to rough it a bit.

I’m not one for adventure travel, and the remotest place I’ve been is Lapland, when the kids were young, to see Santa. We had a fantastic time and their faces lit up when they met him. One day, it was unbearably cold – with the wind chill, it was -42C.

There are things that drive me mad when I travel. Sometimes the gadget for turning the lights off at night – especially after a few drinks – is more of a challenge than a convenience.

My all-time favourite courses are Pine Valley, in New Jersey, and Royal Portrush, in Co Antrim. For the whole Irish experience, I go there and play links golf, have a Guinness and enjoy the atmosphere. It will be incredible to have the Open Championship there this summer, after 68 years.

Interview by Lisa Pollen