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Photo by **EDMUNDS BRENCIS**
(Picture Agency)

In Search of the Next Green

What do Moscow, the Bahamas, and Thailand all have in common?

Not much in terms of culture, architecture or climate, but all three are among the hottest new locations for golf tourism.

Modern golf was invented more than five centuries ago in Scotland. Since then it has grown into a \$20 billion industry catering to elite professionals and casual enthusiasts around the globe. As long as golfers have been charging up the fairways, they have been curious to find new and appealing courses to play.

One man who has taken advantage of the thirst for new golf challenges is David Bakyta, a member of the Professional Golf Association (PGA) of America and one of the world's most adventurous golf tourism entrepreneurs. Bakyta's work in the golf industry has taken him to many fascinating places around the world, from helping build a golf course in El Salvador to his current position as a professional golf instructor and entrepreneur in Moscow.

According to Bakyta, golf tourism is booming because more and more amateur golfers are foregoing expensive club memberships, and instead spend their money visiting several exotic courses each year. 'I think a lot of people look at country club memberships that cost \$20,000 and wonder why not go to four luxury resorts that cost \$5,000 each instead?'

Bakyta's Florida-based golf tourism business helps elite business clients find the most exciting courses around the world and design their travel itineraries around the golf

experience. A successful overseas golf trip doesn't depend on the destination course alone – the entire trip is treated as a luxury event. From hiring professional golfers to play alongside the travellers to booking reservations at the trendiest restaurant in Marbella, Bakyta's job encompasses everything from finding the most convenient long-haul flights to arranging for cocktails once the final hole has been played.

Bakyta acknowledges that golf tourism is inherently a luxury service, but he's quick to point out that the industry is moving towards offering services to golfers of every background and skill level. While ritzy destinations like Spain and the Bahamas top many golfers' wish lists, an affordable and exciting golf trip for beginners or casual players can be had in 'off the beaten path' locations such as Scandinavia or Southeast Asia.

If you are planning your first golf vacation, Bakyta recommends getting in touch with a tour operator and specifying the golfing ability of everyone travelling with you. 'You don't want to end up on a tour where you're not able to play the planned amount of golf or keep up with the pace', says Bakyta. But beginning golfers shouldn't feel there is any barrier to planning a golf trip. Bakyta sees the educational element as a growing part of golf tourism. 'Many hotels and resorts hire golf professionals and host their own golf camps.' No matter how far you travel to reach the green, there's a course waiting for you to play it. **BO**

David Bakyta is a professional golf instructor, golf tourism entrepreneur, and member of the PGA. Bakyta worked for two years as Director of Membership and Events for the Trump Organization, a position that included many rounds of golf with President Donald Trump himself.

