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NOTHING ABOUT GOLF IS GOING TO FEEL NATURAL,” instructor Marcos Zuazu tells me, and I couldn’t agree more. I’m 27 minutes into a two-day program at the Jim McLean Golf School, and already my fingers are improbably twisted, my lower back is screaming, and I’m wondering if it’s too late to sign up for flower arranging.

Weeks ago this seemed like a great idea: My travels often take me to golf resorts, so why not take up the game and spend a few hours playing effortless rounds on rolling, palm-fringed terrain as course flags flutter gaily in the breeze. But this? Not so much.

“Just relax,” advises Zuazu as he pries the club from my vise-like grip and readjusts my fingers. “Hold the club gently, and focus on making contact and advancing the ball.” Determined, I twist my torso to the right, fix my eyes on the dimpled orb in front of me, swing big and finish with a flourish, my right heel cocked jauntily. The ball, however, hasn’t moved.

If anyone can help me develop my skills, it’s Zuazu. The former coach of Mexico’s junior national team, he spent 13 years teaching stateside before landing at El Camaleón. Nestled between my hotel, the Fairmont Mayakobá (which manages the course), and two other resorts that occupy Mayakobá’s vast acreage, the Greg Norman-designed course is considered one of the Riviera Maya’s finest. And its Jim McLean Golf School, open less than a year, is the newest in a chain of schools ranked number one in the United States. As director of instruction, Zuazu assures me that of all the students he’s tutored over the years, only a handful could be considered unteachable. I pray I’m not one of them.

This time, Zuazu places the ball on a tee and advises me to aim for that, not the ball. I swing and — wonder of wonders — manage to launch the ball into the air and onto the emerald turf. *Fore!* My confidence grows with every swing. The ball doesn’t always soar; mostly it gets a bit of air and then plummets. But I’m advancing the ball. I am, at some base-line level, golfing!

All courses are customized to students’ abilities, so given my level of experience (zero) and aptitude (again, zero), Zuazu divides my eight hours of instruction into four daily two-hour sessions. And just like in “real” school, I’m issued supplies (including a golf glove, shirt and visor) and homework: chapter two of McLean’s primer *The Eight-Step Swing*.

On day two, we got out on the greens, where I tried my hand at chipping and putting. I was much better (or more accurately, sucked less) at the short game, and the session, peppered with the immensely satisfying sound of the ball plopping into the hole, flew by. Day three was an introduction to drivers — and the less said, the better.

On day four I vowed I would taste the fruits of the past days’ labor. Today I would play where the pros play, on a multimillion-dollar course that hosts a PGA Tour event each spring. Today, clad in pink plaid Bermuda shorts, with my golf glove blooming from my back pocket, I even looked like a pro.

For my performance, I blame the beauty of the course, which is punctuated with cenotes, crisscrossed by canals and blessed with stunning ocean and jungle vistas. On the sea-view 15th hole, a par-3 took me nine strokes. And on the par-4 17th hole, I donated two balls to the canal and took 13 shots to get the ball in the hole. Apparently plaid shorts do not a golfer make.

Nevertheless, I graduated from golf school with a budding love of the sport and a new respect for golfers. So what if I never develop a decent long game? My plaid Bermudas will look stunning for minigolf. — SARAH GREAVES-GABBADON

✓  
Get in the Swing  
Fairmont  
Mayakobá, Riviera  
Maya, Mexico



El Camaleón’s par-72, 7,039-yard course winds through jungle, mangrove and oceanfront landscapes, and course hazards include this cenote on the first hole. Above: The neighboring Fairmont Mayakobá resort is a plush retreat with a spa that offers golf-specific treatments.

## editors’ picks

**1 Casa De Campo, La Romana, Dominican Republic** Golfers can perfect their skills at the David Leadbetter Golf Academy and then play on a trio of Pete Dye courses, including the world-famous Teeth of the Dog. The Three-Day Mini School includes nine hours of customized instruction, with video analysis and club fitting. \$900. 888-212-5073; casadecampo.com.do

**2 Half Moon, Montego Bay, Jamaica** Originally designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr., Half Moon’s undulating, par-72 Montego Bay course was recently renovated, with multiple tee complexes and a repositioned fairway. The whole gang can learn the game together at the Family Beginners clinic, which includes two hours of instruction for two grown-ups and a maximum of four little ones. \$250 per family. 888-830-5974; halfmoon.com

**3 Wyndham Rio Mar, Rio Grande, Puerto Rico** Two courses (one a Greg Norman design, the other by Tom Fazio and George Fazio), ocean-view and riverfront holes, and GPS-equipped carts make this resort a golfer’s go-to. A variety of golf-specific packages, which include accommodations and breakfast, are available year-round. Rooms from \$339 in low season (\$509 high). 787-888-6000; wyndhamriomar.com

◀ Jim McLean’s Two-Day Golf School at El Camaleón includes eight hours of instruction, video analysis and lunch for \$1,495. 011-52-984-206-3088; mayakoba.jimmclean.com. The Fairmont Mayakobá resort offers complimentary shuttles to the course. Rooms from \$219 in low season (\$359 high). 800-441-1414; fairmont.com