

Golf Tourism?



Simon Hudson?

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1 An Introduction to Golf Tourism

Introduction

Ever since Tiger Woods first won the Masters' in 1997, golf has got sexier. No longer largely the preserve of the privileged, it's become a trendy sport with an appeal across generations, genders and cultures. The Ryder Cup is now watched on television by around a billion people worldwide. Compare that to the mere 260 million who watched the 2006 Soccer World Cup. TV has helped create golf icons across the globe with increasing tournament coverage and advertising endorsement. Golf pros promote everything from alcohol to automobiles and from beverages to bling. Two of the top three earners in all sports in 2007 were golfers. But professional golfers are not just aloof celebs. Any decent handicapped golfer can play alongside their favourite heroes at corporate pro-am competitions. Many businesses invest huge amounts in this unique opportunity for sponsorship and executive perks. Living on golf courses has become a trend over the past two decades. Golf course real estate has been spawning courses across Europe, North America and Asia.

Fashion has also entered the arena, infusing golf attire with funky fabrics, shapes, colours and detailing, pushing the limits of clubhouse etiquette. And golf gear is no longer just for the golf course. Argyle-style diamond print sweaters became city chic in 2008, reinforcing golf's street cred. Golf retail has expanded, too, moving on from small golf club collections to gigantic big box chain stores, featuring multiple designer brands and computerised, virtual fairways as well as extensive putting green practice areas to try out equipment.

Golf is becoming less corporate and more sport for all. Families world over are looking to golf as a generational-spanning game and specialized family courses are multiplying with affordable fees and lessons. Schools in Canada are even introducing golf as part of the Phys Ed curriculum. Women are increasingly attracted to the sport, with clubs developing female-only instruction and tournaments and pro shops luring them with pink and purple pretty clothing and equipment.

It is clear from the opening Spotlight that golf is big business. Whether as a primary motivator or as a secondary activity, golf attracts millions of holiday-makers worldwide, contributing over \$20 billion annually. But, despite this phenomenal figure, no-one has yet categorically defined who the golf tourist really is and documented the scale of the industry. This book will examine international golf tourism spotlighting countries, clubs, courses, consumers, competition and commercial concepts.

Defining golf tourism

Golf tourism falls under the umbrella of sport tourism, one of the fastest growth areas in the tourism industry. Although sport tourism is a relatively new concept in contemporary vernacular, its scope of activity is far from a recent phenomenon. The notion of people travelling to participate in and watch sport dates back to the ancient Olympic Games, and the practice of stimulating tourism through sport has existed for over a century. Within the last few decades however, destinations have begun to recognize the significant potential of sport tourism, and they are now aggressively pursuing this attractive market niche.

The subject has also gained strong academic and public interest in recent years. This is evident in the publication of numerous textbooks related to sport tourism (e.g. Standeven and De Knopp, 1999; Hudson, 2003; Weed and Bull, 2004; Higham, 2005; Gibson, 2006), the development of the *Journal of Sport Tourism*, and a number of special journal issues devoted to sport tourism. Much of this work focuses on describing and defining the concept of sport travel, but broadly defined, sport tourism includes travel away from a person's primary residence to participate in a sporting activity for recreation or competition; travel to observe sport at the grass roots or elite level; and travel to visit a sport attraction such as a sports' hall of fame or a water park, for example.

Golf tourism itself has also been defined in a number of ways, but for the purposes of this book, golf tourism is simply defined as travel away from home to participate in or observe the sport of golf, or to visit attractions associated with golf. Figure 1.1 is a representation of the business of golf tourism. The figure shows the golf tourists in the middle and they can be divided into three basic categories:

- ◆ tourists who go on holiday principally to play golf;
- ◆ tourists who play golf as a secondary activity whilst on holiday or on a business trip;
- ◆ those who attend tournaments as spectators, or visit golf attractions.

Chapter 2 expands on the segmentation of golf tourists. They in turn are served by a number of different sectors. These include the golf tour operators (see

Chapter 3), accommodation and transportation services (Chapter 3), the courses and resorts themselves (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6). In turn, these suppliers have to make important decisions regarding planning and development, marketing, financing and human resource development (Chapters 5, 6 and 7). Finally, the business of golf tourism has a number of economic, social and environmental impacts (see Chapter 8). Throughout this book, the players and elements in this model will be discussed and analysed.

Spotlight: Wales Challenging the Giants of Golf Tourism

The Welsh Assembly Government is counting on the Ryder Cup scheduled for October 2010 at the Celtic Manor Resort to put Wales firmly on the golf tourism map, rivalling Scotland, Ireland and England in the international arena. It is the biggest event ever to come to Wales and one of the biggest sporting attractions in the world.

Scotland has always been considered the birthplace of golf with the rudimentary beginnings of the sport back in the 15th century. The first golf club was established near Glasgow in 1744. St Andrews, built in 1754, was given the royal seal in 1834 and has been hailed ever since as the bedrock of British golf. But, more recently, Wales has been identified by golf tour operators as a cheaper but good quality alternative for golfing holidays.

The Ryder Cup is slated to be a landmark for the country's tourism. The Welsh Assembly Government has recognized the importance of the Ryder Cup as a means to challenge the 'giants' of golf tourism, stressing the alliance of business and golf to attract corporate events and, as a spinoff, foreign investment. Currently, there are 500 international companies based in Wales, employing 80,000 people, and responsible for \$21 billion in investments since 1983.

The government is using this globally-televised event to highlight tourism in rural and urban Wales as well as business opportunities. With the national recession hitting hard throughout the UK, it's a heaven-sent chance to revitalize the economy.

Ryder Cup Wales invited Ian Woosnam to be the official ambassador for Team Wales. Captain of the victorious European team at the Irish Ryder Cup in September 2006, Woosnam wanted to raise the Welsh profile as a separate entity from England. 'Winning the bid to host the 2010 Ryder Cup gave Wales the opportunity to tell the world what it has to offer,' he said.

Newport – chosen as the Ryder Cup city – has 45 golf courses within a forty-minute radius, including four championship courses. The 160 miles long by 60 miles wide country actually has more than 200 courses with a golfing tradition stretching back centuries. The Welsh Golfing Union was established in 1895, the second oldest union in the world (second to Ireland). Alongside a rich sporting history in golf and rugby, Wales also boasts 641 castles and 687 miles of coastline, adding to the broader tourism appeal.