

3 The Golf Tourism Product

Spotlight: Celebrating golf Disney-style



Junior Golf Camp at Celebration, Florida, courtesy of Celebration

Disney never misses a trick when it comes to marketing and providing products for families. It has even delved into the world of golf with an 18-hole, championship golf course, designed by father and son team, Robert Trent Jones Sr. and Jr. Established at Disney's flagship Florida community in 1996, Celebration Golf Course also features a renowned Golf Academy as well as a PING nFlight Fitting & Teaching Studio. One of only three in the USA, this studio offers custom club fitting to golf-pro standards. In addition to a three-hole junior course for ages five to nine, there are five different tee boxes at each hole on the 18-hole, 7,038-yard course, facilitating play for all levels of ability.

Owned by Celebration Golf Club LLC, the club has hosted over 3,500 tournaments, including the US Senior Open Qualifier in 2002 and various national and state championships. Rated 4 ½ Stars in Golf Digest's 'Best Places to Play' since 2004, Celebration provides a comprehensive events package including electronic scoreboard, televised results and even a Scottish bagpiper to welcome and lead out golfers. To counteract the hot weather, two pre-iced coolers are provided for every golf cart and iced wet towels are distributed on hotter days. With 'Red Carpet Service', there are bag valets, costumed 'greeters', a full-time professional Golf Event Manager, shuttle services to and from the practice range and club cleaning after each event.

Celebration is a prototype in many ways, showcasing an environmentally-friendly lifestyle and avoiding urban sprawl in its picket-fence perfection. The golf course is user-friendly for pros, families and novices. Ranked in the 'Top 25 Public Courses'

by Golf World's 2009 Readers' Choice Awards, the course has a broad appeal as confirmed by its ratings in the Top 25 Best Family Golf Resorts and in the Top 30 Courses for Women by Golf For Women magazine and the top 100 Golf Shops by Golf World Magazine.

The Golf Course and Academy has also achieved national recognition as the site for the finals of the Golf Channel's Junior Drive, Chip and Putt competition which aired on American TV, Thanksgiving Day 2008. Junior golfers can enjoy a variety of programs from after school academy, summer, spring, and holiday camps as well as golf schools for destination visitors and weekend programs. Each year they host a specialty camp in partnership with the American Explorer Academy located in Colombia to showcase golf in the USA, as part of their English study curriculum. Nick Lawson, Director of Instruction at The Golf Academy, says the widespread appeal of these camps is enhanced by Orlando's position as the number one tourist attraction in the world. A variety of lesson packages are available ranging from clinics, group lessons, private lessons with video analysis, on-course instruction and golf schools.

Celebration's General Manager, John Bixler works closely with their lodging partners -The Gaylord Palms, The Bohemian Hotel Celebration and The Melia Hotel - on joint marketing programs. Celebration is also a member of the Central Florida Hotel & Lodging Association (CFHLA), Experience Kissimmee and Visit Florida. They also collaborate with third party marketing companies, such as Golf Pac, Tee Times USA, Golfnow, CSI and Hello Florida.

Sources:

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Golf tour operators

A large number of tour operators cater to the golf tourism market, and a few of these are referred to on page 57 in the Spotlight on Celebration Golf Course. As mentioned in Chapter 1, many of these operators are represented by the International Association of Golf Tour Operators (IAGTO). In 2012, IAGTO had more than 492 tour operators as members from 62 different countries. Most golf tourists travelling abroad will purchase a golf package from one of these tour operators, as they are responsible for more than 80 per cent of the international sales of golf packages. The package will usually include pre-payment of green fees and pre-booking of tee-times, as well as transportation and accommodation. Laura Golf Tour, for example, is a small incoming agency for golf tourism in Antalya (the Mediterranean area of Turkey), whose main services are guaranteed tee-time and hotel reservations, transfer services between airport and hotel and hotel and golf course. A member of the Turkish Association of Tour Operators since 1953, the company also offers car rental, flight counselling, customer care services, and guiding services. Laura Golf deals with over 7000 golf tourists annually, who mainly arrive from the UK, Germany and Japan.

According to a 2013 golf tour operator survey the vast amount of golf travellers are British, American and Canadian, most often travelling domestically (KPMG, 2013). Scandinavians (predominately Swedish), Germans and Austrians are also among the most frequent golf travellers. Since the recession, golfers have become more price sensitive and the cost of any given package has become a key decision-making factor when choosing a golf trip. But despite changes in golf consumers' spending habits, golfers still care about the quality of courses and related accommodations, expecting more value for their money before booking a golf trip. Today, with the revolution of social media, word of mouth grassroots marketing has become a vital aspect in golf tourism businesses. Referrals on Facebook, Twitter, Tripadvisor and various other golf travel blogs have become the basis of attracting new consumers (KPMG, 2013).

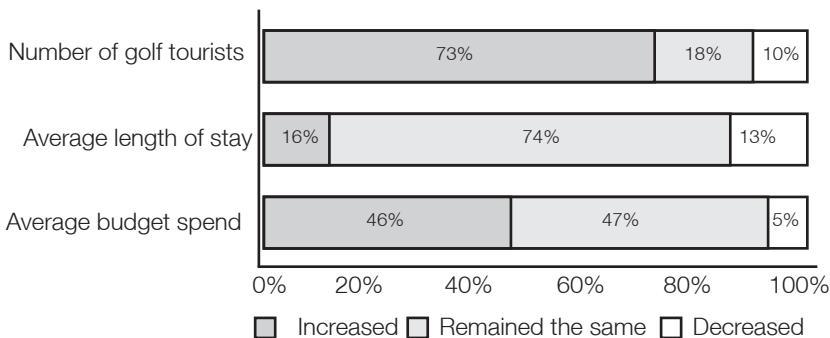


Figure 3.1: Trends in golf tourism according to tour operators (Source: KPMG, 2008, 2013)

Golf tour operators tend to sell a variety of golf tourism products. For example, PerryGolf at www.perrygolf.com is a Wilmington, North Carolina-based operator that provides golf cruise accommodations to twelve of the world's most desirable locations. The company breaks its offerings into four different areas: VIP golf coaches with concierge drivers; cruise charters; rail charters; and online services, primarily used for trip planning and booking reservations. PerryGolf arranges personalized itineraries for groups of men, women and couples that combine play on the world's leading golf courses with safaris, wine touring and sightseeing. Some golf tour operators focus on one particular part of the world. Eagle Golf Tours, for example, specializes in selling golf tours for British golfers to various locations in the US including the Carolinas, Florida, Arizona, California, Nevada, Virginia, Alabama and Georgia. Neil Cutler, managing director of the company, says that 90 per cent of his business is to that part of the world, and that 99 per cent of his packages are tailor-made. Many of his customers (about 60 per cent) come back year after year, and they come to him because of his experience in that market. Cutler set up business in 1990 when very few operators were selling golf tours from the UK to America, and has visited over 50 times. 'The British love the climate in South Carolina,' he says, 'and they find the golf terrific value for money.' About 60 per cent of his business is with groups of men and then the other 40 per cent is couples. However, he is seeing an increasing number of women buying his golf packages.

It was mentioned in Chapter 2 that requests for customized and personalized vacations are rising sharply, and golf tour operators are changing their businesses to meet that demand. Robert Lewis, president of TravelGolf.com, a golf publication network, suggests the top three locations in North America for customized golf vacations are Las Vegas, Nevada, and Hilton Head/Myrtle Beach in South Carolina. One interesting package in the USA, sold by the PGA, is the Ultimate Tour Player Experience at TPC Sawgrass, Florida (see the Snapshot on page 60). The package is promoted by the PGA as ‘the first time everyday golfers have had the opportunity to experience what it is like to be a PGA Tour player competing in a PGA Tour event as part of the Tour player experience’. If imagining life as a professional is not enough, then golfers can always pay to play with a professional. Saddlebrook Golf Academy based in Tampa, Florida provides a ‘Play with a Pro Program’ which gives golfers two hours of on-course play with a pro instructor. Led by Steve Bann and Dale Lynch, who are recognized PGA Tour team coaches, Saddlebrook focuses on each participant’s personal goals in terms of golf swing and game tactics. Saddlebrook players have the opportunity of improving their technique on an expanding 20-acre golf facility including two Arnold Palmer signature golf courses. The programme also offers *a la carte* golf playing lessons, for resort guests or visitors. Rates for the programme will vary by the number of participants and whether one is a resort guest or visitor. Saddlebrook players, who have already purchased a resort guest package, pay \$175 per day for the ‘Play with a Pro Program’.

Snapshot: PGA Tour Experiences



The Sawgrass Golf Resort & Spa, a Marriott Resort, Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, courtesy of Sawgrass Golf Resort & Spa