

9 The Impacts of Golf Tourism

Spotlight: Justin Timberlake's ultimate green golf course

Justin Timberlake at the opening of Mirimichi Golf Course, courtesy of Faith-Ann Young

Justin Timberlake is giving celebrity cachet to green golf courses, building an eco-friendly, Platinum LEED certified golf course development in his home state of Tennessee. Mirimichi Golf Course – a \$16 million project in Woodstock, near Memphis – is the first US course to receive the Audubon Classic Sanctuary certification. Audubon International launched the 'Classic Sanctuary' programme in 2008 for courses in the process of redevelopment or restoration.



Originally known as Big Creek Golf Course, Mirimichi was the course where Timberlake first learnt how to hold a club and hit a ball. His fan club website intermingles golf news and environmental achievements with his celebrity lifestyle and music career – reaching out to a different, younger demographic than the more typical baby-boomer golf target market. In his new Mirimichi website, Timberlake claims to be 'redefining golf courses' and creating harmony between golf, people and nature.

Opened in July 2009, Mirimichi boasts an 18-hole championship course with an educational walking trail where golfers and guests can learn about natural resource usage and responsible energy consumption. Timberlake rescued the course just before it was scheduled for auction. 'We thought it was such a landmark for the community, we'd scoop it and save it. And we did ...when it's finished this summer it will be a Platinum LEED certified green course. The first in the United States of America, so that's pretty exciting that you could take all that land and make it eco-friendly,' he commented.

Aiming for PGA Tour quality, the 303-acre site now features irrigation and drainage systems that re-use and maximize the use of rainwater. There are native grass areas, waste bunkers, lakes and streams that reduce maintenance and more lake areas and re-circulating streams that support wildlife. In place of equipment sheds and a maintenance centre, Timberlake has built a 'Natural Resource Management Centre' which features biodegradable treatment of rinse water.

Timberlake planned to use Mirimichi as the headquarters for his celebrity music career. Although the course is upscale and challenging, he also intends to nurture new golfers there with a nine-hole course called 'Little Mirimichi' and an 18-hole putting course. He wants the club to serve as a social and sporty hub for the local community with special programmes targeting families and children. Costs are relatively affordable – from \$59.50 for weekday rounds and up to \$73 for weekends and holidays. It was thanks to considerable family resources that Timberlake was able to open a new course during the economic downturn which had been sparking golf course closures across the U.S.

The course features artistic stone cart-path bridges, manmade creeks with re-circulating water, Champion Bermuda greens and Patriot Bermuda fairways. Azalea bushes accent the surrounding landscaping with shade-tolerant grass or pine straw under all the trees. Drainage systems in the 80 sand bunkers prevent sand from washing away. Only half the 200-acre course will be mowed as native grasses have been planted in between play areas. Bordered by a forested buffer which prevents any future adjoining development, the new cart paths follow a shady route. The 18 holes have been transformed by Mike MacElhose and Randy Wilson so that the previously flat front nine now features undulating topography and both uphill and downhill shots on the rolling fairways. The workforce comprised around 120 construction and staff workers. In this nature-reserve style atmosphere, Mirimichi staff monitor water flow, count wildlife annually and calculate the club's carbon footprint.

Timberlake has already hosted his own PGA Tour tournament (the Justin Timberlake Shriners' Hospitals for Children Open) and regularly plays with professional golfers. During the 2009 PGA Tour events, the Golf Channel aired a series of short videos called 'Choose your course,' which highlighted the work of superintendents and the environmental benefits of golf courses. The messages were introduced by Timberlake. In 2013 Mirimichi was named the best golf course in Tennessee in *Golfweek* magazine's Best Courses You Can Play!

Sources:

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Introduction

The unprecedented expansion of tourism has given rise to a number of economic, environmental and social impacts which are concentrated in destination areas (Wall and Mathieson, 2006). Tourism research has tended to emphasize the economic impacts and yet there are increasing concerns about the effects of tourism on host societies and their environments. A number of techniques have been developed to monitor these impacts. Common analytical frameworks include an environmental audit, environmental impact analysis, carrying capacity, and community assessment techniques. It is beyond the scope of this book to cover these techniques in detail, but the tourism manager needs to have knowledge of the most current models. Managers must also have an understanding of the principles of sustainable tourism described as ‘tourism which is developed and maintained in an area in such a manner and at such a scale that it remains viable over an indefinite period and does not degrade or alter the environment (human and physical) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and well-being of other activities and processes’ (Butler, 1993, p. 29).

Table 9.1: Positive and negative impacts of golf (Sources: Barcelona Field Studies Centre, 2009; Salgot and Tapias, 2006)

Advantages	Disadvantages
Employment and income benefits, both direct and indirect	Loss of biodiversity
Tax benefits to local, regional and national governments	Eutrophication of river or seawater through use of fertilizers
Attracts new firms to the region	Heavy user of water for irrigation
Health and social benefits. Careers can benefit through ‘networking’.	Biocides used to maintain the greenness of the ‘greens’, control insects, fungicides and weeds, contaminate both the air and water
Attracts the higher-spending social groups	Golf clubs often portray an elitist and exclusive lifestyle
Helps conserve valuable fragments of coastal habitat from encroaching urbanization and agriculture	Leads to an increase in road traffic
Increases local property values	Raises property prices beyond the reach of local young people
Waste can be recycled	Displacement through land occupancy
Quality of tourism increases	Creates elitism
Counteract problems of seasonality	Creates pressures on land

This increasing emphasis on sustainability has important implications for the golf industry, and this chapter focuses on the three pillars of sustainability – the economy, the environment and society. In the past, golf tourism was encouraged for its economic benefits with little consideration for the effects on the environment. But as witnessed in the opening Spotlight, this is beginning to change. For golf tourism to be sustainable, it is vital that its impacts are understood, so that they can be incorporated into planning and management. Table 9.1 lists just

some of the positive and negative impacts of golf according to experts, many of which are covered in more detail throughout this chapter.

The economic impacts of golf tourism

As mentioned above, early tourism research focused mainly upon the economic aspects of the industry, with many early impact studies directed at international and national levels. However, there are an increasing number of studies that examine regional and local economic impacts, and this chapter contains a number of such examples (see the Snapshot on the economic impacts of golf tourism in South Carolina). Similarly, there are a growing number of studies that attempt to estimate the impacts of specific events – Chapter 8 referred to several golf event impact studies.

According to Wall and Mathieson (2006) four factors have contributed to both the emphasis on economic impact analysis and the quality of such studies. First, when compared with physical and social impacts, economic impacts are relatively easy to measure. There exist widely accepted methodologies for measuring economic impacts, but in social and environmental sciences these are still in the early stages of development. Second, large amounts of reliable and comparable data have been collected on economic aspects of tourism, often collected routinely by government agencies. Third, research has advanced the application of economic assessment tools in tourism research. Economists have traditionally used input-output (IO) analysis, but other methods such as linear programming, general equilibrium models and cost-benefit analysis have also been employed in recent years. Multiplier analysis is also popular with economists, whereby the money spent by tourists in the area will be re-spent by recipients, augmenting the total. The multiplier is the factor by which tourist spend is increased in this process. For example, research in the Western Cape of South Africa has shown indirect benefits of golf to be positive with a multiplier effect of 1.68 for every rand spent. The final reason for the emphasis on the economics of tourism, especially its benefits, reflects the widespread belief among agency personnel that tourism can yield rapid and considerable returns on investments and be a positive force in remedying economic problems.

The impact of tourism goes far beyond enrichment in purely economic terms, helping to benefit the environment and culture and the fight to reduce poverty. Over the past few decades, the share in international tourism arrivals received by developing countries has steadily risen, from 31 per cent in 1990 to nearly 50 per cent in 2012. Tourism can serve as a foothold for the development of a market economy where small and medium-sized enterprises can expand and flourish. And in poor rural areas, it often constitutes the only alternative to subsistence farming which is in decline. In Rwanda, for example, tourism has become the country's top source of foreign income, overtaking tea and coffee exports. Big emerging markets (BEMs) like Brazil, India, Turkey and Vietnam, also see the potential of tourism as a powerful economic force.