
1 An Introduction to Golf Tourism

Spotlight: Wales challenging the giants of golf tourism

Celtic Manor Resort, home of the 2010 Ryder Cup, courtesy of © Crown copyright (2009) Visit Wales



The 2010 Ryder Cup, held at the Celtic Manor Resort, put Wales firmly on the golf tourism map, rivalling Scotland, Ireland and England in the international arena. The Ryder Cup 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 was a landmark for the country's tourism. The Welsh Assembly Government 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 used the 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 was 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.

The Ryder Cup dates back to the 1920s when it started as a contest between US and British golfers. Samuel Ryder – a successful entrepreneur – donated the trophy and the inaugural Ryder Cup matches were played at the Worcester Country Club, Massachusetts, in 1927. Since 1979 the biennial competition evolved into a USA versus Europe match, securing international TV coverage in 150 countries and territories for 2010. In the run up to the 2010 event, Wales reinforced its increased profile with curtain raisers staged during the Ryder Cup Wales 2009 summer of golf. The Bull Bay Golf Club held the Welsh Open Young PGA Professional Championship in both 2008 and 2009, sponsored by Ryder Cup Wales 2010. The Welsh Open at Chepstow in July 2009 and the Welsh National at Llanelli in September 2009 were also similarly sponsored.

The Welsh Assembly Government also used the opportunity to regenerate golfing facilities, providing financial support to the tune of \$3 million for golfing projects throughout the country via the Ryder Cup Wales Legacy Fund. In a report by Roger Pride, Director of Marketing for the Assembly, there were eight factors identified to differentiate Welsh golf from traditional, ‘stuffy’ images. These were:

- Easy access to tee-off times
- The unique Welsh welcome means you won’t be made to feel small
- You can go at your own pace
- No unnaturally scorching sun
- The outstanding beauty of the natural environment
- You don’t have to take out a loan to pay for a round of golf
- Relatively easy access
- The antidote to the English, Irish and Scottish golf scenes

Pride, who was also a Director of Ryder Cup Wales 2010 Ltd, has led the development of Wales’ golf tourism strategy. He has identified their target demographic to be the 29 to 49 age group for whom time is currency. Their needs encompassed the Internet, closer destinations and shorter breaks. He also noted an increasing proportion of female golfers, linking that with Welsh Hollywood icon, Catherine Zeta Jones. The alliance between golf apparel and fashion was also underlined as well as the crossover between younger celebs from music/TV/film/soccer to playing and endorsing golf.

The Ryder Cup was a great success, boosting the Welsh economy by over \$120 million, according to an economic impact study conducted after the event by IFM Sports Marketing Surveys. Thousands of visitors helped focus the sporting spotlight on Wales, with the total attendance for the week of the match being 244,000. The majority of respondents from outside Wales confirmed that they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the welcome they received and said their experience made it more likely they would visit Wales to play golf.

Note: all currencies in US\$. Exchange rates: 1 euro = \$1.276; 1 UK pound = \$1.5; 6.8 Chinese yuan = \$1.

Sources

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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 500 million who watched the 2010 Soccer World Cup Final. 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 ten earners in all sports in 2013 were golfers (Badenhausen, 2013). 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. Golf-inspired brogues and loafers have become a fashion trend in the US and the iconic Argyle prints have permeated every type of clothing. Golf retail has expanded, too, moving on from small golf club collections to gigantic big box chain stores, featuring multiple designer brands and computerized, 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 the world over are looking to golf as a generation-spanning game, and specialized family courses are multiplying with affordable fees and lessons. Schools in Canada are even introducing golf as part of the Physical Education curriculum. Women are becoming 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 \$22.9 billion annually. Despite this phenomenal figure, no-one has yet defined what characteristics make a golf tourist

nor 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. Hinch and Higham, 2011; Standeven and De Knopp, 1999; Hudson, 2003; Weed and Bull, 2004; Higham, 2005; Gibson, 2006), as well as 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 sport’s hall of fame or a water park, for example.

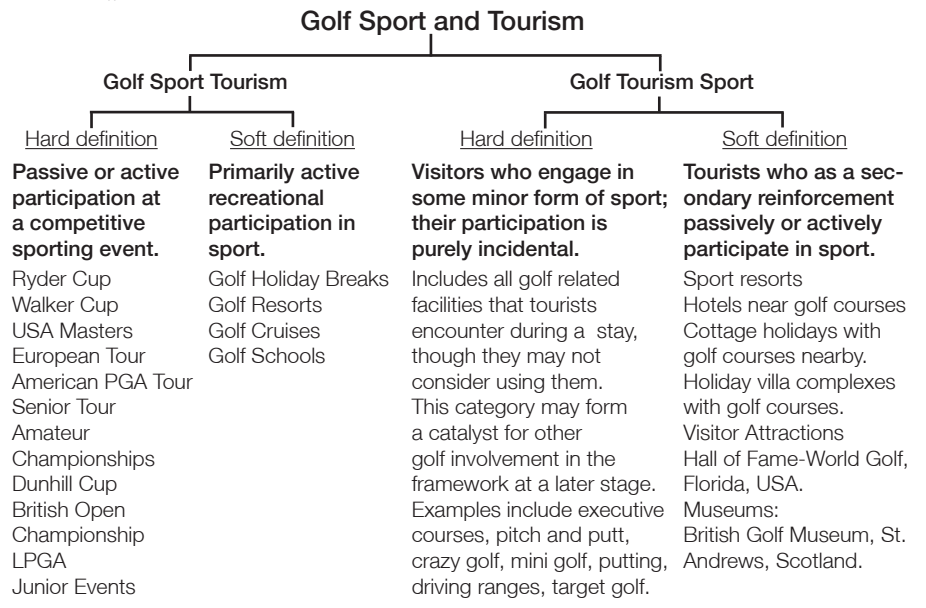


Figure 1.1: Application of the sport tourism and tourism sport framework to golf (Source: Adapted from Robinson and Gammon, p. 229)