

# 3 Types of Clubs

## Introduction

**C**lubs come in so many different types and forms, that it becomes necessary to classify them, much the way we do with hotels. Hotels may be classified by size (number of guest rooms), service level (economy to luxury), price (based on average rate), location, etc. Clubs are classified in a slightly different way. When we discuss the types of clubs that exist, we can do so in six different ways:

- 1 By primary activity/location
- 2 By clientele
- 3 Equity/nonequity
- 4 Size (by number of members, gross volume, or initiation fee)
- 5 By ownership
- 6 Tax status

It is important to understand how and why we classify clubs in these ways, and who does so. In short, though, we classify them for the same reasons that we might classify hotels, restaurants, or other types of businesses – to be able to group similar clubs with one another and for comparison purposes. For instance, it would be unreasonable, and counterproductive, to group ‘city clubs’ and ‘country clubs’ together because of their different purposes and mixes of services. Yes, they all have private membership and high levels of service and traditions but they are very different in other regards (including location and services). So, instead, it makes more sense to discuss them in the context of similar operations, just as we would refrain from discussing quick-service restaurants and fine dining restaurants together. While they might have some similarity (they both serve food), one could just as easily argue that they represent different corners of the same industry.

## Classifying clubs by primary activity/location

**P** **primary activity** is perhaps the most common way to classify clubs and, in fact, this is the way that much of the industry and companies that serve the industry use. By primary activity, we are referring to the singular activity that motivates members to become a member of a club. For instance, the most common example would be a golf club. Or a yacht club. Or a tennis club. Or a hunt club. It gets a little confusing when we couple **primary activity** with **location**. We do this for a good reason though – they often mean (or, at least, suggest) the same thing. We commonly refer to ‘country clubs’ or ‘city clubs’. When we do so, we are obviously referring to location, but it also infers activity. For instance, country clubs (usually) offer golf. And city clubs often offer a mix of dining, athletics and rooms. Yacht clubs, also, denote an activity but also indicate where they are located (on the water). So, it is important to remember that there is a correlation between location and activity, although not a perfect one. But back to classifying clubs by activity. Primary activities may involve (but are not limited to):

- Golf/Country
- Dining/City/University
- Yachting
- Racquet (tennis, squash, badminton, paddle tennis, pickleball)
- Aquatics
- Cricket
- Hunting
- Fitness/athletics
- Arts (and letters)
- Equestrian/polo
- Aeronautics
- Auto/motorcycle (common in Europe)
- Curling
- Alpine ski/snowboarding (common in Canada)
- Military clubs

No list could possibly be comprehensive since it would have to include almost every activity that people engage in at clubs. Not all of these will be discussed in detail but some of the (more) common types of clubs, and associated activities, are discussed below.

## Golf/country clubs

**G**olf clubs are clubs whose primary (and sometimes, only) activity is golf. Occasionally, the term golf club and country club will be used synonymously. Golf is a popular activity, although declining in popularity. Since country clubs outnumber golf clubs, let's discuss country clubs in little more detail.

Country clubs typically offer a variety of activities, in addition to golf, such as tennis, paddle tennis, fitness, aquatics, and even bowling. The number and range of activities is virtually unlimited, especially in those clubs that operate year round and may offer multiple seasonal activities. One of the authors worked at a private club in Connecticut which had 500 members, 18 holes of golf, several tennis and paddle tennis courts, a swimming pool, three dining rooms and a ballroom for banquets. This is not an uncommon mix of activities and facilities for a club of this size. Such a club would also need to hire skilled professionals in each of these areas. Country clubs have begun to offer additional activities and services to their members, such as fitness. This will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.



Photo 3.1: Manchester Country Club, by Gil Talbot Photography, courtesy of Manchester Country Club.

Continuing with this example, a club of this size would have multiple membership categories, of which the one with the most members would usually be the 'full' member category, which would allow those members to golf. The club would also have multiple other membership categories (discussed more in Chapter 8). However, golf would most likely dominate the club, the general manager would