



Adventures In Golf



Since the late 1970's, AIG has customized golfing itineraries for thousands of parties, large and small, with each program designed to make the most of the vacation - to Britain, Ireland, or other destinations.

Our experienced travel advisors offer in-depth knowledge of the countries and their golf courses, and peerless service. From initial inquiry to confirmed itinerary, the entire process can take as little as 24 hours.

This is a formula, which has produced an ever-increasing list of satisfied customers, and commendations in *Passport*, *Forbes*, *Sky*, and *Connoisseur Magazines* bear testimony. Additionally, AIG is a premier travel partner of Andrew Harper Travel.

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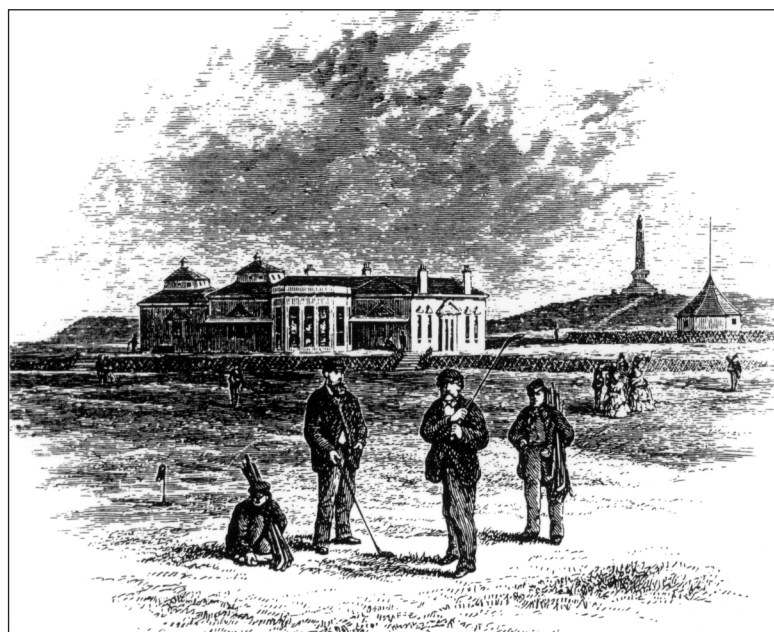
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Spring is here! The courses are greening up and the new season is almost upon us. It's time to get the clubs out, find the shoes, and hit some balls. **And, if you have not made your travel plans yet for the summer, don't despair – just pick up the phone and contact us today!**

We still have tee times available at Ballybunion and St Andrews (long sold out to the general public) but these are going fast, so time is of the essence! We regularly sing the praises of the old and famous, and they deserve their plaudits. **But several new courses have entered the must play category**, in some cases as soon as they opened. Old Head, Kingsbarns, and Doonbeg all fall neatly into that bracket, and Rosapenna (Sandy Hills), Ballyliffin Glashedy, The European, and Carne rightly sit alongside them.

One tends to forget that Loch Lomond, The K Club, Mount Juliet, Adare, and Ballybunion's Cashen Course are also recent developments, since they are already established courses with high rankings in their home countries and beyond. Tralee and Waterville

seem to have been around forever, but they too are relative newcomers in the context of golf's history in Ireland.

Some wonderful new courses have been developed in England, too. Wisley, The Oxfordshire, Queens, Hanbury Manor,



and The Belfry come to mind. As with all of these being parkland courses, AIG clients have tended to bypass them in search of the true seaside links. **Perhaps**

we are sometimes too focused on the links courses. Ganton, Alwoodley, Woodhall Spa, and Walton Heath offer springy fairways and fast greens, which match any links. And, the likes of St George's Hill, Swinley Forest, and The Berkshire can justly claim to rival their more famous neighbors, Sunningdale and Wentworth, which all devotees of the game rightly cherish.

How nice it is, also, to step onto the courses at Skibo or Gleneagles. Fine design and magnificent scenery make for enjoyable play, and where un-crowded fairways are guaranteed, as is the case at Skibo, the pleasure is heightened. For scenic courses far from the madding crowd, Machrie and Machrihanish take some beating. The feeling of remoteness is palpable, the views are memorable, and the courses are historic. When the Western Open was first played at Machrie, over one hundred years

ago, the purse on offer larger than that for the Open Championship! And, the value of the silverware in the trophy cabinet would comfortably have exceeded

the cost of course construction. Short flights to both of these courses are available from Glasgow Airport, making even day trips a feasible option.

This year the Open Championship returns to Royal Troon with its famous Postage Stamp 8th hole, where inventive shot-making can be required if the wind gets up. Gene Sarazen aced this hole in his farewell appearance, but most players are delighted to escape with par. In good conditions, the player's score needs to be made on the outward half at Troon. Even the long par 5's are reachable in two shots for the big guns and one or two of the par 4's are drivable.

However, the brutal back nine sorts the men from the boys every time. Turning into the prevailing wind, those long homeward par fours just grind you down, with only the best swings holding up as the pressure mounts. When in sight of the finish, you reach the "short" 17th, which stretches to around 250 yards for the pros. Treacherous slopes protect its plateau green and unforgiving bunkers lurk nearby. Deep rough threatens within spitting distance on either side of the apron. Negotiate this hole successfully and arguably the hardest driving hole on the course lies in wait. Ask Greg Norman, whose playoff loss to Mark Calcavecchia could be attributed to finding sand off this tee. For the big boys, the safe channel down the middle

is wickedly narrow, but the lay-up shot leaves a very long second to a tight green in front of the clubhouse.

If you would like to visit the 2004 Open in style, contact us for details on an outstanding hospitality package. Craigend House overlooks the championship tee at the 17th hole, and has direct access to the course via its delightful garden. Butch Harmon will be in attendance each day to give our clients the inside line, and the culinary delights of Marco Pierre White ensure the gastronomy will be as memorable as the golf. A number of sports personalities are expected to swell the ranks on Saturday and packages can be tailored to suit your needs for any number of days, subject to availability. But, PLEASE BOOK EARLY!

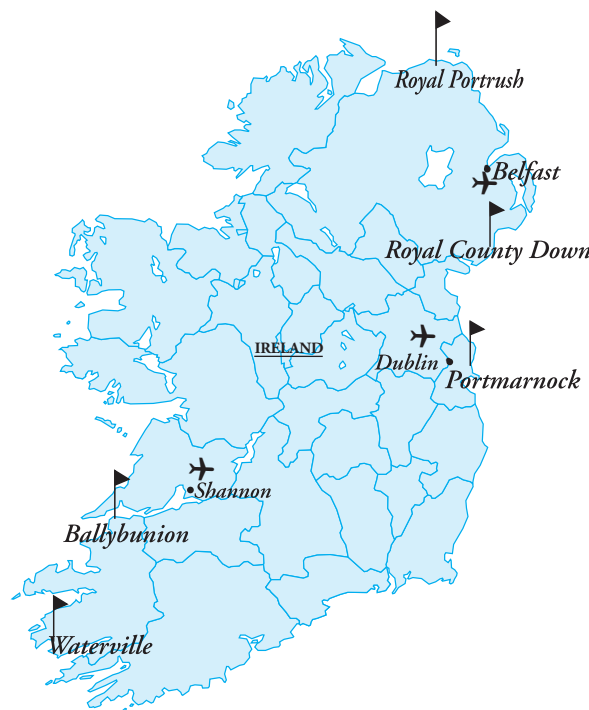
You may also like to diary the following venues for future Open Championships:



Just remember: the tournament always starts on the third Thursday in July.

Clients often ask us to recommend hidden gems convenient to the famous courses, which they have chosen to visit.

So below, we present a number of suggestions, grouped by area and referenced to their more famous neighbors.



Portmarnock

Portmarnock Hotel's Links Course, designed by Bernhardt Langer, is a real challenge, as are Royal Dublin, The Island Club and St Margaret's. A little further north, County Louth at Baltray, is a links in the grand manner, with sweeping fairways, towering dunes and some wonderful views.

Royal County Down

Warrenpoint lies a few miles inland of RCD and provides a stiff test, while Ardglass is scenic but quirky and lies a little north of Newcastle.

Royal Portrush

Mention the Causeway Coast Challenge and the initiated think not only of Royal Portrush, but also of Portstewart, Castlerock and Ballycastle. Even at Royal Portrush, too many visitors leave without sampling the delights of the Valley Course, a worthy partner to Dunluce and, itself, the venue for tournament play.

Ballybunion

Now that the Cashen course has matured, an increasing number of visitors are taking time to play both Ballybunion courses – as well as finding time to visit Tralee, Dooks and Dingle. The scenery on each of these is positively distracting.

Waterville

Ring of Kerry has been significantly improved since it opened a few years ago and Killarney now has three courses, with the Lackabane course providing a more modern alternative to Killeen and Mahoney's Point. Old Head and Cork are not far to the east.

St Andrews Old Course

Visitors to St Andrews are spoiled with choices. Besides the New, Eden, Jubilee, and Strathclyde courses in the town, Peter Thompson's Dukes Course lies just outside. A short drive down the road are Craig, The Golf House Club of Elie, the St Andrews Bay complex with courses designed by Sam Torrance and Bruce Devlin, and, of course, Kingsbarns. Within easy commuting distance, too, are Ladybank and Lundin Links, both used as qualifying courses when the Open is at St Andrews.

Carnoustie

Close to Carnoustie are Panmure (at Barry) and Monifieth, while Scotsraig, just across the Tay Bridge, is another course regularly used for the final qualifying rounds for both St Andrews and Carnoustie.

Muirfield

East Lothian is a golfer's paradise. In the immediate environs of Gullane are Luffness New, Longniddry, Kilspindie, North Berwick, The Glen Club, and Gullane Nos 1, 2 and 3! On the way back to Edinburgh are Musselburgh (originally home to The Honourable Company) and Haddington.

Turnberry

Nearby Royal Troon and Prestwick are, of course, established tournament venues. But, Western Gailes, Glasgow Gailes, Kilmarnock (Barrassie), Irvine Bogside, and Prestwick St Nicholas all enjoy fervent support from locals and visitors alike.

Royal Birkdale

Royal Birkdale is the flagship to a veritable fleet of fine courses on the Lancashire coast. Southport & Ainsdale, Hillside, Hesketh, West Lancashire, and Formby all offer golf of the finest quality, with clubhouses to match, and Southport, although lacking top class hotels, has a wide range of excellent shops, pubs, and restaurants.

Royal Liverpool

Although not far from Southport as the crow flies, Hoylake, as the locals call it, is the other side of the Mersey tunnel from Southport and travel between the two can be slow. Therefore, when visiting Hoylake it often makes sense to stay in Chester and play some other courses – such as Old Tom Morris' Wallasey, or the James Braid-designed Caldys, both of which are as hospitable to visitors as is Royal Liverpool, itself.

Royal St George's

Surprisingly, there are two other former Open Championship venues in the neighborhood: Royal Cinque Ports and Prince's, each offering a fine test of golf on fairways of true links character. Not far away are Littlestone and Rye, with the nine holes of Leeds Castle surround a fortress sometimes described as "the loveliest castle in the world".

Wentworth & Sunningdale

The belt of heathland running from Surrey into Berkshire has some of the best golfing country in Britain. Swinley Forest, St George's Hill, West Hill, Woking, The Berkshire, and New Zealand lie in this tract, while Walton Heath is a short drive to the south.

