



What Should I Know About the Links at St Andrews-The Old Course

The Links St. Andrews traces its roots 600 years back to the Middle Ages. Golf was played here before Gutenberg invented the printing press, before Columbus discovered America, before Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel, before the invention of the rifle & revolver, and before the invention of the piano!

It is considered the oldest golf course in the world and known as the Home of Golf. But getting to this lofty status wasn't always easy for the Links of St Andrews... as you will see by some its unique history:

Golf was being played at the Links at St Andrews in the early 1400 hundreds and was becoming increasingly popular when King James II of Scotland banned golf in 1457 because he felt that young men were playing too much golf instead of practicing archery. The ban was upheld until 1502 when King James the IV took up golf and removed the ban.

The "Rabbit Wars", wow such an odd tale!! St Andrews was in decline at the end of the eighteenth century and run by an inept Town Council, was in need of cash to keep it afloat. In February 1797 it persuaded two local merchants, John Gunn and Robert Gourlay to advance the town £2080 Sterling. As security against the loan the two men acquired a bond over the links that gave them the right to sell "whole or part of the subjects" at public auction.

They did just that in November 1797, selling part of the land to Thomas Erskine for £805. In August 1799, Erskine sold the right to the use of land for an annual payment to Charles Dempster and his son Cathcart. With a name like Cathcart you knew something weird might happen, and trouble ensued.

The Dempsters rented the land for £130 a year to one James Begbie, who bred rabbits on their behalf, selling the pelts and meat. For almost two years the rabbits did what they do best, until their numbers overwhelmed the links, with the scrapes and holes they made in the ground becoming an increasing nuisance to the golfers.

So for many years golfers and rabbits shared the Links of St Andrews. In 1805 the local inhabitants won the right to kill the estimated 900 or so rabbits. For sixteen years the Rabbit Wars were waged on the links and in the courts. In 1821, a local land owner and golfer named James Cheape bought the land and

is credited with saving the links for golf and laid the foundations of St Andrews golfing prosperity.

The Old Course was pivotal to the development of how the game is played today. For instance, in 1764, the course had 22 holes. The members would play the same hole going out and in with the exception of the 11th and 22nd holes. The members decided that the first four and last four holes on the course were too short and should be combined into four total holes (two in and two out). St Andrews then had 18 holes and that was how the standard of 18 holes was created. Around 1863, Old Tom Morris had the 1st green separated from the 17th green, producing the current 18-hole layout with seven double greens and four single greens. The Old Course is home of The Open Championship, the oldest of golf's major championships. The Old Course has hosted this major 29 times since 1873, most recently in 2015. The 29 Open Championships that the Old Course has hosted is more than any other course, and The Open is currently played there every five years (with an occasional exception).

One of the unique features of the Old Course are the large double greens. Seven greens are shared by two holes each, with hole numbers adding up to 18 (2nd paired with 16th, 3rd with 15th, all the way up to 8th and 10th). The Swilcan Bridge, spanning the first and 18th holes, has become a famous icon for golf in the world. Everyone who plays the 18th hole walks over this 700-year-old bridge, and many iconic pictures of the farewells of the most iconic golfers in history have been taken on this bridge. A life-size stone replica of the Bridge is situated at the World Hall of Fame museum in St. Augustine Florida. Only the 1st, 9th, 17th and 18th holes have their own greens. Another unique feature is that the course can be played in either direction, clockwise or anti-clockwise. Along with that, the Old Course has 112 bunkers which are all individually named and have their own unique story and history behind them. The two most famous are the 10 ft deep "Hell Bunker" on the 14th hole, and the "Road Bunker" on the 17th hole. Countless professional golfers have seen their dreams of winning the Open Championship squandered by hitting their balls into those bunkers.

The St Andrews, Europe's largest public golf complex has 7 golf courses including the new cliff top Castle Course. Of the six 18 hole championship courses at the St Andrews Links complex, four have been ranked on Golf Digest's Current Best 100 Courses Outside the United States. The four courses are the Old Course, the New Course, the Jubilee Course and the Castle Course. The Eden Course, the Strathtyrum Course and the Balgove Course account for the remaining courses at the complex.

The clubhouse was built in 1854 and is the home of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club. Golf was largely a winter sport until the middle of the century when mechanical grass cutters allowed play in the summer as well. With the increased prosperity of the Victorian times and the expansion of the railways, golf tourism took hold all over Britain.

The courses of St Andrews Links are owned by the local authorities and operated by St Andrews Links Trust, a charitable organization. St Andrews is also home to the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews, one of the most prestigious golf clubs and until 2004 one of the two rulemaking authorities of golf (in that year, the Royal and Ancient Club passed on its rulemaking authority to an offshoot organization, The R&A-The Royal and Ancient). The USGA is the American rule making version of the R&A.

Millions of golfers would like to play The Old Course at St Andrews. So just how can you get a tee time on a course that has 45,000 rounds per year and tee times sometimes made 2 years in advance? There are a number of options available to you:

Private Advanced Tee Times – The Old Course is currently fully booked for advanced reservations from April to October 2018. You can call the course for off season tee times and rates.

Old Course Ballot – Nearly half of the Old Course tee times each year are allocated to the Ballot to give people unable to book a tee time for a chance of playing. It is drawn 48 hours in advance of play and golfers should provide their names, home club, and handicaps, either on line or by phone or in the clubhouse before 2 PM two days before the day they wish to play. To enter there must be a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 4 players.

Single Golfers – Single golfers with suitable handicap (maximum of 24 for men & 36 for women) who wish to play the Old Course without an existing tee time should check in at the Old Pavilion on the day of play and the staff will do their best to join them with a two or three ball group.

Authorized Providers of Old Course Tee Times – There are a number of authorized providers (Golf Tour Operators) offering packages, including guaranteed Old Course tee times throughout the high season (April 15th – October 14th, 2018)

Winter Package – The Winter Package includes one guaranteed tee time on The Old Course and offers a round of golf on two other St Andrews Links courses.

There is also a St Andrews app with a wide variety of features that you can download from the app store for both Apple and Android phones.

So what can you expect to pay to play The Old Course. Green Fees run from 88 pounds (\$122) in the winter to 180 pounds (\$250) in the summer. The summer rate is not bad considering it can cost up to \$500 to pay Pebble Beach and even more at some other clubs in America. The caddie fee, that's 50 pounds (\$70) plus tip (\$30) and you are expected to use a caddie. Then there is club rental,

that is another 40 pounds (\$55) and shoe rental if need is 13 pounds (\$18). That includes complimentary socks with each pair of shoes. All total about \$425 dollars to play one of the greatest and historical golf courses in the world.

Golf Buggies (Carts) — Old Course:

Golfers who are registered disabled with a ***permanent*** condition of disability and relevant supporting documentation may request a buggy for use on the Old Course between April and October. It will be driven by a qualified caddie driver and the fee is £40 (\$55). Golfer's disability documentation should be provided ***at the time of booking***. This information can be faxed. When entering the Ballot, please bring documentation with you.

Remember no one plays golf on The Old Course on Sundays. (with the exception of certain tournaments). The Course is used as a public park for the citizens of St Andrews on each Sunday. It is quite a site to see; children, parents, dogs, picnics, and tours on the most famous golf course in the world.

Today 250,000 rounds of golf each year are played on the Links of St Andrews. If you get the opportunity you should go to Scotland and experience the Old Course and the quaint town of St Andrews. Playing the Old Course is like no other and It will be a round of golf that you will never forget.