



The Modern Golfer's Passport

*Insider Strategies for Luxury Golf Travel,
Private Access, and Extraordinary Experiences*

Contents

Intro

Introduction

The Passport You Did Not Know You Were Carrying

01

The New Definition of Luxury Golf Travel

What scarcity, authenticity, and time mean for the modern traveler

02

The World's Great Golf Pilgrimages

Ten destinations, each rewarding a different kind of traveler

03

Why Private Golf Has Become the Ultimate Social Network

Trust, community, and the relationships golf builds

04

How Experienced Golf Travelers Gain Access

The doors are not locked. They are simply not labeled.

05

Designing the Perfect Golf Trip

The eleven-point framework and sample itineraries

06

Golf's Most Underrated Destinations

The best time to see a place is roughly eighteen months before everyone else

07

Borrowed Days

The golf trip hidden inside the travel you are already doing

08

Luxury Golf Trends Shaping the Next Decade

Demographics, wellness, and the forces reshaping the game

09

The Etiquette of Private Golf Travel

There is only one measure of success as a guest

10

Building Your Lifetime Golf Passport

A list is a plan that has not been scheduled yet

Final Thoughts

What the game actually gives us

Introduction

The Passport You Did Not Know You Were Carrying

There is a moment, usually somewhere around the fourth or fifth serious golf trip of a person's life, when the purpose of the exercise quietly changes.

The first trips are about the courses. You go to see the thing you have read about. You stand on the first tee at a place you have studied in photographs for twenty years and you try, mostly unsuccessfully, to play golf.

Then something shifts. You begin to notice that the courses were never the point. The point was that four people who could not have found six consecutive hours together in their ordinary lives found eighteen holes, a long lunch, and a walk back to the hotel in the dark. The point was that a business relationship that had been polite for three years became honest somewhere around the twelfth.

Golf, it turns out, is one of the last remaining technologies for compressing time between people.

Golf is the only sport where you spend four hours with someone and learn more about them than you would in four years of meetings.

That is why golf travel has moved from the hobby column of an affluent household's spending to something closer to infrastructure. It is not recreation. It is where relationships are formed, tested, repaired, and passed down.

The shift from ownership to access. A generation ago, the aspiration was to own: the second home on the course, the boat, the box at the stadium. The current generation of high earners has watched the carrying costs of ownership compound and has quietly concluded that the asset was never the house. The asset was the invitation. Access is lighter, more varied, and considerably more interesting than ownership, and it does not require a roof.

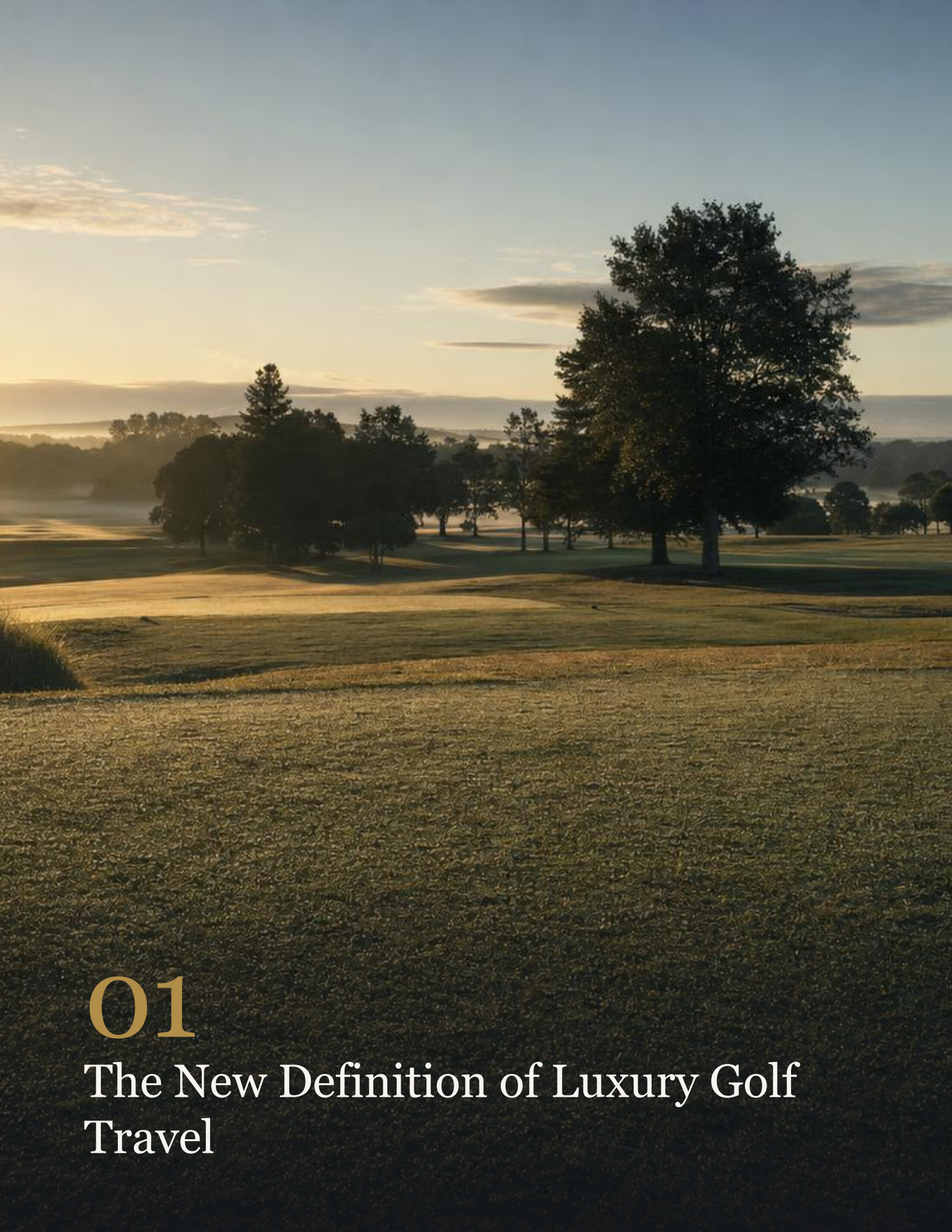
The shift from possessions to experiences. This is now well documented in consumer research and thoroughly visible in any private club dining room. Affluent households across most developed markets have been shifting discretionary spend toward experiences and away from goods for more than a decade. Golf sits at the center of that shift because it is one of the few experiences that is simultaneously a destination, a social ritual, a physical activity, and a shared memory that can be repeated annually for forty years.

The shift from status to social capital. Purchasing power buys a great deal. It does not buy the phone call that gets four people onto Cypress Point. It does not buy the member who says, without being asked, "come as my guest in April." That is social capital, and it accrues the way all capital accrues: slowly, through consistent behavior, and mostly to people who are not obviously trying to accumulate it.

This guide is about all three shifts. It is a field manual for people who have realized that the most valuable thing golf produces is not a score.

The passport in the title is not the one in your desk drawer. It is the accumulated record of where you have been, who took you there, and who you have since taken somewhere. Some people carry a thick one. Most of them earned it the same way.





01

The New Definition of Luxury Golf
Travel

The New Definition of Luxury Golf Travel

Luxury used to mean the best available. It now means the least available.

Ask a well-traveled golfer to name the finest day they have ever had and you will almost never hear a five-star hotel in the answer. You will hear a hard-to-reach place, a small number of people, and a set of conditions that could not be repeated on request.

That is the entire modern definition in one observation. Luxury has migrated from quality to scarcity, and then from scarcity to authenticity.

Scarcity is now the product. The most coveted golf experiences in the world are constrained not by price but by supply. A single-digit number of tee times per day. A season eleven weeks long. A club that does not accept unaccompanied guests under any circumstance. You cannot buy your way past most of these constraints, which is precisely why they hold their value.

Authenticity outranks polish. A links course in a gale with a nineteen-year-old caddie who has never left the county is now more prized than a manicured resort with valet everything. The affluent golf traveler has been to the manicured resort. What they have not had is the thing that feels real.

Time is the actual currency. Every person reading this can buy a first-class seat. Not one of them can buy a Tuesday. The trip that gets said yes to is the trip that respects the traveler's calendar: fewer transfers, shorter drives, more play per day away from home. Design around time and you have designed a luxury product, regardless of thread count.

The wealthiest people I travel with negotiate hard on almost everything except one thing. They will pay anything to not waste a day.

Why the best experiences are not online. There is a structural reason the finest rounds do not appear on booking platforms. Clubs that are genuinely private have no commercial incentive to be discoverable, and every incentive not to be. Their access flows through members, and members extend it through relationships. The result is a two-tier market: a visible tier that anyone with a credit card can enter, and an invisible tier that operates entirely on reputation. Most of what is worth doing sits in the second tier.

Why relationships outrank purchasing power. This is the hardest lesson for successful people to absorb, because in most of their life the two are interchangeable. In private golf they are not. The currency is trust, the exchange rate is set by behavior over years, and it cannot be front-run.

WHAT MEMBERS KNOW

Members are not gatekeeping out of snobbery. They are protecting a finite resource. Most private clubs cap guest rounds per member per year, sometimes at a number in the low teens. When a member spends one on you, they have spent a meaningful fraction of an annual budget and put their own standing behind your conduct. Understand the arithmetic and your gratitude becomes appropriately specific.

PASSPORT NOTES

1. Judge a golf experience by what constrains it, not by what it costs. Constraint is the reliable signal.
2. Buy time before you buy amenities. Fewer transfers and shorter drives improve a trip more than any suite upgrade.
3. The visible market and the invisible market are different markets. Almost everything memorable is in the second one.
4. Assume every private round you are given cost someone else something. It did.
5. Authenticity beats polish with this audience every time. A rough edge, correctly framed, is an asset.



02

The World's Great Golf Pilgrimages

The World's Great Golf Pilgrimages

Ten destinations. Each one rewards a different kind of traveler.

What follows is not a ranking. It is a set of profiles built around the questions experienced travelers actually ask: when to go, how long to stay, where to sleep, what to eat, and what the trip is really for.

SCOTLAND

The pilgrimage that reorders your definition of the game

BEST SEASON: Mid-May to mid-June, and September. July and August bring crowds and the highest rates. May offers long light and firm turf. September offers the best value and the most agreeable weather of the shoulder seasons.

IDEAL LENGTH: Seven to nine days. Fewer than six and you are commuting rather than traveling.

BASE YOURSELF: St Andrews for the east coast pilgrimage; Dornoch or Nairn for the Highlands run; Gullane for East Lothian, which is the most efficient golf geography in the world.

WHERE TO STAY: The Old Course Hotel or Rusacks in St Andrews. Greywalls in Gullane, adjacent to Muirfield, is the most atmospheric bed in Scottish golf. Links House at Royal Dornoch in the north. Gleneagles if the group includes non-golfers who require an alternative to wind.

DINING: The Peat Inn near St Andrews. The Seafood Ristorante on the beach. Bonnie Badger in Gullane. In Dornoch, the food is simple and the whisky list is not.

THE ITINERARY THAT WORKS: Three days in East Lothian (North Berwick, Gullane No. 1, Muirfield if you can arrange it, Renaissance), three days in Fife (Old Course, Kingsbarns, Dumbarnie, Crail), then two days north to Dornoch and Brora if you have the time. Do not attempt the west coast in the same trip. Machrihanish and Askernish deserve their own journey.

INSIDER EXPERIENCES: Play North Berwick late in the day when the town is on the beach. Walk the Old Course on a Sunday, when it closes to golf and opens to the public. Take a caddie at Dornoch and ask about the 1990s.

BUCKET LIST: The Old Course at 6:40am in June, with a caddie, playing the correct lines rather than the safe ones.

IRELAND

Where the golf is severe and the hospitality is not

BEST SEASON: June through September. May can be glorious or brutal. Do not plan around a forecast.

IDEAL LENGTH: Seven days, split between two regions.

WHERE TO STAY: Adare Manor is the finest hotel in Irish golf, and one of the finest in Europe. Ashford Castle for the northwest. Ballyfin for a non-golf interlude that will earn you significant credit with a spouse.

DINING: Aniar in Galway. The Oak Room at Adare. In Ballybunion and Lahinch, eat where the caddies eat and order what is landed that morning.

THE ITINERARY: Southwest four days (Ballybunion Old, Lahinch, Waterville, Tralee), then north (Royal County Down, Royal Portrush, Portstewart) with a night in Belfast. County Down is, by wide consensus among people who have played everything, one of the two or three most beautiful golf courses on earth.

INSIDER EXPERIENCES: Carne in Belmullet, at dusk, in the wind. Almost nobody makes the drive. Everybody who does talks about it for the rest of their life.

BUCKET LIST: Royal County Down in the morning with the Mourne Mountains clear, which happens less often than the photographs suggest.

CALIFORNIA

The most concentrated golf coastline in America

BEST SEASON: September and October on the Monterey Peninsula. Clear, warm, and past the summer marine layer.

IDEAL LENGTH: Four days on the Peninsula, or ten days if you are running the coast from Los Angeles to the Bay.

WHERE TO STAY: The Lodge at Pebble Beach for proximity. Post Ranch Inn in Big Sur for the drive and the view. Bernardus Lodge in Carmel Valley if the group includes wine as a primary objective.

DINING: Aubergine at L'Auberge Carmel. Bernardus. The Bench at Pebble for a casual dinner overlooking the eighteenth.

THE ITINERARY: Spyglass Hill, Pebble Beach, Monterey Peninsula Country Club Shore if you have a member, and a late nine at Spanish Bay with the piper walking in at sunset. Add Pasatiempo in Santa Cruz, an Alister MacKenzie design that most visitors skip and every architecture student prioritizes.

INSIDER EXPERIENCES: The 17-Mile Drive at 6:30am before the gates fill. Cypress Point remains the most exclusive round in American golf and is arranged exactly one way, through a member, months in advance.

BUCKET LIST: The par-three seventh at Pebble in wind, from the back, with something to prove.

FLORIDA

Modern architecture's laboratory, and the easiest logistics on this list

BEST SEASON: Late October through April. Avoid August unless the objective is to sweat.

IDEAL LENGTH: Three to four days. Florida rewards the long weekend better than any destination in the world.

WHERE TO STAY: Streamsong Lodge for a self-contained golf trip with three world-class courses and nothing else to distract you. Naples for a group that wants restaurants and beach. The Four Seasons at Surf Club in Miami for the trip that is only partly about golf.

DINING: In Naples, USS Nemo and Sails. At Streamsong, eat at the lodge and go to bed early, which is the entire point of Streamsong.

THE ITINERARY: Streamsong Red, Blue, and Black over three days, walking, with caddies. Or a Naples base with Calusa Pines and Talis Park if you have relationships, and Tiburon if you do not.

INSIDER EXPERIENCES: Streamsong Black late in the day, when the scale of the property reads properly in low sun. Seminole remains the most storied private club in the state and is, as always, a member conversation.

BUCKET LIST: Thirty-six walking holes at Streamsong in February, which is as good as American resort golf gets.

ARIZONA

Desert golf, executed at the highest level, ninety minutes from a major airport

BEST SEASON: Late October through early May. January and February are peak in every sense.

IDEAL LENGTH: Three to five days. Scottsdale is built for this.

WHERE TO STAY: The Phoenician or Four Seasons Troon North for full service. Mountain Shadows for design-forward and a genuinely excellent short course. Andaz Scottsdale for groups.

DINING: Scottsdale's dining divides cleanly into two moods, and a well-built trip uses both.

For the room as much as the food. Ocean 44 on Scottsdale Road is the best seafood in the desert and the best people watching in Arizona, which is not a coincidence. Toca Madera is louder, later, and deliberately theatrical: go at nine, sit in the main room, and understand that the scene is the menu's equal partner. Sexy Roman, inside the W in Old Town, arrived with a name that invites skepticism and a kitchen that ends it, run by a James Beard nominated chef; the martini cart and the tableside tiramisu are theater, and the pasta is not. Kauboi, on the third floor of The REMI, is the newest room worth being seen in: a Japanese steakhouse built around a live-fire robata grill, with a whiskey lounge behind the dining room and a terrace that runs late. Book all four for eight o'clock or later. Nothing in this city's Entertainment District is at its best at six.

For the food and the atmosphere in equal measure. Dominick's Steakhouse for the rooftop and a steak that justifies the price. Mastro's, which set the standard the rest of the city has spent twenty years chasing. And Marcellino Ristorante in Old Town, which is the quiet answer to all of it: family-run, unhurried, and the meal that people remember longest after the trip ends.

INSIDER EXPERIENCES: The Ra Ra Room, beneath the Suns' downtown arena in Phoenix, is a members-only dining club from Major Food Group, marked outside by a single lit martini glass and nothing else. Members can send guests in without being present, which is the detail worth knowing. If you can find someone to put you in, go. It is not a meal you forget.

GOLF: THE TWO TIERS. Scottsdale holds one of the highest concentrations of genuinely exclusive private golf in the world, and almost none of it is visible from the road. Whisper Rock, with two courses and a membership heavy on touring professionals. Scottsdale National, which operates on an invitation model unlike anything else in American golf.

Silverleaf at DC Ranch, a Tom Weiskopf design climbing into the McDowells, which is as beautiful a private course as exists in the Southwest. None of these can be bought into on a trip. Every one of them is a member conversation, and the ask should never be the ask. See Chapter Four.

The public tier is exceptional, which is the part visitors underestimate. We-Ko-Pa Saguaro on Fort McDowell Yavapai land is walkable, houseless, and one of the finest public courses in the American West. Quintero, an hour northwest of the city, is worth the drive precisely because of the drive: elevation, isolation, and almost nobody there. Build the trip around those two and you have a week that stands entirely on its own, with or without an introduction.

BUCKET LIST: A dawn round at We-Ko-Pa with the McDowells lit orange, dinner at Marcellino, and a flight home the next morning.

NEW ZEALAND

The most beautiful golf on earth, and the longest flight to reach it

BEST SEASON: November through March, the southern summer. February is the sweet spot.

IDEAL LENGTH: Ten days minimum. The flight demands it.

WHERE TO STAY: The Farm at Cape Kidnappers and Rosewood Kauri Cliffs, both Robertson properties, both extraordinary. Huka Lodge in Taupo for the non-golf day.

DINING: Eat at the lodges. This is one of the few destinations where the property kitchens genuinely outperform the region.

THE ITINERARY: Auckland arrival, two nights at Kauri Cliffs, then Tara Iti if the relationship exists, then Cape Kidnappers, then Queenstown for scenery and a day at Jack's Point. Build in one non-golf day for fishing or helicopter.

INSIDER EXPERIENCES: Tara Iti is Tom Doak's sandbelt-quality masterpiece on the Mangawhai coast and is, by design, extremely difficult to see. Access is entirely through membership.

BUCKET LIST: The clifftop stretch at Cape Kidnappers, which is the single most vertiginous walk in the sport.

TASMANIA

The destination that has converted more skeptics than any other in the last fifteen years

BEST SEASON: November through April.

IDEAL LENGTH: Five to seven days, combined with mainland Australia.

WHERE TO STAY: Saffire Freycinet on the east coast is one of the great small hotels in the world. Barnbougle's own lodging is simple and correct and adjacent to the first tee.

DINING: Franklin in Hobart. The Agrarian Kitchen in New Norfolk. Tasmania's food and wine scene now stands entirely on its own.

THE ITINERARY: Fly into Launceston, play Barnbougle Dunes and Lost Farm over three days, then charter to King Island for Cape Wickham and Ocean Dunes. Finish in Hobart for MONA and two days of eating.

INSIDER EXPERIENCES: Cape Wickham has more oceanfront holes than almost any course on earth and sits on an island of fewer than two thousand people. Getting there is half of the story.

BUCKET LIST: Thirty-six at Barnbougle in a two-club wind, then dinner where nobody changes clothes.

SOUTH AFRICA

The best value in world-class golf travel, and the widest range of adjacent experience

BEST SEASON: October through April for the coast. The Cape is at its best in February and March.

IDEAL LENGTH: Ten to fourteen days, because the safari extension is not optional.

WHERE TO STAY: Ellerman House in Cape Town. Delaire Graff or Babylonstoren in the Winelands. Singita or Londolozi for the bush leg.

DINING: La Colombe in Constantia. The Test Kitchen alumni restaurants across Cape Town. Winelands dining is world class and priced at a fraction of California.

THE ITINERARY: Cape Town base with Steenberg and Clovelly, then the Garden Route for Fancourt Links and Pinnacle Point, then Leopard Creek on the edge of Kruger, then three nights in the bush.

INSIDER EXPERIENCES: Leopard Creek overlooks the Crocodile River and the Kruger boundary. You are watching game from the tee box. Nothing else in golf is comparable.

BUCKET LIST: Fancourt Links in the morning, Pinnacle Point in the afternoon, wine at sunset.

JAPAN

The most refined golf culture on the planet, and the least understood

BEST SEASON: April to early June, and October to November. Autumn is exceptional.

IDEAL LENGTH: Eight to ten days, integrated with Tokyo and Kyoto.

WHERE TO STAY: Aman Tokyo or Hoshinoya Tokyo. The Kawana Hotel on the Izu Peninsula, which has hosted golfers since 1936 and remains one of the most atmospheric golf properties in Asia. Amanemu for the onsen leg.

DINING: Japan requires no advice beyond this: let the hotel book it, go where they send you, and eat at the counter.

THE ITINERARY: Tokyo for three nights, Kawana for two, then Kyoto and Ise. Hirono near Kobe is the finest course in Japan, a Charles Alison design, and requires member introduction.

INSIDER EXPERIENCES: The Japanese golf day includes a formal lunch between nines and, at traditional clubs, an onsen bath afterward. Do not treat these as interruptions. They are the point.

BUCKET LIST: The Fuji Course at Kawana in November with the ocean below and the maples turning.

PORTUGAL

Europe's most efficient luxury golf trip, and its most improved

BEST SEASON: March to May and September to November. The Algarve plays year-round.

IDEAL LENGTH: Four to six days.

WHERE TO STAY: The Magnolia or Conrad at Quinta do Lago. Sublime Comporta north of Lisbon for the design-led crowd. Praia D'El Rey on the Silver Coast.

DINING: In Lisbon, Belcanto and Alma. In the Algarve, seafood at Vila Joya. Comporta is now a genuine culinary destination in its own right.

THE ITINERARY: Two days on the Silver Coast (West Cliffs, Praia D'El Rey), a night in Lisbon, then the Algarve for Monte Rei, San Lorenzo, and Quinta do Lago South. Comporta Dunas has become the most talked-about new course in continental Europe.

INSIDER EXPERIENCES: Monte Rei is a Nicklaus Signature course run as a private club with resort access, and it delivers a service standard rare in European golf: one caddie or cart host per group, no exceptions.

BUCKET LIST: Comporta in October, followed by three days in Lisbon that have nothing to do with golf.

Emerging Destination: Watch Vietnam and Morocco. Both now have multiple courses by first-tier architects, credible five-star hospitality, and prices that will not survive their own discovery. The window on both closes within five years, which is exactly the window worth using.

PASSPORT NOTES

1. Match the destination to the group, not to the ranking. Ireland punishes a weak player. Portugal does not.
2. Two regions per trip is the maximum. Three is a logistics exercise disguised as a holiday.
3. Shoulder season is not a compromise. It is usually the better product at a materially lower price.
4. Build one non-golf day into any trip longer than five days. The trip gets better, not worse.
5. The far destinations, New Zealand, Tasmania, South Africa, Japan, require length to justify the flight. If you cannot give them ten days, wait until you can.



03

Why Private Golf Has Become the
Ultimate Social Network

Why Private Golf Has Become the Ultimate Social Network

Every serious professional network has the same problem: it cannot manufacture trust. Golf can.

Consider what four hours of golf actually contains. Sustained proximity. Shared minor adversity. Repeated small decisions that reveal character. Long stretches of unstructured conversation with no agenda and no screen. An enforced honor system where the participant reports their own score.

There is no boardroom equivalent, and there is no software substitute.

You cannot fake who you are for eighteen holes. The game will tell on you by the fourth.

Trust compresses. Relationship builders in private equity, family offices, and founder circles have all arrived at the same conclusion independently: a round of golf accomplishes in one afternoon what six months of quarterly lunches will not. Not because deals get done on the course, but because the qualifying conversation gets done. You learn whether you want to be in business with someone long before you learn whether you can be.

Consider the patterns you will see repeatedly:

A founder preparing for a raise plays three rounds over eighteen months with an investor who never once discusses the company. When the round opens, the investor's diligence is already ninety percent complete.

Two executives from merging organizations, told to integrate their teams, spend a day together at a club neither belongs to. The integration goes well. Nobody in either organization can explain why.

A family office principal brings her twenty-six-year-old daughter to the member-guest for four consecutive years. By the fifth, the daughter knows sixty people who will take her call, and none of the relationships required an introduction email.

Community is the underrated part. For people in the second half of a career, the private club is often the last institution in their life that produces unplanned friendship. Work relationships are transactional by design. Neighborhood relationships are proximate by accident. The club is the rare place where affinity, repetition, and shared standards overlap.

Philanthropy runs through the same channel. The charity outing is not incidental to private golf, it is one of its primary functions. Significant capital moves through relationships that began on a scramble team. The mechanism is simple: people give to people they have walked with.

Generational transfer is the quiet superpower. A shared club is one of the few assets that appreciates across generations without being taxed, divided, or sold. Grandparents and grandchildren have almost no naturally occurring shared activity. Golf is one.

INSIDER TIP

The most valuable person at any club is rarely the most prominent member. It is the long-tenured caddie master, the head professional who has been there twenty years, and the woman who runs the dining room. They know every relationship in the building. Learn their names first and everything else follows.

PASSPORT NOTES

1. Never bring an agenda onto the course. The round is the diligence, not the pitch.
2. The best golf relationships are built on repetition, not intensity. Three rounds a year for a decade beats a spectacular week.
3. Bring the next generation early and often. Access that is not transferred is access that ends with you.
4. Charity golf is real network infrastructure. Treat those days with the same seriousness as a client dinner.
5. Reciprocate before you are asked. This single behavior separates the frequently invited from the once invited.



04

How Experienced Golf Travelers Gain
Access

How Experienced Golf Travelers Gain Access

The doors are not locked. They are simply not labeled.

New arrivals to this world assume private access works like a velvet rope, and that there is a price or a person who lifts it. That is not how it functions. Access is a byproduct of reputation, and reputation is built through a small number of unglamorous behaviors performed consistently over years.

Member introductions are the primary channel, and there is only one correct way to use them. Never ask a member to get you on their course. Ask them about their course. Express genuine interest in its architecture, its history, its restoration. Most members are quietly proud and rarely asked. A meaningful number of invitations originate from a conversation the member did not perceive as a request, because it was not one.

Reciprocity is the engine. If you belong to a club, your single most valuable asset is not your own access. It is your ability to host. Members who host generously are the ones who receive generously, and the ledger is remarkably accurate over a ten-year horizon.

Formal reciprocal programs exist and are underused. Many private clubs maintain reciprocal arrangements with clubs in other regions and countries. The request must come from your professional to their professional, in writing, typically several weeks out. Most members never ask their pro shop whether this exists. It often does.

Charity events are the most reliable underrated door. Tournaments at otherwise inaccessible clubs run throughout the season. The entry is a donation, the cause is legitimate, and you will spend the day with members who will remember you if you conduct yourself well. This is the most direct path from outsider to known quantity that exists in the game.

Concierge and curated services occupy a real and legitimate role, particularly for international travel where local knowledge and pre-existing relationships shorten timelines dramatically. Judge these services on one criterion: whether they have genuine standing relationships or are simply booking what anyone could book.

Reputation is the only asset in golf that compounds without capital. It is also the only one you can destroy in a single afternoon.

How reputation actually compounds. Every private round you play produces a data point about you that circulates. Were you on time. Did you know the customs. Did you play at a reasonable pace. Did you overstay in the grill room. Did you follow up. Nobody

tells you the results of this evaluation, and everybody performs it. Three good data points and you are the guest members offer to bring. One bad one and you are the guest they explain away.

HOST ETIQUETTE

If you are the member, your job is to remove every decision from your guest. Confirm the day before with dress code, arrival time, and parking. Meet them in the lot, not the grill room. Handle all payment invisibly and in advance. Introduce them by name to the professional and the caddie master. A guest should never have to reach for a wallet or ask a question.

PASSPORT NOTES

1. Show interest in the club, never in the tee time. The invitation follows interest, not requests.
2. Ask your own professional about reciprocal arrangements. Most members never do.
3. Charity events are the fastest legitimate route into rooms you cannot otherwise enter.
4. Host more than you are hosted. The ledger balances in your favor over time.
5. Assume every round is being evaluated. It is, and the results circulate for years.



05

Designing the Perfect Golf Trip

Designing the Perfect Golf Trip

Most golf trips fail for the same reason: too much golf.

The instinct of a group planning a trip is to maximize rounds, because rounds are the visible product. The result is a group that is exhausted by day three, playing badly, eating poorly, and quietly counting the days.

The experienced traveler optimizes for a different variable: how the group feels on the last night. Everything below serves that.

The Eleven-Point Framework

1. **Golf quality.** Two exceptional courses beat five good ones. Cut the weakest course from the plan and put the money into the other days.
2. **Accommodation.** Proximity to the first tee outranks luxury of the room. Every twenty minutes of morning drive costs the trip more than a suite adds.
3. **Food.** Book dinner reservations before you book tee times. This sounds inverted. It is not. Restaurants in golf destinations have less capacity than golf courses.
4. **Wine.** One person owns the wine. Give them a budget and full authority. Committee wine decisions produce mediocre wine and long menus.
5. **Transportation.** One vehicle, one driver, no exceptions. Groups that split into rental cars stop being a group.
6. **Pacing.** Maximum thirty-six holes in one day, and only once per trip. Build in one afternoon with nothing scheduled.
7. **Companions.** Four is optimal. Six works. Eight is an event, not a trip, and requires a different plan entirely.
8. **Family integration.** If partners are attending, the golf must end by three and the destination must have a second reason to exist. Ireland, Portugal, Cape Town, and Napa all pass. Bandon and Streamsong do not, by design.
9. **Recovery.** Bodies over fifty do not walk thirty-six for four consecutive days without consequence. Plan the trip your body will actually complete.
10. **Wellness.** The best properties now have serious spa, cold plunge, and physio. Use them. A ninety-minute massage on day two changes the back half of the trip.

- 11. Amenities.** Book the caddie. Always book the caddie. It is the highest-return line item in golf travel and it is not close.

The best golf trip I ever took had eleven rounds planned. We played seven. Everyone still talks about it.

Sample Itineraries

Three days, domestic, four players. Fly in Thursday midday. Play Thursday afternoon. Two rounds Friday. One round Saturday, fly home Saturday evening. One property, no transfers, walking. Scottsdale, Streamsong, or Bandon in September.

Five days, domestic. Two courses, one base, thirty-six on day two, an off afternoon on day four for spa or fishing. Add one dinner off property. Sand Valley or the Monterey Peninsula.

Seven days, international. Two regions maximum. Three nights, transfer, three nights. Arrival day is not a golf day; it is a walk, a light nine, and an early dinner. Departure day is not a golf day either. That leaves five golf days from seven, which is correct.

Ten days, long-haul. New Zealand, Tasmania, South Africa, Japan. Three destinations maximum, one full rest day, one non-golf experience that will outlive the golf: safari, fishing, a wine day, a temple day.

Father and son, five days. Walk everything. Play from the same tees, which matters more than it sounds. One caddie for the two of you, so the conversation stays between three people. Book one round at a course neither of you has played, so it is new for both. Leave a day for something entirely unrelated to golf.

Couples, six days. Golf ends by two. Half the days have no golf. The hotel is the star of the trip, not the course. Portugal, the Cape Winelands, Ireland's southwest, and Carmel are all built for this.

Client trip, three days. Fewer people than you think. Better courses than you can comfortably justify. No presentations, no printed materials, no scheduled business conversation. If the client raises business, follow. If they do not, do not.

BUCKET LIST BUILDER

The trip most people never take and always want: one week, one region, one bag, playing the same course every morning. Repetition on a great course produces a relationship with it that a single visit cannot. Dornoch, Bandon, Barnbougle, or Lahinch. Same tee time, seven days running.

PASSPORT NOTES

1. Cut one round from every plan. The trip improves.
2. Book restaurants before tee times.
3. One vehicle, one wine decision-maker, one person holding the itinerary.
4. Arrival and departure days are not golf days. Plan for five playing days in a week.
5. The caddie is the best value in luxury golf. Never skip it to save money.



06

Golf's Most Underrated Destinations

Golf's Most Underrated Destinations

The best time to see a place is roughly eighteen months before everyone else does.

Every destination on the previous list was once on this list. Bandon was a rumor in 1999. Tasmania was a joke in 2003. The pattern is consistent: a serious architect, an owner with conviction, remote land, and four or five years of quiet before the ranking lists catch up.

Here is where that pattern is currently running.

Tasmania. Already covered, and still, remarkably, underplayed by American travelers. Two courses at Barnbougle and two on King Island give a genuine four-day itinerary at a standard that would command triple the price in the northern hemisphere.

Japan, for visitors. Japan has more than two thousand golf courses and a design heritage that includes Alison, Mackenzie influence, and a domestic school of extraordinary quality. Almost no Western golf traveler goes. The barrier is perceived, not real: the resort courses are accessible, the service standard is the highest in the sport, and the country is worth visiting regardless of golf.

The Cabot properties. What began in Cape Breton is now a global collection: Nova Scotia, Saint Lucia's Point Hardy, the Scottish Highlands, and central Florida. The common denominator is dramatic land and a walking-first philosophy. Point Hardy in particular has more oceanfront exposure than almost any course built this century.

The American Sandbelt. Nebraska, Kansas, and Wisconsin now contain a density of world-class minimalist architecture that rivals any region on earth. Sand Hills, Prairie Club, Ballyneal in Colorado, and the Sand Valley complex in Wisconsin, which now includes a faithful reconstruction of C.B. Macdonald's lost Lido. These are hard to reach, which is exactly why they remain quiet.

Mountain golf, and Lake Tahoe in particular. High-elevation golf in Colorado, Utah, Montana, and the Sierra offers a season of roughly twenty weeks and a sensory experience that coastal golf cannot replicate: thin air, enormous carry, pine and granite, and light that photographers travel for.

Tahoe is the most compelling of these and the least understood, because most people know it only as a ski destination and never think about July. The north shore around Truckee holds a concentration of high-end mountain golf that has no real equal in the American West. Martis Camp and Lahontan on the private side, Clear Creek Tahoe on the

Nevada side with a Coore and Crenshaw routing through the pines, and Old Greenwood and Coyote Moon for visitors who arrive without an introduction. Edgewood sits on the lake itself at the south shore, which is the shot everyone photographs.

The season runs roughly late June through early October, and the last two weeks of September are the best of it: firm turf, no crowds, aspens turning, and mornings cold enough to need a sweater on the first tee. Reno is under an hour away and lands private aircraft without ceremony, which makes a three-day Tahoe trip genuinely realistic from anywhere in the West. Add a day on the water and the trip converts a golf group into a family trip without anyone having to compromise.

The rest of the mountain category is short by necessity and spectacular by nature.

Wine country golf. The two-activity trip is the most reliable format in luxury travel, and golf plus wine is the strongest version of it. Napa and Sonoma. Bordeaux's Medoc. Tuscany at Castiglion del Bosco. Mendoza in Argentina. The Cape Winelands, which combines the best value in wine with the best value in golf on the same peninsula.

The Silver Coast of Portugal. North of Lisbon, cliffside, windy, and priced like a secret. It will not stay one.

WHAT MEMBERS KNOW

The reliable early signal is not the marketing. It is the architect and the routing. When a top-tier design firm takes on remote land with an owner who intends to keep the property walking-only, that project is worth a flight within three years of opening, before the ranking lists and the rates arrive.

PASSPORT NOTES

1. Follow the architects, not the rankings. Rankings lag by three to five years.
2. Difficulty of access is a leading indicator of quality, not a deterrent.
3. Two-activity destinations, golf plus wine or golf plus wildlife, deliver the highest satisfaction for mixed groups.
4. The dollar goes furthest right now in South Africa, Portugal, and Japan.
5. If a place is on your list and you can get there in the next two years, go. The window on quiet is always shorter than it appears.



07

Borrowed Days

Borrowed Days

The Golf Trip Hidden Inside the Travel You Are Already Doing

The most efficient trip in modern business is the one that was already on the calendar.

Every year, executives and founders travel to conferences, board meetings, portfolio reviews, and client cities. Historically that travel was pure cost: fly in, sit in a room, fly out, arrive home depleted.

The current generation has quietly rewritten the format. The meeting stays. Two days get added on the front or the back. The result is a trip that the business justifies and the person actually enjoys.

Call them borrowed days. They are not vacation, because no vacation was requested. They are not work, because nothing on them appears in a calendar invitation. They are borrowed from a flight that was already paid for and a week that was already surrendered, and they are the best value in travel available to a busy person.

Conference extensions. Any major business hub in the United States is within ninety minutes of at least one exceptional golf property. The two days after a conference cost a fraction of a standalone trip, because the flight is already spent.

The relationship trip. Three or four people, two nights, one great course, no agenda. This is the single most effective business development format available to a senior professional, and it is dramatically underused because it does not look like work.

Client entertainment has narrowed and deepened. The eighty-person outing is dying. What replaced it is the six-person trip with better courses, better food, and enough time for actual conversation. Fewer clients, more depth, better outcomes.

Founder retreats. Small groups of operators taking two days away from their companies, walking, and talking about problems they cannot discuss internally. Golf is the setting because it provides structure without requiring facilitation.

Executive wellness. Walking eighteen holes covers roughly five to seven miles, outdoors, without screens, with sustained low-intensity movement and social contact. Every element of that description appears independently in longevity research. Golf is not exercise disguised as leisure; it is one of the few activities that delivers physical, cognitive, and social benefit simultaneously, which is why participation holds up across decades better than almost any other sport.

Family integration. The extended-stay format works equally well domestically. Fly the family in for the back half. Two days of business, three days together, one flight.

The best business trip I take every year is the one my company thinks is a conference and my family thinks is a holiday. They are both correct.

PASSPORT NOTES

1. Borrow two days from travel you are already doing. It is the cheapest great trip available.
2. Six people beats sixty. Depth outperforms scale in client entertainment now.
3. Do not schedule the business conversation. Create the conditions and let it happen or not.
4. Golf's health profile, walking, outdoors, social, low impact, is why it sustains participation into the seventies.
5. Fly the family in for the second half. The marginal cost is small and the goodwill is not.



08

Luxury Golf Trends Shaping the Next Decade

Luxury Golf Trends Shaping the Next Decade

The forces reshaping golf travel are mostly demographic, and demographics are slow, visible, and reliable.

Wellness becomes the anchor amenity. Golf properties are being rebuilt around recovery: performance centers, physiotherapy, cold plunge, sleep programming, and nutrition. Within a decade the spa will be as central to a golf resort's proposition as the second course.

Longevity reframes the sport. Golf is being reconsidered as a longevity practice rather than a pastime. Expect more properties marketing directly on cognitive and physical outcomes, more emphasis on walking, and a continued decline in the prestige of the golf cart.

Family participation rises sharply. Junior and family programming has moved from afterthought to acquisition strategy. Short courses, par-three layouts, family tees, and relaxed dress standards are proliferating because clubs have learned that the household, not the individual, is the actual unit of membership.

Small group replaces large group. Every category of golf hospitality is shrinking in headcount and rising in quality. Eight becomes four. Four becomes a better four.

Curation becomes the paid product. As information becomes universally available, its value collapses and the value of judgment rises. What affluent travelers now pay for is not knowing where to go; it is having someone who knows the difference between two similar options and has the relationship to arrange the better one.

AI-assisted itineraries become standard, and change less than expected.

Planning, sequencing, and logistics will be substantially automated within a few years. Access will not be. Software can find the tee time that is publicly available; it cannot make a member offer one.

Experiential spending continues to outpace goods. This trend has run for more than a decade across every affluent market and shows no sign of reversing. Golf captures a disproportionate share of it because it is repeatable, social, and geographically distributed.

Younger affluent members arrive with different expectations. They want flexibility over permanence, multiple affiliations over one, dress codes relaxed, food better, and the whole experience faster. Clubs adapting to this are growing. Clubs resisting are aging.

Destination and flexible membership models expand. The single-club, single-city model is no longer the only structure. Multi-property and portfolio-style access, in various forms, is the fastest-growing structural change in the private club world.

Globalization of the golf trip. Twenty years ago the international golf trip meant Scotland or Ireland. It now credibly means Tasmania, Vietnam, Morocco, Uruguay, or Japan. The map is genuinely larger than it has ever been.

INSIDER TIP

Watch what clubs build next. A club building a short course, a fitness center, and a better casual dining room is planning for the next thirty years. A club building only a new grill room is planning for the next three.

PASSPORT NOTES

1. Wellness is becoming the deciding amenity in destination selection. Choose properties accordingly.
2. Walking is returning as the prestige format. Cart golf is quietly losing status.
3. The household is the unit of membership now. Places that welcome families will hold value.
4. Automation will handle planning. Relationships will still handle access.
5. Flexibility is the direction of travel. Portfolio access is displacing single-club permanence.



Dear Mr. Harrington,

Thank you for a wonderful afternoon. The course was in superb condition, and your hospitality made it even more memorable. I look forward to our next round together.

Warm regards,

Jonathan

09

The Etiquette of Private Golf Travel

TRADITION. CAMARADERIE. EXCELLENCE.

The Etiquette of Private Golf Travel

There is only one measure of success as a guest: whether you are asked back.

Everything in this chapter serves that single metric. None of it is difficult. Almost all of it is invisible when done correctly and glaring when not.

Arrival. Be early, but not too early. Twenty-five minutes before the tee time is correct at most clubs. Ask where to park rather than guessing. Change in the locker room, not the car park.

Dress. Ask before you go, every time, without exception. Standards vary enormously and the club's standard is never unreasonable inside its own gates. When uncertain, dress one notch more formally than you think is required. Bring a jacket. Bring a tie. You will use one of them once and be glad both times.

Phones. Assume the phone stays in the bag. Many clubs prohibit use entirely outside the parking lot. Silence it before you arrive, not on the first tee.

Photography. This is the most common and most damaging mistake modern guests make. Many private clubs prohibit photography entirely. Almost all prohibit posting. Ask your host directly, accept the answer without negotiation, and never post an image of a private club without explicit permission. A single Instagram post has ended more guest relationships than slow play ever has.

Pace. Be ready when it is your turn. Play a provisional. Pick up when you are out of the hole in a casual round. Nothing marks a guest as unfamiliar faster than a slow group behind them.

Caddies. Ask your host what is customary before you arrive so you are not calculating on the eighteenth green. Tip in cash, in an envelope if you can manage it, above the stated minimum.

Money. Do not attempt to pay for anything. Most private clubs do not accept cash from guests, and the attempt puts your host in an awkward position. Reciprocate later, generously, elsewhere.

The grill room. Stay for one drink. Then offer to leave. Let your host insist. The guest who lingers past the natural end of the day is remembered for it.

Gifting. Modest and thoughtful outperforms expensive. Wine your host will actually drink. A book. Something from your own club's shop, which is both personal and reciprocal in spirit. Never anything with your company's logo on it.

The thank you note. Handwritten, mailed, within seventy-two hours. This is not a formality. In a world of texts, the physical note is now so unusual that it functions as a genuine signal. It costs six minutes and it is the single highest-return action in this entire book.

Send the note. Everyone means to. Almost nobody does. That gap is the whole opportunity.

Stewardship. The relationship does not end when the round does. Check in without an ask. Send the article they would like. Extend the invitation before they extend the next one. Relationships in golf are maintained the same way they are built, through unhurried consistency.

GUEST ETIQUETTE, ABBREVIATED

Ask about dress. Arrive twenty-five minutes early. Phone in the bag. No photographs without permission. Never post. Play ready golf. Tip the caddie well and in cash. Do not reach for your wallet. One drink, then offer to go. Handwritten note within three days.

PASSPORT NOTES

1. The handwritten note is the highest-return six minutes in golf.
2. Never photograph or post a private club without explicit permission. This is the modern cardinal sin.
3. Ask about dress code every single time, regardless of how well you know the club.
4. Do not try to pay. Reciprocate later instead.
5. Leave slightly before you want to. Being missed is better than being endured.

TRAVEL LOG

May 14

Arrived in Dubrovnik
Old walls, stone streets,
the Adriatic — so blue
it doesn't look real.
Walked the city walls
at sunset. Unreal.

May 16

Kotor

Fjord-like bay.
Climbed to the fortress,
Worth every step.
Locals are so kind.



PLACES TO SEE

- ☐ Iceland — Ring Road
- ☐ Patagonia
- ☐ Japan — Alps & Kyoto
- ☐ New Zealand
- ☐ Morocco
- ☐ Bali
- ☐ Scotland

Not all those who
wander are lost.



10

Building Your Lifetime Golf Passport

Building Your Lifetime Golf Passport

A list is a plan that has not been scheduled yet.

Most golfers carry a vague sense of the places they intend to see. Very few write it down, and the ones who do go considerably more often than the ones who do not. What follows is a structure and a worksheet. Use them.

Organize by geography. The British Isles. Continental Europe. The American West. The American Sandbelt. Australasia. Asia. Africa. South America. Aim for one new region every three years.

Organize by architecture. A more interesting organizing principle than geography, and the one that changes how you see the game. Old Tom Morris. C.B. Macdonald and Seth Raynor. Alister MacKenzie. Donald Ross. A.W. Tillinghast. George Thomas. The modern minimalists: Coore and Crenshaw, Doak, Hanse. Pick one and follow their work for a decade.

Organize by experience. The dawn round. The thirty-six-hole day. The round in a full gale. The round with your father. The round with your child. The round after which nobody wanted to leave the table.

Organize by family tradition. The same trip, the same week, the same people, every year. The tradition is worth more than any individual course on it.

Organize by championship. A Masters practice round. An Open Championship at St Andrews. A Ryder Cup. Each of these should be experienced once, and the practice rounds are better than the tournament days for almost everyone.

Organize by wine region. Napa. Bordeaux. Tuscany. Mendoza. Stellenbosch. The Douro. Golf in the morning, cellars in the afternoon, and a partner who is genuinely pleased to be there.

The Passport Worksheet

My Top Ten Courses

The ten I would play again tomorrow.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Places I Want to Visit

Five destinations. Beside each, the year.

DESTINATION	TARGET YEAR	WHO I WOULD TAKE

Golf Experiences Worth Pursuing

Not courses. Experiences. A gale. A dawn. A championship. A caddie who knows the place.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

Relationships Worth Strengthening

Three people. Beside each, the invitation you have been meaning to extend.

PERSON	THE INVITATION	BY WHEN

Trips I Want to Share With Family

The ones that will still matter in thirty years.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

BUCKET LIST BUILDER

Put a year next to every item. An undated list is a daydream. A dated list is an itinerary, and itineraries have a habit of happening.

PASSPORT NOTES

1. Write the list down. The act of writing it roughly doubles the odds you go.
2. Date every entry. Undated intentions do not survive a busy year.
3. Organize by architect at least once. It will change how you see every course afterward.
4. Protect one annual tradition above all the new destinations. Repetition builds what novelty cannot.
5. Fill in the relationship section first. It is the part you will be most glad you did.

Final Thoughts

What the Game Actually Gives Us

At some point the courses stop being the reason.

You will have played the famous ones. You will have the photographs, the yardage books, the logo balls you never hit. And you will notice, going back through it, that the memories that survived are not organized by architecture. They are organized by people.

Golf gives us access, and that is the obvious part. Access to places, to rooms, to conversations that were not otherwise available. It is the reason most people start traveling for the game.

Golf compresses trust, and that is the useful part. Four hours produces a kind of knowledge of another person that no amount of correspondence can manufacture. It is why the game has outlasted every attempt to replace it with something more efficient.

Golf preserves relationships, and that is the underrated part. Friendships fade for lack of a reason to meet. A standing annual trip is a reason. Thirty years of a reason is a friendship that survived a career, a relocation, and a great deal of life.

Golf gives us time, and that is the scarce part. Not the four hours of play. The unstructured hours around it: the drive, the lunch, the walk back, the last drink where the real conversation finally arrives.

And golf lets us see the world differently. Not from a coach window or a lobby, but from inside: on the ground, with a local walking beside you, in a place that has been playing this game for four hundred years and will be playing it long after the last of us has stopped keeping score.

That is what the passport is for.

The greatest rounds are rarely remembered because of score. They are remembered because of who stood beside us, where we were, and what the journey represented.

Go book the trip. Then send the note.