

SWEAL-^{HY}

Top 10 Golf Courses

UNITED KINGDOM

Whether you're a pro or just starting out in the sport, there's no better place to explore the world of golf than in the UK. Scotland is the birthplace of the game after all, while England is fourth in the world for the number of golf courses it boasts. Then again, Ireland's two top links courses have some of the most beautiful scenic shots in the world.

If you're not already gripped by the sport, then you will be after a round or two at some of the following courses – 10 of the best in the UK as far as we're concerned. See if you agree.





Royal St George's

Kent
England

An Open Championship venue for more than 130 years, Royal St George's in Kent boasts Britain's deepest golf bunker on the fourth hole. This course lies alongside the English Channel and has impressive long fairways. It's unconventional to say the least, thanks to those massive bunkers and its figure of eight-style design. The majority of holes have blind spots or hazards and keep golfers literally on their toes all the way round. Happily, there's plenty of wildflowers and thick, green dune grass to add colour to the occasion. This course has hosted 15 Open championships. Royal St George costs £165 to play in Winter, £330 during the Summer months.



Royal Lytham & St Annes

Lytham St Annes
England

Royal Lytham & St Annes is a true icon of links golf. This world-famous course, with its 174 bunkers and subtle terrain, has been the setting for 11 Open Championships and countless dramatic moments in golf history. Lytham is a thinking player's course, where placement and precision are key. The first hole - a unique par 3 - immediately signals that this is no ordinary round. With the sea breeze often in play, every shot demands attention. A Summer green fee of £350 grants access to one of the finest and most historic tests in the game.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Royal Portrush Golf Club Portrush

The Venue for the 153rd Open Championships in July this year, Royal Portrush is loved for its dramatic (sometimes cliff top) views, and that of the Irish Sea in particular. Appreciated for its welcoming and 'non-stuffy' atmosphere, this course, also impresses with its elevated and spectacular dunes. There are only a couple of holes demanding blind shots and the rest is very playable - even the rough isn't that bad on a good day. Toughest hole here is the 14th, aptly named Calamity. The current course dates back to 1929 (although the club has been in existence since 1888) and in 2019 two new holes were added. Playing here will cost you £295 during the Summer (the course is closed in winter).

Royal County Down Newcastle

Many consider it a travesty that the Royal County Down course has never hosted The Open. It has, however, delighted fans of the Walker Cup, Curtis Cup, the now disbanded Irish Open Amateur Championship and, on nine occasions, the Ladies' British Open Amateur Championship. The current world champion, Rory McIlroy visits frequently. What makes Royal County Down so special and challenging is its size (7,200 yards from the furthest tees) an idiosyncratic wind and several blind corners. Then there's the bunkers disguised by thick grass. On the plus side, the views of the Mountains of Mourne are majestic. Sitting in the Murlough Nature Reserve, there's a different and spectacular view from every hole. Costs for a round are £425 April to October.

SWEALTHY LUXURY HOME & LIFESTYLE

ENGLAND

Royal Birkdale Southport

Sitting resplendent amongst impressive dunes, the 18 holes of the Royal Birkdale all boast elevated tees, making it very popular for those who don't enjoy blind corners. The fact the course is 'through' the dunes, rather than alongside them adds an extra challenge. This course - just 40 minutes north of Liverpool - is also an Open Championship favourite, having hosted the event 10 times now. Play on a day when the nearby Irish sea has a strong wind and this enjoyable course becomes a nightmare for those unaccustomed to such meteorological shenanigans. An off-season weekday game is £240, and it's £370 at the weekends in Summer.

Sunningdale Golf Club (Old) Ascot

The first inland golf course to impress back in 1901 when it was designed, Sunningdale in Surrey, sits amongst what was once a pine forest. Great for those who enjoy putting, there are big greens with cross-bunkers and hazards of sand necklaces, as well as banks of heather - all designed to cause diversions, and, of course, add to the beautiful surroundings. The 18-hole course has played host to The Walker Cup, Curtis Cup, Senior Open Championship and the European Open. Alongside the Old Course sits the New Course (which reportedly is more difficult to play). Sunningdale's Summer green fee is £325 for both the Old and the New courses. Pay £550 a day to play both courses together.

SCOTLAND

The Old Course at St Andrews

St Andrews

It may be the oldest golf course in the world, but that doesn't detract from its challenges or the beauty of The Old Course at St Andrews. With features such as Hell Bunker and Swilken Bridge, not to mention its undulating nature, even champions are often flummoxed on first arrival here. And talking of champions, a besotted Jack Nicklaus famously announced there was 'no other golf course even remotely close to' The Old Course. If you fancy a round yourself at this Wembley of the golfing world, just make sure you're within the maximum permitted handicaps – 24 for men and 36 for women. Summer prices are £340, reducing to £160 in the low season.

Muirfield at Gullane

Gullane

The fourth ever golf course to stage The Open, Muirfield is regarded as an eccentric course thanks to its concentric layout ie nine holes are encircled by a wider nine holes. Then there's the wind, which hits from all directions. To date the club has staged a total of 15 Open Championships, as well as the first Ryder Cup. But that's not surprising when you consider the astonishing sea views, deep bunkers (which can be incredibly difficult to emerge from) and the eerie cry of curlews as they soar past. The 9th hole with its seven bunkers is the toughest on this course. The entire course is long, measuring 7,192 yards. The green fee is £325 a round in the Summer months, reducing to £125 in Winter.

Royal Troon in Ayrshire

Troon

Described as "a supreme test of shot making, nerve, power and skill," Royal Troon on Scotland's more rugged west coast, hosted The Open last year. And, in fact, it's hosted the famous championship 11 times now – the first in 1923. Royal Troon is the local club of golfing great Colin Montgomery, whose father was once greenkeeper there. The first hole starts at the beach with views of Ailsa Craig in the Irish Sea, and a bit further up, the Isle of Arran. Famous holes include number eight, the ever narrowing and neat Postage Stamp and number 11, The Railway. Known as the toughest hole of all, a train passes down one side while there's impenetrable gorse down another. And, as if that wasn't difficult enough, a fierce wind is often thrown in to the mix too. Book for £420 in Spring/Summer.



Royal Dornoch

Dornoch Scotland

A four-hour drive from Glasgow, Royal Dornoch may be one of the more remote of the prestige golf courses to access, but that just makes it all the sweeter on finishing. Rated fifth best in the world by Golf Magazine four years ago, it's not difficult to see why. Not only is the course challenging, fair and fun, but the game is played with the wild North Sea and white sandy beach by your side - regardless of which hole you play. Known for its elevated greens, not to mention the spectacular and colourful scenery, Royal Dornoch is memorable to the say the least. "Spellbinding" is another adjective regularly used to describe this northerly course. Fees are £280 for a Summer round and £155 in Winter.

