

Types of Golf Courses

At one time, courses were only really categorized as 'private' or 'public'

Private courses

Are for members only. Visitors may play on payment of a 'Green Fee'. Costs of the green fee vary considerably depending on time – courses often have 'twilight rates' – after a certain time of the day – frequently there are Winter rates – between certain months of the year. The rate will also vary depending on whether the visitor is 'introduced' by a member or not.

Many courses will not allow visitors at the weekend (unless introduced). Some courses do not allow visitors at all, unless they are introduced, but these are a small minority. If in doubt about whether you will be able to play on arrival at a course, or whether the cost of a round falls within your price structure, give the Club Secretary or Professional a call beforehand. In the vast majority of cases you will receive friendly advice, and occasionally some cost benefit!

Most private courses are very welcoming to visitors (they need the green fee income!) Some may require sight of a 'handicap certificate'. Please ensure that your game is at an 'acceptable' level before venturing on to a full golf course. Even more important is a knowledge of the etiquette of the game, especially in knowing when to let a following group play through if you are holding them up.

Lots of clubs have a second course – sometimes 9 holes, sometimes all par 3 holes. These are often called a 'blue' course. Most private golf clubs operate on the principle of an annual subscription for membership. These are often very much more reasonable than people are led to believe – especially if you consider the amount of time you can spend enjoying the club's facilities. What can be expensive and off-putting to the would-be member is the 'entrance fee', which combined with the subs can often double the cost of your golf in the first year. Many clubs, except for the prestige locations have now waived the entrance fee in a bid to attract new members. If you want to know, speak to a member of the club, or pick up the phone to the Secretary.

Public courses

(Sometimes 'municipal' if the course was built or came under the control of the local authority) normally do not have a membership, and all players pay a green fee to play. Many of these do not have a tee-time booking system, but operate on a first-come basis.

It should be mentioned here that there are some superb public courses, and particularly in Scotland, but also true elsewhere, some of the municipals are championship standard.

Nowadays, there is a huge range of different types of membership between the traditional types mentioned above. One frequently-used expression is pay'n'play. At these, there are members who pay a subscription, normally lower than at private member clubs, but who then pay an additional fee each time they play. In the UK, the point is being reached where more people are playing golf on this basis than any other. And it can be a cost-effective way of playing golf – particularly if you do not envisage playing many times in the course of a year.