

Golf Tourism Embraced as Profitable Industry

One of the trends of the last decade around the world are the growing investments in golf in an effort to increase the number of foreign visitors and enhance tourism revenue earned. This has seen the spread of golf globally and the number of world class golf courses has been steadily rising over the years as well.



Even the real estate sector has been drawn into the lucrative golf tourism industry. This has seen the emergence of exquisite golf resorts each trying to stand out as the one that offers the ultimate golfing experience. Some of the best golf courses can now be found in Europe, North America, Africa and Asia. Each continent striving to set itself apart from the rest in an effort to increase revenue from golf tourism.

Golf now contributes about \$20 billion annually and by itself or as a secondary motivator is able to attract millions of holiday makers across the world. Approximately 56 million people play golf worldwide with 26.7 million of these residing in the United States, 5.5 million in Europe, 5 million in Canada, 14 million in Japan, and 3.8 million in the United Kingdom.

Among them about 5 to 10 per cent travel worldwide with the sole purpose of playing golf. This number has been steadily increasing over the years as more countries embrace golf tourism as a key source of foreign exchange.

Developing countries have not been left behind by the golf tourism bandwagon. These countries have recognized that golf tourists tend to outspend average tourists and thus have invested heavily so as to reap the benefits of extra foreign revenue. This has been supported by a recent report by the International Association of Golf Tour Operators (IAGTO) which showed that operators in Africa posted a 20 per cent increase in sales on average.



The rise has been attributed to the increasing investments made into golf tourism by developing countries. For example, Kenya has over the years invested in eight 'Export-ready' golf courses which are meant to be appropriate for international golf travelers. These are Muthaiga, Karen, Limuru, Windsor, Sigona, Nyali, Vipingo and Great Rift Valley. This saw the country in 2009 voted as the 'Undiscovered Golf Destination of the Year' by IAGTO.

There are about 32,000 golf courses in 140 countries in the world. Popular golf tourism destinations include Spain, North America and Portugal. Over half of the world's golf courses (17,000) are in the USA with Europe accounting for about 6,000.

However, emerging golf destinations such as Malaysia, Egypt, Mexico and China are offering increasing competition to the traditional golf markets by offering quality golfing experience at a fair price. South Africa, Turkey and Dubai are also expected to join in the list of most popular destinations for golf tourists according to a KPMG Golf Advisory.



In conclusion, the future of golf tourism looks bright and even more profitable. The awareness of the sport globally is rapidly growing. It is estimated that the demand and supply of golf is rising at a steady rate of 12 per cent annually. This has seen an increase in golf resorts and related employment opportunities. Creativity in relation to new golf courses is at peak levels and there are even plans to play golf in space!

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