

Stay and play is becoming big business for Aberdeenshire

The Trump International Golf Links is a magnet for sportsmen from across the globe but also represents a highly successful business for the local economy, says **Alexander McDiarmid**

As a businessman of some note himself, Donald Trump doubtless had more than golfing recreation in his mind when he took his special brand of entrepreneurialism into the north-east corner of Scotland.

There were two conspicuous plus-points about locating the Trump International Golf Links on the Menie estate just off the A90 ten miles north of Aberdeen.

One was its sheer beauty and sporting appeal, of course. As the New York-based tycoon himself put it: “When I saw this piece of land I was overwhelmed by the imposing dunes and rugged Aberdeenshire coastline. I knew that this was the site... I have never seen such an unspoiled and dramatic sea side landscape and the location makes it perfect for our development.”

The second pertains to that develop-

ment in a strictly business sense. The site is, after all, right next-door to Europe’s oil and gas capital and therefore an unmissable presence and magnet for visiting energy executives – a global workforce that likes to work hard and play hard, often with a penchant for golfing pleasures and challenges.

The course is just 25 minutes by car from Aberdeen Airport and 15 minutes from the city centre; and a mere two years after it first got off the tee on a dead straight trajectory that defied the initial challenges, the golf course is emphatically proving its worth in both a sporting and business sense. In its first year it was ranked the Best Modern Course in Great Britain & Ireland and Best of The Best by the Robb Report.

Designed by renowned links golf architect, Dr Martin Hawtree, the Par 72, 18 hole championship course is a masterpiece stretching more than 7,400 yards along the North-east coast of Aberdeenshire. Set amid the Great Dunes of Scotland against the dramatic backdrop of the North Sea, the already-renowned links course offers breathtaking scenery and an unparalleled test of golf. Designed for players of all levels of ability, it promises a unique golfing experience.

Colin Montgomerie calls it “one of the best – if not the best – links courses I’ve ever played”, this year’s Scottish Open



The dramatic, undulating topography at the Trump course is carved out of the natural landscape

winner Justin Rose called it a “stunning golf course” and Phil Mickelson said: “I thought the Trump course was sensational. What I really enjoyed about it is that it’s really a traditional links course but it’s on a modern-day scale”. Trump International hosted visitors from no fewer than 40 countries last year; and Golfweek magazine put it right at the top of its 50-strong list of best-designed modern courses, ahead of five St Andrews courses. In other words it has already proved itself to be a good-going business on the ground – literally – and now, aiming at the city’s incoming waves of oil-related visitors, it is keen to present itself not only as a world class sporting diversion, but as a warm and welcoming host with accommodation and hospitality well up there in that class too. The exclusive Corporate Membership packages have proven to be a winning combination that includes tee times and provides special rates on accommodation and dining in the resort’s two on-site restaurants. Bespoke golfing packages for 16 to 140 golfers, tournament coordination, personalized branded products and

Coaching from a PGA professional are also on offer.

All of which are centred around the luxurious granite-built MacLeod House and Lodge, located at the heart of the estate and brimming with period features and old Scottish charm. It is just a few minutes from the course and the extensive practice facilities. The handsome, restored 14th-century baronial mansion and lodges have 19 rooms and is part of the Stay & Play price of £425 for overnight accommodation, breakfast and a round of golf on the championship course. The tee time rates, while – depending on seasons and desired options – rates fall steadily to £125 for Aberdeen residents keen to enjoy a round of this new golfing experience on their own doorstep.

But it is also a perfect base from which to explore Scotland generally or other golf centres in particular. The resort is situated just a few miles from two of the most esteemed links golf courses in Scotland – Cruden Bay and Royal Aberdeen – and are only a short drive or Trump helicopter ride to Trump Turnberry,

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Not only is it a great course but it's one that's fun to play. And it's really beautiful. It is a different feeling building your own course



MacLeod House and below, hole 3 of the course, where the high grassy dunes provide shelter from the North Sea



Carnoustie and St Andrews. If visitors want a full golfing itinerary or wish to soak up some Scottish culture with a trip to one of the many historic sites in the vicinity, such as Balmoral or visit one of the famous malt whisky distilleries, the team at Trump International can tailor a holiday package.

The nearest original attraction for the incoming oil executive has to be the Trump course, however, with its challenging, undulating topography carved dramatically but minimally out of the gifts of nature.

The well manicured estate exudes a surprising tranquillity that begins with the mile-long, snaking drive descent from the A90. This sweeps down to the smart clubhouse – with its big dining-room windows looking over the dunes out to sea.

The surrounding high, marram-grass spiked dunes could have much to do with, creating natural shelter as they do. Natural is a key word, too, in terms of the course's rugged character. While it has been designed and refined by acknowledged expert Martin Hawtree, its design respects the dramatically undulating topography, so creating special hole-by-hole challenges and interesting pace changes. Hawtree himself says: "When you go round it and play you will find it is one of the most extraordinary golf links sites you will have seen or ever will see." And the owner echoes that. "I knew it would be fantastic – and it is," says Donald Trump. "But seeing it in reality surpassed even my imagination – and that's saying something." The team at the Menie estate are proud of their project's accessibility – an open-to-all system without required membership but real flexibility in pay-and-play accommodation which means you can turn up at any time and be on the green stuff almost immediately.

Donald Trump is keeping up the momentum of his ambition to be golf's greatest human driver by purchasing the Doonberg resort in Ireland and the famous Turnberry resort on the South Ayrshire coast. But the North-east property remains extra-special for him, with the clue being in his own words: "Not only is it a great golf course but it's one that's fun to play. And it's really beautiful. It is a different feeling building your own course rather than acquiring one someone else built. I'm a builder and I love the challenge of creating something remarkable."

Playing to win, it seems, can sometimes refer as much to society as it does to the self-esteem of a famous golfing hero.