



A FIRST TIME BUYER'S GUIDE TO

JOINING A PRIVATE GOLF CLUB





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INTRODUCTION

I

From an outsider's point of view, joining a private golf club may seem complicated. But if you are reading this, you probably have some interest in purchasing a membership. Once you realize how a championship-level golf club membership will benefit you and your family, any trepidation about it will disappear more quickly than a perfectly struck tee shot. This guide is designed to help you understand the truths about being a member of a prestigious golf club and to answer those questions that may be holding you back from signing on the dotted line. It will provide you with a history of private golf clubs and help you to overcome any misconceptions about belonging to a golf club. You will know how to take advantage of your membership, have a better understanding of the process for signing up, and know what to expect once you become a member. Let's begin, however, by answering a few frequently asked questions.



Will I be able to get on the course regularly enough?

There's nothing worse than being the weekend warrior who has to settle for an inopportune tee time, or may not even be able to find a tee time at all because a public course is overcrowded. And even if you do get a tee time on a busy weekend or holiday, you'll have to wait for all the hackers ahead of you slowly to play every hole. As a member at a private golf club, you won't need a tee time reservation. Just show up and you'll have immediate access to a championship-level course, and you won't be constantly waiting for the group ahead of you because golfers at a club understand the etiquette of the game. Most private clubs do not require you to call ahead, and if you only have time to play 6 or 7 holes, so be it. The flexibility and freedom you enjoy at a private golf club is one of the greatest benefits.



How can I justify the cost?



While many private golf clubs offer deals from time to time, the typical weekend warrior will not save much money becoming a member of a club. However, when you take into account all the other benefits, whether they be personal, social, or business, a better question might be, "How can you afford not to buy a membership?" Most clubs have additional facilities beyond just golf that will contribute to the overall health of you and your family. When you consider the lifelong friendships, personal health, and many, many other benefits, you simply cannot begin to measure the value of the membership with dollar signs.

Will I (and my family) be welcomed at the club?

Without a doubt, one of the biggest concerns about joining a private golf club is whether you and your family will feel welcomed. You can play the golf course, try the food, and see all the facilities before you make your decision, but you may not have much of an opportunity to meet all staff or many of the members. Fortunately, almost all of the private clubs pay very close attention to new members. They want to have you as members long term and make you part of the club-family.



Is my golf game good enough?



Anybody who thinks their golf game is “good enough” probably won’t be getting any better anytime soon. Even the most avid golfers admit that their game is “not good enough yet.” That said, no matter your skill level or abilities, belonging to a private club with access to quality golf instruction and a championship-level course will allow you the best opportunity to improve your game. One of the best ways to improve your game is to play with people who are better than you are, and at a private club, there will be plenty of good golfers around to challenge you to improve. So whether you are just looking to break 90 or perhaps searching for some quality competition, a championship-level golf club will have a myriad of lower handicap players to help you improve and test your skills.

What is my exit strategy?

Eventually, there may come a time for you to leave the private golf club. At some clubs, you just stop paying your dues and your membership ends. For others, you may not be able to officially leave until a new member is found to replace you. Make sure to check out the separation policy when you sign up so that there are no surprises later. In some cases, you could get a portion of your initiation fee back.



Will I get tired of playing the same course?



When you are playing a classically designed, championship-level golf course that is architected to challenge every aspect of your golf game, you won't likely get tired of playing it. And the best private golf clubs make consistent investments over the years to improve their design or to correct flaws. That said, if playing the same course over and over no matter how good it is just isn't your thing, ask whether some other local private courses have exchange (reciprocal) policies with your club.

What are the hidden costs?

Here is a list of some other potential hidden costs:

INITIATION FEES

Most private golf clubs will ask you to pay an introductory fee to join the club. Sometimes, this fee is not refundable.

MINIMUM EXPENDITURE

Most private clubs ask their members to spend a minimum monthly amount in food & beverage, pro shop, or other revenue generating ventures at the club in order to guarantee and maintain a monthly flow of income.

FUTURE ASSESSMENTS

Assessments are a quick way to generate crucial funds to cover projects or emergencies. Every club handles assessments differently, but it would be a wise to inquire about short and long-term projects and the club's plan to pay for those projects.

CLUB DEBT

Almost all private golf clubs are in some sort of debt. As a general rule, clubs that are multiple millions of dollars in debt are typically considered to be struggling, but a \$1 million debt is fairly common. Be sure to find out just how much debt a club is in and how that club expects to pay back that debt. This will give you an overall sense of the private golf club's health.

MISCELLANEOUS COSTS

The costs below may show up on a monthly invoice or they may require you to reach for your wallet while enjoying your club membership. Regardless, they do require payment and should be considered when evaluating club membership: tipping of employees, lesson fees, locker room fees, bag room storage, holiday gifts to staff, practice range, pool, caddie or cart fees, food/beverage, and tournaments.



HISTORY

of How Private Golf Clubs Were Established

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From 1880 through 1930, private golf clubs began opening throughout the United States and were backed by what Wikipedia calls “upper-class elites.” By 1907, private golf clubs and country clubs were deemed to be “the essence of the American upper-class,” and they acted as community social centers during the 1920s. However, the number of country clubs decreased drastically during the Great Depression for lack of membership funding.

Throughout the 20th century, many golf clubs were exclusive, which is to say, they could exclude potential members based on race, gender, or social status. For example, Augusta National Golf Club, home to The Masters, did not allow African-Americans to be members until 1990. The first female members allowed in the club were Condoleezza Rice and Darla Moore in 2012. And while Augusta National has defended its policies because it is a “private” entity, these policies have led to some common misconceptions about what it means to belong to a private club.





COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

About Joining a Private Golf Club

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Over the past few decades – and especially since the explosion of the popularity of the game when Tiger Woods burst onto the scene in the late 1990s and early 2000s – the attitudes and culture at most private golf clubs have certainly changed.

◆ Elitists-only attitudes

Without a doubt, a certain level of civility is expected as a member of a private golf club. That said, to use a word like “elitism” when discussing the attitudes at a private club is a bit of stretch, especially in today’s “golf is for everybody” environment. As a member of a private club, you can expect to be treated with respect by the staff. You may occasionally come across an overly arrogant fellow member, but chances are, that member isn’t nearly as well-respected as they think they are. In fact, many of today’s top private clubs encourage their senior members to mentor and support new members. Of course, some clubs are more formal than others, but many clubs are becoming less and less “stuffy.” Simply put, in today’s private clubs, if you have and show a passion for golf, respect the rules, and have a friendly demeanor, you won’t likely need to worry about people looking down their nose at you.

◆ Must be a low-handicap golfer

No private golf club will require you to have a low handicap to be a member. But rest assured, if you aren’t happy with your game right now, it will show marked improvement once you begin playing and practicing on a regular basis at a championship-level golf facility. If you aren’t sure where you fit in, here are a few numbers to consider:

- More than half of USGA golfers have a handicap index of 14.0 or higher.
- Only 1 in 4 golfers with a handicap are single-digit or better.
- More than 1 in 5 golfers have a handicap of 20.0 or higher.

◆ The costs are hard to justify

Dollar for dollar, it can be difficult to justify a golf club membership versus simply paying to play at a public course. But as any golf club member will tell you, it’s the benefits that you can’t put a dollar sign on that make a membership so valuable. As a member, you will create lifelong relationships, provide a high-quality environment for you and your family, establish business contacts, and put yourself in a prime position to improve your game. [“The Value of a Private Golf Club Membership”](#) can be a helpful tool if you are still struggling to justify the costs.

ADVANTAGES

of Joining a Private Golf Club

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There are many key benefits of joining a private golf club, and not all of them have to do with your golf game. A membership offers so much more additional value to an avid golfer or family. Most proprietary memberships extend full golf privileges to the entire family, which in turn drastically reduces your playing costs. It's a great value. In addition, you will enjoy the new relationships and friendships you build for the rest of your life.



Benefits

The benefits are many, but here is a short list:

PREMIUM GOLF EXPERIENCE

What is a premium golf experience? For some, it depends on how well they play. But to many avid golfers, the experience of golf is much, much more than just a score. When you are standing on the first tee of a wonderfully manicured golf course, with beautiful surrounding scenery and lush fairways and greens, your score will, to a certain extent, become subordinate. In addition, a premium golf experience takes into account a stellar clubhouse, a great pro shop and staff, excellent food & beverage, quality playing partners, and a host of other qualities. And when you're finished with your round, being able to enjoy the "19th hole" with lifelong friends is a perfect cap to a perfect day.

GREAT CULTURE OF PEERS

When you join a private club, you create an immediate bond with the other members of the golf club. It is an environment where you will have opportunities to be paired with new players on a regular basis. If you are looking for a challenge, a private golf club will have many good golfers to play with, and playing with them is a great way to improve your game.

UNLIMITED PLAY

It doesn't matter if you play 36 holes per day, per month, or per year. The choice of how many times you play is yours. Once you join a club, you will see improvement in your game. At a golf club, you'll be able to take advantage of that momentum and take your game to new levels.

IT'S A GREAT ENVIRONMENT FOR THE KIDS

If finding quality family time is one of your priorities, joining a private golf club is ideal for strengthening family bonds. This is especially important for young golfers. If a junior golfer hopes to ascend their game to the highest levels, belonging to a golf club provides the necessary development to help them reach their goals. The best junior golf programs offer focused instruction and inject the character and mindset required to help young golfers succeed, in golf and in life. And you can never have complete control over who your kids hang around with, but when you are spending family time at a golf club, you can be assured that your kids are making higher quality friends on average. Just don't be too upset when your son or daughter starts beating you every time out on the course.

PLAY A SUPERIOR COURSE

No matter where you play golf, even if it's in your backyard, it's a whole lot of fun. But when you are playing the game you love on a championship golf course, it just doesn't get any better. And as a member of a quality private golf club, you can hone your game on a course that makes you feel like you are getting a great experience every time out. As a member of a championship golf club, you'll get the most out of your golf experience, and the most out of your game.

Wellness

Here is a list of the eight key health benefits of golf, courtesy of [healthfitnessrevolution](#):

EXPOSURE TO THE OUTDOORS

Basking in nature provides us many health benefits for our mind and body. Studies have shown that constant exposure to green areas relaxes the body, reduces stress, and can aid in alleviating anxiety. Furthermore, exposure to sunlight allows the body to soak up vitamin D from the sun, promoting bone growth in youth and reducing the risk of depression, heart disease, and certain cancers.

FOSTERS RELATIONSHIPS

Because golf is a high-intensity sport, there is plenty of down time for interacting with fellow golfers. Studies have even shown that a great number of business deals are closed on the golf course.

BURNS CALORIES

Skipping out on the golf cart and walking the average course can cover three miles or more. If you opt to carry your own clubs, you'll burn even more calories. With all the walking, carrying, and swinging involved, golfers can burn up to 1,000 calories in a single round.

KEEPS YOUR HEART RATE UP

Playing golf can lead to quite a bit of exercise for your heart. As is the case with burning calories, the walking, carrying, and swinging will increase your heart rate, keep it pumping, and increase blood flow. Naturally, this will lower your risks for heart diseases and decrease levels of "bad" cholesterol.

GOOD FOR YOUR BRAIN

As your heart rate increases, so will blood flow to the brain, which can stimulate and improve nerve cell connections. This can delay mental illnesses such as dementia. Plus, the strategy involved translates eerily well to life decisions. Knowing when a risk will pay off and understanding the consequences of a mistake are essential to quality of life.

IMPROVES VISION

It requires pretty good vision to zoom in on that round, little white ball that may be yards away. Golfers learn to hone in on small targets from long distances and even when the ball is on the tee, golfers are presented with the opportunity to evaluate the keenness of their vision while improving hand-eye coordination.

BETTER SLEEP

Since you are getting quite a bit of exercise, your tired body will thank you at night when it's time for some long deserved rest. Golfers will fall asleep faster and sleep more profoundly, and are able to remain in a deep sleep for longer periods of time due to the amount of energy expended. Deeper sleep is necessary for your body to regenerate cell and repair any muscles and tissues.

REDUCES STRESS

Golf helps to alleviate stress. Being in an outdoor area where you can interact with others who share your interests is a great way to forget any troubles. The pleasure of walking in an open and natural environment and spending time with friends places golfers in a good mood and can release endorphins, which are natural, mood-enhancing chemicals that can make you happier and more relaxed.





PROCESS

of Joining a Club

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As you make your decision about whether to join a golf club, you should have a clear understanding of your goals. You should have a clear understanding of what you expect to gain from your membership, how you want to use it, and what aspects of belonging to a championship-level golf club are most important to you and your family. Once you have expectations prioritized, be sure to do your homework.

If you are lucky enough to have options near you, don't just take somebody's word for it. What is best for one avid golfer may not be best for another. Be sure to weigh all your options and compare them up against your list of priorities. You may find that it is more than worth it to drive a few extra miles or spend a few extra dollars.

After you've narrowed down your options, be sure to contact those clubs about membership information. How those private golf clubs respond to your request is a good indicator of what you can expect as a member, and it can go a long way toward helping you make the right decision. But before you make a final decision, be sure to set up some time to preview the course, even if it takes a few rounds to be sure, and spend time talking with staff and other members. They will either validate your top concerns or put them to rest.



EQUITY MEMBERSHIP

and How It Affects Your Exit Strategy

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As an equity member, you are a part owner of the golf club along with the other members. These member-owned equity golf clubs are typically the most exclusive and the most expensive, but they also offer amenities that other memberships do not. Because there are typically fewer members at this type of club, the availability of tee times is higher. Also, having fewer golfers on the course leads to better playing conditions. An equity club usually has requirements for spending on food and beverage, and other costs for club services, as well as cart fees, locker room use, and club storage. Be sure to ask about the exit requirements if you are joining such a club. Some clubs reimburse exiting members all or a portion of their ownership stake in the club. Some of these clubs provide no reimbursement at all, and some clubs allow you to sell your membership to another person.



GET THE MOST

From Your Membership

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Once you've decided to join a private club, be sure that you take advantage of the benefits your membership has to offer. If you are investing in a family membership for example, have an idea of what services and amenities will suit your family, especially as it relates to developing their love for the game. Whether it's lessons, competition, or just a mutual appreciation for the outdoors, spending time with the family at the golf club creates great memories.

Arguably the most valuable benefit of belonging to a private golf club is the relationships you will develop. Whether you are making lifelong friends or indispensable business connections, you will be hard-pressed to find a more amiable environment for bolstering your social life and business acumen.

Of course, you'll want to be in a situation where you can improve your game, so have a design plan. Know how much access you will have to the practice facility and the golf course, and look for opportunities to learn from the club's pros who can give you the tools to help you play your best. You'll also want to be in an environment with opportunities to play with better golfers, which is one of the fastest ways to improve your game.



ABOUT HACIENDA

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Hacienda Golf Club is a traditional, private golf club offering a true “Classic Course” experience. It has a long history of hosting some of the most notable players in the game, such as Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson. Hacienda has a culture that cultivates friendships in a comfortable atmosphere. Its clubhouse provides wonderful dining, family and social activities, and a family pool. The club offers a variety of golf memberships. Contact our Membership Director by email at membership@haciendagolfclub.com for more information.

Request Membership Information



haciendagolfclub.com