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## 4 Ways To Get a Tee Time at the Old Course

*by Gordon Dalglish — President, PerryGolf*

Prospective clients often come to us in confusion over how the Old Course at St. Andrews works as it remains the most highly sought, publicly accessible golf course in the world. During the summer season demand far outstrips available supply and as a result many of the explanations provided are less than clear. The Links Trust who operate the Old Course, alongside many of the other St. Andrews courses recognize four principal options which provide access to the course;

**1. Direct application** - Old Course tee time(s) acquired directly by the individual from the St Andrews Links Trust through their annual Advance Reservations program. The program accepts applications twice a year for tee times from private parties that require at least two (2) golfers but no more than eight (8) who wish to play the following season. The first deadline is in early September for an application you are required to submit yourself that requests the dates you'd like to play the Old Course plus one additional Links Trust course of your choice. The second date is in early January when any unused or returned starting times are resold.

Applicants are notified in about two weeks whether they have been successful or not. If you are, you will pay the Links Trust directly. If you are not successful, you need to consider the other options listed below.

**2. Ballot** - For golfers who are unsuccessful with the St Andrews Links Trust Advance Reservations program, the **Daily Ballot** is an option. It is a lottery process. Every day in St Andrews (except Friday), the Links Trust accepts local applications until 2 pm for play two days later. Monday's Ballot is for Wednesday; Thursday is for Saturday and so on. There is no Friday Ballot because the Old Course is closed on Sunday. Winners are posted at 4 pm around town in St Andrews and online.



The Daily Ballot may be a reasonable alternative for golfers who are staying in St Andrews for a number of days (increasing chances of success) or who do not have an absolute requirement to play the Old Course. Demand (and hence percentage success rates) do vary significantly at different times and due to various factors. A challenge with the Ballot is also how to manage the rest of your golf schedule given you will have tee times reserved elsewhere that would need to be changed if your good fortune in

accessing an Old Course time creates a conflict with your planned schedule. Further, if there are more than four players in your travelling party, there is a strong possibility that even if you have some success with the ballot, some members may get to play and some not, and at the very least your group's play would almost certainly be entirely split up, and may be on different days, causing disarray to your group's schedule.

**3. Single golfer walk up** - Every morning the starter on duty operates a list of single golfers who register to play when an opening occurs during the course of the day. While it is very last minute, it ensures that almost no time or slot in a four ball goes unused.

**4. Guaranteed premium times** - Every year we provide unrivaled access to guaranteed play on the Old Course through a longstanding contract to inventory a substantial number of guaranteed starting times for play from April to October. **We offer these times on a first come / first served basis.** PerryGolf Clients can purchase them from twelve (12) months in advance of their travel to a single week in advance. We can accommodate groups of as many as forty (40) golfers in a single booking, even more with sufficient notice. Those who require careful control of their schedule are provided the flexibility to do so, often when other such routes have closed. Better still and best of all, we are uniquely capable to arrange your experience so that it is enjoyed by the group, as a group, for one of the greatest rounds of golf in the game. From within our premium time inventory, for an affordable supplement and subject to availability, we can confirm your Old Course starting time guaranteed within 24 business hours of receiving your deposited reservation.

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Given the confusion which seems endemic to the explanation of how to play the Old Course at St. Andrews, I embarked on a secret shopper exercise earlier this year in an attempt to uncover the myriad of explanations being provided to the traveling golfer by various companies. With almost 30 years in the industry, I found myself frustrated by some of the half answers and poor explanations, some certainly designed to paint the best picture of what a particular company was

trying to pitch. In light of that I thought it may be useful to list some key issues which the travelling golfer should consider, and ask questions accordingly of any prospective golf travel vendor when planning a trip to St Andrews ...

**Ballot Process**– Some operators may openly suggest likely success rates with the ballot which are in fact unrealistic. I would be very wary of claims that any company has particular success rates via the ballot that in any way may outperform others. It is not possible for any organization, local or otherwise to influence the outcome (or beat the odds) of the ballot process which is rigorously and correctly policed by St Andrews Links Trust. Also remember that if there are more than four in your party, the strong likelihood is that even if you have some success with the ballot, there is a strong possibility that some will play and some will not, and even in its most successful possible outcome, your group will probably be entirely split over different days.

**Direct application process** - A number of companies reference the direct application process but do not allude to the possibility your application may be rejected. They work on an assumption of success when in reality this may be far from the truth. In some months there may certainly be lower demand and a better supply of times, there is however applications are not accepted at all for the month of September and there is only a very small chance of success in the month of August, due to lesser times being available and there being greater demand.

**Premium times** - Some companies make reference to premium times as an option if you are unsuccessful with a direct application but offer no insight with respect to what that cost may be. This will likely involve buying an expensive package which effectively includes an exceptionally high supplement for accessing the Old Course. Importantly this information may not be shared with you during the purchase process, and you may only discover the true cost of this option after you may have failed to secure a less expensive starting time via the Direct Application process, and you find yourself already having paid a deposit to the travel company, with no great options for securing a starting time on the Old Course at a cost you may be comfortable with.



## Important Links

[Availability of Guaranteed Tee Times](#)

[Old Course, St Andrews VIDEO](#)

[How to Play the Road Hole VIDEO](#)

**Specific hotel requirements** – A number of starting times are allocated to certain local

hotels and guest houses. Each property receives a modest allocation. Although not the intent of the Links Trust, some tour companies do re-sell times which have been allocated to specific hotels as part of their tour operator package. It is a requirement to stay in a particular property with a particular time. Consequently guests may find themselves staying in a property (and paying a premium for it) which may not be in keeping with their particular accommodation expectations, but which they are being required to stay in simply to access the Old Course. This route is clearly not without its potential negatives.

St. Andrews is a great town. It has a wonderful ambiance and sense of history to it but as described, the demand to play the Old Course far outstrips available supply. I understand the desires of golfers who want to play the Old Course without any surprises, as with any service in high demand it pays to understand your options and most importantly plan your trip well in advance to avoid disappointment.



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