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ni2012.com



Royal Portrush Golf Club
*Room only, based on 2 people sharing.



GOLF IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The major capital of the world right now, it seems Ulster is on the tip of every golfer. By **Aaron Diamond**



Royal County Down

The Irish Open made a triumphant return to Northern Ireland after almost 60 years this summer. How long has it been since you visited? Home to some of the world's greatest courses and certainly the most iconic links, Ulster seems tailor-made for a golf break. Here are some of the best it has to offer.

ROYAL COUNTY DOWN

royalcountydown.org

This course is the tops – Royal County Down has always been at the forefront of top lists. The outstanding scenery makes this course one you won't forget. Each detail, from the Mountains of Mourne to the shores of Dundrum Bay, is exquisite. Play straight or you'll end up in one of Royal County Down's famous bunkers or deep gorse which covers the majority of the course. As one of Ireland's oldest clubs, Royal County Down is soaked in tradition. The heritage, scenery and level of play is what makes this course a gem of Northern Irish golf.

ROYAL PORTRUSH

royalportrushgolfclub.com

Not to be outdone, Royal Portrush is a very close second in the debate over the

best golf in Northern Ireland. The home to the 2012 Irish Open, Royal Portrush has the honour of being the only club outside of mainland Britain to host the The Open Championships. The course, designed by Harry Colt, is known for its classic style and difficulty. A few of the holes have blind tee shots that may lead you to some treacherous bunkers or ravines. The most infamous hole is 14, known as Calamity Corner. This 210-yard par 3 plays to a green sitting uphill and neighboured by massive dunes to the left and a ravine to the right. If travelling to Northern Ireland for golf, make sure to hit at least one of these top two.

PORTSTEWART

portstewartgc.uk

The Strand course at Portstewart has some of the most picturesque holes in Northern golf. The front nine especially have a certain awe-factor. The highlight is the second hole which from the tee you can almost see the green below as your drive follows a large dune over on the left. The course was redesigned in the eighties by Des Giffen who added seven new holes. His design follows the landscape of the dunes and shoreline; perfectly integrating with the older holes. Portstewart ranks up

there with the big boys of Northern Irish golf. It is definitely worth a stop.

LOUGH ERNE

loughernereresort.com

Lough Erne may not have the history that other Irish golf courses have but it does have the beauty. Located on the shores of Lough Erne, the course as well as the hotel are a fantastic place to stay and play. It opened in 2009 with a stroke-play duel between Rory McIlroy and Padrig Harrington. The holes are challenging but forgiving enough allowing even amateurs to pick up a few birdies. The two noteworthy holes are the ninth and tenth. The former being a long par 5 leading to a narrow, angled green, and the latter being an amazing par 4 that ends with the green jutting out into the lough. Lough Erne offers up some spectacular sights and great play for all levels.

CASTLEROCK

castlerockgc.uk

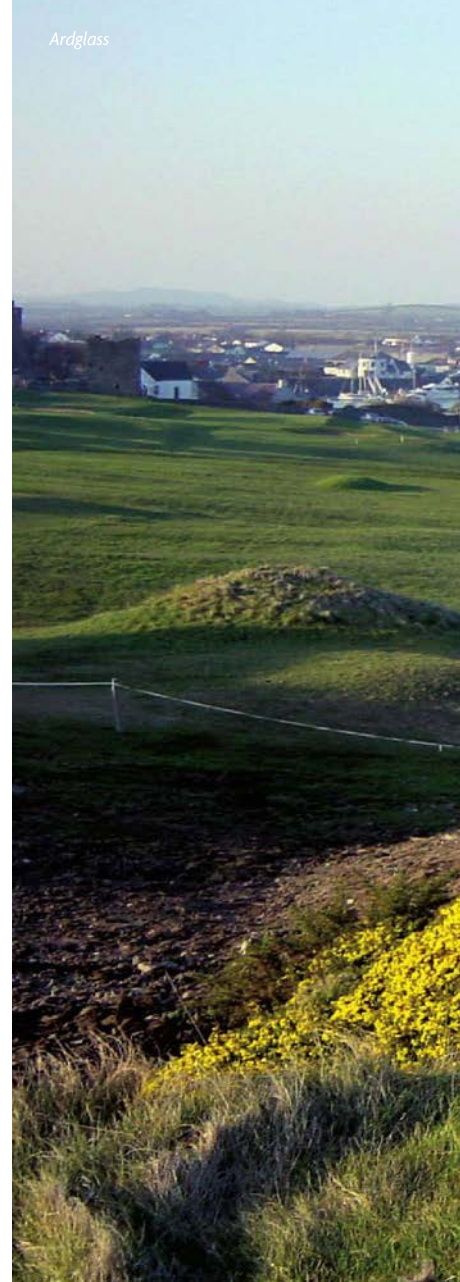
Located along the banks of the River Bann, the Castlerock Golf Club is a wonderful course designed by Ben Sayers, later modified by Harry Colt. Sitting in the shadow of Portstewart and



Malone



Kirkistown



Royal Portrush, Castlerock gives players the challenge of a classic links-style course. Tred lightly, holes like number 4 plays tougher than it looks. Running along the railroad tracks, this 200-yard par 3 can slip up many a good golfer with the burn that snakes across the fairway unnoticed. Add Castlerock to your tour of Northern Ireland golf, you won't be disappointed.

BELVOIR PARK belvoirparkgolfclub.co.uk

As one of the best parkland courses in Northern Ireland, Belvoir Park is definitely one place you should not miss. It is located right outside Belfast, perfect if on a weekend trip. The Park is beautifully designed by Harry Colt. Even today, with so many modern parkland courses popping up, Belvoir Parks' classic style endures. The only noticeable change from the original design is the addition of some trees by club captain, Dr. J A Smiley, in

1958. Combine Belvoir Park with Malone and Royal Belfast for a great Northern Ireland golf weekend.

MALONE malonegolfclub.co.uk

This is a hidden gem. Malone, like Belvoir Park, is a fantastic parkland course built back in 1895. Currently situated in Dunmurray, Malone is an upscale course surrounding the gorgeous Ballydrain Lake. This lake comes into play on their famous par 3 15th as well as the final hole. Besides the lake there are many mature trees to stand in your way. The atmosphere at Malone is quaint and relaxing. Allowing for a nice game for any level of player.

CLANDEBOYNE cgc-ni.com

Overlooking Belfast Lough and the Scottish coast, Clondeboyne offers grand views and great play. The Dufferin

Championship course is beautifully designed with fairways lined in gorse, bracken, and mature trees. Coming in at 6,556 from the back tees, the Dufferin will test most players – especially with numerous blind drives and harrowing carries. The course is one of the best inland parkland style courses in Northern Ireland but the fairways roll like a links. Clondeboyne is situated 12 miles outside of Belfast, making for a great jumping off point to explore the budding city, as well as other magnificent courses in the area.

ARDGLASS ardglassgolfclub.com

Sitting atop high cliffs, the Ardglass golf course is a links unlike many others. The course plays fairly straight forward but the arrangement of the holes is magnificent. The opening holes offer amazing views of the sea and harbour from up on the cliffs. And on the back nine you will find holes like the 11th which sits down in the valley



Sitting atop high cliffs, the Ardglass golf course is a links unlike many others. The course plays fairly straight forward but the arrangement of the holes is magnificent

along the shore. One of the most unique features of Ardglass is the club house. Built out of a 13th century castle, it seems daunting but a walk inside shows a warm and inviting interior and staff. Ardglass is the perfect compliment to Royal County Down which is no more than 20 miles away. Its fairly easy to play them both in one day or a weekend.

ROYAL BELFAST
royalbelfast.com

Royal Belfast is Ireland's oldest golf club, and it wears that title proudly. This place is one of the founding members of the Golf Union of Ireland and is one of the few courses in Ireland to have the 'Royal' prefix. Being a 'Royal', this course boasts some of the nicest fairways and greens around. The course was designed by the famous Harry Colt in a pure parkland layout. Fairways sprawl out in front of you with Belfast Lough in the distance. Don't be fooled by the simple setting - Royal

Belfast is no slouch. The par 3s and 4s are long and tricky while the par 5s, two of which make up the last three holes, are stout and undulating. Take a walk through history in their clubhouse filled with memorabilia dating back to when the course first opened in 1882.

GALGORM CASTLE
galgormcastle.co.uk

Nestled amongst two historic monuments, the Rory Oge MacQuillian Castle and a series of souterrains, Galgorm Castle Golf Course is a beautifully designed parkland course. The area blends the line between classic and modern. The 220-acre estate is bordered on two sides by the rivers Main and Braid. These features, along with numerous lakes that dot the property, create the main hazards for players. In particular, the 4th and 7th holes require a flight over a pond in order to reach the green safely. Galgorm Castle is a joy for all levels of players. The scenery is excellent

and course is challenging. Galgorm sits 2 miles outside Ballymena in Co. Antrim.

KIKISTOWN
linksgolfkirkistown.com

Way out on the eastern side of the Ards peninsula, Kikistown is Ireland's most easterly 18-hole course. This course is a hidden masterpiece designed by James Braid. Although a par 69, Kikistown can prove difficult with elevated tees and greens as well as the ever-present hazard, the wind. One place this 'hazard' makes its presence is on the great par 4, 10th hole. Named 'Long Reach', the green sits up high making for quite a difficult approach - making it near impossible for par if there is wind. Kikistown carries many interesting stories among its greens - from World Wars to Medieval times - this place has a feeling all its own. It is only 15 miles south of Newtonards, but it can be very easy to miss. Add it to your next golf trip, its definitely worth it.

WHAT'S ON

TITANIC BELFAST

titanicbelfast.com



Opened on 31 March this year, the Titanic Belfast is a beautiful museum that immerses you in the stories surrounding the majestic Titanic cruise-liner. Although the festival celebrating its opening is now over you can still visit the area and see the Titanic exhibition. Every detail about the ship is explored – from construction to demise and beyond its discovery. This building and exhibition is something to behold, check out their website for more details.

DALRIADA FESTIVAL

dalriadafestival.co.uk



Growing from the Highland Games held every year at Glenarm Castle, the Dalriada Festival is a combination of sport, music and food. Running from the 13th-21st of July, this festival should be tons of fun for the whole family. The event is focused on highlighting the food, music and sport cultures of Scotland and Ireland. Some sights to while there include the Fabulous Baker Brothers, Northern Ireland band Freefall, the Highland games and a concert from Ronan Keating. Tickets are on sale now for £39.95 (€49.52) from gotobelfast.com.

BELSONIC 2012

belsonic.com



Music fan? Over the summer Northern Ireland will be jam packed with music festivals and concerts. But one you definitely should check out is Belsonic 2012. As the biggest its been in years, Belsonic 2012 will have headline artists the likes of Skrillex, David Guetta, Noel Gallagha, Thin Lizzy, Paramore, and Tom Jones. Concerts start 15 August to the 26 at Belfast's premier outdoor venue, Custom House Square. Tickets are on sale now from their website.

ULSTER RALLY

ulsterrally.com



Have the need for speed? Get to the Ulster Rally taking place 17-18 of August in Antrim. Watch professional rally drivers fly through the narrow streets of Antrim at high rates of speed. The rally, which has run every year, is in its 36th year and has expanded to five categories including historic, challenge and Rally NI. The roads these guys drive on are some of the best rallying roads in Northern Ireland. Bring a camera to capture the cars flying over crests and sliding around corners. Spectator entry is free.



Galgorm



Lisburn



Ballycastle

LISBURN

lisburngolfclub.com

Lisburn is the essence of parkland beauty. With magnificent mature trees, rhododendron and hydrangea sprawling all over the course, it no wonder many have called it the 'Augusta' of the North. Holes like the 6th epitomise this notion. The course is perfectly set up with each set of nine holes looping out and back to the clubhouse. The designer, Fred Hawtree, truly created a test for all golfers out of what used to be a farm. Lisburn is conveniently located between the M1 and A1 in Lisburn, Co. Antrim. Just like the other parkland style courses, namely Belvoir Park and Malone, Lisburn is sure to give you and your mates amazing round every time.

BALLYCASTLE

ballycastlegolfclub.com

Can't decide whether to play a links course or parkland? You don't have to at Ballycastle. Here the course is split, with holes 6-18 as links and holes 1-5 as parkland. The parkland portion is played next to Bonamargy Abbey and the Margy and Carey Rivers inland. Then the course

runs out towards the sea, where the remainder of holes are links-style. Ballycastle is great for all levels of players. It is a fairly short course that tests you in a variety of conditions. In addition to the interesting play there are the views of the Irish Sea and Rathlin Island. Ballycastle is most proud to be a part of the Causeway Coast amateur golf tournament held every June. Whether you're playing in the tournament or simply slipping another round in before heading home, Ballycastle will fit in perfectly.

CAIRNDHU

cairndhugolfclub.co.uk

This beautifully displayed links course on the coast of Ballygally is one of the most scenic in all of Ireland. From the fairways of Cairndhu you can see the coastline of Scotland in the distance. The course is lined with amazing floral displays that originate from the original land owner, Sir Thomas Dixon's wife. Cairndhu sits a top cliffs that add more to the amazing scenery and difficulty of the course. The signature hole is 'Head,' the par 3 2nd. The tee stands up 100 yards or so above the Antrim coast and you hit out towards the headland, which gives the hole its name. Playing at Cairndhu is a spectacular experience.