

WELCOME TO MY CLUB:

THE HERITAGE





As the only course in Ireland to be designed by the great Seve Ballesteros, this blossoming club offers a truly one-of-a-kind experience, building on a heritage all their own. By **Aaron Diamond**

Crystal blue lakes and white sand flank you to either side. You smell the freshly cut grass and the aroma of summer. The day is made even better by the sun shining on what are perfect conditions for golf. No, you're not at some tropical island resort; instead you're in Ireland, only an hour outside of Dublin at the Heritage Golf & Spa Resort.

When it opened in 2004, out in Co Laois, the golf course was the only portion completed. Today, the Heritage features a luxurious hotel and spa for when that perfect golf day comes to a close. That perfect golf day would not be possible if not for Niall Carroll, the golf operations manager of the Heritage.

Niall knows his golf. Having grown up in Straffan, it was a no-brainer that he went straight to work at the K Club. With seven years experience at there, and a background in sport and leisure management, Niall knew he was prepared when the Heritage opened up and jumped at the opportunity to join. "I've been here since day one," he says, telling me how he started as assistant director of golf and has progressed up to golf operations manager.

Niall definitely enjoys his time at the Heritage. "My mam grew up about ten minutes from here so I've been around the area since I was a kid," says Niall. "The owner at the time, Tommy, was one of my influences as well. He was a gentleman, and his vision and drive for the resort was something that impressed me. He knew he was gonna put it onto the map."

So far so good. For 2012 the Heritage was ranked 44th in Golf Digest Ireland's Top 100 golf courses in Ireland. This is due in part to the club's perseverance in upholding a high quality resort.

"Whether it be the booking facilities, the pro shop, the food and beverage element of it, the golf course, after golf, whatever it may be we're very conscious that we need to keep our quality up there." It is this attitude that makes the Heritage special.

Along with the upkeep of the facilities comes, what Niall believes, is the most important element to any successful business – the customer. "We're very conscious that the customer is the number one priority here," he notes, "we don't want to look like we have to cut our costs. Every course and every business in Ireland is in the same position but we're



very conscious that we're not going to do that to the detriment of the quality to the customer."

This is apparent as soon as you walk into their immaculate, three-story, 38 thousand square foot clubhouse. "I think it gives people the wow factor when they get here" remarks Niall about this amazing facility overlooking the 9th and 18th greens. Here you can shop in the fully stocked pro shop or grab a bite to eat at the Spike Bar or Greens Restaurant. Then there is the Seve Ballesteros Suite situated on the third floor, the perfect place to hold a golf banquet.

Speaking of Seve, his work on the course is one of the biggest differentiators of the Heritage from other tracks in Ireland. It stands as the only Ballesteros designed course in Ireland. "We're conscious, as well, now we're very proud to have him as our course co-designer. His work stands up for itself." Everyone at the Heritage is proud to be linked to such a great golfer. His

design, in conjunction with Jeff Howes, is extraordinary.

"It's beautiful. We've 10 acres of water, 98 bunkers - its a difficult challenge but we have a variety of tees available that will challenge golfers of all abilities and still ensure they enjoy it. I know for me the big thing with golf is it has to be enjoyable. The course is beautiful and it is difficult, but it is very playable from all tees. Everybody can get a chance to play it. It's all about scoring well in my opinion. If you play well you'll score well, that's the fair test of a golf course."

The design is focused on the natural landscape. Seve's goal was to make the course challenging yet playable through the use of natural hazards. Although there are an abundance of bunkers, everything is positioned perfectly allowing any golfer to play a good game.

And if you need practice, the best place to go is conveniently located on the

premises – the Seve Ballesteros Natural Golf School. The Heritage is, once again, the only resort in Ireland and the UK with this calibre of teaching facility. It features floodlit indoor and outdoor driving bays, targets, video analysis, and a specially designed putting and chipping area. "Seve was big on the short game area" notes Carroll, "so we have a huge putting green and a chipping green with bunkers."

Additionally, the Ballesteros Golf School has a par 3 course. This course is perfect for the beginning golfer still on lessons to the veteran of the fairway reworking their game. It's a great program; "you start with your lessons and move on to the par-3 course with holes ranging from 100 yards to 200 yards down. And then it's a natural progression on to the championship course here."

Don't worry about having to be a member. The championship course is open to visitors everyday. Carroll says, "We take



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them seven days a week. We don't have any days specifically for members, so the course is open 7 days a week for green fee traffic." If you want to pop down and have a go at the Ballesteros course you can easily book a tee time either online or by calling their pro shop. "For the quality of course and facilities that you're getting, I think value for money wise its going to be hard to beat somewhere like the Heritage."

Once you've played the course, you'll fall in love with it and the great hospitality – so why not become a member? It's easy too. At the moment, there is no fee for signing up to become a member. Currently

they are restructuring their membership fees but they will be going down from previous years. Niall is very involved with the members. He quips, "They're all genuine, down to earth people, and I get on very well with them. Membership is a huge part of my job. We're trying to grow at the minute, like every club, its obviously difficult but we're getting there."

The future looks bright for the Heritage Golf and Resort. They are continuing to provide an excellent golf experience as well as luxurious accommodation. While times may be difficult, Niall is not too worried, "You know, year on year we're growing

our revenues slightly. Its not jumping up or anything like that, but we feel that if we can kind of ride out the crest of the storm that we'll come out stronger at the back of it."

The Heritage offers up some of Ireland's best golf from a course like no other. The Ballesteros course is meticulously maintained, upholding the passion of the man who designed it. "Its a good way to honour the man because he was European golf" says Niall. Seve and Howes put together a gem of track out in the Irish countryside.

"When its nice, you get out of the city, the hustle and bustle, and come down here," says Niall, emphasising how the Heritage is the perfect getaway. "In 40 minutes you can be here. It's very tranquil down here in the middle of the country. You can be anywhere in the world once you get a nice sunny day." You won't be disappointed if that next sunny day is spent on these greens.