



# A Mystery Guest Report

THE GUEST EXPERIENCE AT WATERFORD GOLF CLUB

Gordon Campbell | Confederation of Golf in Ireland | July 18, 2016

## Preface

Waterford Golf Club have engaged the services of The Confederation of Golf in Ireland (CGI), specifically Club Support Officer, Gordon Campbell since late 2015. During this time, the club have spoken with CGI on a number occasions, focusing on the issues facing the golf industry in Ireland since the economic recession of 2008. These discussions have focused on Membership Development, Marketing, Governance and the commencement of a medium to long-term Business Plan.

At the most recent meeting, a brief discussion on a '*Mystery Shopper*' exercise was felt to be something that the club could benefit from – an analytical view of the process of golfing at Waterford Golf Club, from start to finish, from a guest perspective.

## Disclaimer

Waterford Golf Club (WGC) *Mystery Guest Report* is an informal audit to record my experiences, observations and first impressions. It is a place for recording how the review went, observations, best practices and any lessons learned which are then summarised in a Report with recommendations/suggestions going forward.

The Report can become a working & reference document going forward for the Management & Golf Club Committees with the Club's discretion to share the findings with members. Please note the following:

- The structure of the Report may vary from club to club depending on the scale and scope.
- The Report is a broad look at club operations and as such the technical, regulatory or compliance elements would be outside of its' scope.
- The purpose of the overall Report is to;
  - a) promote a focus on the golfing experience
  - b) support the development of a Marketing Plan
  - c) provide some short term action plans ( 0 – 12 months)
  - d) to improve awareness of Waterford GC to potential visitors while enhancing existing membership
- Prepared in good faith on the basis of the information made available without any independent verification. CGI will not be liable for any loss, damage, cost or exposure incurred as a result of any recommendations/suggestions actioned.
- The purpose of this report is to identify elements of the club that can be remedied/ improved so as to make it more attractive for visitors and guests, leading to improved opportunities to membership conversion.

## Booking Golf

Date: July 5<sup>th</sup> 2016

Following a Google search for 'Golf in Waterford' and having found WGC, I followed a link to the clubs website. The 'Visitor Booking' section is easy to find and opens up a BRS page, as expected. On my chosen day, the time sheet read: 'Tee Free; Internet Booking Not Available'. There was no phone number or further information available.

I returned to the website and found the clubs contact details. I called and pressed '4' for the bar. There was no answer and no option to return to the main menu, so I had to hang up and call again. Having called a second time, I pressed 'o' and was able to book golf on my chosen day.

I had to ask how much it would cost. I was asked for my name, I gave only my first name, 'Gordon'. There was no attempt to collect my email address or phone number and as such I will receive no confirmation of my booking or a text reminder. I was not asked if I had played the course before, if I needed directions, if I was in need of breakfast on arrival. There were a number of missed opportunities here that can improve the visitor experience and generate income.

## Waterford Golf Club – Online Presence

As outlined above, I logged onto Google and searched 'Golf in Waterford'. Results: <https://www.google.ie/webhp?hl=en#safe=off&hl=en&q=golf+in+waterford>

The Tower Hotel in Waterford have a paid advertisement at the top of the search and following this link does bring you to information on golf in the area – WGC gets a small mention. Has the club set up an official relationship with the Tower Hotel and how is this relationship maintained? Do the hotel staff know about the course? Are there any marketing materials at the hotel to 'sell' the product?

The very next section on the Google search result does list WGC at the top which is excellent and is one of the benefits of having the county name as your course name, i.e. Wexford GC, Carlow GC etc. There are a number of reviews, mostly positive, about the club that can be seen here. The club does not appear to be 'registered' with Google and should do so. Please discuss with CGI.

Once I had booked my tee time, I returned to the website for course/ club information. I linked to the section on 'Our Course'. I found the text (font) on this page very difficult to read and I would recommend that it be changed. The tab at the bottom of the page, 'Read More', contains great information and images and this could be utilised better.

I could not find a course score card or course map on the site. I could not find a stroke saver. There are no directions to the club on the site. There is no copy of the menu on the site. Further searches around Google did yield some good results and screen grabs are available in the back of this report – if this information is out there then the club should be able to duplicate it on the home site.

## Travelling to and arriving at the Course

I travelled to Waterford the night before my game and stayed at the Fitzwilton Hotel, arguably the closest hotel to the golf course. I asked the receptionist if they could recommend anywhere to play golf – “Faithleg, Tramore, Waterford Castle” was the response – Waterford was not mentioned. I asked about WGC and they said that it was close by but when I pressed if they knew anything more, they drew a blank. Explaining my profession to them, I asked a series of questions – Could they describe the course? Had they played the course? How much is a round of golf? Was there food available there? Was it possible to play as a guest/ rent clubs/ rent a buggy? Unfortunately, they could not answer these questions.

There are a number of hotels along the water’s edge and I have stayed in most – if I asked the same questions of these hotels, would they be any way better informed? As with many of the issues facing golf clubs today, particularly in marketing, the solution is quite a simple one. Working with these hotels to promote your business is a must and I will outline recommendations for same in the final section of this report.

Travelling to the golf course was relatively easy with the use of Satnav technology but I did take time to look for traditional signage too. There is a sign at the slip road (opposite the Slip Café) as you leave Waterford although the visibility of this sign is not great and the sign itself looks to be in disrepair. I imagine this could easily be missed leading to a detour to get back around to the club. On approach to the club, there is no ‘advance signage’ – a sign at least 50 metres from the entrance to indicate entrance ahead. Again, one could drive past the club quite easily and have to U-turn to come back.

## From the Driveway to the First Tee

The drive way into the club is where the first impression of the club begins to form. Having visited the club earlier this year, at the back end of the bad winter, the bunkers at the 11<sup>th</sup> hole were in poor condition. It was recommended to look at picket fencing for the first 80 meters or so along the left hand edge of the driveway to obscure this view. The GUI National Academy recently installed similar and they look excellent.

The length of the driveway should be seen as a great opportunity to excite a visitor and promote the club. Signage on the side of the roadway could indicate opportunities at the club such as corporate days, sponsorship opportunities, membership – again, Carton House do this very well. In addition, the outbound journey, on the reverse of the signs, could indicate ‘Thank you for visiting’ and other well-meaning messages.

The carpark at the club is fine but will clearly need some work in the years to come. I parked close to the club house and found the signage in this area to be excellent – good clear directions to the Pro Shop, Lockers etc. Visiting the Pro Shop, I found Harry in attendance who was excellent in dealing with my visit, issuing a scorecard and walking me over to the first tee to give advice on the semi-blind tee shot. That level of service is not the norm but it would be a fantastic service to offer to all first time visitors. If not, then the placement of a stake at the top of the hill on the first would be standard practice.

## Golf

The playing of golf was enjoyable and the signage around the course was good – if found my way easily from hole to hole. The hole markers/ information boards are excellent and very well maintained. People with whom I had an interaction on the course were very pleasant and polite. There were clear signs of damage from the winter or 2015 and further work is clearly required and I have no doubt that tireless work is happening in this regard. I would note that there were a number of areas of upturned turf around the course that looked rather unsightly and there was no indication as to their purpose/ reason. In this case, I would recommend that these areas be treated as G.U.R. and appropriate signage and ground markings be used.

It could be stated further that setting expectations with visitors from the off could be worth considering. The bad winter was not the 'fault' of the golf club, so visitors should be told of a few areas across the course that are being repaired – setting expectations is key to a good guest visit.

## The Clubhouse & Dining at Waterford Golf Club

Following my round I used the full facilities of the club. I found the locker room to be of decent condition and the showers to be warm with very good pressure. I didn't get the chance to confirm on the day but are there lockers available for a guest if required? It is quite common for all the lockers to be in use by members only.

I entered the dining room/ bar before 12pm and ordered a coffee and took a seat. I was able to avail of a socket to plug in my laptop which was great but unable to connect to Wi-Fi. This is an important service that clubs must now add to their outgoings. The coffee was excellent and reasonably priced at €1.80. I asked about food and was told that food would be available from 12.30pm. I started into some work and when 12.30pm came, I was not approached with a menu or asked if I needed anything else despite having expressed my intention to eat. I allowed for a further 20 minutes to pass before I approached the bar myself and requested a menu.

The food is reasonably priced and quite typical of golf club fayre. I was served in a timely fashion and thought the burger was well priced at €8.50. Paying the bill presented similar problems that I have faced elsewhere in the split of bills across the club and the franchisee. I believe that this is not something that the guest/ member should have to 'suffer' and suggest that the club look to address this arrangement. I had to pay in cash at the bar and take a receipt there and then pay by card for food where a receipt was unavailable (which I needed for the purposes of expenses). A receipt was kindly handwritten for me but clearly this is not best practice.

## Summary

All told, the visit was a pleasant one and everyone I met was friendly and courteous. The golf course was enjoyable and some of the holes are top class. I have no doubt that recovering the course has been extremely difficult and credit to those involved.

Work needs to continue on the course and reference to same needs to be made, i.e. a schedule of course works available for all to see. The post-game experience was good but could be improved. Similarly, the critical analysis of 'pre-game' has revealed that the club needs to do more to market itself online and establish local relationships in Waterford.

A list of recommendations are outlined below. Thank you for your time and attention.

Report prepared July 2016 by:

**Gordon Campbell**  
Club Support Officer  
Confederation of Golf in Ireland

**E:**       gordon@cgigolf.org

**M:**       087-145-6505

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Review the current phone system and ‘catch’ all incoming enquiries.
- Write a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for handling incoming golf queries, applicable to all staff.
- Create a system for capturing personal details of all guest bookings, specifically email.
- Send all bookings a Confirmation Email outlining the date and time of the booking, a link to the clubs website and details on directions to the club. A SOP should be in place to facilitate this process.
- Provide information via the BRS System to inform online bookings of the current days arrangements, include the club contact telephone number.
- Register Waterford GC as a business with Google.
- Conduct a Website analysis with focus on course information and visitor use. Review a number of competitor websites for ideas. Simplify the text and arrangements of a number of pages.
- Adopt a budget for online spend to increase the presence of WGC.
- Identify a minimum of six local hotels to build relationships with. This should extend to inviting these hotels to experience golf and catering at the club whilst simultaneously identifying marketing opportunities at the hotel. CGI to advise.
- Road signs near the course are adequate but could be improved. Reposition/ repair/ remove some of the existing traditional signage for the golf course and set out a ‘map’ of where signage should appear in future. CGI to advise.
- Improve the driveway to the clubhouse with a combination of signage and fencing. The entry gates, although freshly painted, are regularly dirt covered and a solution needs to be found for this.
- Get a number of quotes for car park refurbishment to allow for long term financing to facilitate an upgrade in the coming years.
- Install a stake at the brow of the hill on the first tee.
- Put G.U.R. markings in place at all of the affected areas of the course that require it.
- Confirm the opening hours of Catering and communicate to all staff.
- Make menus available in the Pro Shop and promote offers at the time of check in.
- Investigate the opportunity to improve the payment of bills in the restaurant/ bar in relation to a bill being split and a customer conducting two transactions.
- As per previous, investigate solutions to two payment methods in the Pro Shop when purchasing Green Fees and stock (club sales and Pro sales).
- Make Wi-Fi open and accessible to all with the best possible signal available in the area.

## SCREENGRABS

1. Course map available at oobgolf.com

The screenshot shows the website for Waterford Golf Club. The page features a navigation menu with links to home, golfers, courses, equipment, and clubhouse. The main content area displays the course map for the White course, designed by Willie Park Jr. and James Braid in 1912. The map shows the layout of the 18 holes, including the clubhouse, clubhouse, and clubhouse. Below the map is a table with the following data:

Hole	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Out	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	In	Total
White	384	334	119	380	370	361	164	494	170	2,776	270	452	443	178	398	439	128	270	368	2,946	5,722
Men's Handicap	5	11	17	1	7	3	15	9	13		14	10	6	12	2	8	18	16	4		
Men's Par	4	4	3	4	4	4	3	5	3	34	4	5	5	3	4	5	3	4	4	37	71
Women's Par	4	4	3	4	4	4	3	5	3	34	4	5	5	3	4	5	3	4	4	37	71
Women's Handicap	5	11	17	1	7	3	15	9	13		14	10	6	12	2	8	18	16	4		

At the bottom of the page, there are links to Enter Score, Report Course Changes, and Edit Data. The website is displayed in a web browser window with the address bar showing the URL: http://www.oobgolf.com/courses/scorecard.php?id=...



## 2. Directions, scorecard and 'about' information on teetimes.ie

Screenshot of the Teetimes.ie website showing the Waterford Golf Club page. The page includes a navigation bar, a header with the Teetimes.ie logo, and a main content area with sections for Golf Courses, Directions, Scorecard, and Green Fee Rates.

**Teetimes.ie** Book your Golf online in Ireland

Home Tee Times Course Info Join Now Help

Golf Courses Rates & Promotions Society Courses Add Golf Course

### Golf Courses

#### Waterford Golf Club [Co. Waterford]

Founded in 1912, Waterford Golf Club is situated on a hill overlooking the historic city of Waterford in the sunny south east of Ireland.

The front nine was designed originally by Wille Park (twice Open Champion) and the back nine was designed by the great James Braid.

The front nine holes demand accuracy from the tee whereas Birdies can be made on the back nine, but beware as errant shots can result in bogies or worse. The jewel in the crown is the 18th hole. The tee is the highest point of the course with magnificent views of the city and surrounding countryside. The hole then winds 400 yards downhill through score threatening gorse to a receptive green in front of the beautiful clubhouse. Many a scorecard has been wrecked by players running up a cricket score on this hole.

#### Directions

**Coming From Kilkenny or Limerick:** Travel towards the city and turn left on the newrath roundabout, continue on until you meet another roundabout at which you turn right. The Golf Club will be signposted from here and will be the first turn off on the right hand side.

**Coming From New Ross:** Follow the N25 to the traffic lights in Ferrybank and turn right up the Rockshire Road. From here just follow the Rockshire Road to the top of the hill and the Golf Club will be on the left hand side.

**Coming From the city:** Drive over the bridge and out the N25 towards New Ross. Turn left at the traffic lights in Ferrybank drive straight up the Rockshire Road to the top of the hill. Once at the top of the hill, the Golf Club will be on the left hand side.

#### Scorecard

Tees: Blue

Hole	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Out
Metres	308	334	119	381	374	366	168	494	170	2794
Par	4	4	3	4	4	4	3	5	3	34
Index	7	11	17	1	9	3	15	5	13	

Hole	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	In	Total
Metres	270	452	453	178	410	439	128	270	371	2971	5765
Par	4	5	5	3	4	5	3	4	4	37	71
Index	14	10	6	12	2	8	18	16	4		

#### Green Fee Rates

**Summer Rates 2016**  
Mon-Fri: €30  
Sat-Sun/B.Hols: €40

#### Promotions

**Summer Online Specials**  
Play on the weekends from €35pp.

Find Tee Times

Home | About Us | Privacy Policy | Terms of Use | Contact Us

© Online TeeTimes Ltd. 2010

### 3. BRS page lacking information

Waterford Golf Club

Call Us. 051 876748  
Book a Tee Time  
Like Us on Facebook  
Follow Us on Twitter

BACK TO CLUB WEBSITE

**Tee Booking Progress**

- 1 select day
- 2 select tee time
- 3 personal details
- 4 payment
- 5 confirmation

**Tee Time Availability for Tue 12 Jul 2016**

[BACK](#)

This is a list of available tee times for the day you have selected.  
Select the tee time you require, then press the 'Book Now' button.  
All prices quoted are in EUR.

Time	Booking Info	1 Player	2 Players	3 Players	4 Players	Book
08:00	Tee Free	Internet Booking Not Available				
08:08	Tee Free	Internet Booking Not Available				
08:16	Tee Free	Internet Booking Not Available				
08:24	Tee Free	Internet Booking Not Available				
08:32	Tee Free	Internet Booking Not Available				
08:40	Tee Free	Internet Booking Not Available				
08:48	Tee Free	Internet Booking Not Available				

### 4. Picket fencing at Carton House







5. Driveway signage:



END