

# GRAYLYN LOOMIS



## Where to Play Golf

- **Choosing the courses** – Play whatever golf courses you want to play! Have a look through Scottish golf map or the full list of course reviews on my site to plan out your trip. My advice would be to play all of the famous courses you want, but try to work in a few lesser-known gems. You'll be amazed by how fondly you look back on the choice to play a local gem after your trip.
- **Tee times** - Getting tee times on Scottish golf courses is a very straightforward process. 99% of golf courses in Scotland are open to the public. Some courses may limit their visitor play to only a few days per week (Muirfield and Troon etc.), but nearly all welcome guests with open arms! You can call every course, email most courses, and even use online booking systems for some of the tech friendly courses. Emailing particularly well-known clubs months in advance typically pays off. Also, I have written an entire post on getting a tee time on the St Andrews Old Course.
- **Ranges** – Keep in mind during your visit that most traditional Scottish golf courses don't have a practice range. The real tip here has to do with St Andrews. The St Andrews Links Trust does have a range, but it is a 20-minute walk from the first tee of the Old Course – don't expect to hit a few balls 10 minutes before your tee time. During high season, a shuttle runs from the range to the first tees of the links courses in town!
- **Hickory Golf** – The experience of playing a round of golf with hickory clubs taps into a purer form of the game. Playing that round in Scotland increases the experience exponentially. Kingarrock Golf Links and the Musselburgh Old Links are two courses that are designed around hickory golf. You can rent a set of hickory clubs at both of those courses for a very reasonable cost.

## Taking a Caddie

- **Should you take a Caddie?** – On many of Scotland’s quirky golf courses a caddie can be invaluable. Blind shots, hidden hazards, and odd routings can make rounds difficult without a caddie showing you the way. Taking a caddie isn’t vital, but in many cases a caddie will add to the experience.
- **Tipping** – The base caddie rate varies from course to course across Scotland. No matter the base rate, I would generally tip £10 if the caddie was decent, £15 – £20 if it was very good service, and £25+ if you had a great experience.
- I caddied a season and a half at Kingsbarns Golf Links just outside of St Andrews while living in Scotland. Based on those experiences I wrote a full post on taking caddies in Scotland.

## Time Away From the Course

- It is tempting to pack every moment of your trip with time on the golf course. However, many will find that throwing in a few non-golf activities adds tons of depth and overall enjoyment to the trip.
- **Major Scottish Cities** – Edinburgh is one of my favorite cities in the world. It has everything you would expect from a modern capitol while tying in the best of Europe, history, and local flavor. If you can plan your trip to coincide with the Edinburgh Festival – you are in for a real treat. I have spent lots of time in Edinburgh and I like it more with every trip. Entire websites could be dedicated to exploring Edinburgh and the festival, so I will point you to exactly that - [www.thisisedinburgh.com](http://www.thisisedinburgh.com). Glasgow is Edinburgh’s brother in many ways. The city is larger, and is packed with pubs, shopping, and Scottish food. If timed right, you can catch great concerts in Glasgow as well. If in Ayrshire playing golf, swing through Glasgow! I have spent less time in Glasgow, so don’t mistake my lack of local knowledge for a dislike of the city! Check out Explore Glasgow for inside tips.
- **Distilleries** – Whisky connoisseurs are in heaven while in Scotland. As many will know, scotch is distilled in various regions throughout Scotland, and quite a few golf courses pair up well with visits to distilleries. Rather than use the space here to describe the best distilleries to visit while on a golf trip, just read my full post about Visiting Scotland’s Distilleries.
- **Castles** – History buffs have no lack of material while in Scotland. Castles in particular abound and trips to golf courses can be tied into castle visits in many cases. If you are playing Carnoustie, Glamis Castle can be found a short drive up the road. It is where the Queen Mother was raised. If you are playing Cruden Bay, Slains Castle can be seen in the distance. If you are in East Lothian, drive into Edinburgh to visit Edinburgh Castle. If you are driving from St Andrews towards Turnberry or Troon, stop by Sterling Castle on the way. However, one of the most beautiful castles

that I have ever seen is Eilean Donan Castle, which is not near any great golf, but is second to few in beauty.

- **Hiking** – “Hill walks” in Scotland are very popular, and there are many trails around Scotland that provide great hikes. One of my favorites is the Fife Coastal Path. It runs from just north of Edinburgh to north of St Andrews. It is an easy walk along that coast that provides incredible views. More serious hikers will be interested in taking on a Munro. Munros are Scottish mountains over 3,000 feet of elevation. There are 282 of these in Scotland, and people make life goals of “bagging” all of the Munros. Walk Highlands is a great website that provides detailed descriptions and maps of Scottish hikes. I have used it for multiple Munro hikes and have always had great results.

## Eating and Drinking Well

- **Food** – If you put effort into finding the right restaurant, you can eat some amazing meals while in Scotland. You’ll find everything from Michelin starred eateries to a hearty gastro-pubs and everything in between. Even the most rural areas of Scotland can offer great food. Take the Three Chimneys for example – a Michelin Starred restaurant hidden deep on the Isle of Skye. For some restaurant suggestions in St Andrews, read my full post here. Scottish seafood is incredible, and those traveling along the coasts (links golf territory) will find great options. You will find Scottish salmon on menus around the world.
- **Drink** – Scotland is full of characterful pubs and bars. My suggestion here is to never let the local looking pubs scare you away. They are often full of friendly locals who are happy to talk and give you a hard time. If you are an ale drinker, try my go-to beer while in Scotland – Belhaven Best. If you are a whisky drinker, you are in luck. Most pubs have great whisky selections... Read my full post about distilleries on the site. Also, if you are a true whisky-head, go visit Machrihanish GC and stay in the Ardshiel Hotel. Its bar has over 1,000 whiskies to try.
- **19th Holes** - A visit to the pub after a round of golf can add greatly to the experience. It doesn’t get much better than thinking back over a round of golf with a pint in your hand and your golf buddies by your side. Rather than restate them here, check out the 19th Hole suggestions on the Suggest Trip Itineraries page on the site! If your course isn’t on there, just drop me an email ([graylyn@graylynloomis.com](mailto:graylyn@graylynloomis.com)) for a suggestion.

## Where to Stay on the Trip

- **B&Bs** – Just as a caddie can add character and memories to your rounds of golf, a bed and breakfast (namely its owners) can add tons of memories and enjoyment to your overall trip. B&Bs are typically easier on the budget and the proprietors offer up tips on the best local spots. I have had B&B owners drive me to the golf course once they found out I was relying on public transportation. The legendary “full

Scottish breakfast” including the black pudding, baked beans, and haggis is found at most B&Bs. Gotta love Scottish hospitality!

- **Hotels** – Hotels can offer the higher end of luxury, and if you find the right hotel, it can offer plenty of local character as well. You can find hotels that hit nearly every price point.
- **Self-catering** – “Self-catering” is a term that isn’t often used in the US, but it refers to renting a non-catered home or apartment. If you are traveling in a group and plan on staying in one area for an extended period, self-catering options are often the most cost-effective option when broken down among the group members. I have had friends have amazing 5+ day trips based from self-catering accommodation in St Andrews.

## Traveling Around Scotland

- **Arrival Airports** - Your arrival airport can dictate the trajectory of your trip. With recent upgrades, Edinburgh Airport (EDI) has cemented itself as the main hub of air travel in Scotland. United Airlines flies direct from Newark, NJ to Edinburgh. US Airways has started a direct flight from Philadelphia, PA to Edinburgh. Countless other options connect to Edinburgh through London or Manchester. Both Glasgow Airport (GLA) and Edinburgh fly to nearly all European destinations and many in the Middle East. Inverness Airport (INV) is your gateway to the Highlands, so if you plan on starting your trip up north, flying into Inverness is a great option. You will likely have to connect through another UK airport to get there.
- **Car Rental** – A “do it yourself” option for travel during your golf trip is to simply rent a car. A few tips: Most vehicles in the UK have manual transmissions, so if you aren’t comfortable with driving manual, make sure to request an automatic. I also recommend buying insurance with the vehicle. I have known many people who have knocked off rental car mirrors driving on the “wrong” side of the road. Just pay attention and don’t drive when you are too tired.
- **Public Transportation** – I spent four years traveling on public transportation through the UK. It is a safe and reliable option to get from course to course. The stigma on bus travel in the US does not exist in the UK. Buses run to even remote areas of the country, and you buy your ticket from the bus driver once you get on the bus. Bring plenty of change as paying with big bills will get you a scowl. Buses can also run late due to traffic... Trains are becoming increasingly expensive, but they too will take you just about everywhere. Buy your tickets at the station, but know that if time is tight, you can buy your ticket once you get on the train for a small premium. The best way to book your train travel is through National Rail, who compare prices and show you all train operator schedules. Plan out your trip so that you don’t get caught waiting hours for a train! You can bring your clubs onto both buses and trains without any issues.

- **Chauffeur Services** – The easiest travel option is to have a travel service drive you around in one of their vehicles. This is a great option for larger groups in which you can disperse the cost. It also means that after a long day of golf and a few beers, you don't have to drive back to your accommodation or the next golf course. The local driver typically also offers tips on pubs, restaurants, and local points of interest. St Andrews Executive Travel is a company that I have personally had great experiences with in the past, although there are many additional options. This can be a very cost-effective option for larger groups.
- **Golf Club Shipping** – After flying back to the UK after a summer break in the US, I lugged two duffle bags and my golf clubs through London, struggling into taxis and trains knocking over desks, drinks, and elderly people. A great option to avoid this hassle is shipping your clubs to your hotel or the first golf course on your trip. I suggest going with Luggage Forward, who provides door-to-door nearly anywhere in the world. Their trans-Atlantic shipping costs are around \$165, meaning you pay more than an airline extra bag fee, but you save tons of hassle.

### Additional Tips:

- **Tour Operators** - Using a tour operator to book your trip is one of the easiest ways to make a trip to Scotland. Many companies will take care of nearly all facets of the trip. However, prices are generally steep, and it can be argued that you lose some of the control gained when booking things yourself. Tour operators have deals with specific courses and hotels, so will naturally steer your trip towards their “profit centers.” Hopefully the information found in this section of the site will allow you to not feel forced into a tour operator.
- **Other Resources** – There are some great additional resources out there on Scottish golf. One such resource, Scottish Golf Podcast, is run by a friend of mine, and I have really enjoyed co-hosting a handful of episodes. The podcast has had a slew of really interesting guests and has covered lots of Scottish golf travel topics. Book recommendations (not necessarily on travel in particular) include *A Season in Dornoch* by Lorne Rubenstein, *Golf on the Rocks* by Gary Sutherland, and *Tom Morris of St Andrews: The Colossus of Golf* by David Malcolm and Peter E. Crabtree.

