

DESTINATIONS

UK & IRELAND | GOLF

of the
BEST

IRISH GOLF COURSES

Pick up on the buzz from the Open, the first in Ireland since 1951, with **Laura French's** top spots to tee off

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ROYAL PORTRUSH GOLF CLUB

Few clubs can beat Northern Ireland's revered Royal Portrush, which hosted the 148th Open last weekend. Founded in 1888 and later held under the patronage of King Edward VII, it has set the stage for some iconic moments, from the inaugural Irish Open Amateur Championship to the first British Ladies' Championship outside England. It comprises two courses, overlooked by the historic Dunluce Castle.

Book it: Green fees start at £50 for Valley Links and £220 for Dunluce Links. Everglades Hotel in Londonderry is a good base an hour's drive away; double rooms are from £80 per person B&B. hastingshotels.com

THE K CLUB

Host of the 2006 Ryder Cup, the 2016 Irish Open and 13 European Opens, The K Club in Kildare is something of a celebrity. Arnold Palmer designed both its courses and anyone who's anyone has played here, from Tiger Woods to Rory McIlroy. But it's not just about the sporting side – there's an ultra-luxe hotel with a spa and gourmet dining.

Book it: A golf-and-dine package, including one night's accommodation, full Irish breakfast, a four-course meal and a round of golf, costs from €220 per person. Agents can book via Preferred Hotels & Resorts.

preferredhotels.com

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3



ASHFORD CASTLE

There's more in the way of heritage at the 140-hectare, 13th-century Ashford Castle in County Mayo. Its scenic, nine-hole parkland course is an excellent bet for beginners, as well as more advanced players wanting to improve their skills. Those aiming to up their game further will find several internationally renowned links courses nearby.

Book it: Rates start at €800 per room per night, including breakfast and complimentary green fees. ashfordcastle.com

LOUGH ERNE RESORT

Clients after something a little more modern? Look to the award-winning Lough Erne Resort in County Fermanagh, which opened in 2007 and boasts a course designed by Sir Nick Faldo, as well as a parkland alternative that's hosted 10 Ulster PGA Championships. It's set among head-turning landscapes – think billowing hills and blue mirror lakes – with a five-star hotel and spa, plus golf lessons taught by PGA professionals.

Book it: A Couple's Faldo Getaway including overnight stay, breakfast and round of golf for two costs from £95 per person. loughernerresort.com

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OLD HEAD GOLF LINKS

When it comes to sheer natural beauty, nothing comes close to Kinsale's Old Head Golf Links, perched on a headland jutting more than two miles into the Atlantic. Spread across 70 hectares, the par-72 course is all about the experience, with wild flowers lining the cliffs, sea birds flying overhead and waves crashing below. But it's not just about the golf – 15 lavishly designed suites offer idyllic views over the ocean.

Book it: Green fees for the 18-hole course start at €225. Seaview suites cost from €275 per night in low season, including breakfast. oldhead.com

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PICTURES: Red Carnation Hotels; Tourism Ireland/Art Ward; Laurence Lambrecht; Kevin Markham