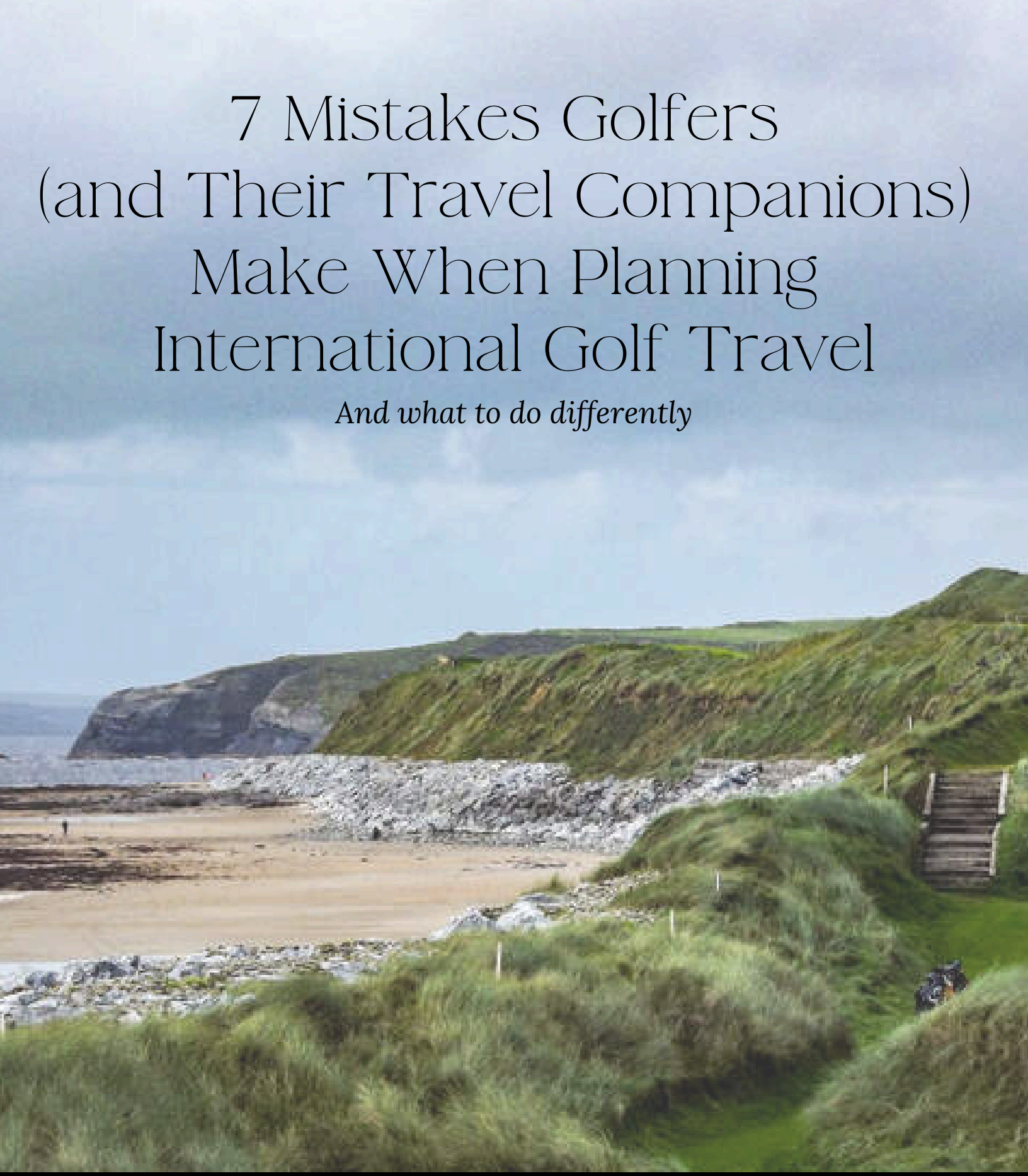
7 Mistakes Golfers (and Their Travel Companions) Make When Planning International Golf Travel

And what to do differently



INGENIOUS Travel

Introduction

International golf travel is one of the most rewarding ways to experience a destination. Playing Ballybunion on a crisp Irish morning, walking the fairways at Valderrama in southern Spain, or teeing off with the Atlantic stretching out beyond the 18th at Praia D'El Rey in Portugal, these are experiences that stay with you.

But they require a level of planning that most travelers underestimate.

In planning international golf journeys, I've watched the same mistakes surface repeatedly. Some cost money. Some cost time. Some quietly undermine what should have been an exceptional trip.

Here are seven worth knowing before you start planning yours.

Mistake #1: Booking Courses Before Booking Accommodation

It seems logical to lock in your tee times first. The courses fill up, the dates are fixed, so you start there.

The problem is that course selection and routing should work together with where you're staying. In Ireland, for example, a week on the southwest coast plays very differently depending on whether you're based in Killarney, Dingle, or Adare. Each base puts different courses within comfortable driving distance and shapes the entire rhythm of the trip.

When courses and accommodation are booked independently, you often end up with long transfer days, backtracking, and a schedule that feels disjointed. The golf is fine. The trip feels off.

Start with the region, then build the routing around it.

Mistake #2: Underestimating What Non-Golfers Actually Need

This is the mistake that quietly ruins more golf trips than any other.

The assumption is that the non-golfer just needs something to do while the golfer plays. A spa day here, some shopping there. That's not a trip. That's a waiting room with better scenery.

The destinations that make the strongest golf trips, Ireland, Scotland, Portugal, Spain, Greece, are also extraordinary places to explore. The non-golfer on a well-planned trip to the Algarve can spend a morning touring the medieval village of Silves, have lunch overlooking the coast, and join their partner for dinner at a restaurant the average tourist would never find.

The goal isn't to keep the non-golfer occupied. The goal is to build a trip where everyone is genuinely excited they came.



Mistake #3: Treating Every Course on the Itinerary as Equal



Not every round deserves the same energy, and building a trip that peaks too early leaves the back half feeling flat.

Course routing is as much about pacing as geography. You want the itinerary to build toward something. Save the bucket-list round for the moment when everyone is fully settled into the trip, not day two when jet lag is still sitting on their shoulders.

This also applies to the number of rounds. More golf is not always better golf. Four strong rounds with enough breathing room to actually enjoy the destination often produces a better trip than six rounds where everyone is exhausted by Thursday.

Mistake #4: Ignoring Seasonal Realities

The photographs of the Irish coastline or the Scottish Highlands look extraordinary year-round. The reality of playing in those places in February is a different conversation.



Weather, daylight, course conditions, and even local atmosphere shift significantly by season. August in Portugal means long evenings, warm nights, and some of the best conditions of the year. It also means the Algarve is at peak capacity and tee times at the top courses require planning months in advance.

Spring in Ireland can be spectacular, but it can also be relentlessly wet. That's not a reason to avoid it. It's a reason to know what you're choosing and pack accordingly.

Understanding what a destination actually looks and feels like during the month you're traveling is not optional planning. It's foundational.

Mistake #5: Booking Too Late for the Courses That Matter

The courses that define a great golf trip, the ones people talk about for years afterward, are also the ones with the most constrained tee time availability.

Old Course at St Andrews operates through a ballot system with no guarantee of a spot. Certain courses in Ireland's northwest release tee times a year in advance and sell out quickly. Private clubs in Spain and Portugal require relationships and advance planning that a last-minute inquiry simply cannot replicate.

If a specific course is central to the trip, that course should drive the planning timeline, not the other way around.

Waiting until six months out to plan a trip built around a high-demand course is one of the most common and most avoidable mistakes I see.

Mistake #6: Overlooking the Value of Local Knowledge on the Ground



An itinerary is a framework. What happens inside it depends heavily on who you're working with once you arrive.

The best drivers and guides in Ireland, Scotland, and Portugal are not found through a Google search the week before you leave. They're people who have spent decades building relationships with club secretaries, restaurant owners, local historians, and innkeepers. They know which table to request, which road to take after a rainstorm, and which local experience is worth your time versus which one exists purely for tourists.

This matters for the non-golfer especially. A private morning in the Alhambra before the crowds arrive, a boat excursion along the Douro Valley, a cooking class in a private home outside Athens. These experiences don't happen without the right people making them possible.

Mistake #7: Planning the Trip Around Price Instead of Value

International golf travel is a significant investment. The instinct to find savings is understandable.

But the places where people typically cut costs; accommodation quality, ground transportation, course selection, guiding, are precisely the places where the experience is made or lost.

A stay at a property that genuinely understands golf travelers is different from a stay at a property that tolerates them. A driver who knows the courses is different from a transfer service that drops you at the gate. These differences don't show up on a comparison spreadsheet. They show up every single day of the trip.

The travelers who come home saying it was worth every penny almost never got there by optimizing for the lowest number.

A Final Note

Planning international golf travel well is not complicated, but it does require the right sequence, the right timing, and the right relationships on the ground.

If you're thinking about Ireland, Scotland, Portugal, Greece, Australia, South Africa, or another international destination and want to talk through what's possible, I'd be glad to help.



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