

If you've ever
wanted to play
golf around the
clock, here's
your chance.

by Leonard Finkel

There is a place where you can start your round one day and finish the next without a break. Where playing golf after midnight is more than possible. Where some tee times don't begin until after midnight! This place is Iceland, where, during a few weeks in the summer, twenty-four hour daylight allows for twenty-four hour golf.

Misperceptions about life on this volcanic island are abundant. It is assumed that Iceland is cold and miserable. Greenland is icy... Iceland is green. In fact, during the winter months, the average temperature in Reykjavik is higher than that of New York



to the championship track, the facility also maintains a nine-hole practice course.

The weather being what it is, it is difficult to maintain playing conditions to American standards in Iceland, but Keilir does a wonderful job. The major difference is the speed of the greens, which are slower than we are used to.

The landscape consists of two distinctly different 9-hole layouts. The front nine meanders through rugged lava beds, which

Land of Midnight Golf

City during the same time. And, thanks to the eternal daylight, June and July are the most benevolent months.

Nordic Golf

Golf brought me to Iceland, specifically the Amstel Light Open. Iceland boasts 56 golf courses, eleven of which are 18-hole courses. The others range from just a few holes to nine-hole-or-more facilities. Golf is a passion here and even if an area cannot support a full-fledged course, they still want their golf. Golfers walk in Iceland, because there are very few power carts.

Golf in Iceland is links style and at the mercy of Mother Nature — including ocean salt, hail, rain, snow and often-powerful winds. Playing on these courses presents challenges of cold winds off Arctic waters as well as pesky rain, which we faced the first tournament day. Conditions were beautiful though, the second day. Icelandic golf takes on a challenge sometimes worthy of a Viking, and Icelandic golfers pride themselves on foul weather challenges. Of the two courses played for the Amstel Light Iceland Open, by far the best was Keilir Golf Course. Originally opened in 1966 as a six-hole course, it eventually expanded to nine holes, then later to twelve, and finally hitting the full 18-hole circuit in 1985. In addition

beautifully frame every hole. Deep green fairways are positioned inside rock walls flanking both sides, each hole a setting unto itself. The back nine plays along the ocean, reminiscent of links courses in Ireland or Scotland. The terrain is natural, the fairways undulating. Severe slopes on the greens present further challenges.

Scenic Beauty

Iceland's popularity is certainly attributable to its breathtaking natural wonders, including glaciers, steaming geysers, geothermal hot spots and magnificent waterfalls. Words simply can't do justice to the natural beauty found here.

One of Iceland's most impressive natural wonders is the Gulfoss Waterfalls. The chasm created by the "Waterfall of the Gods" is awe-inspiring. A trail running along the river leading to the multi-tiered falls allows for numerous viewing angles. And while in Iceland, be sure to experience glacier snowmobiling, a riveting experience. During our excursion, a few bright souls thought to bring clubs. I imagine the ball gets a little extra roll on the slick glacier surface.

Steam and hot waters of the Blue Lagoon come from pure organic water deep below the surface lava. Silica mud, mineral salts and algae are part and parcel of the





The Blue Lagoon

mineral rich seawater dip. A geothermal field supplies hot water to the lagoon and generates steam that runs a nearby power plant. The therapeutic and revitalizing benefits draw an ever-increasing number of visitors every year, making this Iceland's most popular tourist attraction.

Nordica Hotel

The Nordica Hotel sits in the heart of Reykjavik. This 4-star hotel recently reopened after a \$20 million infusion transformed it into arguably the biggest and best in Iceland. The 284-room hotel offers a fine dining restaurant, complete spa and treatment center, health fitness facility and conference center.


Though the rooms are small, amenities at the Nordica Hotel include high-speed internet access, a fully stocked mini bar, in-room safe, lush bathrobes, thick down comforters and satellite TV. The Nordica Spa features ten massage and treatment rooms, three Jacuzzis, two steam rooms and a traditional outdoor log cabin sauna. Nordica also boasts the Vox Restaurant, which every morning hosts a traditional Icelandic buffet breakfast.

Nightlife

Much more than an amateur golf outing, the Amstel Light Iceland Open offers everything a person could want in a dream vaca-

tion — fun, relaxation, adventure and sport. One popular sport in Reykjavik is nightlife. Here, dinner can start at 10 or 11 p.m., with pub-crawling after midnight and finishing when most pubs, cafes and discos close at five or six in the morning.

June and July turns out to be a two-month celebration of the Summer Solstice and many contestants in the Amstel Light Open enjoyed joining in the ritual of barhopping. The panoramic view from the Pearl Restaurant is a must. The food is fantastic and the dining room rotates 360-degrees, enabling one to see the entire city of Reykjavik.

Beware of sticker shock. A bottle of beer can cost \$10, a room at the Nordica Hotel will set you back \$300 a night, and a candy bar can cost \$3.50. But there are ways to curtail high prices. An ideal first-trip to Iceland might be as a stopover to or from Europe. Icelandair provides a three-day or longer optional stopover at no extra charge. There are also very inexpensive winter packages. And hundreds of options between top quality-rated hotels, bed & breakfasts and short-term apartment rentals are available. Check the internet for updated travel information and best bets. 

As in Scotland, the weather can change abruptly from serene to overcast to rain in a matter of minutes. Offshore Arctic winds seem perpetual as you walk along the holes of unprotected oceanfront links courses. Winds can carry a cold and rather knife-like chill if dressed improperly. Icelandic inhabitants dress in layered clothing to adapt to these ever-changing conditions, and that's the sage advice to all golfers in Iceland.

I was well prepared with an array of outerwear from Zero Restriction to cope with rain, wind and the cold. Zero Restriction is the most used rain gear on the PGA Tour, and for good reason. Armed with a Traveler rain suit, rain vests, rain gloves and most importantly a Wind Stopper jacket, I was able to easily and comfortably handle everything Mother Nature threw at me. To learn more about Zero Restriction, call (800) 367-0669 or visit www.zerorestriction.com.



Leonard Finkel + LPGA gals