

The Open Links Trail

A geographics-first 14-day expedition linking 11 of the world's most historic championship links courses — from the Scottish Highlands to the English Channel. Includes hotel bases, booking windows, drive times, caddie protocols, and dining picks.

DURATION

14 Days

GREEN FEE BAND

£3,500 – £5,500

START AIRPORT

Inverness / EDI

BEST MONTHS

May – September

Route Overview

Dornoch → Carnoustie → St Andrews → Muirfield → Royal Troon → Turnberry → Royal Portrush →
Royal Lytham → Royal Birkdale → Hoylake → Royal St George's

#	COURSE	COUNTRY	ACCESS	DRIVE FROM PREV.	GREEN FEE (EST.)
1	Royal Dornoch Championship Course	Scotland	MANAGED	Start point (Inverness 45m)	£175 – £230
2	Carnoustie Championship Links	Scotland	PUBLIC	2h 30m south	£155 – £195
3	St Andrews Old Course	Scotland	BALLOT	30m drive	£295 – £335
4	Muirfield Honourable Company	Scotland	PRIVATE	1h 30m south	£320 – £400
5	Royal Troon Old Course	Scotland	MANAGED	2h west	£285 – £360
6	Trump Turnberry Ailsa Course	Scotland	PUBLIC	40m south	£295 – £395
7	Royal Portrush Dunluce Course	N. Ireland	MANAGED	Ferry + 1h drive	£280 – £340
8	Royal Lytham & St Annes	England	MANAGED	Flight BFS→MAN + 40m	£235 – £285
9	Royal Birkdale	England	MANAGED	15m from Southport	£280 – £330
10	Royal Liverpool (Hoylake)	England	MANAGED	45m south	£240 – £290
11	Royal St George's Sandwich	England	MANAGED	4h 30m south	£230 – £295

💡 **Total Drive Time**

Approximately 15 hours of total driving across the full 14 days — averaging just over 1 hour per travel day. The route is deliberately sequenced north-to-south to avoid backtracking.

Booking Windows & Access Matrix

COURSE	DIARY OPENS	VISITOR DAYS	HCP CAP	STRATEGY
Royal Dornoch	May (12 mo. out)	Every day	24 men / 36 women	Email club to join cancellation queue. Moves fast in shoulder season.
Carnoustie	September (8 mo. out)	Every day	28 men / 36 women	Simplest booking on the trail. Online portal. Add Burnside for a warm-up.
St Andrews Old	August (10 mo. out)	Mon–Sat	36 max	Enter 48-hour online ballot. Or: join 2AM singles queue at Starter's cabin.
Muirfield	April (12 mo. out)	Tue / Thu only	18 men strict	Sells out within hours of opening. Jacket + tie required in dining room.
Royal Troon	May (12 mo. out)	Mon / Tue / Thu	20 men / 30 women	Buy the Day Package — includes Old Course round + club lunch.
Turnberry	Rolling	Every day	None	Book directly online or via stay-and-play resort package.
Royal Portrush	May (12 mo. out)	Mon/Tue/Thu/Fri	18 men / 24 women	Strict HCP check. Sells out instantly in opening hours. Dunluce only.
Royal Lytham	September (8 mo. out)	Mon / Wed / Thu	21 max	Walking only. 205 bunkers. Stay in Southport, commute 40 min.
Royal Birkdale	August (10 mo. out)	Tue / Thu	24 max	Online portal. Book Art Deco clubhouse lunch package with tee time.
Hoylake	Autumn (8 mo. out)	Mon / Wed / Fri	24 max	Internal OOB makes this trickier than it looks. Arrive the evening before.
Royal St George's	November (6 mo. out)	Mon–Fri	18 max	Jacket required in members' bar. Deepest bunker in championship golf on 4th.

 Critical Warning

Muirfield, St Andrews, and Royal Troon sell out within hours of diary opening. Set a calendar reminder 12 months before your target play dates. Missing the opening window means waiting another year.

Recommended Hotel Bases

BASE 1 — HIGHLAND
Royal Dornoch Golf Hotel
Adjacent to the first tee. Walk to the course in 2 minutes. Book well ahead — fills with pilgrims May–August. Also consider Burghfield House for a more resort-style stay.

BASE 2 — FIFE / ANGUS
The Old Course Hotel, St Andrews
Overlooks the 17th Road Hole. The ultimate St Andrews base — stay here unlocks priority tee time access. Also consider the Rusacks Hotel for a slightly lower price point with equal views.

BASE 3 — AYRSHIRE
Trump Turnberry Resort
Staying at the resort unlocks guaranteed Ailsa Course tee times. Covers Troon and Turnberry from one base. The Malin Court Hotel in Turnberry is a budget alternative nearby.

BASE 4 — NORTHERN IRELAND
The Bushmills Inn
20 minutes from Royal Portrush. Iconic Irish country house atmosphere. The Portrush Atlantic Hotel sits in town and is closer, with stunning sea views from the upper floors.

BASE 5 — LANCASHIRE (2–3 NIGHTS)
The Grand Hotel, Southport
Central to Lytham, Birkdale, and Hoylake. The Scarisbrick Hotel is a reliable, well-priced alternative. Southport is the ideal hub for the three English northwest stops.

BASE 6 — KENT
The Bell Hotel, Sandwich
Walking distance from Royal St George's first tee. A 14th-century coaching inn with enormous character. Alternatively, the Heron's Ghyll manor offers more luxury 20 minutes away.

Caddie Protocol

COURSE	CADDIE STATUS	RATE (EST.)	HOW TO BOOK
Royal Dornoch	Highly Recommended	£60 – £80 + tip	Contact caddie master when booking tee time. Ask for a local — they know every bounce on the course.
Carnoustie	Recommended	£55 – £70 + tip	Request via online booking portal or email the club directly.
St Andrews Old	Essential	£70 – £90 + tip	Caddie Master on 01334 466666. Book as early as possible — same-day caddies are rare.
Muirfield	Recommended	£70 – £85 + tip	Arranged through the club on booking. Walking only; trolleys permitted.
Royal Troon	Walking Only	£60 – £80 + tip	Request at time of tee-time booking. Caddies know the crosswind on 8th (Postage Stamp) intimately.
Turnberry	Recommended	£65 – £85 + tip	Book via resort concierge. Electric trolleys and caddies both available.
Royal Portrush	Highly Recommended	£60 – £80 + tip	Contact the club starter directly. Local caddies know Calamity Corner (16th) in detail.
Royal Birkdale	Recommended	£65 – £80 + tip	Email club secretary at time of booking to pre-arrange a caddie.
Royal St George's	Highly Recommended	£65 – £85 + tip	Blind shots and severe humps make a local caddie non-negotiable. Contact the club directly.

 Tipping Guide

Standard caddie tip on this trail: £20–£40 per round for a good bag. For an exceptional caddie who saves you strokes on the Road Hole or Calamity Corner, £50–£60 is appropriate and respected.

Dining Picks — Per Stop

Dornoch	2 Quail Restaurant — Highland fine dining. Book ahead. 25 Castle St. Superb local seafood and game. Alternatively, the Royal Golf Hotel dining room is reliable and convenient post-round.
St Andrews	Haar Restaurant — St Andrews's finest. Modern Scottish tasting menus. 1 Golf Pl. Also: the Dunvegan pub on Pilmour Links for a post-ballot pint — a rite of passage.
East Lothian	The Lobster Shack, North Berwick — Fresh shellfish on the harbour wall. Unmissable after Muirfield. The Grange Hotel in Gullane is an excellent dinner stop for club atmosphere.
Ayrshire	Braidwoods Restaurant (Dalry, Ayrshire) — Michelin-starred. 20 min drive from Troon. Pre-book 2–3 weeks ahead. The 1906 Restaurant at Trump Turnberry is excellent for a post-round resort dinner.
Portrush	55 North Restaurant — Portrush harbourfront. Excellent fresh catch. The Harbour Bar below is a classic post-round Guinness stop. Ramore Restaurant is a local institution.
Southport	The Vincent Hotel Restaurant — Best in Southport. Modern British. Lord Street. The Art Deco Birkdale clubhouse lunch (included in some packages) is one of the highlights of the entire trip.
Kent / Sandwich	The Gallivant, Camber — Stylish coastal inn 15 min from Sandwich. Superb local seafood menu. The King's Arms in Sandwich itself is a character pub for post-round drinks.

Master Pre-Trip Checklist

Bookings & Documents

- ☐ All tee times confirmed in writing with reference numbers saved
- ☐ Official handicap certificate printed and digital copy saved on phone (WHS or GHIN)
- ☐ Passport valid for at least 6 months beyond trip end date
- ☐ Travel insurance purchased (green fee protection recommended — see Allianz Travel)
- ☐ Car hire confirmed at Inverness Airport — SUV class to fit 2 golf travel bags
- ☐ Cairnryan → Larne ferry booked (P&O or Stena Line) for Day 7 crossing
- ☐ Belfast → Manchester flight booked (or overnight ferry return) for Day 9
- ☐ All hotels confirmed with deposit receipts saved
- ☐ Caddie requests submitted to each applicable club

Equipment & Packing

- ☐ Golf travel bag / hard case for flights (Ship Sticks pre-shipment is recommended)
- ☐ Waterproof suit (top + trousers) — mandatory for Scottish weather at any month
- ☐ Jacket + tie packed for Muirfield dining room (non-negotiable)
- ☐ Soft spikes on all shoes — metal spikes banned at all venues on this trail
- ☐ 12+ golf gloves (links wind is brutal on grip wear)
- ☐ 2 dozen+ golf balls (Carnoustie, St George's, and Portrush can be savage)
- ☐ Rangefinder or GPS watch (check each club's policy — most permit)
- ☐ Sun cream, lip balm, hand warmers (all needed on the same day in Scotland)
- ☐ Collared shirt for every round — dress codes strictly enforced

Apps & Tools

- ☐ WHS or GHIN app installed and handicap updated
- ☐ Golfshot or 18Birdies loaded with courses on the trail
- ☐ Google Maps offline maps downloaded for Scotland, Northern Ireland, and NW England
- ☐ XE Currency app for GBP / EUR conversion (Belfast accepts both)
- ☐ thebrief.golf saved to home screen for course intel on the go