

Questions for Leaders

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Learning comes from a variety of options, some of the best lessons can come from those succeeding within the golfing community both inside and outside of New Zealand. As part of the NZ Golf Case study programme we will look to create opportunities for leaders within our industry to answer a number of questions and share their knowledge and experiences.

The opportunity is to look at the information provided and adapt to your environment.

Tell us a little bit about yourself?

I am originally from the USA and a member of the USPGA, I started playing golf as a 6 year old and played competitively throughout my schooling. I worked in a number of golf clubs in the USA with a wide variety of experiences. In 2009 my wife and I moved to New Zealand as the Director of Golf for Kauri Cliffs and Cape Kidnappers, originally for a 2 year commitment but now with a 6 year old son who only knows New Zealand we have decided that New Zealand is our home. In 2013 I started as a consultant for the New Zealand Golf Tourism working group, initiated by Sir John Key and on the 1st July 2014 I started as Executive Director of Golf Tourism New Zealand.

Tell us a little bit about your club/organisation?

Golf Tourism New Zealand initiated originally via a working group to identify the opportunities to engage the international golf tourism market. I work in conjunction with NZ Golf and Tourism New Zealand, with funding via Tourism New Zealand. We develop our existing golf assets into an international sales product. Our main markets are Australia, United States and China. Australia as they are the highest volume of golf visitors, United States as they are the largest golf market and China as they are the fastest growing golf market. Our role is to market New Zealand as one of the world's great golf destinations. To do this we create content such as hi res imagery, video and the development of golf trails, engage with golf travel sellers and media, and work to promote New Zealand as a premium destination.

Our main intention is to use golf as the hero of a trip to New Zealand, while understanding that golfers will also participate in other activities and experiences while they are here. We work with select courses to improve their supply side...meaning better service, retail, training, and presentation. Hiding behind the counter in a pro shop does not create great customer service or a great golf experience. We help clubs understand how they need to operate and who needs to deliver service, not just to the visitor but to the club member as well. If clubs look after their members they have a better chance of success and will be better resourced to invest in their course and facilities.

What do you see as your greatest opportunity?

To continue telling the story of Golf in New Zealand. We have always been seen as a lifestyle destination with beautiful scenery, adventure tourism, and food and wine at the heart of the story. Golf as a part of this story is in its infancy. We need to let the world know the variety, diversity and number of courses we have available. How golfers get here, when they should visit, and what they should come for is our biggest opportunity. In New Zealand we take a lot of things for granted, especially our accessibility to golf and its usually uncrowded nature. This is a luxury in other parts of the world.

What are you most proud of?

1. The golf courses actually engaging with Golf Tourism New Zealand, It's a two way street... we use their product to promote golf overseas and they benefit from our marketing assistance. They actively participate in the education we provide and are willing partners in data provision.
2. Growth - the first two years were about lining things up and since then the international golf market has responded. It is exciting to see that more spend from visiting golfers is now going into the regional areas of New Zealand with a large number of high spend golf visitors going to every corner of the country.

What are your biggest challenges?

The world is a big place and we are a small market. We need a constant flow of new products, and fortunately there have been a number of these lately with Tara Iti, The Hills new 9 hole course, and Windross Farm as examples of some of the new and soon to be opened opportunities. We need these new offerings to be of a very high quality to keep the story alive and continue attracting the golfing world here. Our market is about quality golf experiences and our current golf visitors rank their visit to New Zealand a 9.3 / 10, making golfers the most satisfied of any visitor to the country. We do not look to compete on price, we compete on quality experiences.

How are you overcoming these?

We talk directly to our consumer, the golfers, which is difficult to do in other industries. As an example, I have just returned from River Oaks Country Club in Houston. With the new direct flights between Houston and New Zealand, this is a focus market for us. We spoke directly to the golfers at the club about visiting New Zealand. The average golf trip spend for an American is \$19,000 USD and after this visit we expect to see 20 – 30 visitors in the next 8-12 months. These key influencers will create bigger volumes of golf tourists over the next 2-5 years.

We forge relationships with the key clubs in our most critical golf tourism markets and we have the distinct advantage of being able to talk directly to golfers where they congregate, at their golf club.

What does golf look like in 15 years time?

From my perspective, unless we innovate and change we will find some areas will slowly die. We have too much golf in some areas and not enough in others. Instead of 5-6 average clubs in an area we will likely see 2-3 quality clubs in the area through amalgamation and investment. We need quality over quantity. I think that the Golf Tourism numbers will continue to grow but that membership numbers may dwindle over time.

What have you read or who/what has influenced you as a person and a leader? And what was the key learning?

Initially my American upbringing gave me some perspective of how much we take for granted here in New Zealand. I have met some amazing people in the New Zealand golf industry and have certainly learnt a lot from them all. However 3 people are still key influencers for me from the early days of the Golf tourism project Norm Thompson – who gets the big picture of what we are trying to achieve, Sir John Key – who saw what we had available in the golf industry just sitting there already developed just needing to find a way to harness it and Greg Turner – who was constantly in Sir John Key's ear about the golf tourism initiative and the opportunities available in New Zealand.

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