



## LOOKING AFTER VISITORS

Ray Burniston suggests ways to make your visitors welcome.

Secretary At Work: Reviewed January 2012

Recently we received correspondence from a person who complained bitterly about the way his party was treated when they visited a well-known club as visitors. I do not intend to go into their complaints, which are best addressed, to the club.

However, there is little doubt that the welcome or not that persons get in visiting clubs can vary considerably. In many cases clubs ask for substantial green fees for a day's golf and as such the visitor deserves to be given a reasonable return for his money. Some of the complaints could well be categorised as follows.

1. **Tees** - When paying the green fee, no mention is made that temporary tees or winter mats are the norm for the day. Players accept that during the winter months there will be restrictions but they should be informed before payment. Unfortunately at many courses the tee of the day is a considerable distance back at many holes. One club charges an extra £5 if the players wish to play of the back (white) tees. I am told that only about 10% of visitors pay this but the option is there. If you are going to offer the option you need to ascertain the handicaps of those playing so as to avoid players using the medal tees on a difficult course whose handicap is say 15 or above. You also need to have tees of a sufficient size to accommodate additional play.
2. **Greens** - Too often you hear of visitors playing a course and finding they are on temporary greens or they are being top dressed or similar. They should always be advised of this before paying their dues.
3. **Facilities for visitors** - If your club encourages and has a lot of visitors then the locker room facilities should be of a standard to match. Many clubs have a separate locker room for their members and the visitors changing room is to put it mildly a disgrace. You want to encourage visitors to change and then use the bar and catering areas so it is important to provide them with a decent changing room. Some clubs today provide lockers in their visitors changing room, which can be hired out for the day.
4. **Visiting Parties** - Your Course Manager and staff should be informed in advance of visiting parties so that they can plan their work. This is to avoid staff getting stuck in the middle of a large party.
5. **Starting times** - If you have two starting points then try to avoid having them both taken up at popular times. Often the visiting party starts at one tee and the members at the other one. Hopefully this avoids too many complaints. Some clubs have a strict policy with 'members only' starting until perhaps 9.30 in the morning and between 12.00 to 1.30 in the afternoon. Make sure you inform any visitors of this rule so that they are aware when

deciding their starting times. All tee reservations should be announced well in advance and if you have a web site keep a special page for events which you can up-date direct from your office. Make sure you include your web site address in all your correspondence including leaflets.

6. **Course Rangers** - If you employ them they can be very helpful to visitors in seeing they keep up with the field. A little tact and diplomacy can very quickly speed up the field when pointed out by a sympathetic course ranger. Make sure they have clear instructions of the part they are expected to play.
7. **Matches** - Never allow four ball matches in societies unless they are playing a genuine fourball better ball and instructions are given that you must pick up if you are out of the hole. If playing individual medals or stablefords then stick to no more than three ball matches.
8. **Competitions** - Texas scrambles, shot gun starts or other such competitions are best avoided for visitors unless they have the course to themselves.
9. **Encouraging visitors** - The policy of the club is to give them a good day so that hopefully they will spread the word and come back again.
10. **Professional** - Make sure that they are aware of all visiting parties. If they collect the green fees through the shop then they must be informed of any special factors such as courtesy rounds and dress code.
11. **Casual visitors** - Never forget the casual visitors who may turn up in twos or a four. Providing you have room on the course for them they can be a very useful source of income and invariably they are golfers of a reasonable standard who will cause no problems.
12. **Certificates** - Many clubs insist on some sort of handicap/club membership certificate. This should be clearly set out in your literature to avoid arguments. Some discretion has to be used at times. Remember that there are Associate Members of the EG and members of the Golf Club - Great Britain who will have handicaps. Although these are not official CONGU ones they should be accepted for casual visitors who wish to play your course.
13. **Car Parking** - When attending a regional meeting, I remember visiting a Club in the London area some years ago and finding the visitors' car park was some distance away from the main club car park. It was unlit and there were piles of broken glass from car windows, which had been broken into on previous days. Hardly the sort of place to encourage you to leave your car! This club at this time charged £85 for a green fee and although no club will give an assurance on security in the car park, at least they should use some of the money they take to provide the basics. If the car park is a problem at your club, then try to tackle it. There are many ways this can be done.
14. **Society Income** - If your club is trying to build up good society income then you may need an assistant whose role will be to look after each visiting party on their day at the club. This certainly will be justified if your income from this source is substantial (ie nearly as much or even more than your annual subscriptions).

*Ray Burniston 2001*

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