

# Discover Poland

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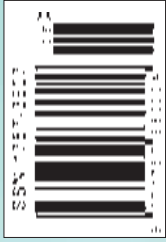
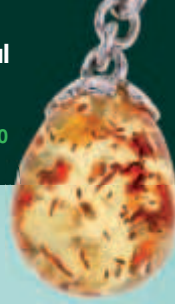
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# What's Your Sport? - Play in Poland



# Golf: “The Future is Bright for Golf in Poland”



Poland is a great destination for the keen golfer. There are some excellent courses in Poland, many of which have been designed by some of the world’s leading golf course architects, and which boast world-class facilities.

**W**illiam Siwek, President of Gdańsk Golf and Country Club in Postołowo talks to Discover Poland about the growing popularity of golf in Poland.

**You have a background in engineering - how did you end up in the golf industry?**

“After graduating from the Technical University of Gdańsk, I moved to Germany, where I set up an engineering consultancy bureau, ship supplier and

ship broker. Following the lead of some of the major ship builders in Europe, I relocated to Cyprus, where I continued to run the business. During this time abroad, I found myself making regular visits back to Gdańsk, to catch up with old friends. It was during one of these trips that a good friend took me to visit a new golf club called Gdańsk Golf and Country Club, which was being built some 32 km south of the city of Gdańsk. I became a mem-

ber of the club in 1992 when the course only had 13 holes.

The initial investors were two couples from Sweden, who decided to build a championship caliber golf course in Poland in 1989, before the anti-communist revolution. They engaged the British-born golf architect, Jeremy Turner, who had been recommended to them by the Swedish Golf Association. After seeing the land for the first time, Jeremy fell in love with it and knew that

the land’s many natural contours would provide for an incredible setting for his first design in Poland.

The land selected for the golf course integrated the remains of an abandoned gravel pit which provided excellent natural features to construct some dramatic golf holes. Jeremy said to the investors when first laying eyes on the site: “Wow... this course could be a Rolls Royce... but can you afford to build it properly?” The



investors said “Yes” however two years into the project the two couples ran out of money after building only 13 holes.

The search for investors to save the project began in 1993. I was one of many people to have received an offer to invest in the project. The search for investors continued for a further two years. In 1995, the situation became dire, as there wasn't even a single drop of petrol to power the lawn mowers, and the grass on the greens had grown too tall. A dramatic call from the Swedes to save the course convinced me to take control of the project on 10 October 1995. It was simply too good a piece of land to let the course fade away.

Several people who had seen the course and the land identified for the remaining five holes and who also were familiar with golf throughout Europe, told me that the potential for the course subject to us finishing the project as per Jeremy's drawings was that it could achieve Top 100 status in Europe.

Naturally there were heavy objections from my wife Gaby, who knew the scope of the work ahead. Additionally, land investments in Poland were limited back in 1995, and it was for these two reasons that the negotiations to purchase the project took 3 days and 2 nights. In the end, Gaby told me, “It's your decision!”

The golf course was completed in 1997, and the club house was opened in June 1997, one day before a big international golf tournament, the Hansa Cup. The rest is history...”

#### How popular is golf in Poland?

“Back in 1993, there was a total of 50 registered golfers

in Poland, a country of some 40 million people. At that time, there were three golf courses in existence: Warsaw Golf Club, Amber Baltic in Międzyzdroje and Gdańsk Golf & Country Club. Those three clubs came together to form the Polish Golf Union in 1993.

Today, there are approximately 3,000 registered golfers and an additional 5,000 non-registered players. There are new golf development projects in every part of Poland, and the numbers of golfers is increasing rapidly, especially during the past two years. The prospects are good for the future,

especially when you bear in mind that we started from zero just 15 years ago.”

#### What can you tell us about those early days of golf in Poland?

“They were very tough times. There were very few golfers at that time, and the local authorities ▶

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# Sport in Poland

☒ were against us because they did not understand the game and what it represented. In the beginning, the attitude towards golf in Poland was very negative. The general perception was that it was an exclusive game for rich, lazy people, driving buggies and smoking cigars. It is amazing how times have changed, and how the improved economy of Poland has helped to bring so many new people to the sport."

## What was the initial inspiration behind Gdańsk Golf and Country Club?

"Matti Idman, Kony Karmelitow and their wives, the two Swedish couples that I mentioned previously, saw the golf boom in Sweden at the end of the 1980s, and felt that there were going to be some big changes in Europe. The Solidarity achievements of Poland provided a new opportunity to transfer Europe's golf culture to a post-communist Poland. Sadly, both founders Matti Idman and Kony

Karmelitow died a few years ago though their vision will never be forgotten."

## How long did it take to design and build Gdańsk Golf and Country Club?

"This is something of an open-ended story. Construction on the golf course began in 1989 and still today remains a work in progress. Like all works of art, there are always some minor improvements to be done. In the end, it is a labour of love."

## In terms of facilities, how does Gdańsk Golf & Country Club compare to the more popular golf clubs in Europe?

"I feel that our facilities are on par with golf clubs in Sweden and Germany. We are in the process of looking for investors to help us realise the full potential for Gdańsk Country Club and Golf Resort. We have completed the master plan with an award winning master planning company from the United States



– our future plans include a our star hotel, over 700 single family and multi-family residential units, a host of on-site amenities including a spa, sports club, community and business centres along with a number of other commercial venues."

## Gdańsk Golf & Country Club has welcomed a number of golfers from Western Europe and Scandinavia – what attracts them to Postolowo?

"Apart from the world-class golf experience, there are excellent shopping outlets. Many of the branded products offered in other European countries are actually produced in Poland and as a result, are less expensive to purchase in Poland. It is also inexpensive to fly to Poland as there are several inexpensive flights from the United Kingdom, Germany and Scandinavia directly to Gdańsk airport. The golf course is located 32km down the motorway from the airport, a drive that takes just twenty minutes.

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And of course, we couldn't talk about this part of Poland without mentioning the nightlife in Sopot, with the legendary SPATiF bar, where the fun does not start until after midnight – just don't book your tee time too early for morning after!"

**What is the most common comment or feedback from golfers from Western Europe and Scandinavia when they visit Gdańsk**

**Golf & Country Club for the first time?**

"They are all surprised. They don't expect this level of quality in a country like Poland. They all say that this is the best value for money golf experience in Europe."

**Compared to Portugal and Scotland for instance, Poland is perhaps not the first place that you think of when it comes to golf**

**destinations – in what way do you think that this situation will change in the future?**

"There is only one issue to be resolved for Poland to obtain the status of a proper golf destination. The government must formerly recognise golf as a sport and remove the ground taxation on golf courses. The government currently continues to tax golf courses as if they were automotive factories. This ground taxation must be changed in order for the game to survive in Poland. The current ground taxation laws are ridiculous because they are disproportionate to the level of revenue that can be achieved in running a golf course as a business. It is an issue that the Polish Golf Union is working hard to correct."

**How do you see the future of golf in Poland? Will more and more Poles take it up? Will we see new clubs emerging across the country?**

"The future is bright for golf in Poland. I am certain that once

we resolve some of the growing pains, like educating the government on the business model and removing the ground taxation, the game will continue to flourish and grow. Our love for the game is just beginning and Poland is only just starting to write its own golfing history." ■

## Further Information

For further information on Gdańsk Golf & Country Club, visit [www.golf.com.pl](http://www.golf.com.pl)

## Map



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