

# GOLF IN POLAND

In our continued series on Golfing options in Poland, Declan Brennan visited the Gdansk and Olsztyn region for Irish Golf World.

Sierra Golf Club



## INTRODUCTION

My second trip to Poland in a relatively short period of time took me to the Gdansk and Olsztyn Region to sample the golfing delights in northern Poland. Our Ryanair flight landed in Gdansk Lech Walesa International Airport and from there our host Bogdan Becla, Director of the Polish National Tourist Office took us on a short walking tour of Sopot. Had I not known that our flight was destined for Poland I could have been forgiven for thinking that we were on the French Riviera! Sopot is probably one of Poland's best-known and popular summer resorts in the Baltic Region. The "Gdansk in Your Pocket City Guide" tells me that Sopot's reputation started with the building of a bath house and spa by a returned French doctor in Napoleon's army.

Like Gdansk, Sopot was originally part of the German Empire and later as part of the Free City of Gdansk. It is the summer home and playground for many of Europe's ruling classes. I believe that Kaiser Wilhelm the Second had a summer home here and I can well see why. The principal city Gdansk too has had a very chequered history. It is strategically the gateway into northern Poland. To say that Gdansk had many masters is an understatement. For example Gdansk was :- Capital of a Pomeranian Duchy (1215–1271); Monastic State of the Teutonic Knights (1308–1454); part of the Kingdom of Poland (1454/66–1793); in the Kingdom of Prussia (1793–1806); Napoleonic Free City of Danzig in the Kingdom of Prussia (1815–1919); Free City (1920–939), World War 2 (1939–1945).

Gdansk in more modern times will I believe be always associated with Lech Walesa and his Solidarity Movement. He was originally employed as an electrician in the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk in 1967. At that time Poland was under Communist rule. Solidarity was formed by Lech Walesa in August 1980 at the Lenin Shipyards in Gdansk. It eventually became the first independent trade union in a Soviet bloc country. Solidarity was a broad, non-violent, anti-communist social movement that at its height had in excess of 9 million members. There is little doubt that Solidarity made a massive contribution to the fall of communism.

In 1983 Lech Walesa was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace and in 1990 he was sworn in as President of a reborn independent Poland, democratically elected in a General Election.

## SIERRA GOLF CLUB

After our short sojourn in Sopot, that in my estimation can rival many of the big Riviera hot spots we made our way to the Sierra Golf Club, which is situated in Petkowice and is approximately 45 km from Gdansk Airport. It is an 18-hole, Par 72, parkland course. The club boasts 26 covered driving bays with a 300 metre range. It has putting, pitching and chipping areas. Sierra was designed by the Scottish Golf Architect Cameron Sinclair. The club is proud to publicise the fact that it has 38 golf carts with a very sophisticated "Golf GPS" system. This device has an 11 inch screen and Wi-Fi communication. This system shows maps, distances, players locations, results, information and advices. You also have the facility via this system to order remotely food and drink at the clubhouse. It enables players talk to club personnel to advise of storm or other emerging situations.

On arrival at the Sierra we were introduced to the club personnel and shortly thereafter a tray full of glasses with sparkling champagne was offered to us. A very hospitable welcome to the Sierra Golf Club.

The Sierra Golf Club is a beautifully laid out parkland course. If I was asked to highlight a couple of holes on this course they would be holes 5, 13 and 16.

Hole 5, Par 5 index 15 measures 436m from the yellow markers. There is an out of bounds all the way to the green along the left fairway. If you happen to feel lucky why not take a short cut over the trees and if successful you then have the prospect of reaching the green with your second shot. Needless to say an accurate tee shot is key to set this up. Without a doubt this a real risk/reward hole and realistically the rewards will only go to the long and accurate long hitters.

Hole 13 is a Par 4, Index 12 and 319m from the yellow markers. The hole is interesting being a dogleg to the right and water to the right also. I don't know why but the water appears to have a magnetic attraction for golf balls! The ideal shot off the tee is to the left part of the fairway, but beware of 2 bunkers that are strategically placed close to the "elbow" of the dogleg ready to gobble up balls that land in that area. Should you manage to navigate all those dangers it should leave you with a relatively easy shot to a two tiered green.





Tokary Golf Club

I found hole 16 to be a relatively long Par 3 Index 2 measuring 155 m from the yellow markers and a very interesting hole. The realists would suggest that you play a lay-up tee shot to the right side of the green. My take on it however is, even if you are a high handicapper, is go for it even though there is water to the left of the green and an elongated bunker protecting the right side of the green. Fortune favours the brave!

I was really impressed with the quality of the greens on the Sierra Golf Course. The fairways too are in immaculate condition and I find it difficult to remember seeing such a diversity of trees and shrubs on a course of this nature.

The green keeping and course staff at Sierra are to be highly commended for an outstanding presentation. The Clubhouse is very generously proportioned and leaves little to be desired. The decor is English in style and within you will find Bar/Restaurant, pool table, professional golf simulators and high end locker rooms and showers.

Golfers who would like to spend a few days in or around the Sierra Golf Club could rent one of the apartments that are situated next to the 7th hole and is surrounded by the dense woods of the Tricity.

Landscape Park. There are 1, 2 and 3 bed apartments – 38–78 sq. metres, fully-furnished and well-appointed. There is a garage space or parking lot and good to note the apartments are but a short walk from the club house.

## TOKARY GOLF CLUB

Tokary Golf Club, situated in Przodkowo was established in 2001 and is approximately 8 km from Gdansk Airport. Although the course, itself on more than 100 acres of farmland is reasonably free of trees and water hazards, there are a few, but it is surrounded by massive forests. There are differences of some 40 m, 44 yards between some of the tee boxes and greens but it is possible to see the fairway and green from every hole. Taking an overview of the course it would be very easy to suggest that the fairways are broad and flat. This perception however will be dispelled when you start to play the course. In its own unique way Tokary is quite a challenging course and demands that you keep focused on the job on hand.

Holes on this course that demand full concentration, not to mention accuracy are holes numbers 1, 2 and 7. Hole number 1, Par 4, Index 2 measures 321 m from the

yellow tee markers. You need to be completely focused with your tee shot, as I was quick to realise; there is a water hazard approximately 100 metres forward of the tee box that will put paid to any poorly struck tee shots. The danger on this hole does not end there – your approach to the green has water to the right and left of the green and to add to the mix there are 2 bunkers strategically placed at the rear of the green to take care of any approach shots played with too much club. Suffice it to say that this opening hole necessitates absolute accuracy and full concentration, otherwise you are likely to come to grief.

Hole number 2, Par 4, Index 13 is 281 metres from the yellow tee box and is a dogleg to the left. While it is possible and no doubt desirable to "cut the corner", this tactic means you must be very accurate as any stray tee shot will end up in the lateral water hazard that runs along the left hand part of the fairway. My recommendation, for what it is worth, would be to attempt to place your tee shot just beyond the "elbow" of the dogleg, approximately 170 metres, but be warned there is a bunker right on the "elbow", so accuracy once more is the key word. Assuming you get part 1 completed without mishap, you should have a relatively easy approach shot to the green that may well produce the hoped for birdie or at least a par on your scorecard.

Hole number 7 is a Par 5, Index 4, is 530 metres from the yellow tee box and is the longest hole on the course. On the surface it appears to be a relatively straightforward hole but you should remember that it is not Index 4 for nothing! My strategy would suggest a 3 or 5 wood off the tee to ensure that your tee shot does not find the water hazard that lies on both sides of the narrow neck to the wider part of the fairway. The big hitters will more than likely take on the challenge and if successful it should be possible for them to attempt to play a fairway wood and a mid iron approach to the green to give them a reasonable opportunity for the birdie.

When you play Tokary do not be surprised if you misread some putts. To the naked eye most of the greens look relatively flat but there is no doubt but they have quite a few "invisible" breaks, so beware!

Within the Tokary golf club complex is a covered Driving Range, Putting Green and Golf Academy. The clubhouse has a Pro Shop, Golf Equipment Rental Facilities, 2 Full Swing Golf Simulators and Catering Facilities. The mention of catering facilities reminds me that we were given a number of typical Polish dishes for lunch. The friendly catering staff ensured that we had a most enjoyable meal after our round of golf.

That evening we were taken on a walking tour of Gdansk. Before I ever reached Gdansk the extent of my knowledge of that city was that it had a large shipyard and it was there that Lech Walesa started the Solidarity Movement that had, without any doubt, seismic consequences for all of Eastern Europe. I had expected to see a large sprawling industrial city. My perception was miles wide of the mark! Gdansk is situated in a most strategic position, both geographically and politically. Politically it changed hands on a number of occasions; it was fought over by Poland, Germany, Russia and Sweden and on no less than twice was it a state in its own right. Let us not forget 2 of the key moments in the 20th century took place here – the first shots of World War 2 were fired here and approximately 40 years later the first signs of the collapse of the Iron Curtain appeared courtesy of Lech Walesa and the Solidarity Movement. The old town of Gdansk has been beautifully and faithfully rebuilt and is a must see attraction for visitors to this region.

Later that evening we had a sumptuous meal in the waterfront Restaurant Gdanski Bowke.

## SAND VALLEY GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB

Saturday morning saw us at the Sand Valley Golf and Country Club. It is a Par 72 measuring 6,529m from the back markers, 5945m from the blues, 5552m from the green tee markers and it measures 4742m for the ladies.



Sand Valley Golf and Country Club

Polska

POLISH  
NATIONAL  
TOURIST  
OFFICE

Move Your Imagination



Mazury Golf and Country Club Naterki



Sand Valley Golf and Country Club is approximately 1 hours drive from Gdansk Airport and is 80km SE of Gdansk City. It was opened in 2009 and the golf course architects involved in this very imposing project were Lassi Pekka Tilander and Tony Ristola. Although Sand Valley is not built close or even near the sea, it has to my mind most of the characteristics and attributes of a typical links course. I am reliably informed that the greens in Sand Valley are the biggest in Poland and one of the largest in Europe. The course has been routed over a naturally sandy site that encompasses a 100 hectare (approx. 250 acres) site. It was a prime "candidate" for a pure links type layout and as far as I am concerned the golf course architects achieved their goal.

Sand Valley has a large grass tee Golf Range, a 6 hole Academy Golf Course and a Putting Green. The Golf Academy commenced business in 2008 and since then the club has had a big number of juniors from the local community and these juniors are encouraged to play Sand Valley courtesy of free access to the Academy and Golf Range for those under 16 years of age.

All of the holes on the Sand Valley course are challenging in one way or another. The holes that most appealed to me were holes 3, 5 and 16.

Hole 3, Par 3, Index 13 that measures 115 metres from the blue tees is the shortest

“ There is no doubt about it but Poland has more than a few gems of golf courses for every standard of golfer from the dedicated low handicap to the plus 18's. The accommodation is first class and the Polish people are most hospitable ”

hole on the course. Club selection will take at least the following 2 aspects into consideration: – (a) wind direction and (b) pin position. You do not want to be too long, particularly if the flag is towards the front. This hole is one that most golfers will target as a very possible birdie chance.

The 5th hole, Par 4, Index 17 is 275 metres from the blues. The tee shot at this hole is a semi-blind one and the preferred landing area would be right of the bunker situated left of the green. You will see that the green on this hole is very heavily contoured so a bump and run shot towards the flag will probably work best on this terrain.

Lest I forget it I must mention hole number 10. It measures 179 metres from the blue markers, is Index 10 and Par 3. The Sand Valley strokesaver has some very definite recommendations for golfers playing this hole – "Don't miss left. Don't miss right. And keep the wind in mind". This obviously is a hole that demands to be treated with the greatest respect!

Hole number 16 should also be highlighted. It is 270 metres from the blues, is a Par 4 and Index 16. The perceived wisdom on this Par 4 hole is to aim at the flag so that your tee shot does not make the water on the left. Believe me there is more room on the right than appears from your vantage point on the tee box. The advice you will get from the locals is – "around the green leave your wedge in your bag". If you manage to follow all that advice to the letter it should set you up for a birdie or a par at minimum.

Once more the hospitality afforded to us on our visit to the Sand Valley Golf Course and Country Club was of the highest order and a huge debt of gratitude is due to the Antti Pohjonen proprietor and the other management personnel at Sand Valley.

Sand Valley has a number of 2, 3 and 6 room villas for rental. All the villas have modern bedrooms, bathrooms, and come fully equipped with modern kitchen, sauna, wireless internet, TV and fireplace. Some of the villas have their own dedicated swimming pool. These villas are available to golfers who intend to spend some time in this area.

Sand Valley Golf and Country Club has the added advantage of being suitable for conferences, team building, corporate events, golf tournament catering and even weddings.

After a most enjoyable round of golf on the Sand Valley course we made our way to the Willa Port Hotel in Ostroda. We were treated to an authentic Polish meal at a nearby restaurant on the waterfront and the Polish delicacies were washed down by very palatable Polish beers.

## MAZURY GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB NATERKI

Mazury Golf and Country Club is situated in Naterki in the countryside near Olsztyn. Mazury was designed by the Hawtree Ltd golf architects firm. This company has been responsible for designing no less than 340 golf courses in Europe alone, 23 of them in Ireland. Hawtree Ltd has the distinction of being the world's longest continuous golf architectural practice, founded in 1912 and has the added accolade of having been one of only 8 firms short listed to bid for the design of the Rio 2016 Olympic Golf Course. Mazury Golf Club, Par 72 measures 6,507m from the back tees, 6093 from the whites, 5,652 from yellow and 5,045 from the Ladies red tees. This is a parkland layout that utilises its location in the middle of the Warmia and Mazury Region to the best advantage. This has been achieved by emphasising the beauty of the area while at the same time causing only minimal interference with the natural surroundings. This is one of the hallmarks of a great architectural firm. This course is considered by some to be one of the most interesting and difficult in Poland.

I found this course somewhat difficult to navigate. On the surface it appears to be benign but there are many challenges to test golfers of all categories. There is no doubt about but when Martin Hawtree was designing this course he had in mind to reward good shots and punish the not so good.

The holes on this course I found to be interesting and challenging too were 2, 5 and 18.

Hole 2, Par 3, Index 11 plays 170 metres off the yellow markers. If you fail to hit your tee shot crisply you could easily find yourself playing a provisional ball as there is water towards the left front of the green, approximately 125 metres from the tee box, that may well claim your tee shot. If you manage to keep your ball dry there are no less than 5 bunkers, 2 to the front right of the green and the remaining 3 guard the right side of the green to claim any wayward tee shots. Suffice it to say that club selection and accuracy are paramount and getting it correct could well earn you a birdie or a par at minimum.

Hole 5 is next on my list. It is a Par 4, Index 5 and measures 344 metres from the yellow markers. The shape of this hole is dogleg left and has water to be avoided on the right and left fairways. An accurate drive of 200 metres + should take you towards the "elbow" of the dogleg and leave you with a midiron shot of some 140 metres to the middle of the green, the approach to which is guarded right and left with many trees. The attraction of this hole for me is that it demands absolute concentration and need I mention accuracy off the tee box.



Gdansk Golf and Country Club – Postolowo



## GDANSK GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB – POSTOLOWO

On our last day in the Gdansk and Olsztyn Region we visited the Postolowo Gdansk Golf and Country Club. Postolowo is situated 26 km from the city of Gdansk. Postolowo Golf Course was designed by the British born golf architect Jeremy Turner and Postolowo opened in 1992. Jeremy Turner spends a lot of his time in Sweden and he has designed many courses in both Sweden and Norway. Jeremy Turner's philosophy in designing a golf course is that a golf course should in every sense belong to the landscape in which it is situated. Jeremy Turner was no doubt assisted in the location insofar as Postolowo area itself is blessed with a sandy soil. The area is also populated with beech, oak and pine trees. Jeremy Turner made the best possible use of a magnificent lake in the heart of the course and some smaller ones as well. Postolowo has staged a number of very prestigious tournaments including the Polish Open in 1997, '98 and 2007 and the European Youth Team Championship in 2002. In 2008 and 2009 Golf Digest ranked it as the best course in Poland and in the top 100 golf courses in Continental Europe. It is also the longest Golf course in Poland and second longest in Europe, measuring 7,101 metres (7,770 yards) from the Championship tees. Postolowo has a Golf Academy, Driving Range with 16 bays, Putting Green, Pitching Area and Practice Bunker.

Jeremy Turner has used the water within the confines of the course to the best effect and that is very apparent on the back 9 where the water comes into play on no less than 7 holes. The holes that grabbed my attention were holes 3, 15 and 16.

Hole 3, Par 3, Index 12 that measures 174 metres from the blues is very well guarded by no less than 5 bunkers, 3 on the left of the green and 2 more on the right of the green. The strokesaver indicates that the moniker on this hole is "One Club More". Did I take that on board? No – I finished in one of the bunkers on the right of the green! The moral of the story is – the strokesaver is rarely wrong.

Hole 15, Par 4, Index 3 measures 375 metres from the blue markers. A good drive of 200m+ should leave you with an approach shot over water to the green that is strategically placed at the end of a peninsula. This hole incidentally is called "Peninsula". This hole is a real test of nerves and skill.

Hole 16 is another Par 3, Index 11. It is longish 186 metres from the blue tee markers and you may well favour a 3 wood or maybe even a driver to ensure that you manage to carry the large expanse of water between tee box and green. If you would like to take on a real challenge and have no fear of water why not try this hole from the Championship tee. That means your tee shot will have to carry more than 200 metres over water!

## CONCLUSION

During our 5 days in the Gdansk and Olsztyn Region we sampled courses that I would dearly love to play again in the future. There is no doubt about it but Poland has more than a few gems of golf courses for every standard of golfer from the dedicated low handicap to the plus 18's. The accommodation is first class and the Polish people are most hospitable.

## FACT BOX/USEFUL INFORMATION

**Direct low - cost flight, Ryanair from Dublin to Gdansk. (approx. 2.40 hours)**

Sierra Golf Club: [www.sierragolf.pl](http://www.sierragolf.pl)

Tokary Golf Club: [www.tokarygolf.pl](http://www.tokarygolf.pl)

Sand Valley Golf and Country Club: [www.sandvalley.pl](http://www.sandvalley.pl)

Mazury Golf and Country Club - Naterki: [www.mazurygolf.pl](http://www.mazurygolf.pl)

Gdansk Golf and Country Club - Postolowo: [www.postolowo.com](http://www.postolowo.com)

Warmia and Masuria travel portal: [www.mazury.travel](http://www.mazury.travel)

Olsztyn travel portal: [www.visit.olsztyn.eu](http://www.visit.olsztyn.eu)

Pomorskie region travel portal: [www.pomorskie.travel](http://www.pomorskie.travel)

Willa Port Hotel: [www.willaport.pl](http://www.willaport.pl)

Marina Golf Club Hotel: [www.marinagolfclub.pl](http://www.marinagolfclub.pl)

Karczma Jana Restaurant: [www.karczmajana.pl](http://www.karczmajana.pl)

Gdanski Bowke: [www.gdanskibowke.com](http://www.gdanskibowke.com)

**For more information on Poland please visit: [www.poland.travel](http://www.poland.travel)**

To my mind Hole 18, Par 4, Index 4 measuring 349 metres off the yellow tee markers is a very good and demanding finishing hole. If you are fond of water you will love this hole! It has water down the left hand side of the fairway in no less than 3 separate locations. The first section of water will gobble up any mishit shots to the left, and should you hit your tee shot cleanly you will need to be extra careful not to direct it towards the water that is further along the left side of the fairway. Should you manage to navigate without ending up in water number 1 or 2 you are then confronted with a water hazard, larger than the green that guards the green to the front and left. The portion of the green to the right, not bounded by water has a "sentinel" in the shape of a bunker guarding the right side of the green. This hole alone emphasises the fact that the course architect always had in mind – Reward the good and Punish the bad!

All in all Mazury is a very challenging and well laid out golf course that is well worth a visit.

After golf that evening we were taken to Olsztyn and given a guided tour of the city. Olsztyn, like a lot of cities in this part of Poland has a chequered history. Olsztyn is the capital of Warminsk–Mazurskie and has a population in excess of 175,000 and was founded in the 14th century. For quite some time Olsztyn part of Prussia, being under German rule until 1945 and then the Warmian capital was returned to Poland. One of Olsztyn most famous inhabitants is the astronomer Nicolas Copernicus. Needless to remark Olsztyn has a lovely bronze seated figure of Copernicus. There is a legend claiming, that stroking Copernicus' nose brings luck and it is plain to see that his nose has been stroked many times.

When our walking tour finished we were taken for dinner to a Mazurian Style restaurant, Karczma Jana, courtesy of Justyna Szostek, Director of The Warminsko - Mazurska Tourist Board, where once more we were treated to a sumptuous meal and we were introduced to the delights of Polish Vodka that is distilled from potatoes. Wow what a treat and absolutely no after effects the following morning!

We slept at the beautiful and luxurious Hotel Marina Golf Club near Olsztyn, placed at the picturesque Wulpinskie Lake peninsula.

Gdansk Golf and Country Club – Postolowo

