AMEREXPERIENCE
GOLF™

A RESEARCH-INFORMED FIELD HANDBOOK

THE GOLF COURSE-FIT HANDBOOK

Choose the course, tees and Course Handicap that fit your game and your trip.

AMEREXPERIENCE GOLF™
Lassi Pensikkala | Economist and Digital Publisher
Edition 1.0 • November 2026

Evidence, official handicap guidance and travel-tested questions—made practical.

START HERE

The best fit is personal

A great golf round begins with the challenge that fits the player and the day—not simply the destination's reputation or longest tee.

THE DESTINATION

01 Course fit

Choose a course whose design, condition, access, price and facilities fit this trip.

THE PLAYING LENGTH

02 Tee fit

Use your actual 7-iron distance, then account for course difficulty and the kind of challenge you want.

THE SCORE CONTEXT

03 Handicap fit

After choosing course and tees, convert your Handicap Index into a Course Handicap for that rated tee set.

KEY DISTINCTION

The Course Handicap does not select the tee. The tee is chosen for playing fit; Course Handicap then adjusts your strokes for that course and tee.

BEFORE YOU COMPARE COURSES

- Your current Handicap Index, if you maintain one.
- Your typical total 7-iron distance (carry plus roll), not your best-ever shot.
- Each candidate tee's yardage, par, Course Rating and Slope Rating.
- Your trip priorities: walking or cart, group mix, available time, budget and desired challenge.

EVIDENCE SNAPSHOT

What the evidence supports

Several evidence streams point in the same direction: fit the course and tee to the golfer, then use the handicap system to make scores portable.

50%+

of male golfers and about 75% of female golfers in USGA analyses were playing tees longer than recommended by the tee-fit systems evaluated.

USGA COURSE / SCORE ANALYSIS [1]

7-iron

USGA's Best Tees approach uses 7-iron distance and course playability as practical inputs—not age alone.

USGA GUIDANCE [2-4]

COURSE CHOICE [10]

A course is more than yardage

A study of 155 golfers ranked course condition first in course choice, followed by green and cart fees, layout, tee-time access and travel distance. This is one older U.S. sample, not a worldwide demand ranking.

TRIP SATISFACTION [11]

The whole trip matters

Golf-traveler research found resort-experience attributes contributed to overall satisfaction, which was associated with repurchase intention. The study is older, so use it as a planning lens, not a current market-size claim.

Context, not a rule: Arccos's 2026 report found an average 50-yard driving-distance gap between male golfers in their teens and golfers in their 70s, while fairway-hit rates rose with age. Those tracking data describe group averages; they do not tell an individual which tee to play. [8]

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DECISION 1 / COURSE

Choose the course for the trip you want

A famous course can be a poor fit for a particular group, schedule or game. Compare the full playing and travel experience before you book.

CHECK	WHAT TO FIND OUT	WHY IT MATTERS
Rated tee options	Yardage, par, Course Rating and Slope Rating for each available tee set.	Lets you compare the actual playing challenge and calculate Course Handicap.
Course design	Forced carries, water, fairway widths, doglegs, green targets, rough and recovery options.	Two courses of similar yardage can create very different shots and difficulty.
Condition and season	Typical firmness, rough, maintenance, weather, wind and seasonal patterns.	Conditions affect playability and the value of the green fee.
Movement and time	Elevation, walking routes, cart rules, round length, transfers and time between rounds.	The scorecard distance is not the distance you walk or the time the day takes.
Trip logistics	Tee-time access, fees, rental clubs, hotel location, food and options for companions.	The trip succeeds through the whole itinerary, not only the golf holes.

HOW TO USE THIS

For each course, mark the factors that matter to your group. A course with a strong match on playing fit, tee access and practical logistics may deliver a better trip than a more famous but poorly matched option.

Course-selection research found that golfers weigh several attributes together. Condition, price, layout, tee-time availability and travel distance all entered the choice—not one yardage figure alone. [10]

DECISION 2 / TEE

Choose the tee you can enjoy today

The USGA’s Best Tees work uses total 7-iron distance as a practical starting point and also accounts for course playability and player preferences. [2–4]

01

Measure a typical 7-iron

Use a representative total distance—carry plus roll—from normal play or a reliable measured session. Avoid using your longest flushed shot.

02

Estimate a suitable course length

Enter your average 7-iron distance and the course configuration in the USGA Best Course Length Calculator. Treat the result as a starting point for comparing rated tees. [3]

03

Review the holes that decide the fit

Check forced carries, landing areas, approach-shot lengths, green targets, hazards and elevation. Course difficulty can justify choosing shorter or longer than distance alone suggests. [4]

04

Choose the experience you want

A relaxed holiday round, a serious test and a group competition can call for different choices. Pick the set that suits the round, then record the exact tee set for handicap purposes.

No age rule: USGA guidance does not assign a tee by age or gender. The golfer chooses recreational tees; tournament committees set competition tees. Let actual playing ability and course fit lead. [6]

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DECISION 2 / PLAYABILITY

Scorecard yardage is only one part of difficulty

The same posted length can play differently because of terrain, obstacles, course setup and the shot distances the layout demands.

TEE YARDAGE	COURSE DESIGN	CONDITIONS	PLAYER FIT
Distance on card	Carries, landing zones	Wind, firmness, rough	Shots you can play

Course Rating estimates the score a scratch golfer is expected to make from that tee. Slope Rating represents how much harder the course is for a bogey golfer relative to a scratch golfer. Together with par, they let the WHS convert a Handicap Index into a Course Handicap. [5, 7]

INSPECT THESE BEFORE BOOKING

FEATURE	QUESTION TO ASK
Forced carries	Can I carry the required distance with a normal, reliable shot—not a personal best?
Landing area	Is the landing zone wide enough for my typical dispersion? What happens on a miss?
Approach shots	Will the chosen tee leave a realistic club into greens, or long forced carries on par 3s?
Terrain	Are there steep slopes, long walks between greens and tees, or exposed areas in expected weather?
Course rating	Do the rating and slope correspond to the exact tee set I plan to play?

USGA playability guidance allows course difficulty—such as forced carries and demanding greens—to change the tee that best fits a golfer, even when scorecard yardage alone points elsewhere. [4]

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DECISION 3 / HANDICAP

Convert your index for the tee you selected

A Handicap Index is portable. Course Handicap translates it to the strokes needed for a particular rated course and tee set under the World Handicap System.

COURSE HANDICAP

HI × (Slope Rating ÷ 113) + (Course Rating − Par)

Use the unrounded values in the formula, then apply the WHS rounding rule. A calculator or the course's handicap table can do this for you. [5]

WORKED CALCULATION

INPUT	EXAMPLE
Handicap Index	18.0
Selected tee Slope Rating	128
Selected tee Course Rating / Par	70.8 / 72
Course Handicap	18.0 × (128 ÷ 113) + (70.8 − 72) = 19.19 → 19
Target score at handicap level	Par 72 + Course Handicap 19 = 91

WHS TERMS

Keep the terms separate

Handicap Index = your portable ability measure. Course Handicap = strokes for the course and tee. Playing Handicap = Course Handicap adjusted for the format or allowance in a competition.

The 91 is a handicap-level benchmark, not a promised score. If you post the round, select the exact rated tee played. If your golf federation uses a different system, follow its local handicap rules. [5, 6]

OPEN THE ONLINE CALCULATOR

Calculate your Course Handicap for your selected course and tee

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TRAVEL CONDITIONS

Travel changes both distance and effort

A course can play differently from home because of altitude, wind, ground conditions, heat and the route between holes. Include those factors in the trip plan.

+19.2 yd

Arccos reported this average distance gain for 10-handicap golfers at elevations of 5,000+ feet compared with sea level. It is a dataset estimate, not an individual guarantee.

ARCCOS 2026 REPORT [8]

13,145

Average steps in an 18-hole walking round in a 2007 study of 130 male golfers across three courses; cart riders averaged 6,280. Course layout changed walking totals.

SANDERS ET AL. [9]

TRAVEL-DAY CHECK

- Altitude: use local warm-up shots or reliable local advice to reset club choices. Do not change your Handicap Index because the ball flies differently.
- Wind and firmness: confirm the forecast and ask whether the fairways are firm, wet or running fast.
- Movement: ask about cart availability, walking distances, elevation and long green-to-tee transfers.
- Energy: plan realistic tee times and recovery between rounds, especially in heat or on hilly courses.

Why the scorecard can mislead: in the walking study, the minimum route through the course averaged about 1.25 times the published course playing distance. That finding came from three U.S. courses, but it is a useful reminder to check the actual route and terrain. [9]

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TRIP DESIGN

Build the day around the whole group

The most suitable destination is often the one where everyone can enjoy the day—even when golfers have different handicaps or one companion does not play.

GROUP FIT 01

Mixed handicaps

Choose a course with several rated tee sets. Each golfer can play a fitting tee and calculate an individual Course Handicap.

GROUP FIT 02

Playing together

For a competition, check the format, handicap allowance and any tee/par adjustments with the organizer. Do not invent a side calculation.

GROUP FIT 03

Golf plus holiday

Compare food, accommodation, local experiences and non-golf options alongside the course. Golf-traveler satisfaction research indicates resort experience matters, though its study is older. [11]

GROUP FIT 04

Simple logistics

Check the first tee time, airport or hotel transfer, club rental, cart booking and the gap before dinner or the next activity.

FOR A BETTER SHARED ROUND

Agree on the goal before booking: championship test, social holiday round or a mix. Then choose the course and tee options that make that goal possible for the group.

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TAKE THIS WITH YOU

The pre-booking course-fit checklist

Use this one-page screen for each course on your shortlist. It is a decision aid—not a validated score or a promise of a perfect round.

MY GAME TODAY

Handicap Index: _____ Home course / federation: _____

Typical total 7-iron distance: _____ Units: yards / metres

Walking, cart or either: _____ Desired challenge: _____

THE COURSE AND TEE

Exact tee set available and rated: _____

Yardage: _____ Course Rating: _____ Slope: _____ Par: _____

USGA course-length tool checked (if applicable): ☐ Yes ☐ No

Forced carries / narrow landing areas / difficult approaches: _____

Terrain, walking route, cart policy and expected conditions: _____

THE TRIP

Tee time and likely round duration: _____

Green fee, cart, rental clubs and transport costs: _____

Hotel / airport transfer and non-golf options for companions: _____

HANDICAP

Course Handicap for this exact tee set: _____ Target score benchmark: _____

For competition, format and Playing Handicap confirmed with organizer: ☐ Yes ☐ N/A

Decision: ☐ Best fit ☐ Possible with adjustments ☐ Not for this trip
Reason: _____

WORKED EXAMPLE

From course shortlist to first tee

A fictional example shows the order of decisions. The numbers below illustrate the WHS calculation; they are not a tee recommendation for every golfer with the same index.

Traveler profile Handicap Index 18.0 • Average 7-iron distance 140 yards • Social 18-hole round • Traveling with a mixed-handicap group

SHORTLIST QUESTION	COURSE A	COURSE B
Tee and yardage	Long tee, 6,900 yd	Rated tee, 6,100 yd
Course data	CR 74.1 / Slope 140 / Par 72	CR 70.8 / Slope 128 / Par 72
Layout note	Several long forced carries	Fewer forced carries; more recovery options
Trip note	Later tee time; cart limited	Suitable tee time; cart and rental available

Step 1 — Course and tee fit: Use the official length tool as a starting point, then compare the actual forced carries and layout. For this fictional social round, assume the traveler chooses Course B’s rated tee after checking those details.

Step 2 — Course Handicap: 18.0 × (128 ÷ 113) + (70.8 − 72) = 19.19, rounded to 19. At par 72, the WHS target-score benchmark is 91.

WHAT THIS EXAMPLE TEACHES

The Handicap Index alone did not select the tee. The traveler checked course fit first, selected a rated tee, and then calculated Course Handicap for that tee. The final choice still depends on personal preferences and actual course conditions.

USE THE EVIDENCE WELL

What we know—and what still needs judgment

A sound handbook separates official rules, measured observations and practical recommendations. That keeps the advice trustworthy across countries and player types.

EVIDENCE TYPE	WHAT IT CAN SUPPORT	WHAT IT DOES NOT PROVE
WHS rules and USGA guidance	How to calculate Course Handicap; recommended tee-fit inputs; official distinctions between rating, slope and par.	That one tee choice is optimal for every person or every course.
USGA course/score analysis	Many golfers select tees longer than recommendations based on the systems evaluated.	An exact universal tee length for a given age, sex or Handicap Index.
Golf travel and course-choice studies	Condition, price, layout, tee-time access, distance and resort experience can all matter.	Current global demand proportions; studies vary by country, year and sample.
Shot-tracking reports	Real-play patterns such as distance and fairway accuracy across age and handicap groups.	A causal claim that accuracy offsets distance for every older player.
This handbook’s checklist	A repeatable way to compare courses and tees before booking.	A scientifically validated numerical ‘fit score’ or guaranteed lower score.

Our standard: Use age as context, not a tee rule. Use actual playing distances and course difficulty to choose a tee. Use official course data to calculate Course Handicap. Then apply personal judgment to the travel day and the group.

SOURCES

Research and practical references

The numbered sources below support the handbook. Links are clickable in the PDF. Governing-body guidance is separated from empirical studies and commercial tracking reports.

[1] USGA · David Pierce (2022). Tee Options on Golf Courses: Supply, Demand and Opportunities. USGA Green Section Record. U.S. course and score data; tee-fit methods compared.

[2] USGA · David Pierce (2023). Helping Golfers Choose Their “Best Tees.” USGA Green Section Record. Tee selection work incorporating distance and golfer preferences.

[3] USGA. Best Course Length Calculator. Official tool using total 7-iron distance and course configuration.

[4] USGA. Use Golf Course Playability to Help Select Your Best Tee. Guidance on adjusting tee choice for course difficulty and obstacles.

[5] USGA. Course Handicap and Playing Handicap. World Handicap System definitions and calculation.

[6] USGA. FAQs: Playing from Forward Tees. No age-based tee mandate for recreational play.

[7] USGA (2024). Course Rating vs. Slope Rating. How course difficulty ratings work.

[8] Arccos Golf (2026). Annual Driving Distance Report. Tracking-data report using 2025 rounds and tee shots; observational, not a tee-selection rule.

[9] Sanders, C. M., Broker, J., Berning, J., and Subudhi, A. (2007). The Relationship Between Golf and Walking Benefits: A Pedometer-Based Exercise Assessment. Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise. DOI: 10.1249/01.MSS.0000274510.86518.F5.

[10] Won, D., Hwang, S.-H., and Kleiber, D. (2009). How Do Golfers Choose a Course? A Conjoint Analysis of Influencing Factors. Journal of Park and Recreation Administration. n=155.

[11] Petrick, J. F., and Backman, S. J. (2002). An Examination of the Determinants of Golf Travelers’ Satisfaction. Journal of Travel Research. DOI: 10.1177/004728750204000303.

[12] USGA (2023). The 7-Iron Solution. Tee-selection method and a reported pace-of-play result from one Florida club; single-site finding.

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A GOOD GOLF TRIP STARTS BEFORE THE FIRST TEE.

Choose the course.
Fit the tee.
Play the trip you came for.

AmerExperience Golf™ brings destination knowledge, research and a golfer's point of view together to help you plan with confidence.

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