



PGATM MAGAZINE

Instruction On the Go

Creating your own custom golf school for students is an excellent opportunity for PGA Professionals to increase travel and teaching business

By Don Jozwiak, Senior Editor

PGA Professionals who plan golf travel for their members or customers know that many of today's trips are multi-purpose getaways. Instead of just focusing on how much golf a group can play in the allotted time, golf trips now often serve as family getaways or couples vacations – where golf is just one of the many activities on the itinerary. Planning these trips is a chance for the PGA Professional to show his or her expertise outside the realm of golf, by finding side activities at spas, waterparks, sight-seeing attractions and other off-the-course pursuits.

There is, however, a strong market for trips that enable PGA Professionals to show their expertise in golf. While PGA Professionals often give a clinic or provide a tip or two during golf trips, some instructors regularly take students on trips that combine in-depth instruction on the lesson tee with on-course instruction. These vacations take their inspiration from golf schools, but involve the PGA Professional providing instruction that is a continuation of what the student was already working on at home.

“The students I travel with tell me that our trips are much better than going to a golf school,” says John Hafera, PGA director of instruction at Waters Landing Golf Park in Germantown, Md. *“A lot of times, a golf school is a great experience – but a student is working three or four days with an instructor who doesn't know their swing, has never seen them before and may never see them again. For the students I*

travel with, our instruction trips are usually part of an ongoing relationship. I've worked with them before, and I'll work with them again – and many of them have gone on multiple trips with me.”

Golf instruction-based travel is a more intense, sport-specific sort of travel than leisure travel that happens to include golf – Hafera calls his trips “total golf immersion,”



PGA Professional John Hafera (left) regularly takes students on instruction-based golf trips.

and the students are usually avid golfers. A growing number of facilities allow PGA Professionals to bring a group and use the practice facility or teaching area for their own private instruction. The Jim McLean Golf Academy at Doral Golf Resort and Spa in Miami is one example. The visiting PGA Professional can use the lesson tee on his own, or a member of the McLean staff can join the instruction to add a different perspective.

Visiting different facilities also allows PGA Professionals to take advantage of the unique instruction amenities and opportunities a facility may offer. That's what Hafera does when he takes groups to PGA Village in Port St. Lucie, Fla. Hafera and other PGA members are welcome to use everything the PGA Center for Golf Learning and Performance has at its disposal, from the TrackMan launch monitor to the fitness facilities, creating an instruction atmosphere that is more in-depth than golfers are used to at their home facilities.

In fact, Hafera got the idea to combine golf travel and instruction after a conversation with a representative from PGA Village on the floor of the PGA Merchandise Show a decade ago. He already had experience in running large golf trips, including vacations to Casa de Campo in the Dominican Republic with groups of 40 or more golfers. But Hafera saw the chance for PGA Professionals to use the PGA Village facilities as a chance to create more intimate, golf-specific travel experiences. He keeps his instruction travel to two or three golfers at a time so he can give them his full attention, and the group stays together in a condo to create camaraderie.

"When you spend four days together on and off the golf course, you can't help but make the relationship stronger," Hafera says. *"People have such a good time that the word of mouth leads to more trips."*

Like Hafera, PGA Professional Dave Kendall takes small groups of students to PGA Village throughout the year. The lead instructor at The Kendall Academy at Miles of Golf in Ypsilanti, Mich., finds that combining teaching

and travel creates a unique learning atmosphere.

"I'll work heavily on the short game when I travel with my students, because that's the part of their game that's usually the most underdeveloped; a lot of good players work on their full swing all the time, but they take whatever they get from the short game," says Kendall, a two-time Michigan PGA Section Teacher of the Year. *"I should really call these trips 'scoring schools' because probably two-thirds of our time is spent working on chipping, pitching, bunker play and putting."*

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— John Hafera, PGA

Kendall and Hafera use similar structures for their instruction-based golf trips. Both keep the group size to no more than three players, and find the ideal length for a trip

to be four days – though sometimes golfers will choose to stay on a day or two longer to play more golf on their own. Kendall and Hafera plan the trips as all-inclusive affairs, handling all the details from accommodations and meals to access to the lesson tee and tee times, and the ballpark cost to each student is between \$2,000 and \$2,500. The only detail some golfers prefer to handle on their own is the flight, allowing them to use frequent flier miles they have accrued.

The students arrive in the morning and play a round of golf with the instructor on the first afternoon of the trip. This gives the PGA Professional a chance to see which areas of each player's game need the most help. After dinner and a good night's sleep, the group heads to the PGA Center for Golf Learning and Performance at 8 a.m. for four hours of instruction. There is a nominal fee for PGA Professionals to reserve their own private instruction "pod" at the facility, and Kendall and Hafera build it into their travel prices. PGA Professionals can also make use of the on-site experts, such as PGA Professionals T.J. Tomasi and Joe Hallett.

"What I always tell PGA members is to think of PGA Village as an extension of your facility – for golf, but more specifically for the PGA Center for Golf Learning and Performance," says Bob Baladassari, PGA general manager of PGA Golf Club. *"Not every PGA Professional has a TrackMan system, or SAM PuttLab, or a TaylorMade MATT system, or a 3,000*



The PGA Center for Golf Learning and Performance is a home away from home for PGA members.

squarefoot fitness facility. But when you're here, you do. Our staff's goal is to make the PGA member look like a hero, and to add value to the travel they do with their students."

Hafera says he uses these amenities to make the experience memorable and beneficial to his students.

"You can't just do four hours of full swing work, it's too much," Hafera says. "I like to take advantage of the SAM PuttLab they have there, and the TrackMan. These are things you don't find a lot of places. If the weather is bad, you can go inside and do some fitness work. I also like to use the K-Vest system to work on 3D swing analysis. I can do all of these things and really create a unique experience for the golfer."

Hafera and Kendall head out for an afternoon round on one of the facility's courses to see how the morning's instruction is working. Both instructors take video of their players on the course – Kendall will upload it to his computer to watch after dinner or over breakfast the next day, while Hafera sends it from his iPhone directly to his students' e-mail accounts, and to his own Facebook page to increase awareness of the trips with his other students.

The third day of the trips usually follow the second day's schedule, and the final day typically includes a morning round of golf before an afternoon flight home. In the spring, groups have been known to take an afternoon off from golf to catch the New York Mets play a spring training game at their nearby facility, or to go deep sea fishing.

Kendall says he enjoys the extended amounts of time instruction trips allow him to spend with his students, and that he'd like to make time to expand the program.

"The nice thing about these trips is that they really sell themselves. If I promoted them, and if I had time to do my traveling, I'd could sell several more a year," says Kendall, who usually does five instruction trips per year. "I usually fit them into my schedule when I'm going to be in Florida anyway for the PGA Merchandise Show or the Winter Tournament Series. But I'm looking for ways to grow this with our other instructors. In a perfect world, I'd spend a couple weeks every month taking my students on trips like these."

