

Pit Kälin, who hails originally from St Moritz, has been general manager of Holzhäusern Golf Park since 2007. The man has golf in his genes, having started playing as a teenager in the Engadin on courses in St Moritz, Zuoz and Samedan – that last course being Switzerland's oldest. In his free time, Pit can also be found playing tennis and ice hockey, or cross-country skiing in the winter. He lives in Engelberg in the canton of Obwalden (OW).



Holzhäusern  
Golf Park  
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# “Golf is a social sport and a mind game”

Pit Kälin, general manager of Holzhäusern Golf Park, has turned his love of the game into a career. In our interview, he talked about popular prejudices against the sport and why golf is the perfect hobby for outgoing types who love nature.

**Right off, I have to confess: I'm 51 and have never held a golf club in my hands.**

You are in good company! Lots of people prefer other sporting activities you can do out in nature, like rowing, biking, hiking and running.

**Activities where you can really break a sweat!**

Golf requires a lot of energy, too. How many kilometres do you think you end up walking on an 18-hole golf course?

**I have no idea.**

Between 11 and 13 kilometres. And it takes about 4 1/2 hours. Add a few metres onto that if you have to look for a few balls that have landed in the rough.

**But it is basically a pleasant stroll.**

True, but golf is a mind game! That's why so many top athletes play golf on the side, like ice hockey pro Nino Niederreiter, top skier Marco Odermatt and superstar Roger Federer. Golf is a game of precision tactics, concentration and technique. Up to 100 different muscles are involved in executing a golf swing. Golf is thus a very good game for balancing out other sports. Another advantage is how an experienced golf pro can still play with a friend who's at a lower level. Each player plays their own game and they still enjoy the time spent together. It's social.

**Yet golf hasn't entirely overcome its reputation as a game for the well-to-do.**

Ours is a public course, so there's no elitism; we have something to offer groups of all different kinds and to suit every budget. Amateurs and professionals alike are welcome on our three courses. The nine-hole Rigi course is quite popular for those who don't have the time it takes to play a full 18 holes. On the 18-hole Zugersee golf course players get to enjoy an extraordinary view of the lake. We hold tournaments on that course, including the Ladies Open – a professional tournament in which Europe's best female golfers compete to win a monetary prize. Then we have the 9-hole Pilatus course for beginners and our Fun Golf programme.

**What does “fun golf” mean, given that regular golf is a serious business?**

Fun Golf is for non-golfers interested in trying out the game. Families, groups of friends, clubs and companies book an introductory course in our

golf arena in combination with drinks or a meal. The Fun Golf programme is often combined with seminars and team-building retreats, too. The concept involves a brief instruction session, before everybody grabs their clubs and a ball to start playing. The point of the game is to knock a ball off the tee and then play it into the hole in as few strokes as possible. The fairways are short, affording a relatively low degree of challenge.

**Golf and the environment – are they mutually exclusive?**

As GEO-certified courses, we are obligated to meet the stringent standards of the Golf Environment Organisation for nature conservation, biodiversity, water and plant protection, and energy management. We're able to uphold these standards partly because, although it covers 110 hectares in total, only a third of our site is playing green. Another third serves as a “balancing area” and the last third is a special ecological area. Flora and fauna are free to flourish on those two thirds, which feature reeds, ducks and other birds, trees, hedges and perennials, making the area in question very similar to a nature reserve.

**But surely weed control is practically impossible without using pesticides?**

Ordinarily yes, but the greens, i.e. the 200–300 sqm area around the holes, look pretty not because of using a lot of fertiliser and pesticide, but rather because the grass is frequently mowed – every second or third day in the growing season. The green is the area specially rendered for putting, where the grass is cut to a low height of just 3.5 millimetres.

**Which is best, golfing in the morning or evening?**

I personally prefer playing in the morning, getting out on the course early with the sun still rising, as nature awakens to a new day. But the evening has its charms as well. As long as you can see the ball, you can golf. At Holzhäusern, we have players from early in the morning on into the late evening. The busiest hours are from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. On average, 500 people a day come to our golf courses, where more than 100,000 rounds of golf are played each year.

**Can you play in any weather?**

Except for thunderstorms, yes you can. Standing out in the grass holding a metal club turns you into a lightning rod.

Interview Sabine Windlin  
Image Daniela Kienzler