



The Cost of Building a Golf Course

It's one of the most difficult questions to answer, but one of the most commonly asked, how much does it cost to build a golf course? The answer depends on a variety of factors; three of the most important being, what type of course the client wants, what type of land the course is to be built upon, and the competency of the golf course architect.

Construction costs are also determined by the economic climate and industry status. Recently, with low interest rates and a lull in the building of golf courses, the market place is ripe for new developers to get excellent loans and very competitive bids from architects and construction companies. While variables like insurance and petrol/diesel prices are unpredictable, mere competition will push most firms to bid low and drop their margins just to keep people and equipment working during lean times. Equally, suppliers of materials for expensive billing items such as drainage and irrigation are more focused on turnover than stockpiling.

Construction Items	Minimalist Course	Average Course	Up Scale Course
Mobilisation	10,000	35,000	75,000
Layout, Staking, Civils	10,000	30,000	120,000
Erosion Control	0	25,000	150,000
Clearing and Grubbing	3,000	35,000	280,000
Selective Clearing	0	54,000	240,000
Topsoil strip	40,000	150,000	300,000
Rock Blasting	0	15,000	150,000
Earthmoving	0	375,000	750,000
Shaping	75,000	150,000	300,000
Topsoil Replacement	40,000	150,000	240,000
Storm Drainage	10,000	75,000	500,000
Golf Drainage	20,000	100,000	150,000
Irrigation + Pumpstation	130,000	345,000	910,000
Greens (11,150 sq.m.)	36,000	190,000	600,000
Tees (11,150 sq.m.)	30,000	60,000	100,000
Bunkers	17,000	52,000	84,000
Cart paths	0	112,000	530,000
Seedbed Prep	50,000	95,000	125,000
Grassing (Seed/Sprigs)	50,000	120,000	110,000
Grassing (Sod)	0	50,000	200,000
BUILD TOTAL (US \$)	521,000	2,218,000	5,814,000

Source: Golf Course Builders Association of America, ASGCA, and DGA.

Costs can be kept to a minimum if the client has a good site; gently rolling with good drainage, and starts the job on time with all permits in hand. An architect can quickly identify the best land for a golf course and following their advice should alleviate having to move lots of earth, installing extensive

drainage, time delays, or requiring more resources to get the job completed in time for critical seeding windows or a grand opening.

Specific cost cutting measures include reducing the number of bunkers, especially those requiring expensive speciality sands, minimising the length of cart paths and using seed other than sod are good options. Additionally, if USGA style greens are to be designed, reducing green size is a cost cutting method. Reducing spending on items such as final grading however may cost an owner more in course maintenance in the long run; so judicious corner cutting is crucial.

Some new owners spend tremendous amounts of money on large trees in an attempt to create a 'mature' look for new projects, particularly those using the course to sell real estate, but owners can save more money, and often get better long term results, by planting smaller trees with a drip irrigation system. Equally, clustering trees rather than lining fairways not only looks better, but reduces the number of trees required. Landscaping is a cost that can make or break the look and economic viability of a project.

Reducing the size of the course has an impact on the cost of building and maintaining a course – particularly when land is at a premium. Designing a Par 70 or 71 course instead of a Par 72 may allow an architect to avoid using a difficult, steep, or environmentally sensitive piece of land and this may save up to NZ \$400,000! Additionally, the course will play quicker and if it's a 'pay and play' course, an owner may get more groups through on busy days and make more money – all this affects the bottom line.