

Detailed Notes for Editors

PGA National Czech Republic|Oaks Prague Course Description

In the 19th century, a noble family built a hunting lodge in the Bohemian hills a gentle gallop south-east of Prague. By then, golf had been around for more than four centuries. But little did they appreciate their foresight in choosing a location where, two more centuries downwind and in a different guise, ambitions would continue regarding the shooting of birdies (and, well, hopefully for everyone perhaps not eagles).

Maybe, maybe not...

The talk now is not just about how easy it will (or will not!) be to shoot birdies and eagles, but also about the skill and sensitivity with which one of the world's leading golf course designers has converted the former farm- and wood-land into a course that rewards golfers' intelligence as much as physical prowess. And the elegant chateau, currently under restoration into a stylish clubhouse, will soon return to focus as the hub of a destination unashamedly leading Czech golf into the mid-21st century.

A 5 star hotel and sensitively-zoned residential development are also under way.

If the few months that the full 18 holes have been open are anything to go by, Kyle Phillips's alluring design has kick-started a demand amongst Czech (and, post-Covid, international) golfers for a significant upgrade in golf and clubhouse standards. Managers Troon Privé have been impressed by the almost immediate and constant daily bookings from over 100 players.

Winning the World Golf Awards 2020 prizes as Best Course in Europe and Best Course in the Czech Republic will only heighten this demand.

Phillips's philosophy is that golf courses should have their own character and personality derived from the existing natural features of the land on which they are constructed, as well as its location and history. Where natural golf features do not exist, he is respected for his ability to create landforms that appear to be natural. Phillips brings his personal commitment to each design, working on the design of each course himself, in situ.

This is evident in the two distinct sections of land that he has used to thread his layout through the estate. Some holes take us on a tour through existing oak woods, so naturally that one feels the course has been there for years, whilst a mid-round section demonstrates his skill at converting formerly relatively flat farmland into a golfer's paradise, recalling the uneven ground that made historic courses such fun to play.



Spacious and strategic 1st

After warming up at the almost-disarmingly-beautiful and well-serviced range, Holes 1 to 3 begin the oak-tour. Phillips's brilliant downhill short par 4 opener immediately conveys his message: wide fairways, testing bunkering and undulating greens - from your first tee-shot (which perhaps should be with a modest iron), players who think their way around this course may well be rewarded better than brash hit-and-hope long drivers. However, just to be clear, this course can also very much be about length. To present appropriate challenges for all standards, Phillips has included no fewer than 5 different tees. Players are given a free choice as to which to use, with the total playing length ranging from some 7,000m down to 5,000m.

The par 4 2nd introduces us to another feature of the course: raised greens defended by relatively deep and lavish bunkering. But, as here, if we do stray into these, they are designed generally for the ball to roll down their sides to a flatter sand base, facilitating our escape.

As with the first two, so well is the attractive par 3 3rd set into the forest that it seems to have been there forever. Here, we learn that Phillips rewards physically weaker players who nonetheless have the mental strength to take what seems an indirect route to the flag. To avoid risking the deep sand on the direct line, play to the undefended left side of the green and there is a good chance your ball will roll down onto the putting surface, possibly even giving a chance of one of those birdies...

The 4th to 9th holes lie on the re-landscaped farmland. However, over time, with the growth of the many hundreds of newly-planted trees, these will soon form an integral part of the oak forest already enjoyed by the rest of the course.



Left to right bio-diversity corridor at 4th

The long-ish uphill par 5 4th is reachable in two shots, but only by players prepared to risk sand, whilst there is again a safer route left. Evidence here also of another important feature of Phillips's philosophy: biodiversification. His vision creates not just isolated habitats for all that live within his courses, but system of 'recreational corridors' that connect throughout the golf course. These allow for other activities (animal as well as human!) to coexist with the golf. Hence, here, players will find a bio-corridor in the form of a gulley of rough that descends from the 2nd, across the 9th, and behind the 6th green, connecting the entire area to the forest that adjoins the 10th tee. This is only one of the environmentally sensitive features of Phillips's design.



Bunker-teasing at 6th

After another strategic temptation at the driveable 5th, we reach a Phillips gem: more left to right than it appears, the par 4 6th seems to hide the green behind three corner-cutting bunkers on the right.

But not quite.

The flag is visible from the tee, and teases longer hitters to smash their way close; again, modest irons off the tee may well be better rewarded. A fun hole.

Initially uphill, a good drive at the par 4 7th sets an inviting short iron approach. But take care: the course is generally set on firm ground - its super-slick putting surfaces must be respected, which in turn require careful thought for any approach shot.

The shortest hole on the course follows, but, with its small, raised and heavily-bunkered green, par is by no means a pushover.

Think carefully at the par 5 9th: the gently uphill landing area for your drive falls away into the bio-corridor, so you may need to rein back, before a second that can canter its way down the wide fairway towards, or even onto, another bunkered green, backed by the forest.

Alongside, and then through, the trees, we turn for what is arguably the course's most testing section: the demandingly-long slightly uphill par 4 10th and the beautiful and challengingly-bunkered par 3 11th. The even longer par 4 12th returns us fully to the oak-tour with the course's narrowest fairway to another raised and bunkered sloping green. Back in sight of the château, the contours of the 13th deliver what seems to be the layout's most reachable par 5.



Prague vista at 14th

It is here that the skill of Phillips's routing comes to the fore. The 19th century noblemen must surely have enjoyed the tour of their estate hence, where, approaching what is now the 13th green, the expansive distant vista of Prague would have unfolded to the delight of their guests.

And so it is for us, as we descend the par 4 14th, hopefully delighting in a long drive left that can bound right down the hill towards a green hidden from the tee, close enough for a chip and run – indeed one of the charms of the design and conditioning here is that its firmness enables (and sometime even counsels) approaches short of greens, an attraction that will endear this course to links fans.

After uphill par 4 15th reverses these contours (and with the fun of a green that runs well to the left of its approach), we return to the area in view of the château. Indeed, many a match-play game may well end at the par 5 16th green. But here the heavily-bunkered putting surface is not the initial focal point: turning left through an avenue of trees, we must place our drive carefully to open up our next shot. If each hole were to be named, this one would surely be ‘Waldorf’ (the trees in question are apples and walnuts: in season, pick them up and eat half your salad three holes before the 19th!).



'Waldorf Corner' at 16th

Two challenging holes complete the round, in view through the trees from the château: looking-longer-but-playing-shorter downhill par 3 17th nestles back into the forest, whence the uphill drive to the strategically-bunkered long par 4 18th delivers us back to a double green (the 18th green runs up to the 1st tee warm-up green), all within a close glimpse of the château. A nice touch to finish, summarising the often-understated skill of a designer who has so carefully presented us with his bountiful wares.

And how did we do?! If well, we should praise him; if not, we should blame only ourselves.

This course speaks well for the future of golf in a country where some 100 courses have been built in the past 30 years, and there is a higher-than-average percentage of female players. Come and try PGA Czech Republic | Oaks Prague for yourself, even before the famous local beers at the château...

[Link to Course Guide](#)

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