



Gold Standard Awards 2009 Tour Operator of the Year

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Roland Holm
Spela-Golf.com

Roland Holm will be the first to admit that fate had its part to play in the growth of his tour operator business. Formed in 2003, Spela-Golf.com was the product of a series of coincidences that ran from the sublime to the ridiculous and from old-fashioned good luck to something bordering on divine intervention.

So blessed was his initial foray into the world of golf, that the friendly Swede freely admits that business couldn't have got off to a better start despite an earlier failure. "I'd set up a website to sell advertising space for Swedish companies selling to Swedish people living in the UK. It never really took off, but I put a golf package up on the website and got a booking within a week."

The idea of adding golf to his website came when a friend visited Roland from Sweden and compared a mediocre English course to some of the best in Scandinavia. The seed was sown and resulted in Roland's first tour which couldn't have been better attended.

"I was lucky because it turned out that one of the golfers was the largest importer of golf equipment into Sweden," he recalls. "I was fortunate to get a really influential guy as my first booking who knew everybody in the Swedish golfing world. We had loads of bookings on the back of that."

The company hit the ground running and quickly established itself as a specialist in the design and operation of golf tours to Scotland, England and Ireland. In 2004, during its first year, it welcomed 311 guests thanks partly to its inaugural customer, but also due to Roland's commitment to delivering value. "I sleep well at night," he says. "We're all in it to make money, but I want my customers to feel they've had value for money, and that's why 80% of our bookings are repeat business."

It's a philosophy that has helped Spela-Golf.com grow into one of Europe's most respected tour operators, although it's not only Roland's customers who value his services. At a gala night hosted by Golf Tourism Scotland, Roland and his wife Lorraine picked up the Golf Tour Operator of the Year award, an accolade voted on by the industry itself.

As well as the kudos of picking up a Gold Standard Award, it also helped secure some invaluable exposure says Roland. "It really helped us generate new business because we had a lot of publicity, especially in Sweden. We were in Golf Digest, Svensk Golf and appeared on every golf website in Sweden" he recalls. "It helped us enormously because we had concerns about the year ahead due to Ryanair stopping its flights from Stockholm to Prestwick. It was where we got a lot of our business, but it's not really affected us. We're simply sending people to the East coast instead."