

GOLF

Tradition and Heritage

There are more than 50 championship courses on or surrounding Hilton Head Island, making it one of the nation's most popular golf destinations.

Yet, among the dozens of premium golf experiences to be found, one course stands above the rest. Iconic Harbour Town Golf Links is the bellwether and main event, the single “must-play” venue in the region. On an island where golf is king, Harbour Town is true royalty.

Harbour Town is the jewel of the 5,000-acre Sea Pines Resort, situated on a peninsula of land between the Atlantic Ocean and the Calibogue Sound at Hilton Head's southern tip.

Sea Pines offers 54 holes of fine golf. The Ocean Course and the course formerly known as Sea Marsh, now being redesigned by Pete Dye, are highly regarded resort experiences. Like their famed sibling, they are also rife with gnarled, centuries-old hardwoods, lagoons and salt-riddled marshes.

But the headliner, now and forever, is Harbour Town. The four main reasons are history, design ingenuity, beauty and accolades.

Suffice it to say that the candy-striped lighthouse, standing sentinel behind Harbour Town's 18th green — truly one of the most recognizable symbols in the golf universe — has unusual meaning.

Though it looks to be the real deal, it's never been a guiding light for seafarers. Built in concert with the golf course in 1969, it's no beacon for sailors, but instead beckons golfers the world over, tempting them to test their skills on one of the world's most famous and best-loved designs.

History

Perhaps the single largest appeal of playing Harbour Town is the opportunity to walk the same curving fairways that have puzzled and captivated the world's greatest golfers.

This Pete Dye-Jack Nicklaus collaborative effort debuted in 1969, just in time for a nascent PGA Tour event called the Heritage Classic to be staged.

The powers-that-be at the time, most notably, Sea Pines visionary Charles Fraser and his brother, Joe, were advised that a Tour event located more than 15 miles from a major city would not succeed. They were cautioned that a brand-new golf course wouldn't be appropriate, and that to hold an event in the south during football season — and even worse, over a holiday weekend — would be a death knell.

But Arnold Palmer charged to a three-shot victory that fateful Thanksgiving weekend, on an untested course that had just recently been completed in time to stage the event.

“The King,” Arnold Palmer, set a precedent with that first championship, and has been followed to the winner's circle by a veritable Hall of Fame roster that includes names like Nicklaus, Irwin, Miller, Love, Stewart, Zoeller, Leonard, Watson, Norman, Faldo, Langer and Price.

What's more impressive? The fact that Harbour Town champs have won 66 Majors combined? That the championship roster has won more than 380 tournaments on Tour? Or is it the fact that since the tournament debuted, only three Major winners *have not* attempted to conquer the subtly twisting fairways of this wonderful Pete Dye design? (Use that last one to stump your pals in the next golf trivia contest in the 19th hole. The trio consists of Jose Maria Olazabal, Ian Woosnam and Paul Lawrie.)

No matter how you look at it, Harbour Town is on a short list of non-Major events that every player would love to win.

Design Ingenuity

One of the reasons the pros flock to Harbour Town every spring is the chance to play one of the Tour's most unique venues.

“It's one of the most innovative and revolutionary designs in the history of golf architecture,” said Bradley S. Klein, the architectural editor of Golfweek Magazine. “It's certainly one of the ten most important courses in terms of design, because Pete Dye built all sorts of great contour, shape, form and strategy into a dead level site that was really quite boring to begin

with. Instead of moving massive quantities of dirt, he massaged the earth in a subtle way, turning the holes, and positioning them so the live oaks draped the entrances to the green. It created a tremendous sense of corridors, and you have to keep working the ball from left to right and right to left. It's a really ingenious design."

Always quick to deflect praise, Dye gives credit to one of his colleagues, Robert Trent Jones, for inspiring his vision. "I noticed that Mr. Jones was using big machinery to carve out long tees, huge bunkers and massive greens at nearby Palmetto Dunes at the time," recalls Dye. "I decided to do the opposite. I figured small greens, tiny pot bunkers and a low profile design would separate my identity from the other designers on the island, and be something really unique."

Harbour Town's quartet of par 3s is one of the finest collections in the game. Two are menaced by water, one surrounded by sand, the last requiring a tee shot into the prevailing breezes with wetlands and marsh grasses close at hand.

It's hard to recollect any other world class course that has the proliferation of houses and condos that surround Harbour Town, so it's a testament to Dye's acumen that a round here isn't like a typical ride through a neighborhood subdivision, which is so often the case in the southeast.

The strategy required on each shot and the omnipresence of the fabulous hardwoods defining and influencing the line of play draw the attention. To find success on this beguiling golf course, a player must not only find the fairway, but often must land *on the proper side* of the fairway in order to safely reach the green.

The housing and road crossings fade to the background, as players concentrate on negotiating a par-71 golf course that is both petite (a shade under 7,000 yards) and flat as a Scrabble board (just four feet of elevation change).

Beauty and Accolades

The crescendo of the finishing holes, as a player emerges from the forest to sweeping seaside views, is another of Harbour Town's timeless attractions. The approach shot on the dogleg 16th hole brings the Calibogue Sound into

view from a distance, and the final two holes bring the sparkling water practically within reach.

But there is much more “eye appeal” than the final trio. Throughout the round, large waste bunkers, railroad ties, expansive lagoons, and most impressively, the omnipresent live oaks draped with Spanish moss, stately palmettos, soaring firs and other hardwoods, make Sea Pines’ signature golf course a visual delight.

It’s no wonder that Harbour Town continues to attract accolades and recognition throughout the golf world. Among many other distinctions, it’s ranked No. 67 in GOLF Magazine’s list of the top 100 courses in the world. It’s also scored a unique “triple crown” with Golfweek. The magazine ranks Harbour Town No. 25 in its list of America’s Top 100 Modern Courses, the No. 12 resort course in the nation, and No. 2 overall in terms of public access courses in the state of South Carolina.

The Ocean Course

Focal point it may be, but there is more to the golf life in the Sea Pines Resort than Harbour Town. The Ocean Course was the first golf course on Hilton Head Island, built in 1962 by prolific architect George Cobb.

Mark McCumber, a 10-time PGA Tour winner who also happens to be a member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, redesigned the original in 1995, with an emphasis on traditional and classic principles of design. An eye-pleasing, and not-overly-intimidating combination of lagoons, bunkers and fairway contouring creates a contemporary 6,906-yard course that has been awarded the “Beginner Friendly” Certification from the National Golf Course Owners Association.

It should also be noted that the Ocean Course offers a true rarity on Hilton Head Island — an actual surfside golf hole. The 210-yard, par-3 15th necessitates an uphill shot, usually in swirling winds, to reach a well-fortified green. Just steps behind the putting surface are a wide expanse of beach and the majesty of the Atlantic Ocean. Not even Harbour Town itself can offer such an inspiring view.

Newly Designed Pete Dye Golf Course (Formerly Sea Marsh)

Though it has myriad charms of its own, including its “Beginner Friendly” Certification and its designation as a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary, Sea Pines’ newly designed Pete Dye Golf Course, formerly known as Sea Marsh, was often relegated to a third option by Sea Pines guests.

This was due in part because of its reputation as the most novice-friendly layout of the three, with a junior set of tees, making it ideal for family play. But this dismissive attitude is soon to change. Local architect Clyde Johnston restored the broad, tree-lined fairways in 1990, making improvements to the original George Cobb design.

Now, no less an emissary than Pete Dye, who truly came to prominence thanks to his work at Harbour Town nearly 40 years ago, is completely renovating the golf course. According to a long-time member of the Sea Pines management team, nothing will remain from the original effort other than the playing corridors.

Even beyond Harbour Town, Dye has done some of his finest work on or close to Hilton Head. Courses like Long Cove Club and the Dye Course at Colleton River have further cemented his reputation as one of the top course architects in the world. So avid golfers eagerly anticipate whatever magic he’ll be conjuring at Sea Marsh, which will debut anew in Fall 2007.

Other Golf Amenities

What good are three world-class courses if a resort guest can’t even get the ball airborne? For the abject beginner, the struggling mid-handicapper or the accomplished player trying to shave the last few strokes from the scorecard, the Sea Pines Resort offers professional assistance that is second to none.

The Golf Academy of Hilton Head Island offers guests extensive practice facilities, state-of-the-art video swing analysis, putting greens, chipping areas, two teaching tees, driving ranges and practice bunkers.

Class ‘A’ PGA professionals provide a complete range of golf instruction for guests, from three-hour clinics to four-day, total-immersion golf schools. For children, the “Future Stars” Junior Golf Program provides a fun introduction

to the game with an emphasis on safety, etiquette, rules and fundamentals of golf.

In addition to clinics, The Sea Pines Resort offers a unique training opportunity for aspiring young golfers with year-round programs. Students live and attend school at the resort as part of the International Junior Golf Academy, where the curriculum focuses on academics, intense golf practice and play, the psychology of golf, physical fitness and tournament competition.

Ranked among the top ten golf schools in the United States by *Golf Magazine* and *Travel Magazine*, the goal of the academy is to prepare junior golfers for success in tournament golf, university academics and life. The academy also offers weeklong summer golf camps and a winter holiday camp.

The trio of championship courses garners much of the attention, but they are just a fraction of the multifaceted amenity package at The Sea Pines Resort. Heralded as one of the “World’s Best Places to Stay” by *Condé Nast Traveler*, the resort is steeped in southern tradition, blessed with scenic Lowcountry landscapes in every direction and features five miles of sweeping Atlantic beaches.

Other Amenities

- Tennis has been an important component in the Sea Pines Resort experience nearly since its inception.

- With 23 clay courts, the resort is perennially at or near the top of Tennis Magazine’s “50 Greatest U.S. Tennis Resorts.”

- The Sea Pines Racquet Club was the site of a televised event called the BCS Classic, which included among its winners Rod Laver in 1971 and Ken Rosewall in 1972.

- Sea Pines played host to the Family Circle Cup from 1973 until 2001, and its list of champions includes international stars Chris Evert, Martina Navratilova, Tracy Austin, Steffi Graf and Martina Hingis.

-Other professional events played at Sea Pines Resort include the World Invitational (won by Bjorn Borg in 1976), the Dupont All-American and the Corel Champions Tour (won by Jimmy Connors on three consecutive occasions).

-In 1971, Sea Pines Resort signed Californian Stan Smith — a former U.S. Open and Wimbledon champion — as its touring professional, and Smith has remained with the resort ever since. Today, he runs the Smith-Stearns Tennis Academy for top-ranked U.S. junior players.

- With more than 50 lagoons and lakes, Sea Pines is among the first eco-planned communities in the world, and exemplifies the theme of sustaining and preserving the natural environment throughout its 5,000 acres, including a 605-acre Forest Preserve recognized by the Audubon Society as a noteworthy birding sanctuary.
- Sea Pines offers wide selection of world-class restaurants.
- Accommodations ranging from ocean-side villa retreats and the Four-Diamond Inn at Harbour Town — a 2004 *Condé Nast Traveler* Gold List Reserve winner — to beachfront cottages and homes.

To learn more about **The Sea Pines Resort**, call 1-800-SeaPines (732-7463) or visit www.seapines.com.
