

OCEAN'S 18

Golf's living legend, architect Pete Dye, gets rave reviews for the picture perfect, 18-hole, Ocean Course at Kiawah Island

By Barbara Perkins

Located off the coast of South Carolina, 30 miles and three or four bridges from Charleston, sits an infamous 10-mile strip of sand. Notoriety came, when a spit of island turf became center stage, for the internationally acclaimed golf thriller, "War by the Shore". In addition to hosting the 1991 Ryder Cup with its dramatic finish, The Ocean Course at Kiawah Island has played host for World Cups in 1997 and 2003, the Senior PGA Championship in 2007 and the 94th PGA championship in 2012.

Wild, windy and masterfully situated along the island's most easterly shore, the course, measuring just shy of 8,000 yards, is massive. With more ocean view holes than any other course in the northern hemisphere, this Dye tour de force takes your breath away.

For starters, the driving range offers panoramic ocean views, grass tees and an endless supply of brand new Titleists. The impeccably manicured putting green, also just steps beyond the handsome clubhouse, shares this prime oceanfront real estate.

With the Atlantic as backdrop, it is considered one of the most stunning and difficult, resort courses in the world. The water proves to be a double-edged sword; serving ten spectacular holes directly on the ocean, eight with simply sublime views, while its signature winds, coming off the Atlantic, gusty and howling make the going tough. Thanks to the genius of Dye, you actually don't have to be an expert to play this course. Just be grateful, and humble when choosing the appropriate tee box from his generous selection of six. Remain vigilant – aware of the wind, while taking in every moment of the spectacular scenery.

You'll be sorry if you forget to bring your camera, you'll want it for spur-of-the-moment snaps of wildlife; osprey, herons or maybe the six-foot alligator we saw lounging around a bunker near the 3rd.

As for signature holes, make sure you come out swinging on 17, because here, the only thing standing between you and the cup is about 200 yards of splash. For 18, rely on your trusty driver; it's a par 4 that's plenty long. As you punch your way in on this final hole, try to smile. The folks watching you, hunkered down in classic white Adirondack chairs, set outside the clubhouse, will love you for that.

If you're planning to spend a night or two on Island, we recommend the nearby Sanctuary hotel. The building, grandly reminiscent of an historic manor house, surprised us with facilities inside that were strikingly modern. A majority of the hotel's 255 spacious rooms and suites offer private balconies, which take full advantage of the hotel's beachfront location.

Service here, whether at the front door, front desk, beach or back nine is superlative. The day we misplaced our favorite sunglasses, ended with a smile at 6pm, when the "happy-to-help-you" driver from the morning shuttle tapped on our door. If you're one of those high-energy après-golf types, don't despair. If you're up for it, grab one of the resort's bikes and take off to pedal miles of well-marked trails, have a swim in one of the outdoor pools, workout in the state-of-the-art gym or get in a few sets of tennis under the lights.

To soothe your aching muscles, be sure to book a time at The Sanctuary's spa. You'll find this expansive space, perched atop one of the lobby's two gargantuan spiral

staircases. Try the Carolina Cloud Nine, a 90-minute body treatment featuring a delectable Mandarin orange, pineapple and papaya scrub. With saunas, steam rooms, a vitality pool and tranquility in the lounge area, you'll find this award-winning spa to be the perfect spot to relax and unwind.

By all means do not go to bed hungry. Queue up in the line-out-the-door, family friendly, Beaches and Cream ice cream shop. Or, gentlemen with jackets go for fancy, as we did, at The Ocean Room, the hotel's signature steakhouse. Not surprisingly, the New York strip here was a standout so too was the 60-something page wine list. For dessert, we devoured the chef's special "chocolate box", recommended by our perfectly attentive yet unintrusive waiter.

Top cap off the night, we were tempted to have a go at a snifter of Hennessy Ellipse, but at \$850 a pop, went with a more modest and most memorable moonlit walk on the sands of the lowcountry's most beautiful beach.