## layingthesamegolfcourseweekafterweekcangetboring. Whether you are a scratch golfer or a weekend hacker, a golf get away can bring the excitement back to your game.Golf has often been called a "good walk spoiled." As someone who has loved the game since she was a teenager, I have to disagree with that description. I find a golf course to be the best place for a good walk, a place where I can commune with Mother Nature as well as challenge myself mentally and physically. This summer, I've been fortunate to get away and play golf courses that are not as well known as the ones on the PGA tour stops, but they offer natural settings where the scenery and challenges rival those found on some of America's most famous courses. By Mary Ann DeSantis



about 20 balls among us during a game last June. If you enjoy nature, then you'll appreciate the course's natural hazards. Those same hazards, however, require strategic shots. A long drive off the tee box actually may get you in trouble, as I quickly learned.

"The best strategy on some of the holes, particularly number 15, is to lay up near the hazard and then hit your second shot over it," says Head Golf Professional Steven Hatch, a Texas native who opened the 18-hole course in 2003 for a Dallas company.

equipped with GPS systems that also allow for electronic scorekeeping. A practice facility with a driving range, a chipping green and two putting greens are situated between the rental condominiums and the pro shop.

Carrabelle, located in Franklin County, is a small and charming town, but don't expect a lot of late nightlife. What you will find, though, are friendly locals willing to share the area's fascinating history. Much of the land where the

were built on the radio tower foundations left behind when Camp Gordon Johnston closed.

The stay-and-play packages are a good deal for foursomes who want the convenience of a championship course right outside their door. If you are staying at the resort, golf is \$50 per person per day, and you can play as many rounds as you want. Nightly rates begin at \$162.50 for the condominiums where watching the late evening sunsets from the private balconies is priceless.





FOR THE NEXT GENERATION



THE KING AND PRINCE BEACH & GOLF RESORT

ST.SIMONS ISLAND, GEORGIA KINGANDPRINCE.COM

St. Simons Island, the largest of Georgia's Golden Isles, offers Atlantic Ocean sunrises, picturesque salt marshes, fascinating local history, Southern charm and—I might add—"royal treatment" if you stay at the historic King and Prince Beach & Golf Resort, the only beachfront hotel on the island.

Although I wanted to spend more time on the beach or at the hotel's newly renovated pool "paradise," my mission on this trip was to play the award-winning King and Prince Golf Course, formerly known as The Hampton Club. Prior to the trip, I had been mesmerized by a 3-D graphic

on the hotel's website that virtually transported me above each of the course's 18 holes via hole-by-hole flyover.

With pristine fairways framed by ancient oaks and views of the Fredericka and Hampton Rivers from the marsh islands, the real course is even more gorgeous than the virtual one. Located on the lessdeveloped northern edge of St. Simons Island, the course is a picturesque 12-mile drive from the hotel. And it's definitely fun for all levels of golfers, with slope ratings ranging from 121 to 140.

One of the unique features about playing at the King and Prince is that foursomes are not

required, an unheard-of option at most golf facilities.

"Customers can choose to play by themselves or with others," says Golf Director Rick Mattox, who has managed the course since it opened in 1989. "We have many couples at the King and Prince celebrating their anniversaries or honeymoons, and they often like to play alone. We try to give them the experience they want."

My husband and I were not celebrating either occasion, but we still elected to play as a twosome. We did not want to be embarrassed if we lost another 20 balls, especially on holes 12 through 15, the course's four signature holes. When the course was built, golf architect Joe Lee "gently carved" those four greens on small marsh islands. If the course had been built after the 1990 Wetlands Act went into effect, those unique holes would not exist today, and Mattox and his team take great care to operate under the EPA guidelines and regulations to protect them.

Accessible only by elevated cart bridges, the island holes looked quite daunting on the virtual course. Hitting the greens was not a problem; however, staying focused on our game was, as a parade of wildlife marched by including deer, osprey and a persistent heron who hovered near a putting green.

The course underwent a renovation in 2009, giving it what Mattox called "a totally different look for the next generation."

Many guests return to the King and Prince, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, because they came as children and want their own children to have the same kind of experiences. It's not surprising to see generations of families vacationing together because the resort offers so many amenitiesoceanfront pools, tennis courts, a full-service spa and casual and fine dining. The King's Tavern inside the hotel is popular with locals as well as guests because of Chef Jeff Kaplan's commitment to serving local products and his farm-to-table philosophy. Before golf, I enjoyed his signature King and Prince muffins; after working so hard on my game, I especially appreciated the legendary King and Prince Shrimp & Grits in Tasso Cream. Kaplan says the traditional southern and lowcountry cuisine is appropriate because, after all, "St. Simons is in the heart of southern hospitality."

Seasonal golf packages at the King and Prince begin at \$282 per night based on double occupancy, and special promotional opportunities are available though the King and Prince website and Facebook page.



ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA VINOYCLUB.COM

I will probably never be a great golfer because I get too distracted. And whenever I visit the St. Pete area, I have an especially hard time choosing just one thing to do. This beautiful waterfront city has so much to offer—world-class museums, unique shopping, great restaurants and, as I recently discovered, a 1920s-era golf course that is incredibly woman-friendly.

On a recent morning, I managed to focus solely on the links belonging to The Vinoy Renaissance Resort & Golf Club. Located on Snell Island and less than two miles away from the elegant hotel, the Auduboncertified, 18-hole course looks like a botanical garden with its lush landscaping, palm trees, tropical flowers, gorgeous fountains and pristine fairways.

If you haven't played The Vinoy's course recently, you'll be amazed at how it has changed, especially the side-by-side fifth and sixth holes. Perfectly landscaped mounds and palms have been added to separate the two fairways so that golfers no longer see each other as they chase balls in opposite directions. Along the 525-yard 18th fairway, shrubbery and flowers have been planted to resemble a gallery of people watching golfers from a distance.

"We are constantly evolving and making the course friendlier to play," explains Director of Golf Randy Mosley. "We've made larger tee boxes, widened fairways and added mounds between some of the holes, which has created elevations and made the greens more private."

Mosley also points out that the ladies tee boxes have a few enhancements that the men's do not have—specifically flowers that add a zing of color such as birds of paradise. "Our lady members noticed the changes right away and said the course reminded them of a beautiful garden," Randy says.

The attention to women's golf at the course is not surprising given that the papers to create the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) were signed in 1950 at The Vinoy Club, which houses the pro shop and restaurant. The elaborate clubhouse features the same 1920s Mediterranean Revival architecture as the hotel and is also on the National Register of Historic Places, as is the hotel.

Just because the The Vinoy golf course is "friendly," don't let that fool you into thinking it's easy. In 1992, noted Florida golf architect Ron Garl reconstructed the course, which originally opened in 1925 as the Sunset Golf and Country Club. To make it challenging for modern golfers, he used the nine lakes on the property and built lots of bunkers. The course has a slope rating of 130 from the back tees.

"You can have a low score on the front nine, but the last three holes on the back nine can easily wreck a near-perfect round, " says Mosley. "We describe hole 16 as '568 yards of sheer terror."

The Vinoy Club is a private non-equity course. Only club members and hotel guests can play the course, which spaces tee times eight minutes apart. The Vinoy Renaissance offers a variety of seasonal golf packages (with unlimited, same-day play) starting as low as \$229 per person or \$289 per couple in December.





### THE ART OF GOLF

Golf inspires all types of people to take up the game, and it has even inspired artists to create extraordinary images, portraits and landscapes—many that have never been seen in the U.S.

The Art of Golf, the first major museum exhibition in America devoted to the popular game, opens at the St. Petersburg Museum of Fine Arts on November 3 and runs through February 17, 2013. Organized by the National Galleries of Scotland and Atlanta's High Museum of Art, the show will feature 90 works by Rembrandt, George Bellows, Norman Rockwell, Andy Warhol and others.

The Art of Golf takes a chronological approach to the game, beginning with images of "kolf," an ancient cousin of the modern game. Rembrandt's famous etching "The Ringball Player" (1654) will be part of the section on the game's early history. The centerpiece of the exhibition, however, is "The Golfers," an 1847 painting by Charles Lees that has been reproduced for clubhouses around the world. Quintessential American artist Andy Warhol's portrait of professional golfer Jack Nicklaus is also featured.

For ticket information, please visit fine-arts.org or call (727) 896-2667.



## BLACK DIAMOND RANCH

#### LECANTO, FLORIDA BLACKDIAMONDRANCH.COM

What do tennis great Pete Sampras, NBA star Julius Irving, ballet legend Mikhail Baryshnikov, former Governor Jeb Bush and golf legend Tiger Woods have in common? They've all played golf at Black Diamond Ranch, a 45-hole, Tom Fazio-designed course in Lecanto.

The secluded development off County Road 491 is home to one of America's Greatest 100 Golf Courses, according to *Golf Digest Magazine*. And Black Diamond has received that honor for 22 consecutive years as well as many other prestigious awards for golf communities. Its beauty is undeniable, but with that beauty comes challenges that are unique for a Florida course—specifically 80-foot cliffs surrounding the signature holes on The Quarry, Black Diamond's most iconic course.

Just as I headed out in a golf cart, monsoon-like rains rolled in, and I was unable to play the course that was "cut to perfection" from an old limestone quarry. That is probably just as well because I was awe-struck from the moment I checked in at Black Diamond's private entrance and saw the postcard-like view of The Quarry's 15th hole to my distant right. I was

too enamored with the scenery to think about lining up a perfect putt.

"People fly in from all over the country to play here," says Kerry Rosselet, membership director. "Some golfers have bucket list courses they want to play, and The Quarry is usually one of them."

The Quarry, which opened in 1987, may be the most famous of Black Diamond's three courses, but the others are just as beautiful and challenging. The Ranch, also 18 holes, is a little more rugged than The Quarry, and designer Fazio has said that the course's final three holes "represent the best three finishing holes I've ever designed." Although The Highlands is only nine holes, don't get the mistaken idea that it's an executive course. With elevations as high as 150 feet, the par-36 course has a slope rating of 147, making it one of this country's most challenging.

A stay-and-play package at Black Diamond Ranch after November 1 runs \$399 per person and includes two rounds of golf. The club manages several beautifully decorated houses where golfers can enjoy a home-away-from-home inside the private community.

# NEED A GETAWAY?

If you said "Yes!", then *Ocala Style* has you covered! We're giving two separate readers the chance to visit The King and Prince Beach  $\theta$  Golf Resort on St. Simons Island, Georiga. Winners will receive a two-night stay in an oceanfront room complete with a breakfast buffet for two each morning and two rounds of golf for two at The King and Prince Golf Course, courtesy of The King and Prince Beach  $\theta$  Golf Resort. Want to go? Visit our Facebook page at facebook.com/ocalastyle and stay tuned for details on how to win.

It's that simple!