



# Golfing nirvana

ASK ANY GOLF WRITER FOR THEIR FAVOURITE LUXURY GOLFING DESTINATIONS AND THIS RESORT WILL MAKE THE TOP FIVE, BUT YOU'VE PROBABLY NEVER HEARD OF IT. Peter Swain HEADED TO SLEEPY SOUTH CAROLINA TO TEE OFF AT KIAWAH ISLAND.



A GOLFER'S SANCTUARY  
The Clubhouse overlooks the 14<sup>th</sup> hole of Kiawah's legendary Ocean Course.



IF RHETT BUTLER WERE ALIVE TODAY, CHARLESTON'S most notorious fictional resident would probably play his golf at Kiawah Island, near the famous old seaport where, at Fort Sumter, the first shots of the Civil War were fired. Meanwhile Scarlett O'Hara, a fierce defender of the finer things in life, would surely feel right at home in the lavish resort's Sanctuary Hotel.

But it isn't just Americans cutting a dash at Kiawah. The island is a legend worldwide, with its 10,000 sybaritic acres housing seven top-notch golf courses, stunning natural scenery and wildlife, private beaches fronting the Atlantic, soigné spas, great clubhouses exuding Southern charm, palatial homes, outstanding tennis facilities and an exceptional five-star hotel. The most demanding of belles couldn't ask for more.

Hardly surprising, then, that it's regularly voted the best luxury golf resort in North America. Having recently stayed and played there, I'd go further. I think it's the best in the world.

The centerpiece of the enterprise is the magnificent

Ocean Course, expressly designed for the 1991 Ryder Cup by Pete Dye. Infamous for Bernard Langer's missed putt on the 18<sup>th</sup>, the "War on the Shore" put Kiawah on the golfing map. More recently, Rory McIlroy ran away with the 2012 PGA on the same slightly updated course, which is, quite simply, a masterpiece – albeit a fiendishly difficult one for mere mortals like myself.

The front nine features marshland and trees, with the back nine playing through the dunes. Visually intimidating, most drives are aimed at angled fairways, so the ability to shape the ball both ways is an advantage. Many approaches are to collarless plateau greens, so errant shots plummet down into severe runoffs. The wind often swirls at over 50 kilometres an hour, so trying to overpower the Ocean, I quickly discovered, is a mistake. On top of that, the rough is wiregrass or marshland, so balls are easily lost. And then there's the water. When my Pro V1 trickled into a shallow water hazard, I was strongly advised to leave it. Almost every pond of any size on Kiawah has at least one alligator...

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The par-threes are simply awesome: during the last day of the Ryder Cup, not one player hit the two-tiered elevated 14<sup>th</sup> green. The iconic 17<sup>th</sup> plays 197 yards over water, almost all carry. 34,000 balls, including one of mine, were recently fished out of the pond. The 18<sup>th</sup> is a great finishing hole needing a long drive then an accurate second to the right half of the green to avoid the wicked sunken tongues of sand licking the left side. After doing battle with it, the sumptuous clubhouse is perfect for toasting victory or, in my case, drowning one's sorrows with a slug of the local bourbon.

The Ocean is the best course on offer but the others are almost as good. I found the recently remodelled Oak Point, once an indigo plantation, perfect for a day one warm-up. With wide-open fairways, the Gary Player-designed Cougar Point is good for a more ambitious second-day game. By day three, I was ready for Tom Fazio's 6,932-yard Osprey Point, which features dense maritime forests of live oak and palmettos. A notch more challenging still, Jack Nicklaus' 7,061-yard Turtle



Point, with narrow fairways, small greens and strategically placed hazards, is a big hit on the Pro-Celebrity circuit. Then there are the two courses belonging to the exclusive Kiawah Island Club. Many rate the stunning Tom Watson-designed Cassique the second-best track on the island. Both it and Fazio's much-lauded River Course meander through classic South Carolina Lowcountry saltmarsh savannas.

Now, luckily, the folks at Kiawah know that it takes more than good golf courses to make a great golf resort. So tennis players have 19 clay courts and five floodlit hard courts at their disposal, while the pristine beach is equally good for surfers, swimmers and sailors. Less sporty types can enjoy the wildlife. Bob-

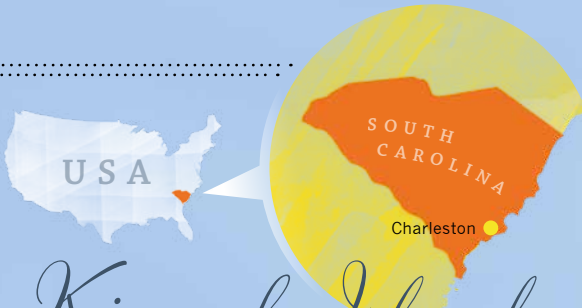
RECOMMENDED READING

**Gone With the Wind**  
by Margaret Mitchell / Macmillan  
The epic American novel that follows Rhett Butler and Scarlet O'Hara as the South, and its way of life, crumbles during the Civil War.

cats, loggerhead turtles, deer and alligators abound, as well as ospreys, bald eagles and turkey vultures feasting on the lost dreams of broken golfers.

The heartbeat of the resort is the magnificent 225-room Sanctuary Hotel. Southern splendour personified, it has two magnificent curving staircases, opulent suites, a luxurious spa, exemplary service and, in the Ocean Room, one of the best steakhouses outside New York. At breakfast, I agree with the locals: the shrimp and grits are mighty fine. For history buffs, nearby Charleston, the capital of the Old South, still has a certain languid elegance, with fascinating Civil War sites like the Battery offering a glimpse of Confederate life now gone with the wind. The New South is also in evidence: I can recommend the crispy pig's ear lettuce wrap at Husk, the hot new restaurant in town.

But the main dish in this part of South Carolina is definitely Kiawah. It's a unique destination well worth the trip. The courses may be tough, but for golfers, tomorrow is always another day.



Kiawah Island

**GETTING THERE**  
Qantas flies from Sydney direct to Dallas Fort Worth, Texas twice daily. From Dallas Fort Worth American Airlines flies to Charleston, South Carolina up to six times a day. Return economy fares are priced from A\$2,035 and business class fares (only available on the Sydney to Dallas Fort Worth leg) from A\$8,243. Total flight time is around 18 hours plus stopover.  
qantas.com.au; aa.com  
Kiawah Island Golf Resort is a one-hour drive from Charleston Airport and transfers can be arranged through The Sanctuary Hotel.

**PLAYING THERE**  
Green fees for the Ocean Course start from US\$232 (about A\$256) for Sanctuary Hotel guests or US\$257 (about A\$283) for outside visitors. The other courses are priced from US\$75-119 (about A\$83-131) for guests and US\$89-140 (about A\$98-144) for visitors.

**STAYING THERE**  
**The Sanctuary Hotel**  
Rooms are priced from US\$330 (about A\$360) per night and suites from US\$775 (about A\$845) per night plus taxes.  
kiawahresort.com



**BELLE OF THE BALL**  
Opposite page from far left: The Sanctuary Hotel; Southern splendour at The Sanctuary; A plush Ocean View Suite. This page main image: The sixth green of the Ocean Course. This page inset: The Gary Player-designed Cougar Point Course.