

Bay Hill, FL



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Arnold Palmer's greatest hits as a course designer have come in some far-flung locales. These include Hawaii ([Turtle Bay](#)), Wyoming ([Teton Pines](#)), Minnesota ([Deacon's Lodge](#)), and a double dip in Ireland ([Tralee](#) and the [K Club](#)).

However the course he's most associated with is [Bay Hill](#), in his adopted hometown of Orlando, Florida. This despite the fact that this robust test of golf was originally designed by Joe Lee.

The PGA TOUR is at Bay Hill this week, at the [Arnold Palmer Invitational](#). Many of the world's finest players will doubtlessly relish their time at Palmer's fiefdom.

Here's the backstory: In 1965, the same year that Walt Disney announced the purchase of over 27,000 acres of land nearby, where the Disney World Resort would soon emerge, Palmer played in (and won) a charity exhibition tournament at Bay Hill. It was love at first sight; Palmer was quickly enamored with the property and told his wife that he wanted to own it. In 1970 he took a five-year lease with an option to buy, and took full ownership in 1975.



Image via [Bay Hill](#)

Although much has changed, expanded and improved in forty-plus years, the ethos of Bay Hill remains much the same. Despite his worldwide acclaim and celebrity, there is still plenty of western Pennsylvania in “the King,” and his homespun simplicity is present throughout this handsome property. In other words, nothing about the 70-room facility screams “resort.” The lodge is low slung, and everything is compact; the pool, tennis, gym and spa are just steps away, several fine dining establishments (and a handsome bar) are tucked just off the lobby, with the acclaimed course but a three minute walk from the front desk.

There’s nothing showy about the golf course either, it’s just a solid, challenging, championship track, and the roster of tournament winners is a fine testament to same. Tiger Woods has won about half the time he’s shown up, but Ernie Els has won at Bay Hill more than once, and Vijay Singh, Phil Mickelson and Kenny Perry have all triumphed there in the last twenty years.

Water provides much of the rigor, the view from the third tee is the first indication that massive ponds are in prime position to wreak havoc with the scorecard. The third, sixth, eleventh, thirteenth and most famously, the eighteenth, all pose danger for either an errant tee ball or approach shot.



Image via [Bay Hill](#)

The golf course was redesigned in 2009, and one of the major modifications was the addition of closely mown areas around the greens to give players more options when missing the putting surfaces. It also allows mid or high handicap players to putt or bump-and-run rather than hit lofted shots around the greens. Furthermore, bunkers were moved further down the fairways, which has little effect on the modest drives hit by most amateurs and resort guests, but can wreak havoc with the tee box bombs delivered by the world's finest golfers.

Just fifteen minutes down the road is the yin to Bay Hill's rustic yang: [The Waldorf-Astoria Golf Course](#). Despite the upscale polish of the ubiquitous hotel brand, despite the pampering of their well-heeled guests, (with \$600 belts for sale in the pro shop, no less!) This lovely golf course can be an absolute beast. Proof: at a 2013 US Open Qualifier not a single player managed to break par.



Image via [Waldorf Astoria Orlando](#)

The course sits on just 100 acres, compared to a typical course that sits on 150 acres. But it is so well screened, surrounded on three sides by Disney properties, and on the fourth side by Interstate-4, the course really seems much more remote than it is. Unlike a typical user-friendly resort property, the Waldorf Course has plenty of constricted fairways, bunkering both big-shouldered and bottomless, and mostly smaller greens.



Image via [MoonFish](#)

There are as many good restaurants in Orlando as there are blades of grass on any Bay Hill tee box. But to toss out a single suggestion, [MoonFish](#) is a hip, visually arresting Asian-Fusion bistro with consistently fine food, featuring great seafood, sushi and steak. And the bonus is it's not too far from Bay Hill, or for that matter, the Waldorf.