

TPC Sawgrass, FL



It's little more than thirty miles in a National Rental Car from Jacksonville International Airport to one of the best one-two punches in the resort golf world: The famed [TPC Sawgrass](#) in the beach town of Ponte Vedra, Florida.



17th at TPC Sawgrass

Everyone knows the Stadium Course, home of the infamous island green 17th, and the Players Championship. However also on

premises is Dye's Valley, considered by many to be among Florida's top twenty layouts itself, no faint praise in a golf-saturated state with a thousand-something courses. However it can't help but wither in the tremendous shadow of the iconic Stadium Course. It's the green-grass iteration of a Billy Ripken or Jim Belushi, doomed by comparison to its Hall-of-Fame sibling.

The Pete Dye-designed Stadium Course was envisioned to be "the most democratic course in the world," according to management, testing all aspects of one's game. Short and long par-3s and par-4s, reachable and unreachable par-5s, holes bending both left and right, and no two consecutive holes heading in the same direction, so that a prevailing wind would always make holes play differently.



16th at TPC Sawgrass

"Democratic" might have been the idea. "Demonic" was the end result. How tough was Dye's initial effort? The Tournament Players Championship was first conducted on the grounds in 1982, and featured names like Nicklaus, Palmer, Trevino, Miller, Wadkins and Sutton—35 Majors won among them. They all missed the cut. The course was quickly softened after a chorus of complaints by the Tour elite, and Dye returned again to make some significant changes in 2006. During an eight-month, 60-million-dollar renovation, the fairways were scalped and a six-inch layer of fresh sand, the equivalent of sixteen football fields per fairway, was installed beneath

the grass, the better to percolate and dry quickly after downpours. Now it's a firmer, faster golf course, where off-line shots bound more quickly toward thick rough, uneven lies, encroaching water, and other unpleasantness.



2nd at TPC Sawgrass Dye's Valley Course

The truth of the matter is that the other eighteen at TPC Sawgrass, the far-less-in-demand Dye's Valley Course, is an outstanding test of the game. Although there are homes throughout, several road crossings, a bit of traffic noise and some slightly tarnished sightlines due to power lines, it remains eminently worthwhile. None of these potential distractions can alter the fact that Dye's Valley Course is full of testing tee shots, beautifully framed fairways, and difficult pin placements. It's a quality course, and if it existed as a stand-alone facility elsewhere in the state, or in Alabama or Georgia, people would flock to play it.



14th at TPC Sawgrass Dye's Valley Course

There are no yawners on the course, but the middle of the opening nine, the third through the seventh, is the most interesting sequence. There are two potentially drivable par-4s for bazooka-types, and a “poor man’s island green par-3,” with water to the right and long and all sorts of shaggy mounding and bunkers, waiting to the left. Perhaps the most solid hole on the course—the no-nonsense sixth, is a long par-4 stretching more than 460 yards from the tips, four-and-a-quarter for blue tee players. A massive lagoon dominates the right side, with an equally sizeable waste bunker in the ideal landing zone.

Management tells the story of a certain group of repeat visitors to TPC Sawgrass. For some twenty years, this foursome insisted on going round and round the Stadium Course exclusively. Finally one year they deigned to check out Dye’s Valley Course. They were immediately smitten with the slightly gentler layout, making it part of their rotation going forward, and moaning about the fact they’d been missing its subtle pleasures due to their myopic focus on the Stadium Course.

Good choices abound outside the 36-hole facility when it comes to gustatory pleasures. The uniquely named Palm Valley Fish Camp serves fresh seafood within sight of the intracoastal waterway. The restaurant is petite and can be noisy, so be warned. Poppy’s Italiano

offers a quaint atmosphere with sizable portions of homemade Italian food. Barb and Wally's Down South Barbecue, as the name implies, specializes in grilled meats.