

Gold Medal Resorts Part II (Kohler)



Whistling Straits

The 2016 Summer Olympics in Brazil have enthralled sports fans worldwide. People are drawn to the drama, the pageantry, and the sad fact that for every gold medal won, there are dozens of elite athletes who come away empty-handed, and rue the fact they weren't a touch faster, stronger or more skilled. Same can be said for the elite universe of the nation's finest golf destinations. GOLF Magazine offers a very short list of Gold Medal Resorts, and to find a place therein is to know you are among the best of the best.

Destination Kohler is just such a place, despite its unlikely location in working-class Sheboygan, about an hour's drive from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Grab your car from National and head out to try four scintillating golf experiences at the Midwest's only Five Diamond Resort. For the time-challenged golfer who can afford one round only, the choice is undoubtedly **Whistling Straits**, an Irish-themed thrill ride hard by the banks of Lake Michigan, site of the 2004, 2010 and 2015 PGA Championship, and the 2020 Ryder Cup Matches. If the itinerary allowed for a second round, then the **River Course** is the choice, a beguilingly beautiful walk among river and woods, site of the 1998 and

2012 U.S. Women's Open. **Meadow Valleys** and the **Irish Course** round out the quartet, and are magnificent resort venues, albeit understudies to the main attractions.



The Straits

The Straits, and the neighboring Irish Course, came to life amidst 560 lakeside acres about ten miles northeast of the resort itself. The land was a former army base, an ecological ruin filled with asbestos, toxic waste, concrete bunkers and fuel storage tanks. But it also featured seventy-foot bluffs rising above the waters of Lake Michigan. Though fairly new to playing the game, resort founder Herb Kohler had quickly developed an affinity for links golf, whose roots are in the seaside courses of the United Kingdom. "I want this course to look like it's in Ireland," was the directive handed down.



The Irish

By the time architect Pete Dye was done scalloping the featureless landscape, employing four decades of know-how, a fleet of bulldozers, and 13,000 truckloads of sand imported from area farms, the wondrous creation of fescue grasses and bunkers surrounding tilting fairways looked as if it were sitting on top of the Irish Sea. Kohler even imported a flock of blackface sheep to roam the golf grounds along the lakeshore unencumbered, adding a uniquely appealing touch. He also decreed the course would be walking only, no carts, as it was meant to be the antithesis of a typically cushy resort course. “He told me he wanted a walking course, and I thought he was crazy,” remembers Pete Dye. “I enjoy walking, and thought I’d be the only one who ever played this course, but I was wrong. He set a trend.”

Despite the constant views of Lake Michigan from throughout the Straits Course, water is rarely in play, other than the quartet of incredible par-3s, several of which look as they are ready to teeter off the cliff, and tumble down into the steel-gray lake. A boomerang hook or high-flying slice, depending on which way the golfer is heading, will come to an inglorious demise on lake’s bottom.



The River

The River Course undoubtedly plays second fiddle to The Straits, but is still first-rate in every capacity. This parkland beauty features the gurgling Sheboygan River on twelve holes and is an exceptionally scenic golf journey, deeply wooded, with a multitude of wildlife. The serene setting, rife with native grasses, unusual mounding, and a color palette of dazzling flowers, provide the visual reverie. But it’s the

strategic element of the routing, the go-for-broke mentality that golfers found irresistible, and made the course an instantaneous hit from its late 1980s inception. It is target-oriented, demanding accuracy from the tee and on the approach. The middle portion of the course is a spectacular series of downhill tee shots, hard-angled doglegs, and an unending series of risk/reward opportunities that tempt golfers to bite off as much as they dare.

While golf is the main attraction, many other amenities make Destination Kohler such a prime attraction. The award-winning [Kohler Waters Spa](#), a five-star facility considered among the world's top fifty spas, is another major attraction of the resort. There's also great fishing, shooting, horseback riding, biking and other fitness activities. Other unique features include garden tours, and visits to either the Kohler Design Center or Kohler Factory itself, where some of the world's finest bathroom and plumbing fixtures are manufactured. Dining options abound, with the marquee option being the [Immigrant Restaurant](#). Paying homage to the factory workers who were among the earliest residents of what eventually became the resort, there are half-a-dozen separate rooms in the elegant bistro, and are decorated in the style most befitting the French, Dutch, German, Normandy, Danish and English, respectively. Specialty caviar, lamb chops, Salmon Oscar and braised veal are among the highlights. [The Horse and Plow](#) is another excellent option, particularly for those not inclined to don sports jackets or coat-and-tie. Crab cakes, chicken pot pie, homemade meatloaf, bison burgers and a wide range of salads are complemented by a dazzling array of beers, both bottled and on draft.