

Sandestin Resort, FL



The Florida Panhandle isn't an easy drive-in destination, but the tiny Northwest Florida Regional Airport in Destin is within a single flight connection for millions of Americans.

Grab your rental car from National upon arrival, because the charms of Sandestin Resort, just thirty short minutes from the airport, are now within easy reach. The 2,400-acre full service resort, with its sugary sand beaches, lively and attraction-filled Village of Baytowne Wharf, proliferation of pools, tennis courts and marina, and particularly its quartet of fine courses, is one of the best kept golf secrets in the southeast.



The Raven Golf Club

The Raven Golf Club, a former host venue of the Boeing Championship on the Champions Tour, is among the marquee venues and the first among equals in regards to the trio of pure resort courses available for public play. This Robert Trent Jones Jr. design is a lovely walk through the marshes, wetlands and pine trees of the resort. The course offers mostly generous landing areas and has a sense of spaciousness lacking at several of the other courses.



Burnt Pine

Burnt Pine is not only the priciest, but also the least accessible of the four courses. Outside play must commence prior to 8 a.m. or after 1 p.m., but being a “dew-sweeper” or teeing it up post-lunch is well worth it. Burnt Pine is a very stately golf course, isolated, great tree cover, generous housing setbacks and a real sense of remove. Capacious bunkering surrounding smallish greens puts a real premium on approach shots. But this woodsy environment ends abruptly midway through the inward nine when players are confronted with the most arresting of the 72 holes available at Sandestin Resort. The par-3 14th is a dazzler, an over-marshland gauntlet with the bay shimmering to the right is both gorgeous and dangerous.



The Links Course

The Links Course has some of the most memorable views on the entire property. Architect Tom Jackson designed this winding layout against the backdrop of the Baytowne Marina and the Choctawhatchee Bay. With five holes that run along the bay, few trees, plenty of wind, and some spectacular views, none better than

the drop-dead gorgeous 8th hole, a 355-yard par-4 with a tough carry from the tee.

The waterside views are delightful, but early on both nines a golfer is practically bumping up against the roadways and byways in the resort and beyond. For example, as one approaches the green of the par-5 11th, one is so close to the Starbucks across busy Highway 98, it's tempting to consider taking the golf cart up to the drive-through window.



Baytowne Golf Club

Finally, there is [Baytowne Golf Club](#), which underwent a comprehensive renovation by original course architect Tom Jackson a decade ago. Baytowne was originally a 27-hole facility, but when The Raven was built nine holes was sublimated into the newer golf course, and nine more were built for Baytowne. This “two-halves-makes-a-whole” philosophy is easy to understand in the playing, as the golf course burrows through a tunnel under the main highway outside of the resort, and offers a number of holes on the beach side of the highway, before coming back to the bay side.

A golfer is never close enough to see the ocean, but you can smell the salty air, enjoy the cool breeze and can at least imagine the crashing surf beyond the condos and hotels one views in the medium distance. It has some nice strategy and some challenging holes, but the housing, road crossings, tunnel traffic etc. makes it a busier and more hectic golf course than some would care for. It's a good test of the game, but far from the bucolic experience at the adjacent Raven. A visit to the resort's bustling Village of Baytowne Wharf, with nearly fifty separate businesses in one centralized pedestrian plaza,

underscores the point that hundreds of visitors enjoy Sandestin, and never bother slipping spiked shoes on their feet, or take club in hand. Happy vacationers, be they couples, singles or families, can be found practically shoulder-to-shoulder, enjoying kids activities, shopping, live music, al fresco meals, libations of every stripe, and even fine dining. As for the latter, gourmands could do much worse than the Marlin Grill, just on the immediate outskirts of the action. Its handsome décor, delectable and wide-ranging menu, lively bar and eclectic drink list are some of the reasons it has long been one of the resort's most popular upscale eateries.