

TPC Louisiana



via priceless.com

New Orleans is known as the Big Easy. But there's nothing easy about finding compelling public-access golf within the city limits. More than a decade ago Hurricane Katrina decimated the city in so many ways, golf included, as courses were flooded, ruined, and in many cases never reopened. Fortunately there are still a few facilities that are worthy of a visit, and on the top of the list is the Pete Dye-designed [TPC Louisiana](#), in nearby Avondale.

Because TPC Louisiana was built on the west bank of the Mississippi, it was spared some of the devastation that Hurricane Katrina wrought further east. Nonetheless, the property was denuded of 2,000 of the original 10,000 trees, and thirty acres of fairway grass was submerged under standing water, due primarily to the fact that there were no workers available after the evacuation to remove the debris clogging the drains. It closed the day Katrina hit in late August 2005, reopening in mid-summer the following year.



The Zurich Classic via tpc.com

TPC Louisiana is the longtime home of the Zurich Classic, a regular staple of the PGA Tour season. The tournament has seen some distinguished champions in recent years. Bubba Watson, Jason Dufner and Justin Rose, Major winners all, have hoisted the trophy. But initially the property was nothing more than 250 acres of swampy marshland filled with cypress trees. The nearby Mississippi River was dredged for the river sand needed to provide the fill for the fairways. “It seems the PGA Tour commissioner only gives me swamps and rock-piles to work with,” said Pete Dye, laughingly. “But I always appreciate the confidence he has in me. And I still love digging in the dirt.”



Hole 16 via tpc.com

The three major physical features of the site are the preponderance of cypress trees, numerous wetland areas and a tremendous amount of fairway bunkering, some thirteen acres of sand in total, and more than seventy additional pot bunkers. Dye built modestly sized greens, no more than 5,000 square feet. He set the bunkers away from the putting surfaces with chipping areas between. “No need to have the bunkers right up against the greens. We want to have a different look, maybe a little optical illusion, and a different strategy to the holes,” explains Pete Dye.

The trees are a commanding presence throughout, no more so than on the petite 13th, a potentially drive-able par 4 of 377 doglegging yards from Tour tees, and 350 from the Dye tees. In mid-fairway is a large cypress surrounded by “cypress knees”— half-a-dozen chest-high, even head-high roots, surrounding the trunk and sticking out of

the turf in a semi-circle. Because cypresses often grow in swamps, the tree roots reach upward, to breathe. This effect on the TPC's 13th hole is eerie at minimum, and undesirable in the worst case, should one's tee shot come to rest among these most unusual natural hazards.

"Pete Dye told me his goal is to challenge the players mentally, on the optics of the hole, and keep them uncomfortable, a little off-balance," relates New Orleans native Kelly Gibson, a long-time Tour player who consulted on the project with ten-time Tour winner and former PGA Champion Steve Elkington. A core strength of the course is the daunting nature of the par-3s, all in excess of 200 yards from the back tee markers.



Joseph Bartholomew Golf Course via nola.com

"Another viable option in New Orleans is the [Joseph Bartholomew Golf Course](#)," said Gibson. This was originally known as the Pontchartrain Park Golf Course, and was built in 1956. The course was renovated in 1979 and renamed to honor its designer, the first African-American inducted in the Greater New Orleans Sports Hall of Fame. Bartholomew apprenticed to famed course architect Seth Raynor, and eventually designed several courses around the city. The sad irony was due to segregation laws, he wasn't allowed to play the courses he had conceived, or enjoy the fruits of his labor. It was only posthumously that the course he built was renamed in his honor.

"Eight courses were destroyed after Katrina, several of which never came back," said Gibson, who has raised millions of charitable dollars for relief efforts. "But millions were poured back into the Bartholomew

Course, and it's one of the city's few public jewels." The parkland course benefits from quick-draining silt material, dredged from Lake Ponchartrain during construction, which affords firm and fast conditions in an area that is often soggy, with most area courses (including the aforementioned TPC Louisiana) built on clay. Considering this city's restaurant scene has few equals (maybe just New York and San Francisco) we'll leave it to a fifth generation New Orleanian to make a few recommendations: "You can never go wrong with [Commander's Palace](#), it's a classic," offers Gibson, who won twice on the Nationwide Tour and twice more on the Canadian Tour. "[Tableau](#) in Jackson Square has a unique twist on classic Creole dishes. [Desi Vega's Steakhouse](#) has some of the best beef in the city, and lastly, [Ole Saint](#) is popular for breakfast, lunch and dinner, and is co-owned by former Saints running back Deuce McAllister."