



# A SLICE OF HEAVEN

The Resort at Pelican Hill has it all: outstanding amenities, great golf and, maybe best of all, a site that makes visitors never want to leave

BY CASEY RICHARDS

**R**obert Ford's 30-plus-year career in the golf industry has featured stints at facilities on both coasts, his native Michigan and numerous other locales. Only one stop, however, left enough of a lasting impression to warrant a second tenure.

"I just fell in love with Pelican Hill," Ford said. It's easy to see why.

Located in Newport Beach, Calif., The Resort at Pelican Hill is a five-star retreat sprawled across 504 acres of sun-drenched cliffs overlooking the majestic Pacific Ocean. While the Italian-inspired resort as a whole, which features 128 luxurious villas, 204 lavish bungalows, a world-class spa and numerous gourmet dining options, celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2018, the Tom Fazio-designed 36 holes of championship golf date back to 1991. Ford was part of the golf club's staff from its opening until 2000, before returning as general manager in 2017.

"I had a deep love with Pelican," Ford said. "The first time I saw this as a young kid from Michigan . . . heck, I had never even seen the Pacific Ocean before."

Now, it's rare for Ford to look up and *not* see the Pacific Ocean. On a clear day, the stunning



blue water is visible at some point on every hole. Yet it's more than simply the views that make playing the Ocean South and Ocean North courses memorable experiences. Fazio, who "re-perfected" the layouts in 2015, skillfully utilized the undulating terrain to craft 36 unique tests suitable for every player.

## Ocean South Course

Welcoming eucalyptus tree-lined fairways and a stretch of four unforgettable seaside holes highlight the shorter of Pelican Hill's two tracks, a par-70 layout featuring five sets of tees that play to a maximum of 6,580 yards.

The front nine cascades downhill from the bungalows toward the ocean. Significantly elevated tee boxes with a vast scope of the wide



No. 17 on the Ocean North Course

fairways are the norm, with the course's main defense being numerous two-tiered *Poa annua* greens. A good start to the round is crucial, as sun-seekers must navigate a 562-yard par 5, a 455-yard par 4 and an uphill, 475-yard par 4 at holes 8-10. Fear not, however, as a picturesque reward awaits.

After utilizing a tunnel to navigate the Pacific Coast Highway, a panoramic view of the Pacific just beyond the 11th green welcomes golfers to a scenic and testing four-hole stretch. The 11th, while only playing to a maximum of 367 yards, can be "diabolical," according to Ford, depending on the wind and a player's ability to stay out of the vast greenside bunkers.

Next up are two shorter par-3s featuring the visual gratification of the Pacific to the left and aural pleasure of the waves crashing onto Crystal Cove Beach hundreds of feet below. The 159-yard 12th plays into a narrow, two-tiered green guarded by an immense waste bunker on the right. Pause for a picture on the tee box before tackling the 131-yard 13th, which features two different well-guarded putting surfaces and marks the end of a 400-foot descent from the first hole. Then, it's time to go back up.

"The next hole is where it really starts," Ford warns.

The final seaside hole, a 544-yard par 5, and the 407-yard 15th combine to climb 250 feet of the way back up to the luxe clubhouse. Finish the ascent with what Pelican Hill Managing Director Tom Donovan calls "one of the toughest holes in Southern California," a 453-yard par-4 requiring lengthy carries both off the tee and on the approach.

"No shot on that hole is easy," Donovan said

### Ocean North Course

Considered to be Pelican Hill's more challenging layout, Ford describes this par-71 routing as "more of a player's course," while Donovan labels it "big and burly." Significantly more open and undulating than the South Course, the North winds through the California cliffside, negotiating canyons, ravines and plateaus to offer a panoramic perspective of the Pacific and surrounding Orange County communities.

"The views are sensational up there," Donovan said.

Accuracy and shot shaping are of heightened importance to score well. The 197-yard second

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necessitates a full carry over a ravine lined with coastal-sage shrub, while the approach into the 433-yard, par-4 fourth is guarded by a steep dropoff and wide bunker on the front and right. Pick your path on the 450-yard, par-4 seventh, as a deep bunker splits the wide fairway. The right side offers a more generous landing area, but an accurate drive to the left provides a better angle in.

Similar challenges highlight the middle portion of the course before a memorable closing stretch.

Rip driver from an elevated tee box on the majestic dogleg-right, 558-yard 17th before an uphill second shot that must navigate water and a canyon that seemingly tumbles into the abyss. A lone tree lines the green, which is perched on the edge of a cliff and features some of the course's most sweeping vantages of the Pacific Ocean and Catalina Island in the distance.

"One of the best views on the golf course," Ford said.

Similar to the South's closing hole, No. 18 on the North requires cross-canyon carries both off the tee and on the downhill approach shot into a kidney-shaped green. Aim for the left side of the putting surface, as bunkers line the right side and the undulation funnels most shots to the right.

"That hole is everything you want," Ford said. "If you go par-par on those last two holes, you've done pretty good."

"Looking at those beautiful sunsets over Catalina," added Ford, "and what Tom Fazio did with these two golf courses is amazing." 🌅

## California Coastal Meets Mediterranean Majesty

The sun-drenched temperate climate of Southern California often mimics that of the Mediterranean, but that's not where the Italian-inspired for Pelican Hill ends.

The resort's architecture embodies the principles of Andrea Palladio, a prominent 16th century Italian architect, as distinguished columns, porticos and rotundas line the property. Italian limestone and Venetian plaster serve as the backbone of the structures, while roughly 750 olive trees dot the resort. The Coliseum Pool is one of the world's largest circular pools at 136 feet in diameter.

"[Our goal is] to bring this Italian feel and Italian flare to an area of the United States where the climate mimics that of Italy, and to showcase that look and feel," said managing director Tom Donovan.

### Where to Eat

There is no need to venture off resort grounds to enjoy an exquisite meal, as Pelican Hill Executive Chef Jean-Pierre Dubray and his team orchestrate seven restaurants of varying cuisine to choose from.

"Every aspect of the food, Jean-Pierre is intimately involved," Donovan said.

The resort's signature dining experience is Andrea Ristorante, with homemade pasta highlighting a diverse menu of classic Northern Italian favorites. Start your meal with some mushroom risotto, which is tossed in a giant wheel of parmesan cheese. Piccolo's culinary scope expands to include sharable favorites from around the world. Pelican Grill is a traditional steak and seafood restaurant with a California flair and also features a sports bar that is a great spot to mingle with locals. Lastly, grab on-the-go meals and snacks throughout the day at Caffè & Market,

including a few scoops of resort-made gelato.

### What to Do

For guests looking to feel some sand beneath their feet, Pelican Hill offers frequent shuttles to nearby Crystal Cove Beach and the Crystal Cove Historic District. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Historic District and its rustic cottages was one of the country's most prominent coastal getaways during the mid-20th century. Today, the more than three miles of pristine beach are perfect for a long afternoon stroll and relaxation.