

Culinary Victor

The Coliseum Grill is among the many unforgettable dining options at Pelican Hill, overlooking the resort's amazing circular pool, 136 feet in diameter.

The Pelican Hill Experience

story by Darin Bunch
photos courtesy of Pelican Hill

The Resort at Pelican Hill understands exactly what golf travelers want

It takes a lot to stand out in the crowd of California coastal getaways. After all, some of golf's most storied destinations — major championship hosts and historic resorts with colorful legacies — come to mind when planning a vacation along the Pacific Ocean. It takes a lot to compete, let alone unseat, the Golden State's best vacation venues.

But The Resort at Pelican Hill is working hard to do just that, mixing style with substance infused with a unique business plan that every traveler can appreciate: no hidden fees. In an industry where everything seems to carry an upgrade price, Pelican Hill does the unthinkable: They don't nickel-and-dime you. Free parking. Free internet. No resort fee. Free complimentary coach to nearby Crystal Cove, a popular Newport Coast state beach, complete with a full family package of towels, sunscreen and goodies for the little ones in a Pelican Hill tote bag. They'll even send someone down to set up your umbrella for the day. That's right, all for free.

"We call it the 'Pelican Hill beach experience.' And it's a very unique beach — 3.5 miles of pristine sand, a whole different feel than being down on the peninsula," says Kate Starr, director of communications and public relations for the resort. "Crystal Cove is definitely a little more refined, historic, rustic, so it's a perfect setting for what our guests are looking for."

Simply put, Pelican Hill gets it right in oh-so-many ways — 36 holes of Tom Fazio golf, stunning accommodations from single-bed bungalows to multi-room villas, unforgettable dining experiences — but especially in their bold, even iconoclastic, customer service model. Not that it's free to stay at Pelican Hill — quite the opposite — but they understand that when you pay for quality at this level, it's just bad form to milk guests for an extra few bucks for services that should never be considered extras.

Northern View

Actually, you're looking out west toward the Pacific when you play holes like this on Tom Fazio's Ocean North course at Pelican Hill, where it's easy to get turned around by the waterfront beauty.



Fantastic Finish

On both courses, the 18th hole requires an interesting carry to test your skills, especially here on the Ocean South course, which finishes up in full view of resort restaurant diners.

Opposite: The Pelican Hill Villas mix luxury, comfort and more ocean views to create the ultimate high-end accommodations.



“When you stay at The Resort at Pelican Hill, once your room rate is set, you know what you’re in for,” Starr says. “There are no surprises.”

No surprises when it comes to price, that is.

Instead, the resort is full of pleasant surprises at every turn, nowhere more impressive than the living spaces themselves. And if you have the opportunity, and means, to book one of the Villas with family or friends, you’ll understand even more quickly why many Pelican Hill visitors are returning year after year and leaving California’s other resorts a distant memory.

“Obviously, I came here to play golf because I had heard so much about the North and South courses, both of which are scenic and challenging,” says Chad Ramage, a Central Californian who happily crossed Pelican Hill off his bucket list in October. “But staying in the Villas was well worth the trip all by itself — especially if you love swimming pools and relaxing in the sun.

“With access to the ‘smaller’ edgeless Villa Clubhouse pool — exclusively for Villas guests; the Coliseum pool at the main resort complex will blow your mind as well with its size and beauty — it was the perfect end to my day, soaking in the last rays of an amazing sunset over the ocean before soaking my body in the whirlpool hot tub to get ready for my next round of golf. It felt like living a dream.”

Living *the* dream might be a better way to say it, even though Ramage left Newport Beach with one regret: “I never should have passed up the Crab and Lobster Mac N’ Cheese on my first night at the Pelican Grill — it looked so good, and I never got another chance to order it because there were so many menu options and dining experiences.”

Variety might be an understatement at a resort and spa only five years old with a five-star rating to match from *Forbes Travel Guide* (only 76 resorts and 35 spas in the world carry

that designation, and Pelican Hill has *both*). Fresh gelato is made daily in the Caffé. The Coliseum Grill offers an otherworldly pool-view setting. Andrea features fresh pasta from the resort’s own “pasta room” and serves one of the most delicious dishes I’ve encountered anywhere in the world: 7-Year-Barrel-Aged Acquerello Risotto with Porcini Mushrooms spooned onto your plate tableside from a giant cheese wheel (and served with shaved black or white truffles, depending on whether you’re visiting when they are in season).

And then there’s Pelican Grill — not your typical clubhouse restaurant. It’s both fine dining and a casual yet upscale bar atmosphere seamlessly integrated into one culinary funhouse, just steps from the golf courses’ expansive pro shop and overlooking one of the coolest stone bridges in existence. (In fact, take the resort tour on Wednesdays that explains the fascinating

architecture and antique furnishings that brought the Resort at Pelican Hill to life).

Pelican Grill has long been an “open concept” kitchen where diners are welcome step right up and talk to the chef and culinary staff, but now the resort is taking things a step further with the all-new Tasting Table — a long wooden table that seats 12 and is served by the chef’s whimsy and creativity each night. When is the last time that happened at the 19th hole of your home club?

“At the Tasting Table, we ask the guests to put themselves in the hands of the chef, and often that’s the best kind of meal because you end up trying things you never thought you would try or would even like, and experience something completely new,” Starr says of the different, more daring, dining approach. “It’s whatever he picks from the market that day, paired with wine, and it gives the chef a chance to be playful with new ideas. He writes the menu by hand each day, and also smokes his own meats, makes his own rubs ... you never know what you might get.”

Unlike on the golf course, where you know exactly what you’re going to get: 36 holes from Tom Fazio, who never disappoints, especially when given such a setting.

“From the minute we pulled up, you could tell that Pelican Hill is pure eye candy,” says Ramage’s playing partner (and competitor) Michael Smee, whose wife and son hit the pools while dad hit his share of fairways and greens. “From our helpful forecaddie, Rory, to the well-designed courses that bring the natural elevation changes and striking ravines into play throughout, both the North and South are mentally tough but definitely playable. And it doesn’t get any better than the South’s back-to-back 3-pars with waves crashing on the rocks next to you, sometimes even feeling the ocean mist.”

Fortunately, such memories don’t cost extra either — just like all the extra special touches at the Resort at Pelican Hill. ☐