

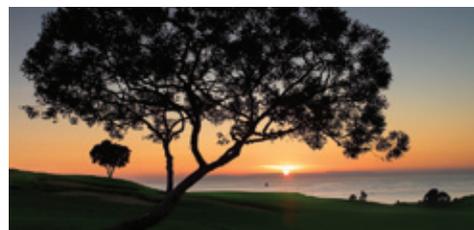
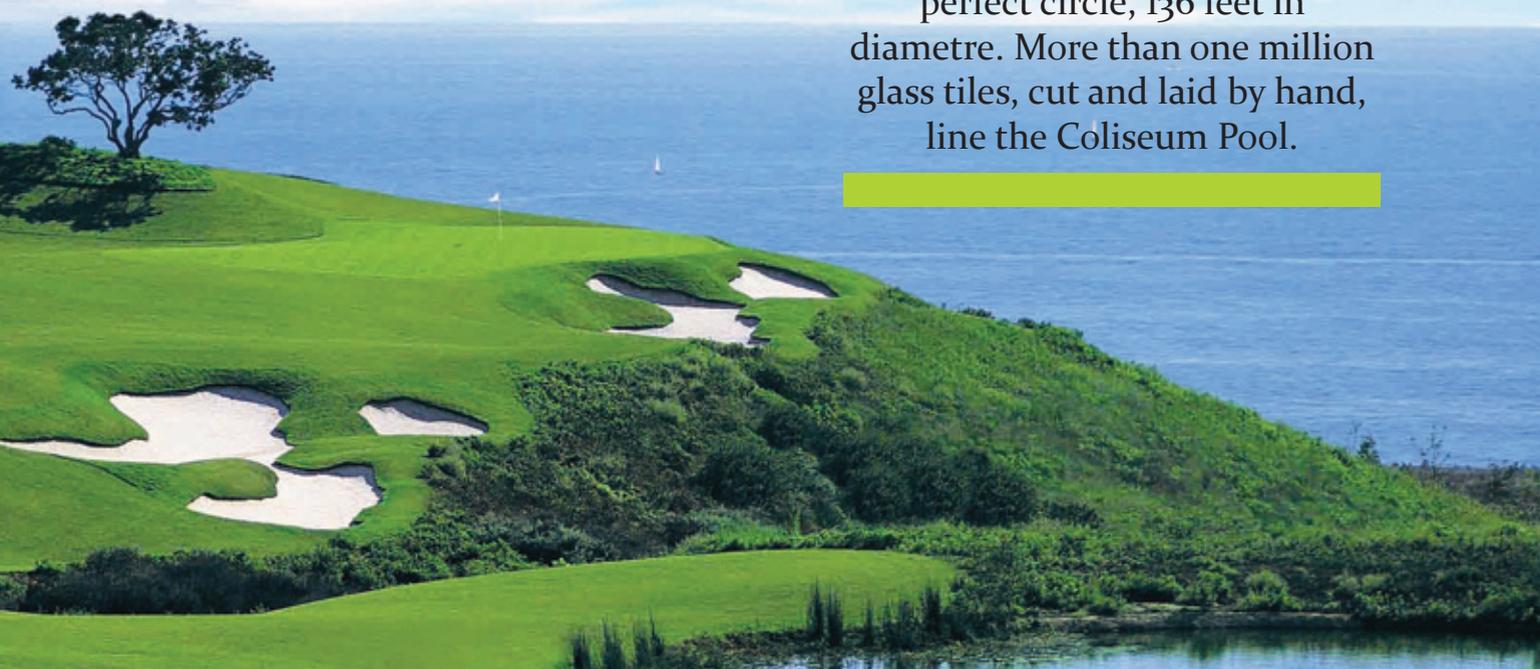


Fazio's Fabulous Fairways at Pelican Hill

Newport Beach resort exudes elegance and decadence

BY KEVIN WOODLEY

The resort features one of the most strikingly unique pools to be found anywhere: an expansive perfect circle, 136 feet in diameter. More than one million glass tiles, cut and laid by hand, line the Coliseum Pool.



Ever wonder about the difference between a five-star and five-diamond hotel? Forget Google or Expedia, a stay at the Pelican Hill Resort on California's Newport Beach coast provides equally immediate – and more enjoyable – answers beyond room rates that start at \$695 for a Bungalow and \$1500 for a Villa.

They are hard to miss as you enter a 504-acre property perched above the cliff-lined beaches, with striking 16th century Italian-inspired architecture offering panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean and a relaxed, open-air Mediterranean atmosphere perfectly suited to the sun-drenched California coastline.

After passing the appropriately named Coliseum Pool – a 136-foot across circular infinity pool surrounded on one side by plasma TV- and Bose-appointed cabanas before disappearing into the Pacific on the other – your “lifestyles of the rich and famous” experience continues throughout accommodations generously surrounded by marble, exposed wood beams and high-end appliances like Wolf and Sub-Zero.

If there were any lingering questions about the five-diamond difference after one night in 2,600 square feet of ultra-luxury, they ended with a call to the butler (on call 24/7 for Villas guests) for a shuttle to the kid's pool the next morn-

ing. It isn't every day, or at any resort, that such a request results in sunscreen soaked toddlers piling into a new Bentley.

That's how they roll at the Pelican Hill Resort though, and why it's one of just a handful in pampering-a-plenty So Cal to earn the five-diamond designation.

But for all the luxurious attention – and attention to detail – that earn that prestigious ranking, perhaps the best part of golf at Pelican Hill is that you don't notice it on two recently redesigned Tom Fazio courses consistently ranked among top must-play destinations by the world's leading golf publications.

The spectacular courses and their views simply demand all of your attention.

Make no mistake – painstaking attention was paid every detail on both the North and South courses. You don't close two of Orange County's most popular (and pricey) tracks for two years just to add 25 sand traps, no matter how spectacular that bunkering now is. Some are obvious, like what-you-need, when-you-

need-it service that starts as soon as you step out of the shuttle (sadly just a Mercedes Benz bus this time). Or the Nike One Platinum balls waiting for a warm-up at the grass tee range, the Laser Link range finder in the cart, and stroke-saving services of a Forecaddie, all included with your \$250 green fee.

Other measures of Pelican Hill perfection are subtler, like the Renaissance architecture at the new clubhouse and a Roman viaduct-inspired bridge leading from it to the courses that extend seamlessly from the look and feel of the resort itself. Or the laser-leveled blades used to make sure the tee boxes are cut uniformly level, and planting of low-growing vegetation to ensure uninterrupted sightlines out towards the deep-blue ocean and iconic Catalina Island.

All make golf at Pelican Hill more enjoyable on one level or another, but all the details become secondary to the two courses themselves. Because when Fazio isn't luring you into a Zen-like state with postcard-worthy backdrops compared often – and favourably – to Pebble Beach,

Coliseum Pool





he quickly snaps your attention back to the shot at hand with a pair of very different designs loaded with challenging canyon carries and risk-reward decisions that defy resort-golf stereotypes.

The first tough choice is picking a course to start on, because the only thing more predictable than praise for both is divided opinions on which is better.

Where Pelican Hill's Ocean South course winds down, through – and in many places across – several dramatic canyons to the resort's only three beachside holes, the Ocean North stays atop the cliffs, instead offering sweeping views of the coastline from pretty much every spot on a longer, more wide-open course.

Open is hardly the way to describe the South course. Though shorter at 6,580 yards from the back tees, its 10-hole descent to the inviting Pacific goes back-and-forth from tight, Pine- and Eucalyptus-lined, chute-like fairways to more open, gently rolling terrain, with severe elevation change and daunting shots over coastal sage scrub

loaded gorges. Add in deceptively thick, club-grabbing rough just off the edge of perfectly manicured Bermuda fairways, and tricky grain- and water-influenced breaks on large, pure rolling greens that make the forecaddie's advice crucial information, and the South course can be a punishing trip to the beach. But all is quickly forgiven once you arrive.

Starting with the 367-yard downhill par-4 11th and a tee shot that seems to hang over the ocean before giving way to a green framed picturesquely by wind-swept, fescue-edged minimalist bunkering, the three ocean holes are as memorable as any at Pelican Hill, even if the next two are short, similarly framed par-3s.

From there you work back up a hillside lined with \$20-million homes towards a memorable par-4 finishing hole. Set picturesquely below the Coliseum pool and requiring ball-gobbling crevasse carries on both the tee and approach shots, the 453-yard 18th is a fitting end to the challenging but scenic South Course.

Just an iron shot away, Pelican Hill's North Course finishes in similar fashion, with two long, forced carries amid a spectacular setting. The path to that final hole on the North, however, is decidedly unique from its southern counterpart.

With fewer big trees lining wider fairways, the North is more forgiving. But at 6,945 yards, a 134 slope rating from the tips, and with forced carries amid elevation changes that create endless ocean vistas, it's far from a push over. It can, however, be a run up, as in onto the greens. That's because the rolling North course feels more like classic Scottish links, with a variety of options around the putting surfaces, including running approach shots up onto them.

That "options" theme is abundant throughout a risk-reward loaded North, and perhaps best exemplified by a 17th hole ranked among the world's best holes by Golf Magazine. Set against an endless blue ocean backdrop, the 558-yard par-5 offers safe passage down the left, but rewards brave lines that flirt with the more



North course

pertinent water – a lake that frames the right side of the hole with help from a long white sand bunker – with a chance to reach in two by carrying the second shot over a canyon and more bunkers guarding a large elevated green.

If the South's challenges keep you coming back for more, the addition of choices make the North course worth playing again. For those planning a longer stay, or just golf obsessed, the affiliated Oak Creek Golf Club offers a third taste of Fazio design nearby (and at about half the price). And to continue the luxury theme, it's hard to argue with a trip to the granddaddy of overdone, the famed Trump National Golf Club Los Angeles, with its record \$250 million price tag, just an hour up the coast. But even if the green fees (Trump is \$275) aren't too problematic, there's also an abundance of entertainment options at and around Pelican Hill that will compete hard for your attention and golf-playing time.

It is easy to lose a day to the art galleries and festivals in Laguna Beach just to the south, or to luxurious high-end, ocean view shopping at Fashion Island a short shuttle (this time in a loaded Escalade) north towards Newport Beach. Not far past that is

Newport Harbour, the largest in the world for pleasure boats, offering everything from deep-sea fishing to whale watching to Catalina sail trips. Los Angeles, with its big league sports teams and endless other tourist trappings, is just an hour north, with Disneyland in between. And then there is Crystal Cove Beach at the base of the Pelican Hill property, featuring endless walking trails as well as bike tours, surf lessons, sea lion kayaking, or just sunbathing and exploring the tidepools along 3.5 miles of pristine beach.

For all the attractions nearby, though, you may find it hard to leave the gated community feel of Pelican Hill. The pools alone ensure that – in addition to the central Coliseum and its one million glass mosaic tiles, the quarter-circle infinity pool at the Villas offers some of the best views on the property – but there are also spa and fitness options to match. And whether it's burgers cooked and eaten poolside at the Coliseum, or more formal fare from the Ritz Carlton-trained chefs at any of five restaurant options, you'll never go hungry.

You'll also never again waste time contemplating the differences between five stars and five diamonds. But you might spend more dreaming of the latter.

GETTING THERE:



The Resort is located between the exclusive communities of Laguna Beach and Newport Beach with just a 15-minute drive from Orange County's John Wayne airport, a 30-minute drive from Long Beach Airport and a 45-minute drive from Los Angeles International Airport.

WHEN TO VISIT:



Southern California is usually much warmer than the Bay Area, and it gets significantly more sun. Even in winter, daytime temperatures regularly reach into the 60s (15°C-20°C) and warmer. Summers can be stifling inland, but Southern California's coastal communities are comfortable. The area's limited rainfall is generally seen between December and mid-April, but it's rarely intense enough to be more than a slight inconvenience.