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The 17th on the Ocean North course

FITTING THE BILL

Stephen Roe visits the Californian resort of Pelican Hill, which was inspired by a 20th-century Californian billionaire and a 16th-century Italian architect

When last year Tiger Woods decided to host his annual Gala Charity Golf event at southern California's Pelican Hill resort for the second year running, course designer Tom Fazio knew he had created something quite exceptional.

Two challenging 18-hole public courses have been carved out of canyons and ravines on a steep hillside rising dramatically from the Pacific Ocean coastline. Each of the 36 holes presents its own unique challenge and the rolling elevations can create some tricky lies, testing golfers of every skill level.

Tiger grew up honing his skills on courses in this area and he retains a special affection for the landscape of Orange County and keeps a home in the nearby fashionable beach resort of Newport Beach.

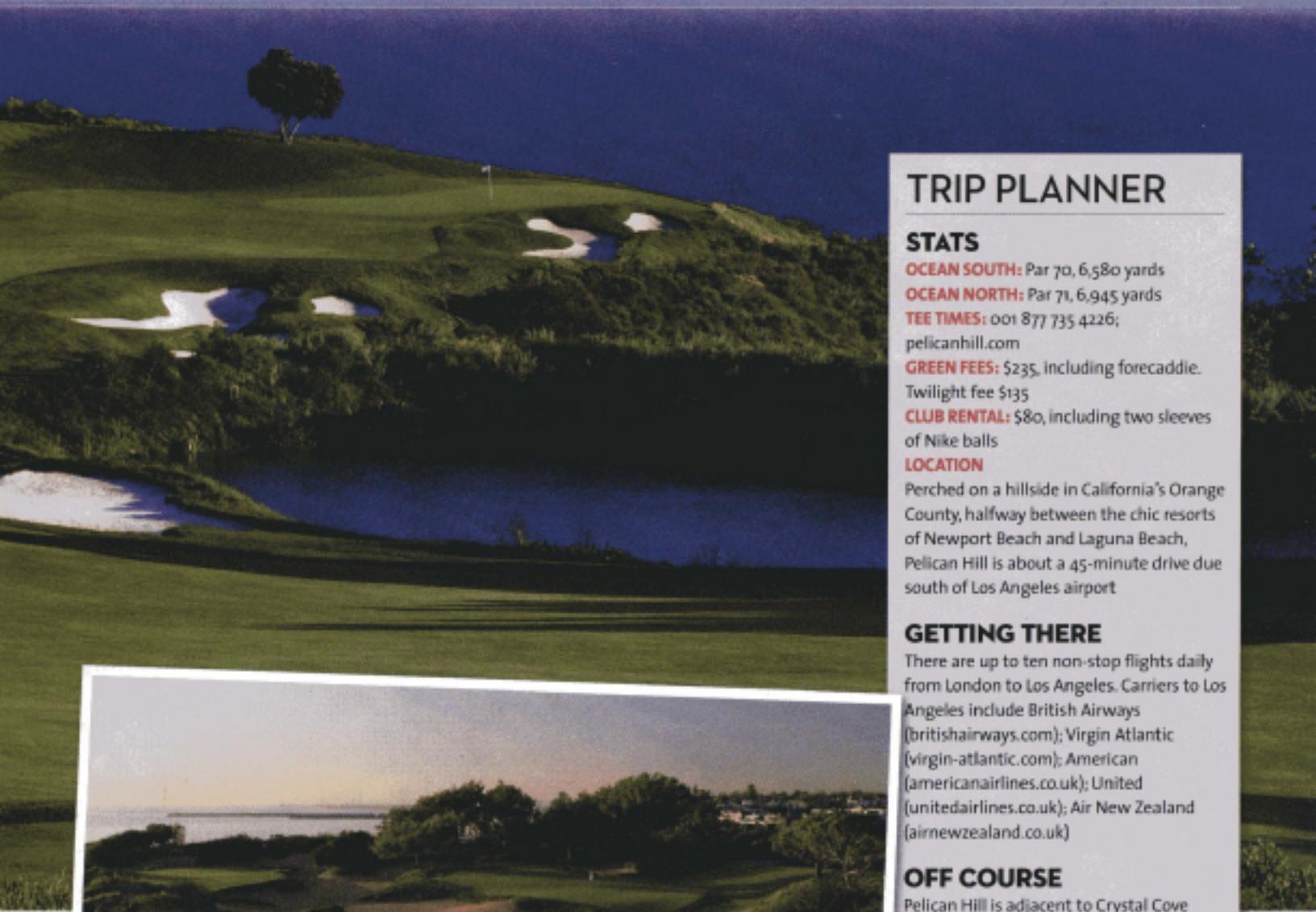
Pelican Hill was created as the lifetime legacy of Californian billionaire Donald Bren, who owns large tracts of land in the area, including the 950 acres on which the resort has been developed. Over 200,000 trees, shrubs and vines have been planted to give the courses and the resort a well-established feel.

From the tees and fairways that play close to the ocean, keen-eyed golfers can spot migrating whales spouting offshore as they make their way along the offshore waters between Mexico and Alaska.

The resort is designed to resemble a manicured Tuscan village with fountains, squares and mature olive trees lining the streets, all said to follow the inspiration of 16th-century Italian architect, Andrea Palladio. The centrepiece is the Coliseum Pool, the world's largest circular swimming pool where guests can sunbathe from private cabanas between vaulted arches, corniced columns and an amphitheatre of terraced decks.

No expense was spared in creating one of America's most luxurious golf resorts, sourcing the finest materials and hiring top-quality management from around the world. Butlers are on hand to polish your golf shoes and each fourball is accompanied by a knowledgeable and well-trained forecaddie. Only club members are allowed out without a caddy, so speed of play is usually good.

Pelican Hill's golf director Steve Friedlander was lured from the Kohler group where he has spent the past eight years developing the 2020 Ryder Cup course at Whistling Straits and Kohler's subsequent



Ocean South's par-3 13th

acquisition of the Dukes course and Old Course Hotel in St Andrews.

Fazio originally designed the two courses at Pelican Hill back in the 1980s, since when they have proved to be among the most consistently popular public courses in southern California. In 2005 both courses were closed while the resort was under construction and Fazio introduced some dramatic redesigns on both. From the clubhouse set on top of the hillside, the two courses drop around 350ft to the seafront holes, enabling Fazio to install some superb ego-boosting elevated tees, with wide landing areas that invite you to open your shoulders and go for it.

Much of the topography is distinguished with uneven slopes that are cut by canyons and ravines, making club selection critical. Both courses play through some rugged bushland terrain, with fairways framed by tall eucalyptus and sage trees. Large undulating greens, often protected by extensive bunkering, ensure that only players with a decent short game can be confident of low scores on these courses.

Practice facilities include a driving range and good short game area. And for anyone needing a tune-up there is Glenn Deck's Teaching Academy and a Golf Yoga clinic, run by Marie Friedlander.

Most first-time visitors choose to play the shorter Ocean South Course where holes 11 to 13 play along the oceanfront. The longer and more open Ocean North Course plays higher into the Californian hillside, affording panoramic views of the Pacific and the nearby resort of Newport Beach.

TRIP PLANNER

STATS

OCEAN SOUTH: Par 70, 6,580 yards
OCEAN NORTH: Par 71, 6,945 yards
TEE TIMES: 001 877 735 4226; pelicanhill.com
GREEN FEES: $235, including forecaddie. Twilight fee $135
CLUB RENTAL: $80, including two sleeves of Nike balls
LOCATION
Perched on a hillside in California's Orange County, halfway between the chic resorts of Newport Beach and Laguna Beach, Pelican Hill is about a 45-minute drive due south of Los Angeles airport

GETTING THERE

There are up to ten non-stop flights daily from London to Los Angeles. Carriers to Los Angeles include British Airways (britishairways.com); Virgin Atlantic (virgin-atlantic.com); American (americanairlines.co.uk); United (unitedairlines.co.uk); Air New Zealand (airnewzealand.co.uk)

OFF COURSE

Pelican Hill is adjacent to Crystal Cove State Park with sandy coves and a marine park to explore. There are miles of rugged trails ideal for hiking, mountain biking and horse riding. Nature lovers will enjoy spotting the abundant marine life from whale watching trips and sunset cruises out of Newport Beach. For the energetic, there are several good surfing beaches nearby. Or just chill out at the resort spa after some retail therapy at the nearby local Fashion Island shopping mall and the stylish art galleries of Newport Beach.

ACCOMMODATION

Pelican Hill has more than 200 terraced bungalow suites, each equipped with a 42-inch television and balcony with views over the course to the Pacific Ocean. Larger groups can opt for the luxury villas of two, three and four bedrooms which come with their own living room, kitchen, a personal butler and access to a private clubhouse and pool. Rates for the Resort Golf and Spa Experience are from $795, including overnight stay in a luxury bungalow, two rounds on either of the Tom Fazio courses with cart and forecaddie or two hours Amber Gold spa treatments and complimentary valet parking.

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