

1991
TO
2016

CELEBRATING
25 YEARS
OF THE PLANTATION COURSE



BEN CRENSHAW (ON FAR LEFT) WITH MARK AND DEBI ROLFING, AND BILL COORE (FAR RIGHT) DURING THE DESIGN PHASE OF THE PLANTATION COURSE.

The Quiet Evolution of Kapalua, Maui



By George Fuller

GOLF RESORTS ABOUND, many of them very good. But there are only a few that check all the boxes for true greatness: a championship-level course, five-star accommodations, excellent dining, a memorable clubhouse, a PGA Tour event ... oh, and whales jumping in the warm waters of the Pacific Ocean just offshore. ¶Ok, admittedly it's sort of cheating to add that last criteria, because not many resorts can match the pixie dust location of Kapalua, Maui, where humpback whales migrate from November through March to birth their calves and then hang around in the bathtub-warm waters of Hawaii long enough to teach the little ones to swim and breach.

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🌿 THE GLUE OF THE RESORT

But even without the frolicking whales, Kapalua ranks among the best golf resorts in the world. It has been long acknowledged among the best in the Aloha State, and as the Plantation Course celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2016, it's interesting to reflect on how the resort as a whole has quietly evolved in those same years to become one of the best anywhere.

Back in 1991, the Kapalua Bay Hotel was the primary accommodations choice at the resort. Built in 1978, it was beloved in its day. Guests could then play two golf courses, the Bay Course and the Village Course — both Arnold Palmer designs — swim and snorkel in Kapalua Bay, and enjoy events such as the renowned Kapalua Wine Symposium and the Kapalua International, a golf event that took place after the PGA Tour season officially ended, but which was known as one of the most enjoyable golf events of the year.

“The single most important thing that ever happened to Kapalua is the golf tournament,” says Mark Roling, now an NBC golf commentator, but whose career in golf began at Kapalua. “I

ERNIE ELS HOLDS THE TOURNAMENT RECORD WITH A WINNING SCORE OF 31-UNDER-PAR IN 2003, A PGA TOUR RECORD.

started here in 1976, three months after the Bay Course opened. I got a job washing carts.”

From there, he rose through the ranks, gaining both experience and the trust of the resort's owners, Maui Land & Pineapple Company. By 1982 he was Director of Marketing and Recreation for Kapalua, and having seen two management companies at Kapalua Bay Hotel struggle to gain market share, Roling had an idea.

“I saw the success of the Hawaiian Open over at Waialae Country Club (on Oahu),” he says, “and I was able to convince Colin Cameron (patriarch of the family that owned Maui Land & Pineapple) that we should do the same.”

Thus was born the Kapalua Open in 1982, won by Hawaii's own David Ishii. In 1983, with strong support from Arnold Palmer to bring a top field of players to Maui, the tournament was renamed the Kapalua International, and a young gun named Greg Norman won in what was his first victory in the United States.

“That was it,” Roling says. “The tournament became the glue of this resort ... it became the *mana* (spirit) of this resort, and it still is today.”

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JORDAN SPIETH, 2016
HYUNDAI TOURNAMENT OF
CHAMPIONS WINNER.



🌸 BUILT IN THE FIELD

During those early years, the tournament was contested over the Bay Course, and was a non-official PGA Tour event. “They called it the ‘silly season,’” Rolfing says. “But it wasn’t silly, not with players like Jack Nicklaus, Palmer, and Norman in the field.” Indeed, the list of early winners included Sandy Lyle, Mark O’Meara, Andy Bean, and Peter Jacobsen, some of the best players of the day.

Still, by the late 1980s, Rolfing and Cameron understood that if the tournament was so important to Kapalua, which it was, they needed to build a tournament course. The available land on which to build one was higher in the foothills of the West Maui Mountains than the existing courses, on steeply sloping land that was still planted in pineapple fields. In addition, a real estate component was necessary to make the project profitable, given the cost to build the course.

Rolfing was convinced the project could be a success, so much so that he became a partner in the development. A number of the best golf course architects were sent land plans and asked to submit designs. “It was a difficult site,” Rolfing says. “There are three massive gulches and four fields between, with a precipitous drop from the highest point on the course to the lowest.”

In the end it was Ben Crenshaw and Bill Coore who were chosen.

“They were not big names as architects at the time,” Rolfing says. “But Crenshaw had played in the tournament, and I knew I could live with Ben and Bill, and they knew that they could live with me.”

“It’s one of the elite eight or nine courses on Tour,” says Geoff Ogilvy, who won the event in 2009 and 2010. “It holds its own and more, and considering the land it’s built on, it is arguably the best on Tour. It’s probably the best use of land anywhere. To get a playable course that any standard of golfer can play on that land in that place is incredible. Anyone else (other than Coore and Crenshaw) would have messed it up.”

Over the years, some epic tournament finishes have helped distinguish the course and the tournament. One of the most memorable occurred in 2000, when Ernie Els and Tiger Woods — who was going for his fifth consecutive PGA Tour victory, the longest streak in almost 50 years — both eagled the 18th hole to force a playoff. Woods dramatically drained a 40-foot birdie putt on the second playoff hole for the win in what turned out to be one of his most amazing years on Tour.

Of course the 2016 Tournament of Champions was remarkable for the dominating performance of Jordan Spieth, whose 30-under-par victory was also one for the ages.



🌸 A CULTURE OF HOSPITALITY

The centerpiece of the Plantation Course is an impressive clubhouse — home to both the golf shop and The Plantation House Restaurant — that overlooks the first tee and the 18th green, a perfect perch for watching the action come tournament time. If you’ve visited in person or seen the tournament on television, you know that the panoramic views from the clubhouse also take in the shimmering Pacific Ocean (and those lovable whales), and the island of Molokai across the Pailolo Channel.

Before and after a round, golfers (along with many non-golfing resort guests) are often found in The Plantation House enjoying breakfast (the crabcake benedict is a must), lunch, fine dining for dinner (think fresh local seafood and steaks), or simply relaxing with a craft brew or their favorite beverage.

Of course, a tournament layout will always draw golfers who want to see how they fare hitting the same shots they see the professionals hit. (If there’s no one behind you, try playing from the 663-yard back tees on 18!) Still, as Mike Jones, Director of Golf Operations at Kapalua, knows well, few amateur golfers want to play the Plantation Course from its full 7,411-yard length.

“The Plantation Course is not for lightweights ... you need to bring

your best game,” Jones says. “But we have made some modifications over the past several years. We’ve softened some greens and made the surfaces more playable. We’ve taken out a number of bunkers to improve pace of play and added others that will help stop a ball from rolling off the fairway. We’ve added new tees to accommodate all players. And we’ve improved the sight lines.”

Another recent addition is a forecaddie program, which Jones instituted to help resort players. The forecaddies can read greens, advise on targets and distances, and knowledgeably assist players around the expansive course.

“It’s all part of our focus on the overall quality of the guest experience,” Jones says. “Troon believes in creating a culture of hospitality, and in Hawaii that equates to a genuine spirit of aloha. Some resort guests come every year. They consider Kapalua a second home, and we want to make them feel like family.”

Clear evidence of the success that Jones and his team at the Plantation Course have achieved is an annual rating as either the No. 1 or No. 2 course in Hawaii by *GOLF*, *Golf Digest*, and *Golfweek*.

🌸 GRACIOUS HUMILITY

The most recent evolution of Kapalua was the 2014 opening



of the Montage Kapalua Bay, sited on the footprint of the old Kapalua Bay Hotel (which closed in 2006). With 50 hotel suites and 84 residences — some of which are managed by Montage and available for nightly rental — the Montage launched Kapalua to a whole new level of quality and luxury.

“This property is about gracious humility,” says Managing Director Richard Holtzman. “These are spacious homes, really, but with all the expected amenities of a luxury hotel. You can cook if you want, or you can dine out. You can have all the privacy of your own home, or you can partake of the elevated services of a Montage hotel. It’s all about choice.”

The main dining option is Cane & Canoe, where fresh and local ingredients meet creative and skilled preparations. And while the fish is caught locally and many of the vegetables are Maui-grown, Chef David Viviano is not hesitant to bring in other ingredients, such as Kobe beef from Snake River Farms, Idaho, ensuring that his cuisine is the very best available.

“We are very proud of the feedback we have received from our guests, including holding the number one ranking on Maui by the readers of TripAdvisor,” Holtzman says. “We have an incredible new property, with all of the amenities one would expect, in one

of the best locations on Maui.”

Perhaps most telling about the Montage’s appeal is a story Holtzman recounts about a group of PGA Tour players who look forward all year long to hanging out at the hotel’s historic Cliff House when they are on Maui for the Hyundai Tournament of Champions, a tournament they can only qualify for with a win in the previous season.

Originally built for the use of the pineapple plantation managers and their families in the 1950s, the Cliff House today is a private dining and hospitality structure situated on a scenic bluff above the ocean. When the PGA Tour comes to Kapalua in January, players commonly hang out in this casually spectacular place, fishing, relaxing, and even cliff diving into the ocean.

“They absolutely love it,” Holtzman says. “I was told that after his first tournament win in 2015, Dustin Johnson excitedly turned to Mark Rolfing and said, ‘See you at the Cliff House in January!’”

Dustin and the Cliff House Boys might show up in January; but Kapalua, Maui, will warmly welcome the rest of us any time of the year. ■



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