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KING'S RETREAT

Southern California's iconic coastal resort Park Hyatt Aviara is the clear winner in a game-changing, multi-million dollar upgrade

BY ROBERT KAUFMAN



In hindsight, I could have chosen to stay home and roll the dice for a chance to buy Aviara Golf Club. But that would have required spending \$100 to snap up one of the three turquoise-colored deeds on Golf Monopoly. Fortunately, I made the smarter move, heading straight to the real McCoy to experience the \$50 million top-to-bottom transformation of the Park Hyatt Aviara Resort, Golf Club & Spa. As a result, it was evident the cost to purchase the board game property is in need of a major increase.

It was difficult to imagine how the toney resort, located 30 miles north of San Diego in Carlsbad, the home base for a monopoly of golf manufacturers such as Titleist, Callaway and TaylorMade, could upgrade the grandeur that guests have been enjoying since 2010. (It originally opened in 1997 as part of the Four Seasons chain of resorts and hotels.) But a big-budget bankroll buys a boatload of luxury.

Reimagined Magnificence

Upon stepping into the stunning Spanish colonial-style hotel, you find your line of

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vision flows directly through a remodeled open-aired lobby to a patio that was once indoors but now unveils a grand marble staircase descending to an event lawn area for a seamless transition to the outdoors with views of the Pacific Ocean and an Arnold Palmer signature-designed golf course. This first impression, however,

merely whets the appetite for what to expect at the AAA Five Diamond and *Forbes* Five-Star getaway.

The largest chunk of the investment was directed toward redesigning the 327 guestrooms (each with a balcony or patio) that include new furnishings, artwork, Bose stereo and, perhaps, best of all, a comfy bed, making snoozing a breeze. California-based design firm WATG and its interior design studio, Wimberly Interiors, were commissioned to reinvigorate a resort for which they had executed the original plans and ensure that every element throughout the property guarantees guests wind up as the true beneficiaries.

“It was fun to do a full-circle project by having the original architect transform their vision into today’s world and for how people now interact with a resort,” says Geoff Gray, general manager, Park Hyatt Aviara Resort. “The project started in 2019 and reopened in October 2020 by hosting MLB’s postseason teams in southern California, with the New York Yankees being the first guests to check into the hotel. After renovating the rooms,

Hole 18 at the Park Hyatt Aviara Resort.



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we then reconstructed the pools from scratch, including adding luxury cabanas around the adult pool and a separate kids pool with a themed waterslide tower and tide pool splash pad.”

In keeping with connecting the indoors to the outdoors, one of Aviara’s newest offerings is a major bonus for golfers (or those who don’t classify themselves as one) looking to swing without fear of hooking or slicing a ball into an adjoining fairway. The resort collaborated with Topgolf to produce two Top Swing Suites, situated adjacent to the Pacific Point lobby bar and each accommodating four to eight people paying a rental fee of \$100 per hour (\$125 on Friday and Saturday) to smack golf balls into a massive digital screen. And forget about waiting on the beverage cart. With a full menu of food and drinks to choose from, customers can eat, sip and swing at their own pace, within

the allotted time, of course.

Given the golf-centricity of the Park Hyatt Aviara, the renovations also brought into play a private space on the first floor to practice putting. The only impediment may be having to fork over a king’s ransom to slumber—king bed included—in the Palmer Suite. But the royal bonus in this 2,180-square-foot, two-bedroom suite is a putting green, complete with four Scotty Cameron putters, on the outdoor patio overlooking the Batiquitos Lagoon.

Other amenities offered at the pet-friendly resort’s 200-acre playground consist of a 15,000-square-foot spa, 24-hour fitness center, a top-tier, six-court tennis facility and, for the cuisine aficionados, six food and beverage outlets, including the hotel’s signature restaurants, Ponto Logo and Ember & Rye, led by celebrity chef Richard Blais, next to the resort’s primary superstar, Aviara GC.





Left: The Arnold Palmer Suite | Above: Hole 3 | Below: The adult pool.



Links Royale

Christened in 1991, prior to the hotel, Palmer's par-72, 7,007-yard layout is sculpted throughout the natural topography, illuminated by multi-colored wildflowers canvassing the hillsides devoid of any real estate encroaching on the golf experience accentuated with waterfalls and streams, enhancing the sensual gratification. As noted by Renny Brown, director of golf at Aviara GC, "It's like playing golf in a botanical garden, regardless of time of year, because there's always something in bloom."

Since 2010, Aviara GC has benefitted from television exposure by hosting an elite professional field of women golfers at the LPGA JTBC Classic, but if that's your only familiarity with the golf course, you're missing out on the full picture. The golf challenge is fairly straightforward, save for a tight, par-4 dogleg at No. 10; otherwise, the real defense is the extra-large, undulating greens, which may help your GIR stat, but if the ball doesn't land in the right spot, your putt's count will soar.

Golfers can thank an initial construction error for some of the largest putting surfaces in Southern California. After nine greens were built, nobody noticed them being twice the size as was planned on paper, so after some debate, the decision was made to increase the size of the remaining greens.

"The mistake really worked out in our favor since the greens are really one of several key highlights of the course that people come away with," says Brown. "We have shrunk them down over the years, but they're still big."

Notwithstanding that miscalculation, the course has aged gracefully after three decades, but Father Time requires some tender loving care. As such, the day after the LPGA completed its tournament this past April, a six-month environmental sustainability project began by closing two holes per week to upgrade all bunkers and re-grass the entire course with TifTuf Bermuda to provide optimum playing conditions year-round while realizing a 20% savings in water usage.

When all is said and done, this 18-hole jewel will become Park Hyatt Resort's crowning achievement to a property makeover the King of Golf would have embraced. **GT**



**Left: Options
abound for cuisine
aficionados at the
resort's six food and
beverage outlets**

**Below, right:
Following a
\$50 million
top-to-bottom
transformation,
the Park Hyatt Aviara
Resort, Golf Club &
Spa is an experience
like no other.**

