



Ocean Links, Amelia Island Plantation. Not a place to overcook your trademark power fade



North East Florida

Florida's oldest region includes the world's most famous island hole and a one-of-a-kind joint effort by two of golf's biggest rivals

It is arguably the most instantly recognizable hole to armchair golfers the world over. A short par 3, its island green set in the middle of a huge lake and buttressed by railway sleepers, it strikes terror into the hearts and minds of everyone who attempts it. There's no bail-out shot – you either make the green or end up wet.

The hole in question is, of course, the 17th on the Stadium Course at TPC at Sawgrass, where golf's "fifth major", the Players Championship, is held each March. TV cameras monitor every angle while the galleries whoop and holler every time a ball hits the water, like a Roman coliseum crowd baying for blood.

Former PGA Champion Bob Tway knows all about it. He scored a record 12 on the hole in the 2005 event after putting four balls in the lake.

Even top players admit they are thinking about the hole long before they reach it. I know the feeling. I gave up on the hole after sticking

two balls in the drink. At least they had company – each year divers retrieve more than 120,000 balls from the lake.

But Pete Dye's 25-year-old Ponte Vedra masterpiece – the first golf course built specifically to accommodate spectators, with amphitheatre-style mounds around greens – is much more than just a single hole. The narrow fairways, fast contoured greens and lake-fringed doglegs make for one of the toughest public courses in the US. And while it may be the punters' favourite, it certainly didn't go down well with the pros initially, Ben Crenshaw commenting: "This is Star Wars golf, designed by Darth Vader."

I actually prefer the Valley Course, its sister. Not only is it a fairer test but it is also far prettier, providing beautiful views of water courses and the thickly-wooded wilderness preserve areas which have earned Sawgrass an Audubon Sanctuary rating.

Just as the TPC is no one-hole wonder,

Florida's North East has an abundance of golf. The region markets itself Florida's First Coast of Golf because of its history. St Augustine, founded in 1565, is America's oldest permanently settled European city. There are more than 30 courses in this corner of the Sunshine State, from Amelia Island on the Georgia border down to the Palm Coast, taking in Jacksonville, Ponte Vedra and St Augustine on the way.

Amelia Island is a genteel place where you can stay in accommodation ranging from historic homes now run as B&Bs to deluxe resorts set right by the ocean. One of these, Amelia Island Plantation, has a trio of courses by Dye, Tom Fazio and Bobby Weed.

The most recent of them, Fazio's 6,775-yard Long Point, is a superb blend of the island's natural attributes, making it an exquisite visual treat – tidal salt marshes, dense pockets of pine and Spanish Moss-draped live oaks, plus the Atlantic. The 15th and 16th

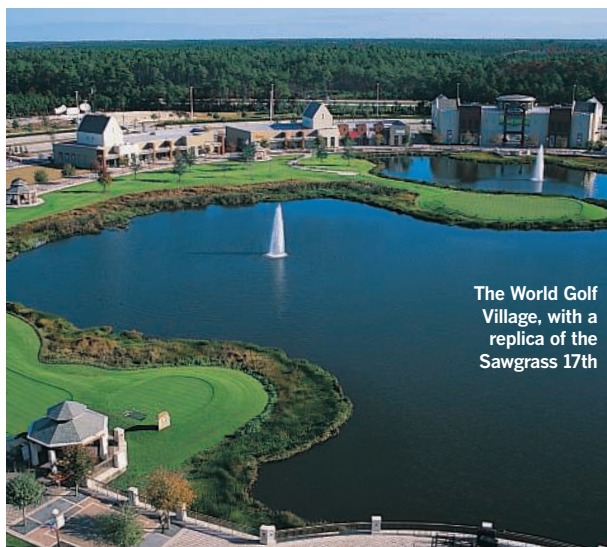
One of the greatest par-3s: TPC at Sawgrass, Stadium Course, 17th hole



DICK DURRANCE/IFPGA TOUR/WIREIMAGE.COM



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The World Golf Village, with a replica of the Sawgrass 17th

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holes running parallel to the shore are back-to-back par 3s. Weed's par-70 Ocean Links has five holes skirting the ocean, two of them also consecutive par 3s, as well as 10 others which navigate wetlands and lagoons. It may only measure 6,300 yards but it plays much longer because of its narrow fairways, small greens and the prevailing wind. The 6,500-yard Oak Marsh was built in 1972, shortly after the completion of Dye's groundbreaking Harbour Town Links in South Carolina. It is the only one of the three where walking is allowed, and then only after 4pm, and is noted for its small greens and tight fairways which meander alongside the salt marsh creeks.

Jacksonville's collection of courses includes Cimarrone, known as "The Wild One" for its natural setting which includes 17 lakes and ponds. The Mark McCumber-designed Ravines Club, 40 minutes from Jacksonville in Middleburg, is Florida's only mountain-style course with fairways crossing, climbing and

plunging down deep forested ravines next to a creek. It feels like anywhere but Florida and ranks high in lists of the state's top courses.

The World Golf Village, 15 minutes from St Augustine, is a golfing mini-metropolis which pays homage to the greats of the game as well as offering two collaborative 18-hole creations by four of golf's legends. There are hotels and villas, shops, restaurants, convention centre, 18-hole putting course, Walk of Champions, IMAX giant-screen cinema and the World Golf Hall of Fame – a shrine to the stars of today and yesteryear in a pyramid-peaked tower which looks remarkably like a temple or church steeple. They are all set in a giant circle around a lake with a replica of the nearby TPC Stadium 17th, where you can win big prizes if you ace the hole.

The Village's first course is the Slammer & Squire, named after its consultants, multiple major winners Sam Snead and Gene Sarazen. It's a testing challenge through the native flat-⇒

WHERE TO PLAY

TPC at Sawgrass

Stadium Course: 6,954 yards, par 72, \$150-290, cart \$32 per person
Valley Course: 6,864 yards, par 72, \$105-\$155, cart \$32 per person

Contact: 00-1-904-273-3235

tpc.com

See if you can keep your ball dry on the Stadium's notorious 17th

World Golf Village

King & Bear Course: 7,279 yards, par 72, \$69-179
Slammer & Squire Course: 6,919 yards, par 72, \$49-\$129

Contact: 00-1-904-940-6100

wgv.com

Arnie and Jack's one-off collaboration augments Sam and Gene's original

Amelia Island Plantation

Long Point Course: 6,775 yards, par 70, \$150-\$175
Oak Marsh Course: 6,502 yards, par 72, \$130-\$160
Ocean Links Course: 6,301 yards, par 70, \$130-\$160

Contact: 00-1-904-261-6161

aipfl.com

Stirring oceanside and marshland creations

Ravines Golf & Country Club

6,899 yards, par 72
\$28-\$36

Contact: 00-1-765-497-7888

ravinesgolf.com

Elevating golf course in every sense

WHERE TO STAY

Sawgrass Marriott Resort & Beach Club

Contact: 00-1-904-285-7777

sawgrassmarriott.com

The Renaissance Resort at World Golf Village

Contact: 00-1-904-940-8000

worldgolfrenaissance.com

Amelia Island Plantation

Contact: 00-1-904-261-6161

aipfl.com



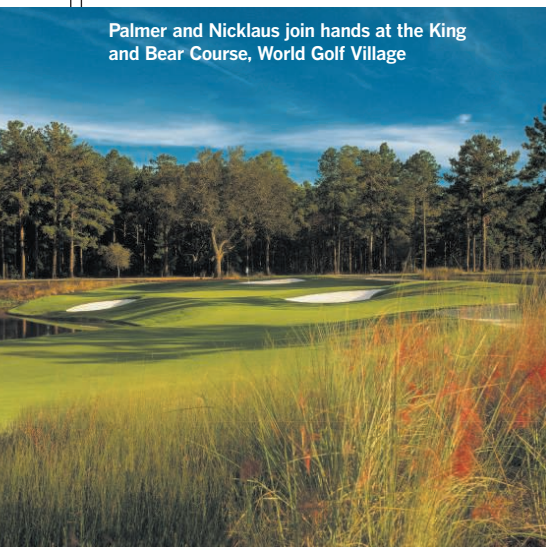
The 16th, Oak Marsh Course, Amelia Island Plantation; beware the salt marsh creeks

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woods and hardwood hammocks and past wetland preserves, but it does not unduly penalise, especially from the more forward tees.

Rarely has a new golf course created such a stir as when the King & Bear was conceived. Hardly surprising either, since this was the first – and probably last – joint effort of two of golf's great players and designers, Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer. Nearly 10,000 spectators turned up to witness their inaugural round. Never the best of buddies on or off the fairways, local lore has it that one's design team would come up with plans, only for the other's to change it all. Asking such strong-willed maestros to work in harmony could have been a recipe for disaster. But far from a hotchpotch, what they produced was a tour de force seamlessly combining the best of both styles with their individual influences evident throughout.

Palmer and Nicklaus join hands at the King and Bear Course, World Golf Village



WORLD GOLF VILLAGE

North East Florida Facts

WHERE IS IT

Florida's North East Coast nestles below Georgia and stretches down from Amelia Island to the Palm Coast, incorporating Jacksonville and St Augustine. The region is just 90 minutes from Orlando, which has daily direct flights from the UK. Jacksonville Airport has connecting regional flights from other US gateways.

Information: florida-golf.org, 00-1-866-883-5511.

KEY ATTRACTIONS

■ Much of the original walled city of St Augustine is preserved 144-block **Restoration Area**. Sites include its 17th Century fort, reconstructed 18th Century Spanish Quarter, Florida's Oldest House, the Oldest School House in the US, and old churches.

■ **The World Golf Village** complex includes the World Golf Hall of Fame, featuring exhibits chronicling the history of golf and honouring some of its legends as well as a giant-screen **IMAX** cinema.

■ Amelia Island seaport **Fernandina Beach** has a 50-block restored historic district with a museum in its old jailhouse. It also has a picturesque seaport with a shrimp fishing boat fleet.

■ **Fort Caroline National Memorial**, near the mouth of St Johns River, is a restored French fort with exhibits highlighting the days when French Huguenots joined forces with local Timucuan Indians to combat the Spanish.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

■ Take the nippers to see the snappers at the **St Augustine Alligator Farm** at St Augustine Beach, then climb the 219 steps of the nearby 120-year-old black and white spiral-striped lighthouse.

■ Interactive exhibits at **Jacksonville's Museum of Science and History** include marine mammals and the Civil War, while Jacksonville Maritime Museum displays models of locally-built World War II ships.

■ **Amelia Island Plantation** has its own nature centre staffed by experts who give interpretive presentations and organise nature programmes for guests and their children. Activities include bike and kayak tours, and shell and shark tooth hunts.

■ Games, food, weapons and tools tell how life changed from Indian to

They've all flown over Florida in their time



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pioneer times in old Florida at **St Augustine's Old Florida Museum**.

NORTH EAST FLORIDA FACTS

■ Route A1A, the road skirting Florida's entire East Coast, is known as the **Buccaneer Trail** in this region to recall its swashbuckling history.

■ **St Johns River**, which flows through Jacksonville, is Florida's longest, at 273 miles.

■ St Augustine's annual two-week Easter Festival includes the **Fromajardis Pageant** and Minorcan Day Tea, in which Minorcan families serve traditional cheese pastries.

■ Fossilised **sharks' teeth** dating back 25 million years are often found by beachcombers on Amelia Island's 13-mile beach.

■ **Jacksonville** is Florida's largest city, with a population of 736,000 compared to Miami's 362,000 according to 2000 census figures.



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Castillo de San Marcos, St Augustine