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ATie Up And Tee Off...

Waterfront Golf Means Never Leaving the Bay



Arnold Palmer Course, Bay Creek Resort & Club: Replica of the Old Plantation Flats Light that marked the channel to Cape Charles, VA

By Jeff Hardy

The Chesapeake Bay area offers inland boaters abundant opportunities to integrate their love of the water and their passion for golf.

From Havre de Grace, MD, where the Susquehanna River empties into the northern end of the bay, 200 miles south to where the bay meets the Atlantic Ocean in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia, some of the best views in the region exist where the bay or one of its many tributaries border a golf course.

"From a Virginia standpoint, there are several courses along the bay that would be tremendous excursions for anybody within the boating community," says Tripp Sheppard, director, membership/VIP Card Program at the Virginia State Golf Association. "Just to be able to moor up and be on the golf course in a matter of minutes and in an idyllic setting in terms of a backdrop would be a boating golfer's dream."

Among the waterfront golf facilities on the southern end of the bay that Sheppard mentioned were Bay Creek Resort & Club, in Cape Charles, VA, near the southern tip of the Delmarva Peninsula, and The Tides Inn, located in Irvington, VA, on the Rappahannock River about 70 miles east of Richmond.

Golfing greats Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus were commissioned to design two 18-hole courses at Bay Creek that take advantage of the tract's extraordinary views and natural features, along with historical landmarks from Cape Charles' 19th and 20th Century railroad era that commingle with the modern contours of a state-of-the-art golf facility. The courses have become the focal point of the community as they wind through the neighborhoods. Both are flexible enough to be challenging for the low handicapper while creating an enjoyable golfing experience for all levels.

Six-Minute Trip, Marina to Pro Shop

The Arnold Palmer Signature Course began making Top Ten national lists immediately upon its opening in 2001. The 7,204-yard course with Tifway Bermuda fairways and Bent grass greens has four holes on the shores of the Chesapeake, eight holes on Old Plantation Creek and several holes framed by sand dunes and large beach bunkers.

The 7,417-yard Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course opened in 2005 amid the old growth woods and meandering shorelines of the Chesapeake and Plantation Creek. The course has Bent grass greens and Tisport Bermuda fairways, and is characterized by acres of natural dunes, large waste bunkers and more than 100 regular sand traps.

Boaters visiting the 1,800-acre site can use Bay Creek Marina, a world-class facility located in the protected harbor of King's Creek, providing a deepwater channel with six feet at MLW and access to the Intracoastal Waterway, the Chesapeake and the Atlantic Ocean. The marina is constructed of Brazilian walnut decking and has 124 slips (plans call for 224 slips at completion) ranging in size from 35 feet to 70 feet, for accommodating boats up to 150 feet.

"It's a six-minute trip from the pro shop to the marina," says Tom Stevenson, director of club operations at the facility. "When golfers who are planning to visit us by boat make reservations for a slip at the marina, we make arrangements to have the shuttle pick them up before their tee times, and we return them to the marina when they're ready to leave."

The par 72 Golden Eagle course at The Tides Inn plays 7,020 yards, with a rating of 70.9 and a slope of 126. The course, with Bermuda fairways and Bent grass greens carved out of the wooded landscape surrounding a 50-acre lake, has hosted numerous USGA and PGA events.

The club's 60-slip marina, described as, "A Secluded Harbor with world-Class Amenities," is located on Carters Creek, is about nine miles from the Intracoastal Waterway. It can accommodate vessels up to 125 feet.

Maryland also has its share of courses that take advantage of the bay's natural gifts. At the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Golf Resort, Spa, and Marina in Cambridge, MD, marina-side shuttle service can have you on the

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first tee in less than 10 minutes, according to Mark Ross Director of Golf at the River Marsh Golf Club, located on the property of the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay.

Virgin Hardwoods, Riverfront Views

The resort is also home to River Marsh Marina, which has 150-slips ranging from 30 feet long and 16 feet wide to 80 feet long and 25 feet wide, with electric, cable, wireless Internet and water hookup available. At River Marsh Golf Club, the resort-friendly course runs along an 18-acre nature preserve in a secluded setting that features classic styling, wide fairways, and rewards and challenges for all levels of players.



River Marsh Marina, a short trip to River Marsh Golf Club at the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Golf Resort, Spa and Marina in Cambridge, MD

The course overlooking the Choptank River has a coastal, almost Low Country feel, with marshy areas carved through 90-foot virgin hardwoods and riverfront views stretching nearly a mile to the opposite shore. The fairways on the 6,801-yard Bent grass layout are a generous 35-to-45-yards wide. Existing pockets of sand were left in their original locations to complement 4-to-5-foot deep bunkers that have been incorporated into the fairways and around the greens.

"Every season 1,000 - 2,000 boating golfers take advantage of our unique setting and added resort amenities. Many of them enjoy the scenic boat ride from the Chesapeake up the Choptank just to play River Marsh." Ross says. "The River Marsh Marina allows us to expand our guest capacity by 40 percent during the summer boating season, we welcome golfers of all levels and are able to accommodate those that weren't planning to play with our golf club rental program."

Another boater-friendly facility along the Chesapeake is Harbourtowne Golf Resort and Conference Center in St. Michaels, MD. The centerpiece of the 153-acre resort with views of the Miles River and the Chesapeake is a Bent grass 18-hole championship golf course designed by legendary architect Pete Dye.

The 6,320-yard, par 70 layout has many of the features that have come to be known as Dye trademarks, including narrow fairways that meander near the bay on the front nine and become tight and demanding on the back, target landing areas, carefully placed mounds in the rough, high grass bunkers, deep sand bunkers, walls of railroad ties and small protected greens. Combined with a slope of 121 and course rating of 70, these Dye trademarks allow golfers of all levels to enjoy a round.

Swan Point Yacht & Country Club started as a quaint, nine-hole course along the banks of the Potomac River about 50 miles south of Washington, DC. In the late 1980s course designer Bob Cupp, a consultant at Augusta National in Georgia, was hired to expand the layout to 18 holes. The result is a 6,761-yard shot maker's course featuring 12 holes where either water or marsh can come into play.

The course rating is 73.2 and it has a slope rating of 130 on Bent grass, with the par 5 No. 4 signature hole playing at 520 yards from the back tees to an island green. Another favorite is the par 3 12th hole, playing 240 yards from the back tees with a carry over marsh to a two-tiered green.

Boaters coming to play golf at Swan Point have free access to the club's 407-foot pier, with 40 slips, power and water. Call ahead and a member of the staff will bring a golf cart for transport to the clubhouse.

Growing Course Access for Recreational Boaters

Bayside golf course development on the Susquehanna end of the Chesapeake is rather limited at this stage, although there are several championship layouts within a few strokes of the water's edge. Among the most notable is Bulle Rock in Havre de Grace, MD. Bulle Rock is home to the McDonald's LPGA Championship, one of four majors on the women's tour.

The course designed by Pete Dye has been honored twice as one of 12 "Five Star Facilities" by Golf Digest. The magazine has also ranked it as one of the "Top 100 Modern Golf Courses" and in 1998, it was the publication's "Best New Upscale Course in North America."

From the back tees, the 7,375-yard course carries a rating of 76.4 and an extremely demanding 147 slope with 100 feet of elevation changes. Tall hardwood trees, natural rock formations and stone walls provide backdrops for many of the holes, with water coming into play on seven of them.

Bulle Rock and a host of additional facilities on the northern end of the Chesapeake Bay are evidence of a trend toward the development of upscale courses. It probably won't be long before golf course developers begin looking for ways to use the bay and the Susquehanna to augment the golfing experience in the area.

Golf course development appears to remain in growth mode throughout the Chesapeake region, with no less than 50 courses either on the bay or virtually within walking distance, and plans for others in the making. And many of them likely will have water access for inland boaters.

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