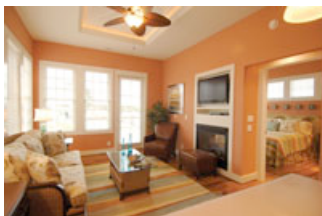




Golfing at Bay Creek Resort

Despite some gusty Bay breezes, Virginia's Bay Creek Resort impresses our writer with its signature golf courses, creative restaurant, and unique accommodations.

By Mary Ann Treger



The wind is gusting so strong I am certain my golf ball will blow into the Chesapeake. It's cold, too. We move fast and speak quickly, hoping our mindless chatter will keep us warm while Mother Nature butts into our round.

As my husband, Terry, prepares to hit the ball, I swear there are tears in his eyes when he looks at the churning Chesapeake flanking the fairway and says, "It's magnificent." Sure, the cold air might have something to do with those watery eyes. Then again, maybe the beauty of this moment is the cause of such emotion.

Truth is, we weren't expecting much. Normally we like to test our mettle a few times a year on name-dropper courses throughout the United States and United Kingdom, but these days, the hassles of air travel make those long jaunts less appealing. We thought Bay Creek Resort & Club by the historic Victorian town of Cape Charles on Virginia's peaceful Eastern Shore would be a pleasant substitute, a stress-free drive from our Annapolis home. As it turns out, we were blown away by the place in more ways than one.



Bay Creek is the first resort to have both Jack Nicklaus- and Arnold Palmer-designed 18-hole signature courses. The Wall Street Journal ranks them in the top 100 residential golf courses in the United States. Each one offers different challenges; both offer awesome beauty and hints of the land's history as a working plantation. There's even a golf cart bridge featuring a quarter-scale replica of Cape Charles' Old Plantation Flats Lighthouse.

I'm not exaggerating when I say the Nicklaus course has four holes along the Chesapeake that rival Pebble Beach for "wow" factor. They really are that stunning. With more than 100 bunkers, miles of sand dunes, mature trees, and elevated tees, this is far from your average resort course.

The property is part of a residential community developed by Richard Foster of Baymark Construction Corp. Situated on 1,729 acres, the resort features 6½ miles of Bay and creek frontage, 55,000 roses, azaleas, hydrangeas and natural grasses, plus 7,500 magnolia and holly trees. When complete, Bay Creek will include 2,700 homes in distinct villages or districts, each reflecting a different architectural style, from Victorian to contemporary. While a full-service hotel is on the drawing board, for now, guests can rent condominiums or two-level villas.



We stay in one of the colorful West Indies-inspired villas in the Marina District. Painted white furniture in our two-level building looks like something straight out of a Pottery Barn catalog. Downstairs, our bedroom has a sitting area with a flat-screen, 40-inch TV, small balcony, and a bathroom big enough to host a party for 10. Upstairs, a fully equipped kitchen and family room are encircled by windows revealing super views of the 124-slip marina, which offers quick access to the Bay, the Atlantic, and the Intracoastal Waterway.

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Before dinner, we browse the resort's string of retail shops, which stock a fun mix of resort wear, coastal home décor, jewelry, and local wines. Upstairs, a gallery features work by local artists, highlighting the area's thriving arts community.

Every resort needs a stellar restaurant and Bay Creek's Aqua doesn't disappoint. Perched on the Chesapeake with never-ending views of the Bay, this casually chic restaurant has several distinct areas to dine or sip a cool one, including a snazzy, under-lit onyx bar and outdoor dining overlooking the water.



We sit at one of the interior banquettes and follow our waiter Spencer's excellent recommendations: Thai-fried shrimp tossed with sweet chili sauce, lime and cilantro for starters, followed by grilled mahi-mahi with golden pineapple-mango salsa.

We awake at dawn the morning of our departure to take a brief beach walk. Overnight, the wind turned into a whisper. The Bay looks like a lake; not one whitecap is in sight. We talk about this unexpected gem, its two world-class golf courses that rival our famous favorites, and agree to return even before we check out.

Bay Creek Resort & Club

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Cape Charles, Va.

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<http://www.baycreekresort.com>

Rates: Accommodations start at \$250 per night; greens fees range from \$65 to \$115.

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