

# Sanctuary Cove Golf & Country Club

## 'The Palms'

A fleeting conversation with a senior member of the **Sanctuary Cove Golf & Country Club**, on the Gold Coast in **Queensland, Australia**, said it all. During a stoppage for a slight holdup for the next tee, my player partner and I were probed for our thoughts on the new **Palms course**, which had opened for play in **April 2011**. The **enthusiasm and pride** on the face and in the voice of the gentleman was obvious.

**‘W**e (the members) think it’s great. We play it in a competition once a week, everyone’s handicaps are going up!’ he beamed. ‘It’s much more difficult than the Pines’.

While the latter statement is up for debate, the Palms’ course designer, Australian Ross Watson, would have also been proud of the feedback for his creation on the land where the original Palms layout stood for over 20 years at Sanctuary Cove.

The original course was designed by American course architect Fred Bolton in the late 1980s and was widely regarded as a ‘resort’

course in terms of design and difficulty. The old layout hosted thousands of rounds over the years but the brief given to Watson was to provide a layout that would extend the golf facilities available to the members, complementing the club’s Arnold Palmer designed private course, The Pines, next door.

The club’s intent is to grow the equity-based membership numbers to a maximum of 1800 over time and to allow a more limited access to the Palms to public and corporate golf. The opening of The Palms is the latest major investment in world class facilities at Sanctuary Cove Golf &



Country Club, which includes the \$12 million clubhouse that opened in 2010.

Watson is a designer in demand with over 70 golf courses worldwide in his portfolio, including the Lido Lakes Resort in Bogor. Whilst retaining most of the established trees and Cabbage Palms on the property, the new course is a sterner and far more strategic test of golf than the original layout and features significantly more undulating and challenging greens. The fairway and greenside bunkering are also more penal in both appearance and playability than the former.

Watson lives nearby the course and was able to spend a substantial amount of time on site during the design and construction phase. The club extended Watson the creative freedom and a 'blank easel' to draft and create the layout, without the layers of overseeing governance that might normally be assigned to course design projects elsewhere. It's apparent that Watson relished the opportunity and the early feedback not only from members, but in terms of tee time and corporate bookings that have been taken in the months since opening, has



been overwhelmingly positive.

The golf course has been deliberately designed to stretch only to a maximum of 5904 metres from the tips, not long by any means but a perfect foil to The Pines, which is a 6600m test from the back tees. The differences in the courses are not limited to length, the green complexes at The Palms are difficult, rolling targets require precise approach shots whereas the Pines' greens are less undulating and more attune to playing longer clubs into the greens.

The bunkering at The Palms can best be described as 'rugged' in

appearance which makes for an interesting contrast with the tropical, water course environment at Sanctuary Cove. There is an earthy look to the sand and certainly in comparison to flatter resort bunkers elsewhere, they present great difficulties with deeper pot bunkers in places, higher lips to contend and thicker Plateau couch grass surrounds. A 'resort' course this is not!

Watson's collection of five par 3s are most impressive. Each hole is routed in a different direction to present a different challenge in the coastal breezes and four of the five holes have water in

play. My favourite is the 16<sup>th</sup> hole, which plays between 148 – 163m to a green that juts out into a lake with protecting bunkers in front and behind. Anything straying to the right is likely to find water or sand at best and finding the green in regulation is no guarantee of a par either, such are the undulations throughout the green.

The 5<sup>th</sup> hole is a striking hole from an elevated tee, over water to an enormous green. The high point through the middle of the green falls away in many directions, creating several sections in which to locate pins positions. By my rough estimation, the green is at least 30 metres deep in places and possibly 50 metres wide – which equates to some pretty expensive real estate for these parts!

The 8<sup>th</sup> hole at only 146m has a touch of the famous 12<sup>th</sup> at Augusta National about it. Water laps at the front of the green which is angled across the player diagonally from left to right, providing a dangerous back right pin location. A bunker eats into the front of the green with more traps at the rear if you over compensate to avoid a watery grave in front. It is no surprise to see the hole is





named 'Amen' on the card.

Other enjoyable holes include the two par 5s that launch the start of each nine. Watson has created an exciting yet daunting challenge for the first shot of the day, with a lake along the right sure to fray the nerves along with several bunkers scattered in the landing area. More bunkers are to be avoided on the second and third shots to the green, with another water hazard to the left of the green.

The tee shot on the 10<sup>th</sup> hole is straightaway but then doglegs slightly left at the landing area around a scattering of tall pine trees, which are dotted around the property and in some cases are over 100 years old. At 472m, this par 5 can be attacked by the longer hitters but the risks include a pond that fronts the front and left of the green and bunkers to the rear. Standing in the fairway, the green setting is one that invites you to go on the attack even if the prudent play is

a layup. Like most greens at The Palms, undulations and a large tier create some difficulties once the putting surface has been reached.

The final holes on the course following on from the stout par three 16<sup>th</sup> are two excellent par 4s, running in opposite directions. The 17<sup>th</sup> requires a pin point accurate drive to the right part of the fairway which doglegs left to right around a deep trap, with a hillside bunker and vegetation to be avoided through the fairway. The second shot plays slightly uphill to a long, tiered green protected by two bunkers. The hole is shaped through a section of large, established trees and is visually attractive from tee to green.

The 18<sup>th</sup> presents a challenging tee shot between bunkers on either side of the fairway. Longer hitters can fly the right hand trap and leave themselves a relatively short iron approach to another large, rolling green that will be a difficult two putt if your

approach is not in the same section of the green as the flag.

For a golf course that had only been open for play for 3 months, the course was in great condition with portents of greater things to come with more years of growth and time to establish itself into its surroundings. Players including veteran Australian tour players Rodger Davis, Brian Jones, Lyndsay Stephen and Ossie Moore, competing in the recent Sanctuary Cove Legends Pro –am, were full of praise for the golf course and the scores certainly gave an indication of how tough the challenge was.

The Palms have introduced GPS technology in each cart which was a welcome addition to the overall experience and the refurbished Visitors Centre and Recreation Club was a welcome sanctuary at the end of a round. Corporate guests and visitors to the Sanctuary Cove area have the option of staying at the Hyatt Regency

Sanctuary Cove nearby, which will allow them access to not only the Palms but also the private Pines course.

The Palms certainly lived up to the expectations of a new Ross Watson design on the Gold Coast, one of the first new courses to open in the region in over a decade. I'm certain The Palms will rapidly grow in stature and reputation over the years and visitors will soon be regaling it as one of Queensland and Australia's best and most popular courses.



**Paul Prendergast**

Twitter: @paulprendo



For Special Stay  
and Play Package Rates  
adventures@obgolflifestyle.com