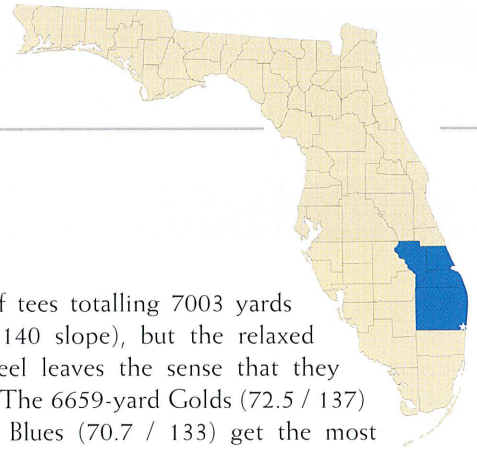


Course Review

Royal Palm Yacht & Country Club

Boca Raton



When groundskeepers dream, this is how they dream: greens so soft they receive your ball like they're catching an egg; so smooth that a spike mark stands out like Mt. Everest; and quick – not ridiculous quick, but pay-attention-or-you'll-three-putt-every-hole quick. It's not just groundskeepers who dream this. Every 10-year-old wannabe Woods or Sorenstam imagines dropping the winning putt on a green like this.

But there's a lot more to Royal Palm Yacht & Country Club than just its greens. You know you've found luxury when the scorecard of the course must advise: "A ball coming to rest on the croquet court shall be dropped in the designated area without penalty." Can't argue with that rule.

The original Robert Trent Jones, Sr. design, which opened in 1959, underwent a \$10 million course and facility facelift in 2002, with a Jack Nicklaus redesign of the golf course and a new 30,000 sq. ft. clubhouse.

Royal Palm provides a reasonable trial, particularly for a club course of such stature. Frustration is just a wandering tee shot away, but landing areas are ample. If you find water or sand off the tee, you've asked for it. Second shots, both on par fours and fives, are radically more serious. Deep bunkers, menacing water hazards, and slow-torture collection areas stand sentinel to push your fortitude.

The 364-yard fourth hole epitomizes this design. A mid-length hole with an ever-so-slight elbow right, the only danger off the tee is a large trap at the corner. Blame only yourself if you find this sand. Blame the course, or Jack, if your incoming shot sinks into the lake short and left that snuggles up to the green, or the bunker above the hole to the right, or comes up just short and rolls a bit back toward you. Precise irons are your redeemer at Royal Palm.

"Nicklaus has provided many different challenges throughout your 18 holes of golf," says Head Golf Professional J. Todd Heifner. "The 10th is our most difficult. This long par 4 takes you down the Intracoastal Waterway. With out-of-bounds on both sides of the fairway off the tee and fairway bunkers protecting a very small driving area, the tee shot is critical to a good score on this hole."



There's a set of tees totalling 7003 yards (74.7 rating / 140 slope), but the relaxed country club feel leaves the sense that they rarely see play. The 6659-yard Golds (72.5 / 137) and 6331-yard Blues (70.7 / 133) get the most dance partners. The Red tees (70.5 / 128) play to 4998 yards.

The number one handicap eighth hole, at 588 yards from the Golds, is a stern assessment of your resolve. Again, put it on cruise control for the drive. Otis Brown lurks to the left, but with an entire other fairway to the right, there's no excuse for going left. The confrontation this hole engenders is really with your third shot. Unless your first two have been rather lengthy, your third must rise over or dart through an imperial gathering of royal palms to a slightly raised green featuring several sand traps.

The nice thing about Royal Palm is that once you reach the green, there are no surprises. Each has its own quiet character, but three-foot breaking putts are hard to find. Closing the front nine is a seemingly innocuous 351 yarder. And if the pin is front left, or even middle, it is somewhat easy. But on the day they place the cup back right, catastrophe looms 10 feet away. The green fades to the right onto a peninsula hanging out over an 8-foot wall above a crystal clear pond. A deep sand hazard grabs anything just left of the water. But you may not notice this because possibly the most imposing clubhouse in Florida stands behind the green.

The eighteenth hole, at 525 yards from the Golds, abuts the same pond as the ninth. Except this green slopes toward the water ... and there is no rough between the green and the water to save you.

An article about Royal Palm would be remiss without mention of the handsome homes astride every hole out here. Whether it be an older ranch home or a state-of-the-art new Mediterranean, each adds to the majesty of the course, a rarity these days.

Royal Palm is a private, member-owned equity, invitation-only club with just more than 500 members. Membership Director Janet Wayne says they are distinguished from other area clubs by the fact that membership is not tied to residency.