



Golf legend Jack Nicklaus is revamping the course at the Naples Beach Hotel and Golf Club in Florida. It's expected to reopen in December.

CHECKING IN

NAPLES BEACH RESORT EVOLVES FROM FOLKSY TO FASHIONABLE



ROCHELLE LASH

The Watkins family of Florida gets it, big-time. Resort life, that is. The Naples Beach Hotel and Golf Club is marking 70 years of superlative hospitality at an enviable beachfront location on the Gulf of Mexico.

The property now is run by the third generation of the family — and it is very much for families.

With \$50 million in upgrades over the past six years, Naples Beach has evolved from folksy to fashionable. It also is a good buy, with free parking, no resort fee and a third night free until Sept. 30. It is the only comprehensive, beachfront resort hotel that is close to downtown Naples — about three kilometres from the buzz of either Fifth Avenue South or Third Street.

Naples Beach is a one-stop, morning-until-night resort, with

oodles of children's recreation, terrific pools (one for adults and one for kids), golf, waterfront dining, beach shops, the Mary C. Watkins Tennis Center and live entertainment. The Clubhouse houses the spa, the golf pro shop and Broadwell's restaurant, which doubles as the 19th hole.

Footpaths wind through flower beds and groves of palm trees, connecting six sections of accommodations, from the adorable Cabana building to the more deluxe Penthouse building.

The hotel has just about everything — mother-daughter spa packages and après-sun skin care, yoga, kids' soccer and cocktails facing a dazzling Gulf sunset. All good, but to me Naples Beach's forte is its gorgeous stretch of sand along the Gulf's mellow waters. Stake out a chaise longue and swim, sun or snooze.

WHAT'S NEW

On the waterfront, Naples Beach has paddleboarding and kayaking, plus two separate swimming pools and hot tubs for adults and kids and a delightful poolside snack bar.

All of the guest rooms and suites have been redone in a perky, summery look of ocean blue and cottage white with fresh pops of lime green. There is a wide range of styles, price points and views of the gardens, the golf course or the Gulf. The Tower Building now sports new glass-fronted balconies. Some rooms have sofa beds for the kids. If you're on the lanai level at The Penthouse section, you'll have your own beachfront, shaded by eucalyptus trees.

At the spa, the summer roster includes aromatherapy showers and yoga sessions on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday mornings. The June monthly specials will be the Ahh Package, an 80-minute hot stone or aromatherapy massage for \$179 U.S. And the Ready Pedi, \$59, starts with a detoxifying foot bath and winds up with a moisturizing paraffin treatment.

The big venture for 2016 is the total rebuilding of the golf course by champion Jack Nicklaus, working with architect John Sanford. The tees, fairways, greens and water and sand traps — every

blade of grass and scoop of earth — have been razed. The first tee-off is expected in December.

Nicklaus' history at Naples Beach began in 1951. The great champion first broke a score of 40 on nine holes when he was 11 years old. He had been golfing for only one year at that point and was on a family vacation.

The new par-71 course will have five tees ranging from 4,800 yards to more than 6,900 yards, plus a 300-yard practice and teaching range, and new golf carts with GPS.

WHAT'S FREE

The Beach Kids Club is the place to be if you're between five and 12. Children — with supervision — spend half or full days at crafts, beach games and swimming. Teens have a volleyball tournament, beach Olympics, soccer and scavenger hunts.

The Sunset Beach Bar & Grill presents a weekly Sunday Night Party and a solo guitarist Wednesday to Saturday evenings. It's a gorgeous location with the sun setting over the Gulf waters and tropical drinks and casual

IF YOU GO

Naples is a 50-kilometre/35-minute drive south of Fort Myers and a 177-kilometre/90-minute drive west of Fort Lauderdale. The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club: 800-237-7600, 239-261-2222, naplesbeach-hotel.com; Naples, Florida. Prices fluctuate according to availability and the view. The third night is free until Sept. 30, based on availability, except U.S. holiday weekends. Until Oct. 31, rooms and suites cost about \$289-\$419 U.S. per night (with third night free); or Nov. 1-Dec. 22, that is \$329-\$599 U.S. Rates include valet or self-parking, supervised Beach Kids Club (lunch is extra), fitness centre, pools. Extra: beach setups, spa treatments, golf (reopening Dec. 2016), tennis lessons/clinics, water sports (paddleboards, kayaks), indoor spa baths. Paradise Coast Tourism: (Naples, Marco Island, Everglades): 800-688-3600, 800-2ESCAPE, www.ParadiseCoast.com.

fare served on the terrace.

The 31st year of the Summer Jazz on the Gulf concert series will be held on the beachfront lawn during one Saturday per month: June 25, July 16, Aug. 20 and Sept. 24.

THE FOOD

There are lots of choices: Broadwell's for breakfast buffets, brioche French toast or omelettes; the Seminole Store for cappuccino, gelato and paninis; and the poolside café for ice cream drinks and turkey club sandwiches.

The Sunset Bar & Grill, open all day and evening, does BLTs on challah, beach burgers, grouper or steak sandwiches and gorgeous salads with steak, crab cakes or shrimp.

HB's on the Gulf takes dining up a big step, with the added attraction of fiery sunsets over the water. The new-in-2016 dinner menu features such small plates as shrimp croquettes, steak tartars, roasted clams and oysters, plus main courses including salads of goat cheese, steak, fennel-and-pollen-seared scallops, clam tagliatelle, sea bass, pork rib chops, lobster and Florida snapper.

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