

Golf at Grand Hotel

By Craig Brass

For more than 124 years, Grand Hotel has provided uncompromising hospitality to visitors from around the globe as they experience the rare beauty of Mackinac Island.

Built in the post-Civil War's gilded age, many people have been introduced to the hotel by the movie *Somewhere In Time*. Upon arriving, they find the film didn't do justice to the serenity and opulence of the world's largest summer hotel.

From the elegance of afternoon tea accompanied by chamber music to the vibrant colors and shocking patterns of renowned designer Carleton Varney to the succulent, five-course dinners, guests are ushered into a bygone era of charm and grace that contrasts sharply from today's nonstop routine.

A lazy stroll on the world's longest porch, or dancing the night away to big band, swing and pop standards played by the Grand Hotel Orchestra, is plenty of exercise for many guests. Others take advantage of the resort's sporting life, participating in activities such as swimming, croquette, tennis, bocce and golf.

"Sports, and golf in particular, have been an integral part of the hotel for more than a century. We aren't a golf destination per se, but we feel strongly that golf is an important part of what we can offer," said Dan Musser III, President of Grand Hotel.

Originally built in 1901, the hotel's front nine, called "Grand," was given a makeover in 1987. A second nine, "Woods," was added in 1994. Together they comprise The Jewel, the resort's 18-hole facility, separated by one and a quarter miles and the only horse-drawn carriage ride between nines in the country.

In order to appreciate what golfing on Mackinac Island is about, it's important to understand what it's not. You won't find 7,000 yards of gorilla golf, played over ravines and off mountainsides, with forced carries and demanding long-irons into massive greens.

Golfing on this historic island is a relaxed endeavor, incorporating a diverse collection of sights and sounds. The clatter of vacationers and residents commuting on bicycles and the clip-clop of horses fill the air around the front nine, with the Mackinac Bridge, Round Island Lighthouse, Fort Mackinac and Great Lake freighters all coming into view.

Short par fours and tricky par threes make up the 2,375-yard, par 33, first nine. The fairways average twenty-yards in width and are framed by bunkers and small pines. Most of the greens are only 3,000 square-feet with a good bit of roll.

The front, though relatively benign by modern standards, is not entirely without peril. Perched atop a bluff, and playing 245-yards downhill to a peninsula green, the seventh-hole offers dramatic, panoramic views and is arguably the hardest par-three in the state; especially when the hole is in the back of the ninety foot-long green.

The second nine is cut through the hardwoods and tall White Pines that dominate the island. At 3,040-yards, par 34, Woods offers a challenging set of longer holes, sharply contrasting the open-air feel of the front.

The short, par four tenth, funnels through trees and peeks out at Lake Huron and the shoreline of the Upper Peninsula. The par-three twelfth rests in a tranquil setting and plays 205-yards. A cascading brook flows from behind and alongside the putting surface and empties into a pond that fronts a multi-tiered green.

The 552-yard, par five, fifteenth appears much tighter than it actually is. Towering trees surround the hole from tee to green and bunkers accent the fairway. The approach is a blind shot with sand and fescues along both sides of the green.

The finishing hole, 401-yards with trees all along the left and grass covered mounds right, culminates with an approach over a small pond to a Y-shaped green. Throughout the entire golf course the statement is clear--if you want to score well, hit it straight.

After the round, golfers may have to wait a spell for the carriage ride back to the hotel. Fortunately, Bobby's Bar at Woods Restaurant sits adjacent to the course. A cold beverage with a hot dog or popcorn can help tide you over. If time is not of the essence, take in a frame or two on the oldest operating duck pin bowling alley in the United States.

A stay in a named suite tops off a visit to Grand Hotel. These specially designed rooms are appointed with one-of-a-kind memorabilia and period pieces focusing on a variety of honorees.

Six rooms are tributes to First Ladies. Others feature the individual style of historical figures like Napoleon and Josephine, Teddy Roosevelt and Lady Astor. Each of the more than thirty unique suites has an authentic array of antique furnishings and appointments.

To lure the golf-minded vacationer off the mainland, Grand Hotel offers a special package--Tea for Two. Available during the shoulder seasons, the program includes accommodations, full breakfast and five-course dinner each day, one 18-hole round on The Jewel or Afternoon Tea in the Parlor, all gratuities and baggage handling charges.

Grand Hotel, one of the few remaining wood-frame hotels from the 19th century, is a National Historic Landmark. Overlooking the Straits of Mackinac, the hotel is open from mid-May through the end of October. For more information call 800-33-GRAND, or www.grandhotel.com.

Craig Brass, author of the book *How to Quit Golf—A 12-step Program*, is an award winning golf writer and columnist for *Michigan Golfer* magazine.