

Tournaments will drive golfers, spectators to Turtle Bay Resort

There are six important nationally televised golf tournaments from Hawaii and two of them happen at Turtle Bay.

It gave us an excuse to check it out and talk to the management of the hotel and the tournaments.

I remember when they broke ground for the Del Web Kuilima Resort & Country Club in the early 1970s. Rumor had it that the hotel was being built with the idea of turning it into a casino.

Two years ago, the hotel, with a new owner and manager, finished a \$60 million renovation. A major step forward was to open the lobby to the spectacular sight of the cove and the awesome views of the North Shore.

At the same time, the hotel added a spacious ballroom, opening the door for attractive convention business. The resort now is under the management of Benchmark Hospitality International of Houston.

We had an evening beverage with Abid Butt, the resort's vice president and general manager. He was confident about the growth in visitors to the resort.

"Look, we have the best product in Hawaii," he said. "No one else has 680 acres to accommodate guests. We have two golf courses. No one else on Oahu has two golf courses. We have five miles of beach. We have horseback riding, 12 miles of hiking trails, tennis and a full-service spa with two swimming pools. No other resort in Hawaii can match us."

Oh, yes, besides having 450 rooms, Turtle Bay has the unusual feature of having 42 executive beach cottages. We were in Cottage 107 with a rack rate of \$850.

We had a drink with Abid — everyone on the staff calls him Abid — then a nice dinner in the signature dining room, 21 Degrees North. The next day we had room-service breakfast and never left the cottage.

There was no reason to. Outside of our floor-to-ceiling window-glass wall was the surf, breaking over the reef, palm trees with a hammock tied between, small birds flitting in and out. A magnificent sunny day on the North Shore. Why move?



**JOHN
McDERMOTT**
HERE
AND THERE

The next day we went to work and sat down with Matthew Hall, the director of golf, and John Dowd, the tournament chairman of the Turtle Bay Championship.

The tournament will be played on the Palmer Course Jan. 23-29. This is the first full-field event on the Champions Tour and will be led by Hale Irwin, vying for the big-

gest cut of the \$1.5 million purse with a top prize of \$225,000. Irwin already has won the title six times, including the past five.

Last year, Turtle Bay locked in the tournament until 2008, continuing a history that started in 1988 when the resort hosted the nationally televised Senior Skins Game with Arnold Palmer, Chi Chi Rodrigues, Gary Player and Sam Snead. The resort also hosted the first three LPGA Ladies Hawaiian Open tournaments from 1986 to 1989.

"We have made significant improvements to the course," Hall said. "We improved the drainages, adjusted some of the tee boxes, brought in paspalum seeding to the greens and fairways to combat the salt spray from the ocean."

He expects about 3,000 spectators a day.

"Admission is only \$10 and a spectator can be standing cheek-by-jowl with some of the best players in the world," Dowd said. "Luckily, we have a loyal gang of volunteers who come out to act as marshals, spectator traffic directors, ticket takers, etc."

The tournament will be followed by the LPGA tournament Feb. 13-18 sponsored by the Seoul Broadcasting System.

The SBS Open will remain at Turtle Bay through 2009.

Last year, the two tournaments together generated more than \$100,000 for local organizations through the Friends of Hawaii Charities.

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