



OFFSHORE: Hole 11 with the ocean as a backdrop

PHOTO: FRANCIS X. GALLAGHER

Sound and Fury

The Caymans' only 18-hole championship course boasts water views and sometimes treacherous winds. BY FRANCIS X. GALLAGHER

The North Sound Club, formerly the Links at SafeHaven Grand Cayman — the only 18-hole championship course in the Cayman Islands — was designed by Roy Case of New Jersey National and Carenage Bay Canouan Grenadines fame. He's known for creating great golf on environmentally sensitive land and working with the natural topography. At North Sound, one hole takes you by the ocean and the others pass salt-water ponds in an open layout filled with native mahogany and coconut trees and bright-colored bougainvillea.

Hurricane Ivan devastated Grand Cayman in 2004, destroying the course by dumping saltwater on it and killing the grass. The clubhouse was also damaged, and cart paths and carts vanished. The course was fully restored and reopened in 2007, with salt-resistant paspalum replacing the Bermuda grass. It hosted the Caribbean Open in 2008.

North Sound is run by PGA golf professional Jason Deer-

wester, who recently left the rain-soaked Pacific Northwest to enjoy Grand Cayman. The course boasts 180 members and about 20,000 yearly rounds. Full-time residents include more than a thousand iguanas of all sizes and colors who sun themselves on the course.

Hole 4 "Lakeside" (425 yards, par 4)

This No. 1 handicapped hole plays long, with prevailing winds and challenging landing areas. Your drive should slightly favor the right side for a better approach to the green; you also have to clear a large lake. Your second shot must avoid a second body of water on the right and an outcropping of trees and brush on the left. Plenty of second shots get lost in the overgrowth. Behind the green, more water is ready to catch overpowered shots.

Hole 6 "Big Bend" (535 yards, par 5)

Jason says you can cut the corner on this dogleg, but his shot from the tee was out of my league. I nailed a drive into the wind and had a slight tail to my ball, sending it slightly right and making the hole a little longer. At this point the hole turns left toward the green. Avoid the water on the left just beyond the palm tree line that runs the length of the hole. I was fortunate to tag a 3-wood to place within a sand wedge to the green, but missed my shot and carded a double bogey.



CREATURE COMFORT: *Hole 8 is where the iguanas like to congregate.*

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the second pond on the left that caught my rolling drive the first day. But let's talk about the second day. I took a far different and more rewarding approach. This time, my drive favored the right side of the fairway, landing on the edge and within a pitching wedge to the green. The green slopes from front to back with sweeping views of the channels and the million-dollar homes and their "toys" floating at their docks. Stay away from trouble and Mitchell will be your friend.

Hole 17 "Devious" (320 yards, par 4)

As the hole says, I was a little devious. Instead of following the contour of this dogleg right, I hit a long ball straight left of the flowering bougainvillea. From here, I had a sand wedge to the green, making par and never touching the fairway. Jason says he has been asking the greens keeper to let the grass grow behind those bushes so that it is more of a punishment for guys like me. Don't do it!

For those who tend to hit a slice or fade, there is a pond right where you will land. I hit a "fun ball" drive, which landed to the right a foot away from a coconut tree. I manhandled a sand wedge, clearing the water and just coming up short. A fun parable hole from either angle.

Hole 18 "Waterloo" (545 yards, par 5)

You might think you have engaged in the battle of Waterloo if you don't control yourself here. With water along the right side and the dogleg hugging it all the way around the green, this hole is not the friend of the slicer. My tee ball was straight and true but not exceptionally long. The key here is to keep your senses and cut off the distance with a squarely hit 3-wood across the elbow of the lake to about 100 yards from the green. From here, you are home free to the elevated green, which has a bunker on the left and back. The green is shaped like one of the Grand Cayman's sting rays — a great finishing hole to a must-play course. Make sure you have a local Ironshore Bock beer served by Jackie at the clubhouse bar.

Hole 8 "Mo" (385 yards, par 4)

Holes 7 and 8 take you into what I call "Iguana Alley." The creatures are all over the course, but they seem to congregate here. Careful on the tee box, as the pond on the right is not visible and is within your reach; ease up with a 3- or 5-wood from the tee. Without this knowledge, I slammed a low "screamer" over the hill on the left of the fairway. Thinking I'd be in the middle of the fairway, I was surprised that my ball was nowhere in sight. I finally found it on the bank of the pond next to a large, sunning iguana. I shooed away "Mr. Lazy" and took a sand wedge, coming up slightly short but within two-putt range for par.

Hole 9 "Small Island" (175 yards, par 3)

One of the course's oddities is the front nine's beginning and ending with par 3s. This one is no disappointment, especially when the wind is in your face as it was my first day. My demise was the large pond; my first ball found "Davy Jones' Locker"; but the second, taken with the power of two more club lengths, made the green.

Hole 11 "Sound" (235 yards, par 3)

I'm going to get a lot of raised eyebrows on this one, but with the wind coming off the sound, I didn't give a second thought when I grabbed the driver. I slammed my tee shot, landing squarely on the green; the ball rolled to the right. With less wind on the second day, I hit a 3-wood and came up short. This hole is also about beauty. Look out over the azure water before you move on — it's the only ocean hole on the course.

Hole 16 "Mitchell" (345 yards, par 4)

My father's middle name was Mitchell, so it is fitting that I review this hole. It is ranked the No. 2 handicapped hole — perhaps because of the water you must clear on your drive or perhaps for

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MIDWAY: *Hole 9*

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