

GOLF
GETAWAY



MIXING BUSINESS *with Pleasure*

All work and no play? Not when you stay at
The Woodlands Resort and Conference Center.

By **Rebecca MacDonald**



CORPORATE MEETINGS MAY BE THE MAINSTAY OF THE WOODLANDS RESORT

and Conference Center's business, but in addition to its 60,000 square feet of meeting space, visitors to the property will be delighted to discover a sprawling playground designed for pure pleasure. Located in the Piney Woods just thirty minutes north of Houston, The Woodlands has added an elaborate waterscape—complete with waterfalls, slides, and five separate pools—to its list of amenities, making the resort as appealing to weekend vacationers as it is to business guests. Two championship golf courses, a full-service spa and fitness center, 21 tennis courts, more than 120 miles of hike and bike trails, and four on-site restaurants make it easy for guests to stay active or relax. ✱ The Woodlands is situated on the shores of Lake Harrison, and water is featured prominently throughout the property. The main building is dedicated to meeting space while guests stay in buildings scattered elsewhere around the property, giving the resort a secluded, retreat-like feel. When the heat and humidity of summer in southeast Texas get to be too much, the new Forest Oasis Waterscape awaits. The centerpiece is the 37-foot Forest Tower, with a double-helix racing slide and waterfall. Bring the kids along for your trip, or rediscover your own inner child with the underwater marine murals of tropical fish. There is even a zero-grade entry pool for toddlers and Puffy's Sprayground, featuring computer-activated water spouts and fountains. Adults looking for a more serene experience can find it in a separate relaxation pool.



While the waterscape is the newest star of the resort, the golf has always been the main attraction at The Woodlands. Many golfers lament that the Tournament Players Course (TPC), site of the Shell Houston Open for 17 years, is no longer available to resort guests (it is now a private course for members of The Woodlands Country Club). However, the TPC was notoriously difficult, even for resort play, and five- and even six-hour rounds were not unheard of. The resort's owners instead turned The Oaks, one of three private courses formerly reserved for members, into a resort course and redesigned the former Pines course into a new championship layout dubbed Panther Trail.

Of the two, Panther Trail is the signature course. Originally designed by Robert Van Hage, the course underwent a complete overhaul in 2002 by architect Roy Case that included reconfiguring eight holes, the addition of six new ones, and the installation of a rolling layout that takes advantage of the property's abundant trees and water. True to its name, it is a sleek, muscular blend of slinking fairways that curl around Lake Harrison, leading up to small, undulating greens. A range of five distance options begins at the green tees, which measure a very manageable 4,896 yards, while longer hitters can step back to the white tees, which offer a perfect next-step challenge at 5,614 yards. Both sets of tees are rated for women,



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A spa and fitness center, 120 miles of hike and bike trails, and four restaurants make it easy for guests to stay active or relax.



with the green tees offering a 69.1 rating and a slope of 117, and the white tees rated at 72.7 and a slope of 128.

Play Panther Trail in the spring and you'll find the course's numerous bunkers and water hazards framed by twenty acres of blooming Texas wildflowers. In fact, the third hole is named Wildflower, and in season a riot of color surrounds the tee box. Hole 5, called Panther Paw, is a par-3 that features a green shaped like a cat's pawprint. Measuring 104 yards from the forward tees, the green slopes sharply off to the right, while bunkers guard the front and left, requiring accurate distance off the tee.

Number 18 is the course's signature hole, and worth the wait. Called Lone Tree, this par-4 challenge, measuring 314 yards from the forward tees, requires a second shot over water to reach the island green. A rock wall drops from the green to the water's edge, waiting to repel short shots. Clear the water

about the menu is that the mouth-watering array of salads, sandwiches, wood-fired pizzas, and pastas make it difficult to narrow your selection down to just one choice. For light eaters, the salads are every bit as inviting as the rest of the menu, with imaginative combinations such as the Mercato, which features Pinot Grigio-poached pears, Gorgonzola, walnuts, and grapes over field greens. If you've worked up a real appetite, pasta selections include traditional favorites such as fettuccine Alfredo, as well as more innovative fare, like the farfalle pasta with grilled chicken, asparagus, and shiitake mushrooms in a Parmesan cream sauce.

For a more formal dining experience, head to the Glass Menagerie, where chef John Brazie combines seasonal ingredients in inventive combinations. Perched on the edge of Lake Harrison, the Glass Menagerie features an elegant decor and a wall of windows overlooking the water. Choose from tasty appetizers such as mustard seed-seared sea scallops or peppercorn-seared tuna in a ginger soy broth, then move on to potato-wrapped sea bass or Texas duck a l'orange, which combines roasted duck with butternut squash and fresh cheese

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stuffed in a roasted poblano pepper.

In addition to these two restaurants, you'll find the Watermark Bar and Lounge, which has an outdoor deck with tables overlooking the lake. A big-screen TV and a baby grand player piano provide entertainment in the lounge, while the game room offers pool tables, shuffleboard, darts, and other amusements for guests. For breakfast, head to The Woodlands dining room for a full buffet and made-to-order omelets.

No Excuses Here

If you're a business traveler, you know all too well that frequent travel can wreak havoc on your fitness routine, but at The Woodlands, there are plenty of reasons not to let your New Year's resolutions slide. If dining out leaves you feeling sluggish, you have several options to rev up your metabolism without leaving the property. Walk, jog, or bike the miles of trails that wind through the resort, play tennis at one of the 21 courts, or head to the on-site fitness center, which features a cardio theater, free weights, and Cybex machines, as well as a variety of aerobics and wellness classes including yoga, water aerobics, and Pilates. Reward yourself for your efforts with a Golfer's Relief massage to unknot those tight muscles. The Woodlands Spa and Wellness Center includes a full menu of spa and salon services designed to help you relax and rejuvenate body and spirit. Even if you come to The Woodlands on business, you'll leave feeling like you've just managed to squeeze in a mini vacation. **TW&L**

For more information, including stay and play packages, visit woodlandsresort.com.

