

Talega

# LET'S PLAY GOLF

• The Magnificent Splendors of Beach Cities Golf

**F**OOOORE..... And that's how my day started. I was off like a herd of turtles. But nevertheless, I was about to play four prestigious golf courses situated in the jewel of South Orange County.

My first stop was Talega Golf Course, the newest club that delights Orange County players of all abilities. Located in the golden hills of Southern California's breathtaking coastline, this course routes you through the splendid back canyons of San Clemente, surrounded by multi-million dollar homes. Beautiful lagoons are home to a wide variety of migratory and resident birds, and on the back nine, the chirps of small wildlife critters serenaded me as I swung.

Designed by Masters Champion Fred Couples and Brian Curley, Talega offers challenges and attractive acreage to all those who are passionate about golf. This course was so exquisite that even the crushed marble bunkers felt like a pleasant day at the beach. I fin-

ished the day at Talega's Heritage Grille with a tantalizing lunch from a menu created by David Wilhelm, who is notable for specialties at French 75, Chat Noir and Savannah Chop House.

As I ventured into my second day of play, I felt the warmth and camaraderie from the moment I set foot onto Shorecliff's facilities. I found their staff was committed to a friendly home-grown environment, and I particularly enjoyed the hospitality from Red, the jovial cook behind the counter.

Built in the late 1950s, Shorecliffs was formally named Estrella Country Club, and was the first master planned community in Orange County. Estrella Country Club was home to Richard Nixon, who played regularly during his Presidency. As a private club (up to the 1970s), Estrella Country Club was eventually renovated and the name was then changed to Shorecliffs, which was when it opened as a public course.



Talega Clubhouse

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Today, Shorecliffs boasts a modest course, which offers a great alternative to higher priced, full-service facilities. There is no bag drop or anyone to clean your clubs, just a very casual environment and a great place to play golf.

As I began my round, I found this course played narrow, made sharp 90 degree turns, and offered dramatically elevated tees that dropped onto well-kept fairways below. Historically, Shorecliffs has been known as a challenging course, but management recently softened it for all levels of players. So I personally would like to thank them for widening the fairways and shortening the carry distances.

My next stop was San Clemente Municipal Golf Course, a long-time favorite of Orange County golfers. Built by renowned golf course architect, William Park Bell, on land donated by city founder Ole Hanson, this is the oldest of all four courses I played. Hanson gifted the course to the city in 1928, and today it is the last municipal course in Orange County.

The front nine boasts sweeping ocean views from many holes and interesting elevation changes. Mature eucalyptus, oak, pine and palm trees separate the fairways, where I played under the shade while enjoying the beautiful ocean views. The back nine, built to the natu-

ral beauty of the terrain, features uphill fairways and challenging 50-foot carry canyons.

San Clemente Municipal Golf Course is known for offering the best



Shorecliffs

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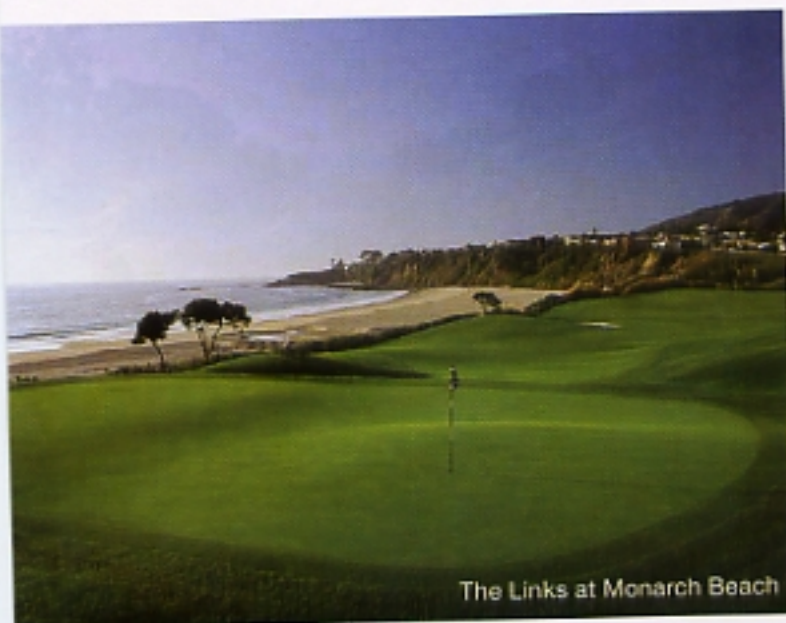
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rates in town, especially for this high caliber of course. Locals can play for as little as \$22 on the weekends and \$14 during the week. With that low price, even I can play often enough to master my game with-



The Links at Monarch Beach

out liquidating my IRA.

My last stop on this journey was The Links at Monarch Beach, which proudly displayed its dramatic sweeping ocean views. This nationally ranked course offers Orange County one of the most complete and enjoyable golf experiences. Designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr. and patterned after the Scottish links style of play, Monarch stretches out onto spectacular beaches of Dana Point. I found this resort to be truly a golfer's paradise.

Following my round at The Links at Monarch Beach, I dined in their elegant Club 19, and as always, threw back a couple of cocktails. After lunch, I relaxed on the nearby sandy beach, unlike my experience with the crushed white marble bunkers that I desperately tried avoiding during my round.

With everything said and played, my Orange County golf experience has been one of lush fairways, ocean views and inviting greens. And now that I've put my skills to the ultimate test, I was finally able to conquer my clubs and can boast my lowest score ever, 71... on the back nine. ☉

— Leslie Stevens

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