

The discovery visit, Abaco Club style



An aerial view of the Abaco Club features the golf pro shop, Winding Bay and the island's tip, or Upper Ridge, which includes the Cliff House restaurant and other amenities. (Photo: Abaco Club)

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the fifth in a series of features on private golf course communities throughout the country, focusing on the people and amenities that make them unique.

By Patrick Rhyne

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Throughout the private community world, there is a promotion called the *discovery visit*. The trip offers a prospective member and spouse the opportunity to kick the tires, play the golf course, drink at the bar, enjoy a few meals and meet potential friends. The process is akin to a courtship ritual.

None, however, court quite like the Abaco Club.

Just 186 miles off Florida's east coast, this Bahama island is windswept, surreal and, simply, spectacular. Waters are clearish blue and sand is sugary white. The Abaco Club offers guests, who are not affiliated with members, a three-visit limit.

That's it. Just three visits.

There are no hotels on the property, so the guest experience is more intimate and authentic — just the way the Abaco Club likes it. Guests mingle with members, share stories over cocktails at Flippers Beach Bar and truly get a feel for what it's like to be a member. And for some, that's all they need.

"What I embrace about Abaco is that it has an extremely high family feel," said Scott Andrews, a member and Richmond, Va., resident. "There's also a family component to the staff. That's what keeps us coming back. It's low key and interesting with the make up of people from all over the world."

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After the three-visit maximum, there's an option to buy a residence or become a member of the Abaco Club. Currently there are six types of memberships, and members also enjoy reciprocal privileges at other Southworth Development properties.

The Abaco Club's ambassador is European Tour pro and Ryder Cup captain Darren Clarke. When he's not on tour, he's usually chasing permit, one of the Bahamas' most elusive fish, on the fly or enjoying family time.

Like most members, Clarke knew this was the place the day he stepped foot on its pristine sands. Clarke has been a fixture at the Abaco Club since its opening in 2004 and even married his wife, Alison, on the beach in 2012.

Acquired in 2014 by Massachusetts-based Southworth Development, the Abaco Club is a true sporting club. From epic bonefish adventures to going after deep-sea wahoo, marlin and more, the Abaco's are a fishermen's dream. A typical morning finds members and guests working out with a trainer, bootcamp style, on the beach. From there, the sky's the limit.

Oh, and the golf isn't too bad, either.



The fourth hole of the Donald Steel and Tom Mackenzie design offers plenty of risk, but the rewards include stunning vistas. (Photo: Abaco Club)

Consistently ranked No. 1 in The Bahamas, the 7,111-yard, par-72 course was the site of the Web.com Tour's 2017 Bahamas Great Abaco Classic. As the pros quickly found out, the [Donald Steel](#) and Tom Mackenzie design doesn't disappoint — it's the first links course in the tropics. Pot bunkers and sloping greens make the most of the island's natural features.

The second Great Abaco Classic Pro-Am will be held Jan. 17-21, and talk about a perfect event for members to rub elbows and play with tour professionals. The five-day event boasts two days of golf, plus golf clinics, dinners and a fishing tournament.

"The Abaco Club has everything money can't buy," said David Southworth, president and chief executive officer of Southworth Development.

He may be right.

THE ESSENTIALS

ABACO CLUB

Location: Great Abaco, Bahamas

Phone: 242.367.0077

Website: theabacoclub.com

Facebook: [@theabacoclub](https://www.facebook.com/theabacoclub)

Instagram: [@theabacoclub](https://www.instagram.com/theabacoclub)

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