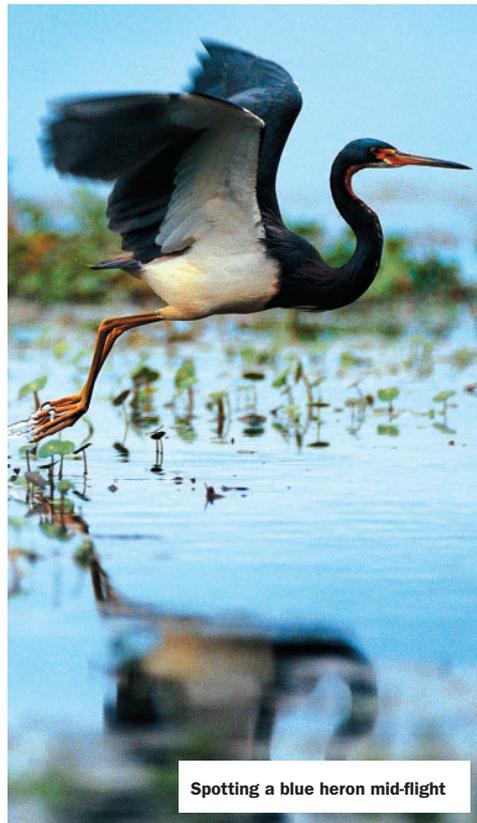




Drink it up poolside this summer.



Spotting a blue heron mid-flight



Kiawah Island's an ideal vacation spot for the entire family.

PHOTOS/COURTESY OF THE SANCTUARY

BY KATIE KELLY BELL

A SANCTUARY OF STARS

Kiawah Island's elegant lowcountry hideaway in South Carolina

TRAVEL

When I quizzed my kids about just exactly what a five-star hotel was, the answers were revealing: “That means it’s run by French people,” or “everything is nice,” and from my youngest: “Where they have princesses and they are real.” Well, one out of three isn’t bad, and “nice” is quite the understatement when talking about the Sanctuary at Kiawah Island. Everything here is, well, nice enough to warrant an AAA five-diamond rating and Mobil 5 Star rating. Indeed, there are five things that make this place star-worthy: service, golf, food, activities and surroundings.

AT YOUR SERVICE

The Sanctuary has that special-touch service demanded of five-star destinations (personal, attentive ... a bit like a solicitous parent). Consider the server who noted my daughter was shivering after getting out of the pool. She swept in with a frothy glass of hot cocoa and a smile. The kicker here is that this service has that unmistakable Southern warmth on the side. People are just darn glad to help, with a friendly (not officious) smile.

During construction (which entailed nine years from planning to completion in 2004), owner Bill Goodwin’s desire was to create the finest resort on the East Coast. He’s not far from his goal, as public relations director Matt Owen, notes: “The Sanctuary is more highly awarded in more categories than any other resort in America.” Even

nature’s contribution, the expansive 10-mile beach, received a top 10 award for wildlife sightings from the Travel Channel.

TEEING OFF

With more than 25 various awards of excellence combined, the five golf courses offer a broad spectrum of challenges. Each manicured course is surrounded by paradise—sunning gators, marshlands, ocean views, maritime forest—and range in yardage from 7,356 (Ocean Point, Bill Clinton’s course of choice) to 6,759 (Oak Point). The Family Tee program lets children younger than 17 play for free during certain hours—an ideal way to introduce your kids to the game without the pressure of finishing 18 holes. The Ocean course is also the site of the 2012 Senior PGA Championship.

LOWCOUNTRY HIGH-CLASS DINING

Where to eat might be the single biggest conundrum of your stay. You might elect to savor a five-course tasting menu at the Ocean Room, the Sanctuary’s Mobil four-star flagship restaurant. Make reservations, and request a window seat for a lovely ocean view; space fills up quickly. The more casual ambiance at Jasmine Porch—abundant windows, elegant brick and wood textures

and draperies that frame out private spaces—make this an ideal place to enjoy the house-cured meats and those signature sweet potato biscuits (my kids still ask about them). Fine dining is fabulous, but being served a glass of wine poolside beats all at Loggerhead’s, where casual fare such as burgers and salads keep every family member happy.

ON THE AGENDA

Biking is a breeze with more than 30 miles of trails and 10 miles of beach, or take a guided nature tour for the inside scoop on where to spot the biggest alligators. Family kayaking is best in the morning before the wind picks up. Spa treatments at the Mobil five-star spa are decadent. The signature massage comes complete with heated, grain and herb-filled wraps that are placed on muscles for a deep, relaxing (and aromatic) treatment. You can always enjoy an idle stroll down the magnificent beach, which will likely yield ocean treasure such as sand dollars and wildlife sightings of loggerhead turtles, blue heron and anhinga. Shopping is available in the Sanctuary (smaller boutiques with unique, one-of-a-kind items) and at the nearby Fresh Fields Market. Only a mere 40 minutes away, Charleston offers myriad of shopping opportunities.

ENVELOPED IN HAPPINESS

Atlantans should appreciate the fact that the Sanctuary’s builder, architect and interior designer are all from Atlanta. The

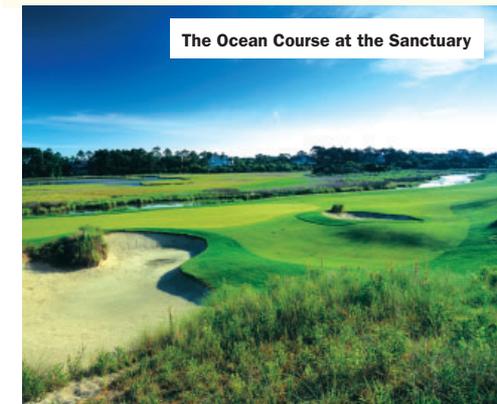
IF YOU GO

The Sanctuary at Kiawah

One Sanctuary Beach Drive
Kiawah Island, SC 29455
www.kiawahresort.com

RESERVATIONS: 877-768-2121 or 800-654-2924

RATES: rooms: \$275–\$750 nightly; suites: \$1,000–\$4,500 nightly



The Ocean Course at the Sanctuary

interiors are a harmonious blend of subtle warm colors that have a soothing luxurious effect—one we all aspire to for our own homes. Guest rooms are bathed in sage and butterscotch tones with thick carpeting, fine wood furniture and plush draperies. The knockout bathrooms boast the works: waterfall showerheads, amenities from Elemis and deep soak tubs. The nicest touch is certainly the scenery; every room at this hotel has an ocean view, complete with a private balcony. After a weekend of pampering, fine food and luxe accommodations, I asked my kids once again to tell me what they thought a five-star rating meant. They unanimously chorused: Lunch by the pool. **SP**