

## **Isleworth Golf and Country Club Windermere, Florida**

Architect: Arnold Palmer/Ed Seay (1986)  
Steve Smyers (renovation)

Tees	Par	Yardage	Rating	Slope
Lewis	72	6765	72.9	139
Chase	72	6409	70.8	134

### Overview:

Isleworth is a 600 acre private gated community surrounded by picturesque lakes and about 10 miles of private waterways. It is ten minutes from the center of booming Orlando and provides these pros everything they are looking for in a residence community. Except for one infamous middle-of-the-night fire hydrant incident back in November of 2009, there is rarely anything that disrupts the solitude of this place.

The schools are good, income taxes non-existent, major airport a drive and a five iron away, tolerable weather ten months of the year, and a golf facility fine tuned to their every want and desire. As a result, it is the home of a plethora of PGA and LPGA pros including John Cook, Stewart Appleby, Darren Clarke, J. B. Holmes, Paula Creamer, Annika Sorenstam, and Yani Tseng. Other sports and entertainment stars and high worth individuals have purchased homes here as well so there is a real who's who atmosphere on the property every day.

The Isleworth Golf and Country Club is the centerpiece of the community that was started by a group of investors in the mid 1980s. The Tavistock Group subsequently took over the development in 1993 and worked to bring it up to a standard that would attract the golf professionals and high worth individuals for their permanent residences. They built an exquisitely appointed 82,000 square foot club house that blends classic design with casual elegance. From the locker room to the wellness center everything about this place speaks to daily needs of their members in an informal atmosphere of comfort. Tavistock even appointed the property with distinguished pieces of lawn sculpture from artists like Henry Moore, Phillip Jackson, Eric Goulder, and Arturo Dimodica.

To most guys the Champions Grill is the centerpiece of the Isleworth experience. This grillroom is something to behold. You walk down a spiral staircase from men's locker room surrounded by the golf bags bearing names of the pros who are members at the club. This leads you to an area with a manly wood appointed bar and restaurant outfitted with comfortable seating and a flat screen TV everywhere you look. The walls are covered with captivating memorabilia including plaques for each Major Championship with winners listed who are Isleworth members. Adjacent is a large recreation room with a putting green and a half court basketball court as it's centerpiece. Additionally you will see every boy toy ever invented including a pool table, ping pong table, video games, table top shuffleboard, dart boards, air hockey, and a golf swing simulator. There are cushy spectator chairs horseshoeing each of those so there are lots of ways to settle a push bet on the back nine with your buddies.

The golf facility leaves no pebble unturned. It includes a massive practice facility with reclusive areas where the pros can practice without disruption. Tiger Woods got his own secluded pad on the driving range with an extra 50 yards of carry room so he doesn't bomb any of the other patrons while practicing his stinger. They have a two-acre short game area with replica bunkering from Augusta National and TPC Sawgrass and an 11,000 square foot putting green. Plenty of room for the pro, the caddy, and a couple of hundred of their brand of shag balls for the daily practice grind.

The golf course was originally designed by Arnold Palmer and Ed Seay and was subsequently modified extensively under the direction of the very capable architect Steve Smyers. The course has a distinct Florida target-golf character to it-this was probably intentional to give the professionals a way to simulate the challenges they see during their regular work day. It is a testing golf course with six sets of tees that can be stretched to as much as 7500 yards for those with masochistic proclivity. At 6400 yards it is all most amateurs can handle so pick your teeing ground with proper forethought.

The most distinctive characteristic of this course is the very demanding driving areas. Throughout you see harrowing bunkers hugging the corner of the doglegs adjacent to which is the most advantageous approach angle to the green. But unlike other courses, the other side of the fairway provides little respite-there is no safe way to play off the tee on most of the holes. You have to take on the challenge through the day if you want any chance of hitting these greens in regulation.

The course does not have very many stunning holes you will not forget but there are quite a number that will get your competitive attention. Once you get over the greeting of the Charging Bull on the first tee you have a relatively routine opening hole. But your heart beat will be prompted by the harrowing challenge of the "Cypress Chute" you have to negotiate on the par 3 second. Two through four are the three lowest handicap holes on the front so reaching the fifth tee with a scorecard still in tact is your biggest challenge. A little bit of a breather over the next few holes brings you to Champions Point and a view of some really nice boat slips with their matching bungalows. "Best of Bessie" is a very challenging par four at the eight and you close the opening nine plotting your way "Around the Lake" with another technical par four.

A bit of a ethereal moment as you leave the cart park next to nine and drive by the Three Monks on the front lawn of the clubhouse driveway. Seems appropriate to mutter a little deferential prayer on your own behalf before heading to the back nine.

The back nine starts routinely enough but, like the front, you get a sizeable challenge on the next two holes. The 11<sup>th</sup> with its beautiful flower beds behind the green is the Kodak moment of the day. But this is a full metal challenge with a 150 yard club-especially if the wind is influencing. The 12<sup>th</sup> provides another daunting approach with the green wedged between a pond and a side hills on the right. The par five 13<sup>th</sup> is a bit of a breather-more lakeside residential eye candy.....these people must have large families or extensive wait staffs.

From here to the end the holes are not bulky in length but they will challenge you constantly to execute well planned shots. After an interesting short hole on sixteen, the last two are the hardest handicap holes on this side and they well deserve that distinction. Both green settings are diabolical so the real challenge on each of them is at the end. The final hole is a bear-this is two booming shots or a deft up and down if you need a par to wrestle away the back nine Nassau.

Isleworth, when taken in total, is quite the golf experience. If it presents itself as an opportunity just throw caution to the wind, pay the ticket, and indulge yourself for the day in the life of the rich and famous.

## Hole By Hole:

### #1 Par 4 360/350 Charging Bull

The course begins with a simple technical hole-you need to be precise on two shots to get yourself started on the right foot. The hole bends slightly right so you drive to center just off the bunkers on the right. Too far left is safer but gives you a much tougher angle at the green. Intimidating look of major sand between you and the green but you have to ignore your psychological demons and focus on the target. Green is set on a 7 to 1 angle sandwiched between a deep bunker in front and another beyond. Stepping in the green makes it important to get onto the pin level of the day.

### #2 Par 3 190/175 Cypress Chute

The challenge ratchets up quickly as the next three holes are the hardest handicap holes on this side. This one will get your attention-key is to get to the third tee without substantial damage to the scorecard. The total forced carry across the edge of the pond presents a very difficult challenge so early in the round. Tee shot sets up for a draw out over the pond turning up to an elevated green framed on the right by the Cypress trees. There is bail out to the left but it is no chummy up and down from there. Don't go pin seeking, make a swing with conviction to middle position of the green and play from there. Anything at the green that is timid will be rejected by the steep hill in front and leave you a blind elevation pitch up to the putting surface.

### #3 Par 5 560/531 Lake Blanche Monster

This is a right slinging three-shot hole that is set above a bevy of ferocious bunkers on the right. The bunkers on the left are reachable so you have to slip a left to right drive up the center of the fairway to be on grass. The layup is to a wide area leaving you a look up a hill to a green above wrapping around a gaping bunker on the left. The shot in favors a draw working up and left to follow the fall line of the green. Interesting thing here is that you really need to shape opposite shots on the tee and into the green. This is probably why the pros who play here regularly like the course-it demands you have a full inventory of the different shaped arrows.

### #4 Par 4 423/411 Hurricane Bend

This is a very hard hole-sharp dogear left around a string of bunkers with cordoning bunkers on the right side for good measure. As I mentioned in the opening, you have to embrace these tee ball challenges all day because the safer route is often no safer. You have to hit a hook off this tee to find that gap or take on a piece of the bunker on the left and carry it into the narrow landing area. If you are on grass the green has a nice ramped access up the center between the bunkers on either side so a longer club has a chance to scramble up onto the green. Another defensive hole for sure-if you reach the fifth tee at 2 over or better you are playing very well indeed.

#### #5 Par 3 202/180 Swale of Sin

In case you haven't noticed yet these greens have serious undulations. They are like a waved topsheet before the bellowing air pockets have subsided below them. Longish club across a deep swale from which the hole gets it's name to a dogear right green set above the swale and collared by a bunker behind. If you cannot manage the fade aim at the center of the back bunker and putt from there. The green is tipped sharply from the right edge to the left and has Daytona-like banking along the back right edge of the green. Putts from the left along the top right rim of the green have slope and speed because the grain runs left to right. Another difficult par to make.

#### #6 Par 4 361/352 The Ledge

More appropriate name might have been "The Peak" since the green looks like you need llama assistance to ascend it. From the tee you want to hit it right center off the three bunkers you see on the left that will leave you at the foot of Vecuvius with a serious elevation short iron over some nasty bunkers embedded in the face of the hill. This green has a culvet running from the center of the green to front left so if you spin it at all you get a pull back on the ground toward the front left. Factoring the elevation change into your club selection for the approach is critical. If you can pick a spot below the hole and hit a short shot without much spin you probably get a good scoring chance here.

#### #7 Par 5 512/493 Champions Point

You get a large dose of the lake front palacial homes on this hole-clearly the big bucks are needed for a lot with a slip. The entire hole leans to the right toward the lake so you want to work it right to left into the pitch of the landing area to have a look up the hole from the center of the fairway. They are baiting you here to go for this very small cape style green arrangement where your target is set tightly above a string of bunkers and the hazard on the right. Sensible shot is a layup aimed at the bunker about 20 yards to the left of the green. From there you can pitch to a downhill landing area that feeds toward the water. Very technical hole that should garner a par if you are not too greedy.

#### #8 Par 4 436/414 Best of Bessie

As a friend said standing on this tee looking out at the landing area, "I think Bessie gets the best of most people who play this hole". The fact that the landing area is below the teeing ground is not obvious standing on the tee so the tee ball will carry further down the hole than you expect. The bunkers set into the hills down the right need to be taken on to get a fairway rollout-the fall off left of the fairway is no place from which to play your second. The green is accessible-fairly deep with a fall off to the back. With a well placed drive you can get aggressive scoring opportunity otherwise you are aiming at the front edge of the green and thinking pitch and putt.

#### #9 Par 4 430/426 Around The Lake

The outward nine ends with a technical sharp dogear left par four that wraps around the edge of the lake behind the tree line. Drive it hard to right center to get a look around overhanging limbs on the corner. The green is set on the 5 to 11 angle above a face bunker on the left with a bail out pitching area to the right. The approach shot is a draw working up the line of the green to the pin position of the day. On your way to the next tee, make sure to whisper a little pennance to the three eery monks standing on the grassy knoll over looking your cart from in front of the club entrance. You will need their good graces for the challenge ahead on the back side.

#### #10 Par 4 345/324 Homeward Bound

Much like the first hole, not a very long hole to begin the back nine but it is very narrow in the driving area. The hole is a question mark hook to the left straddling a big bunker all the way up the left and more cordoning bunkers on the right. Similar to number 4 you have to hit a hard draw to follow the path of the hole or fly one dexterously over the bunker and have it land very softly in the fairway so as not to trundle through. The second shot is to a narrow green set up off the fairway with bunkers front left and right. If you hit this fairway it is an easy par-from either fairway bunker you are on the defensive.

#### #11 Par 3 152/123 Eagle Pond

This is the postcard par 3 for this course-short club across a pond to a green that sits on a devious diagonal to the hazard. This angled setting makes the middle and back pin position much more difficult. There is a bunker front right between the pond and the green-which provides potential solace to a tee shot moving right. This green is pretty shallow all the way across so missing long is a possibility. There is a spine in it across the center so the front half leans toward you and the back half away from you. Get out the cell phone-this is a Kodak moment.

#### #12 Par 4 390/364 Up and Over

As the name implies this hole has two distinct challenges in store for you. A blind tee shot to a landing area slightly above you that is framed about 100 yards ahead by two sentinel trees. This would be the up. Hit this hard because it is important to have the shortest club in your hand possible for your approach shot into this green. That would be the over. From the landing area you are now looking down at a green not dissimilar to the last hole but just an inverted arrangement to the pond. The green is on a diagonal right to left to the hazard so it sets up nicely for a draw coming in on the dry side. There is bail room front right of the green so plan your miss accordingly.

#### #13 Par 5 524/516 Hourglass Lake

Straightforward three-shot hole here runs across and along a lake fronting some really expensive real estate. Drive to center across the water to a generous landing area. Your lay up is over a huge bunker on the left to give you an angle to a shoe-tongue green above you with no bunkers. The green has two distinct tiers-almost a back stop wall across the center defines the lower front area. The back half is more of a small end table. Any approach without proper line and conviction can tumble off either side

of the front of the green into adjacent pitching areas below. You should get a good scoring opportunity here with a short club in your hand on your third.

#### #14 Par 4 376/354 Thread The Needle

The name of the hole would suggest narrowness but it really is not confining anywhere until you get to the green. The hole is very straight-drive to center-and you will get a good look at an angular green slightly below you set against a scenic backdrop of the lake. The green is very unusual in that it has a false left instead of a false front-the left side of the green is so tilted to the left there are no useable pin positions on that side of the green. The approach shot in is to the front third of the green on the right and putt to any pin from there. Very pretty hole with a simple presentation.

#### #15 Par 3 184/137 Aim and Fire

This short hole will grab your attention. Sort of an uphill longish club into an upside-down anvil shaped green that is wedged between very deep bunkers straddling the center of the green. Make a smooth strong swing up to the center and forget any back pins because the bunkers really encroach the back half of the putting surface. Par here is a very good score.

#### #16 Par 4 321/293 Favors The Brave

This is a reachable par four for the gorillas but I still like a driver in the hand even if you cannot challenge the green from the tee. Drive it up the right to get a good look at a very deep green that runs away from you and sits on a 5 to 11 angle with a nasty pot bunker protecting the left front. An approach in from the left is really difficult because of the pot-from the right you get a good bit of green to use to dampen your approach and settle in the vicinity of the hole. The shorter the club you have in your hand for your second the better.

#### #17 Par 5 548/528 Most Feared

Shift gears from here to the house-it becomes much more of a macho challenge on the last two holes. This par five is very visual and challenging from the tee to the bottom of the tin. Drive is a right to left shape to follow the gentle turn of the first part hole and stay out of the array of mounds and bunkers that flank the landing area. If you are in the fairway you now have a lay up to a narrow landing area at 100 yards over three cross bunkers that hyphenate the fairway. This area falls off to the right into the swamp grass and bramble adjacent to the lake on the right. Right to left curve to left center will take the critter garden out of play. The shot into the green is a major challenge to get near the flag since this very deep and undulating green is propped up from the fairway on a tall mound and will reject timid shots short and left to adjacent pitching areas. Predominant lean of the green is left to right in the first half and right to left in the back half of the green. Nasty bunkering protects the right side of the green so I think your approach is a soft fade off the left edge of the green to the segment that has the pin today. Any pitching and putting will be a full Pelz experience here.

#### #18 Par 4 451/438 Long Way Home

Number two handicap hole lies between you and the big house-full metal challenge. The landing area for your tee ball is very generous and leans to the right toward a series of fairway bunkers. A drive along the edge of those bunkers is the short way home and the best angle of attack. But I believe you have to favor left center and stay out of the sand or you will not have any chance for a par on this hole. You will have over 200 in to a green with a narrow accessible front raised from the fairway that widens as you work into the center and back. The very deep sand pits right of the green are a no-no for sure- there is a bail out pitching area on the left. Par here is likely to be made with a dexterous chip and a putt. Once you hole out it is time for a cool one and some boy toy distractions in the Champions Grill.