

## Ritz-Carlton Grande Lakes Golf Club

Designer: Greg Norman (2003)

Tees	Par	Yardage	Rating	Slope
Gold	72	6708	72.2	135
Blue	72	6324	70.3	127
White	72	5835	68	121
Green	72	5223	69.8	115

### Overview:

If you are on a golf trip to Orlando and playing the usual suspects, Bay Hill, Orange Country National, Grand Cypress to name a few, consider taking an afternoon and adding the Grand Lakes Course at the Ritz-Carlton to your vacation rota. Built on a typical piece of Florida marshland Greg Norman figured out a way to raise from the flood plain a very interesting set of holes that in many ways defies the typical central Florida formula of flat holes hemmed in by acres of sand and water.

The front nine wends through the oaks and cypress trees with some accent from the wetlands. The back nine serious soil was moved to raise topography from the flood plain and create compelling holes among the wetlands. This side is more exposed to the elements and any hint of wind brings the greater presence of the wetlands to front of mind.

The driving areas are generous throughout but having said that there are specific angles of approach to the greens that are advantageous. A yardage book is a great asset to understanding the proper lines of play. There is plenty of sand-some crushed sea shell waste areas as well-but the course is not overbunkered. Bunkers have clean edges which makes for a very tailored presentation.

The most thought was put into the green complexes which have very dramatic topographical interest. Many of the greens are more than 40 yards long and have serious contour so just being on a green is no guarantee of a two-putt. The green conditions were about as perfect as I have seen in Florida and the putting speed they can maintain as a result can be disarming.

The hole sequence on the front is user friendly with two par fives within three holes to allow build up of some par acorns. As you get into the last three on this side the water is closer at hand and the wind influence picks up increasing the challenge accordingly. Making a decent score on the outward nine is a matter of patience and line control.

Starting at the 11<sup>th</sup> the character of the course changes dramatically and your focus must heighten as well. Check the hole-by-hole attachment below for the details. The Par 4 11<sup>th</sup> is one of the most unique holes you play all day with a tree and sand feature in the center of the driving area that forces you to pick a favored line of play right off the tee box. To the chagrin of the Michelob Ultra crowd, a short Par 3 and a short Par 4 follow that favor brains over brawn and will punish overly aggressive play as the course works toward a strong finish down the last five.

The five finishing holes are a wild collection of very unusual holes that demand calculated patience to get to the house with your scorecard in tact. The common theme is adjacent disaster to the charmed line of play on each hole which makes the risk reward calculation on almost every shot of paramount concern. The green complexes down the stretch are some of the most imaginative you see all day so articulate approach shots are required or you can get into some very dicey up-and-down situations.

The finishing hole provides a grand view of the Marriott and Ritz-Carlton hotel and play facilities. It seems like an appropriate back drop to what has undoubtedly been a stout and invigorating golf challenge.

Hole-By-Hole Analysis (Gold/Blue):

#1 Par 4 387/376 yards

The day begins with a simple and straight opening hole. Wide receptive fairway but you want to be right center for a look up the green. Don't be fooled by the staggered bunkers in front. This is a deep sloped green with a sizeable dent in the left center.

#2 Par 4 381/343

Greg's not wasting time, this one will get your attention early in the round. Drive is straight away to another generous driving area but the left side gives the best angle of approach. 44-yard long and narrow putting surface with a big bunker shadowing the right and a fall off left into the adjacent water hazard. Best play may be the front edge leaving a pitch and a putt for par.

#3 Par 5 511/475

First of two par fives in the next three holes. Hit a right-to-left shaped drive off the bunker on the right. The lay up is to right center for an angled approach that matches the line up of the green. The shot in is another right-to-left shot working up the center line of the green. This is a scoring opportunity if you position properly.

#4 Par 3 166/145

The par threes are very kitchy here, not long but demand accurate shots. Required is a short to medium shot across face bunkers to a wide heart-shaped green. Either chamber of the heart is very shallow so going for flags on the corners is problematic. The apron notch in the back center of the green will collect shots that are too strong so you can expect to be chipping back to pins on either side.

#5 Par 5 536/509

The water that flanks the left of this par five makes it somewhat narrow and a bit more unforgiving than the third. Drive is left center to get a look back to the lay up zone on the right. This area gets progressively narrower from 200 yards in. I like something ending up around 115 on the right edge of the fairway looking back up the angled green to the left. The green is close to 50 yards long so you have to be accurate with your distance control on the approach shot.

#6 Par 4 398/385

One of the truly subtle but novel holes on the course-it has a real Irish look to it. A relatively straight Par 4 you drive to left center off the bunker on the left. Approach is to a narrow bunkerless green some 42 yards long with rounded shoulder on all sides. You can bounce one into this green but anything falling off will leave a dexterous pitch recovery-hence the Irish-ness of the hole.

#7 Par 4 349/320

A rest spot here with a short dogear right Par 4 that should make for another scoring chance. A left-to-right shape off the tee will move you closer to the green and avoid the curtain of bunkers flanking the left of the hole. Be aware that the water is just off your left shoulder so there might be more wind influence than you expect. This green is a long pencil shape set on an 8 to 2 diagonal with a bunker on the right and a crushed sea shell shallow waste area flanking the left.

#8 Par 3 191/171

Much like the first three par this looks innocuous but there are issues lurking. The tee sits offset to the green complex with a carry required over the marshy stuff. Wind will likely be influencing from left into another very deep green at 40 yards with a good tilt from back to front. The pinching bunkers seem to set up for a draw landing in the front third.

#9 Par 4 434/387

Stout finishing hole to end the outward nine. Rip one to left center and you have a long iron/hybrid approach to a cleverly arranged green on a 7 to 1 diagonal with a pair of green side bunkers. This approach would favor a fade using the left shoulder of the long green to feed up the center once it lands. A par here makes the Clif Bar at the turn much tastier.

#10 Par 4 361/336

The back nine starts with an easy one so take advantage of it. The left side of the hole is dominated by a crushed shell waste bunker that buffers a hook from the hazard left. Drive close to the waste bunker on the left for a good look up to the green lurking behind a bunker front right. This green has a full Green Bay Packer shoulder pad roll off on the left so it favors a fade working up the line of the green.

#11 Par 4 396/373

Much like the front the second hole on this side will get your attention. The wind effect will pick up in the next run of holes because of your exposure to the waterways. A tree and sand feature in the center of the fairway forces you to choose a line of play for your drive on either side. The right side, over the fairway bunker about a 190 carry off the blue marker is the best line, but be aware that there is pond encroaching on the right if you flare one. This green is an upside-down heart shaped one that wraps around a front bunker. An operator error to center with your drive leaves you behind the tree feature and will force you to lay up on one side or the other instead of going for the green. If this happens pay attention to the flag location of the day which will determine which side of approach to choose. A bogey here is no embarrassment.

#12 Par 3 173/161

This is another clever angular par three that has serious wind influence off the water to the right. This deep green sits at a 7 to 1 angle to the tee box and juts out slightly into the hazard. Definitely a fade curve is needed to work up into the green. He has generously provided chipping areas short and left in that it is likely a pitch and a putt will be needed for par.

#13 Par 4 327/317

A short technical crescent shaped Par 4 that will drive big hitters batty. Less than driver is likely with a right-to-left line to follow the crescent shape of the hole. This leaves a short pitch into the shallowest green on the course fronted by three bunkers. Depending on which side of the green they place the flag you aim up the corresponding gap between the bunkers. Long is no good at all so be careful.

#14 Par 5 565/544

From here to the end the day gets progressively more challenging. This is a cool three-shot Par 5 that is shadowed by water on the left from tee to green. Drive is right center off the bunker on the right. Now you must carry a long club across a pair of layered bunkers that choke off the fairway from 300 to about 160. The problem is if you cannot carry the right bunker your lay up shot to the left is headed straight at the water. On the final approach the green is up against the hazard on the left and definitely in play so a fade approach working up the green is the shot. Long right is fine since Greg left a recovery pitching area back there.

#15 Par 4 434/423

The number one handicap hole this is a monster Par 4 that should play with the prevailing breeze. Drive is left center just off the right of the left fairway bunker. The massive waster bunker up the right of the entire hole leaves a quite playable shot so do not panic. What distinguishes this hole is the green complex-42 yards deep, raised from the fairway, pinched between bunkers, with a sharp falloff to the right of the green. The approach can use the front ramp to feed one on, which is likely the case if you have a long club in your hand. Putting this green is a real adventure.

#16 Par 4 387/365

The adjacent water theme continues on this medium length Par 4 that is bunkered up the left offsetting the water presence on the right. A draw working up besides the fairway bunker on the left is the shot. The approach is one of the most dangerous of the day with one bunker short left balancing the water pinching the green complex on the right. Many balls will be in the front bunker but long left over that bunker is a playable pitch. Pars on three of these last four holes is a major victory.

#17 Par 3 185/172

Sort of the evil twin sister to #12 this one the green protrudes toward the water on the left with one bunker set in the middle of the front approach line to the green. The shot is between this bunker and the one on the right to a narrow strip of green or the chipping area behind. Playing a fade off the water is a courageous thought....not a good thought but a courageous one.

#18 Par 5 527/521

Stunning finish with this longish five par working around the water all the way up the left of the hole. A draw off the first bunker on the right is the play, but make sure to turn it because this bunker is within reach. The second plays across the north end of the same bunker to just inside the series of bunkers on the right from about 160 to 110. If you had the nerve to lay up to the left you get a good view up the opening to a narrow green set 5 to 11 to your approach line. There is bail out areas right and long of the green if you need them. With a short iron in your hand on the third just take it over the front right bunker with a soft draw and you will have a good look at a birdie to finish.