



WEEKEND AWAY  
COFFS HARBOUR

# The rough with the smooth

The combination of a beautiful course and excellent restaurant appeals to the retired golfer in **Bruce Elder**.

I had never thought of staying at a golf resort. A very dubious local champion at the age of 14, I turned my back on the game after one too many blustery encounters with a roaring southerly on a NSW south-coast course.

One look at the thousands of densely planted, flooded gums that fringe every fairway at Bonville Golf Resort, a superb golf course on the hinterland of Coffs Harbour and Sawtell, and the wise and laconic advice of the man who taught me to play the infuriating game came rushing back.

"If you're behind a tree," Tommy Mulvihill used to say, "always aim for the tree. If you hit it, then you can say 'bloody good shot'. If you miss it, then you have achieved what you were planning to do all along."

Mind you, Bonville is no ordinary golf course. Its designer, Terry Watson, was asked to create something similar to the home of the US Masters, Augusta National in Georgia. He created 18 holes edged by flooded gums, so any wayward player is likely to end up behind a tree and only those who shoot straight and true will come away with a respectable score.

Every hole is created so each group of golfers thinks they are the only players on the course. There are 12 kilometres of paths between greens and fairways. No one is allowed to walk the course; everyone has to drive a buggy, or "electric cart", as they are now called.

The club brochure says the course is in 80 hectares of forest "with an additional 80 hectares of natural bushland, which contains pockets of sub-tropical rainforest". As well as flooded gums, there are blackbutt, camphor laurel and tallwood. "Grass trees are used to indicate distance from the green – one tree is 100 metres, two is 150 metres and three is 200 metres." With so much shrubbery, Bonville is a natural sanctuary for many native species. In the evenings, swamp wallabies and kangaroos are said to graze on the light rough.

All this is true. In the evening, as we stroll to the Flooded Gums Restaurant – overlooking the 18th fairway – I notice wallabies munching on the edges of the near-perfect greensward that is the fairway in front of our room.

And what a restaurant. This must be among the best dining on any golf course in Australia. Apparently, award-winning chef George Francisco, of Jonah's at Whale Beach, pops in regularly to advise on menu selection and planning. It's a small room overlooking the golf course, with only the idle chatter of a few bragging golfers at the bar to be heard. We enjoy such locally sourced delights as an entree of Woolgoolga lobster and angel-hair pasta and roasted jewfish with lobster, scallop and prawn boudin, ruby grapefruit and calamari. The



Well groomed ... (clockwise from main) Bonville Golf Resort's award-winning course; the rooms have views of fairways and bush.

jewfish is cooked perfectly and flattered by the textures of crisp calamari and the seafood base. It's great value at \$39.

Between meals you can wander around the clubhouse's restaurant-bar and examine the photographs of famous people who have eaten, drank and swung a club here. Among them are images of Jimmy Barnes, Kerri-Anne Kennerley and the entire Wallabies team, circa George Gregan and John Eales, which invites a bad joke – told by the staff, not me – that when they played at Bonville, there were more Wallabies on the fairways with clubs than there were wallabies munching quietly in the rough.

As for the accommodation, it's good, without ever matching the food. The rooms are large and comfortable – in the style of a four-star motel – with a flat-screen television, king-size bed, a large and comfortable bathroom (with no bath but a huge shower recess) and one of those multi-purpose pieces of furniture with a bar fridge, a desk and a luggage rack.

Each room has a small verandah with a table and chairs where you can sit, look through the

trees and watch birds on the water hazards and golfers curse and slice into the gums. For golfers, there are a range of amusingly named packages: "The Overnighter" includes accommodation, breakfast and 18 holes; the "Double Up" is two nights' accommodation, two breakfasts and two rounds of golf; the "Triple Treat" is three of everything and the "Grand Slam" is five of everything. Five rounds of golf – how good is that? – on what is trumpeted as "Australia's most beautiful mainland golf course".

Bonville has won *The Golf Course Guide* award for Australia's most beautiful golf course four years in a row and, in 2006, the World Travel Award for Australia's leading golf resort. I list these awards because, if I'd been voting, I would have added my voice to the praise. It's a beautiful golf course and resort. Every vista is an interplay between the beauty of the gums and the mown perfection of the fairways. It almost makes me want to take up golf again.

Weekends Away are reviewed anonymously and paid for by Traveller.

## Visitors Book Bonville Golf Resort

**Address** North Bonville Road, Bonville.

**The verdict** Superb food and good-quality accommodation in an idyllic golf-course setting.

**Price** - Rates range from \$220 a couple for a resort room at the weekend to \$464 a couple with breakfast and 18 holes golf at the weekend.

Packages available.

**Bookings** Phone 6653 4002, see [bonvillegolf.com.au](http://bonvillegolf.com.au).

**Getting there** Bonville is 520 kilometres north of Sydney via the Newcastle Freeway and Pacific Highway.

**Perfect for** Golfers wanting to enjoy fine food and one of the most beautiful courses in the country.

**Wheelchair access** Yes.