

THE CUT

# GOOLF

DOES NEW ZEALAND HAVE A NEW NO 1? WE PLAY...

# TE ARAI LINKS

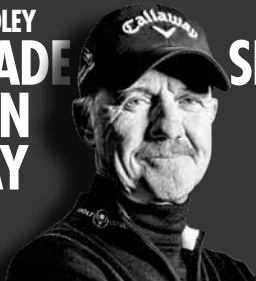
+ THE COACHES'  
**MASTERCLASS**



CLAUDE HARMON III  
**RIP  
YOUR  
DRIVES**



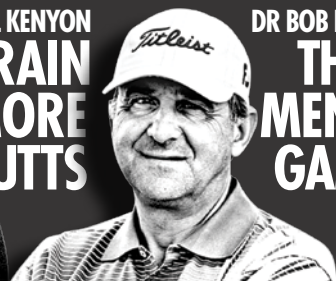
SEAN FOLEY  
**A-GRADE  
IRON  
PLAY**



PETE COWEN  
**SHARPER  
SHORT  
GAME**



PHIL KENYON  
**DRAIN  
MORE  
PUTTS**



DR BOB ROTELLA  
**THE  
MENTAL  
GAME**



# PURE CLASS

GEOFF SAUNDERS PLAYS THE NEWLY OPENED SOUTH COURSE AT AUCKLAND'S TE ARAI LINKS AND ASKS: DOES NEW ZEALAND HAVE A NEW NO 1?

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fter visiting Te Arai Links in December, our small group of three went on to play Tara Iti the next day. Tara Iti is New Zealand's current top-rated course.

These two experiences naturally provoked debate on the merits of the two courses. A member of our party is on *Golf Digest's* course-rating panel and after playing Tara Iti he steadfastly maintained the course had retained its number-one ranking. A second member of our party rated the two courses first equal and I promoted Te Arai South Course to my personal No.1 ranking.

It was obviously too close for our group to agree on a clear winner. With the Tom Doak North Course ready for play by October this year, the final rankings of each course in this cluster of three magical golf layouts will be intriguing. One thing is clear – New Zealand will shortly be able to boast two more world-class golf courses.

The other great news is that Te Arai Links is more accessible to New Zealand golfers than many may imagine. Yes, it is expensive, but most Kiwi golfers will regard Te Arai Links as a 'special occasion' golf course – or possibly the experience of a golfing lifetime.

Jim Rohrstaff, the managing partner of Te Arai Links, explains where he sees Te Arai Links' positioning in the New Zealand and international markets: "Most of our play would be local at present – New Zealanders. But we are now getting a lot of inbound enquiries from Australia and the US.

"We are in one of the most spectacular locations in New Zealand. It is a beautiful destination, whether you play golf or not. More men than women play golf, we get that, but women are also the fastest-growing market in the game. We are also building something that says you do not have to play golf to enjoy this place; we will have a beautiful spa and a wonderful wellness and fitness centre."

Noted Los Angeles interior designer Jenni Kayne was responsible for the interiors of Te Arai Links' 43-square-metre suites, two-bedroom cottages and four-bedroom villas.

"She has hit every single detail brilliantly," Rohrstaff says. "It all speaks to a great luxury experience, not just a golf experience. The main attraction here is golf – we are building two world-class golf courses – but if you are a non-golfer, you can have a wonderful time here at the beach and take private surf lessons. We have great mountain biking trails... it's an all-inclusive place."

Room rates fluctuate according to the season for both New Zealand and international guests but Rohrstaff says the aim is to keep the tariff for suites under \$1,000 a night.

"The room rate currently sits at \$800 per night in peak season but drops to as low as



OPPOSITE: Te Arai Links: a 'special occasion' golf course, but one that's accessible to Kiwi golfers.

**“BEN CRENSHAW AND I HAVE SOUGHT SAND-BASED SITES WHERE THE LAND MORE THAN THE DESIGNERS DETERMINE THE DESIGN AND CHARACTER OF THE COURSE.” - BILL COORE**



The sound of crashing waves accompanies players around the course, along with panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean, the Hen and Chicken and Little Barrier islands.



\$500 in the low season, a product that we believe will appeal to New Zealanders and Aussies. We are perfect for that special occasion – so a couple could come for two nights and play two rounds of golf each for a total of around \$3,200.”

A round of golf for New Zealanders ranges from a low of \$250 to \$400, depending on the month. International golf rates go from a low of \$350 to a peak-season \$600. For instance, golfers planning that dream trip to Scotland will realise just what excellent value Te Arai Links represents compared to rates of over \$800 a round at some of Scotland’s top courses.

Dining at Te Arai Links is currently confined to Ric’s Pizza Barn, but the Ocean Restaurant will shortly be added. Ric’s sits next to what is promoted as The World’s Largest Putting Green – another great after-match diversion.

Now to the course itself. We were fortunate to have Te Arai Links marketing director, Grace Rokela, to make up our four on our first outing around this exceptional, very playable golf course. We played the back tees at 5,881 metres. It is very much a links golf experience and a relatively easy walk.

The sound of the waves crashing accompanied our round and we were constantly presented with panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean, the Hen & Chickens and Barrier islands. The first three holes rise inland, with the fourth returning downhill to the sea. After the intriguing par-3 fifth comes an absolute beachfront run of four great holes to the ninth green.

The course finishes strongly with the evil but tempting short par-4 14th, another tight drive on the par-4 16th, followed by the short par-3 17th hole. My personal favourite was the par-5 18th, where the golfer is presented with a temptation of playing left on the second shot to try to get close to the final green in two. Fortunately, my caddie guided me well away from the largely concealed, cavernous bunker and wasteland on the left of the fairway by the green to a far safer pitch from the right side of the green.

Te Arai Links is first class all the way, from your arrival in the carpark through to the 18th green – and then on to Ric’s for a beer and pizza. [www.tearai.com](http://www.tearai.com)



Te Arai’s suites and two-bedroom cottages have interiors by noted US designer Jenni Kayne.



Ric’s Pizza Barn is a top stop for players after a round.



Grace Rokela : "Picking my favourite hole is near impossible..."



**T**he Arai Links marketing director Grace Rokela was born in New Zealand and raised in Naples, Florida. She played college golf in the United States for Savannah College of Art and Design. She was marketing and brand manager at Golf New Zealand before being offered the opportunity to be part of the legacy project that Jim Rohrstaff and Ric Kayne have created at Te Arai. Here, she shares some thoughts on the course and her favourite hole:

"With 18 outstanding holes on the South Course, picking my favourite hole is near impossible. However, the hole that takes up the most space on my phone is hole number 17. On the 17th tee box, it is easy to get distracted by the waves crashing on the coastline from Te Arai Forestry to Pakiri.

"My advice on the par-3, 17th – playing anywhere from 94 to 119 yards [86m to 109m] – is to focus on the wind direction and commit to your swing. Don't try to get too fancy with your shot, otherwise, you might end up in the surrounding bunkers.

"Last week I played the 17th at 7:30pm with cotton-candy skies, the waves crashing, pitching wedge in hand, playing a match with a friend... It doesn't get much better than that.

"This hole will become one of the most photographed in golf in the next few years." □