

From tee to green, the best club was family

► **KIAWAH**
Continued from Page M1

Kiawah Island, rightly promoted as a golfer's paradise, was a risky vacation choice for a family with one avid regular golfer (my father) and one enthusiastic yet infrequent golfer (my brother-in-law). The non-golfers (the women) worried that the powerful draw of world-class courses would set the daily schedule. We all wondered whether easy access to golf, beaches, bike trails, kayak tours, and Charleston's shops and history would pull us in different directions.

Upon arriving at Charleston International Airport, it became clear our vacation would be an unpredictable adventure with multigenerational considerations and complications. For starters, a car rental mix-up left my sister and brother-in-law with an ill-fitting car seat, stranding them in the airport parking lot for over an hour in 90-degree heat. Next, we had to adjust to close living quarters that were not child-proofed. My nephew had introduced a new dynamic, which we carefully negotiated with two rental cars, a condo equipped with crib and high chair, and plenty of patience.

We quickly learned that tee times and toddler whims are impossible to coordinate. Any semblance of a daily schedule revolved around my nephew. Thankfully, Kiawah's many offerings helped us stay flexible without feeling shortchanged, though we passed on lengthy scheduled excursions such as fishing trips, sunset cruises, and plantation tours.

When my mother had suggested Kiawah, the island seemed like it offered something for everyone. We wanted to venture beyond New England — somewhere culturally different, yet not a long flight.

We liked Kiawah's proximity to the airport (35-minute drive) and historic downtown Charleston (45 minutes). We liked the convenience of a wired, three-bedroom rental condo with a well-equipped kitchen for cooking family dinners. We liked living within walking distance of the beach and a pool and the short drives to a playground, supermarket, and multiple golf courses. We liked the easy access to outdoor activities.

Approaching Kiawah Island, trees draped with Spanish moss line the road, creating an otherworldly natural backdrop free of tourist trappings. Kiawah is a



PHOTOS BY SHIRA SPRINGER/GLOBE STAFF

The 18th green on the Ocean Course at Kiawah Island Resort. St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Charleston, the oldest congregation in South Carolina, once guided ships with its steeple light.

carefully-developed barrier island with nature trails winding between pristine beaches, salt marshes, ponds, luxury homes, and award-winning golf courses.

The island seems far removed from any urban center. It is a picturesque, 13.5-square-mile preserve for outdoor enthusiasts of all types, though it caters to the golf crowd. Kiawah boasts five top courses designed by Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, Tom Fazio, and Pete Dye. Among their exploits, my father and brother-in-law, enjoyed an exquisitely torturous round on the Dye-designed Ocean Course on the eastern edge of the island.

From the clubhouse's back porch, the 18th green and the Atlantic Ocean crashing along the right side of the fairway look movie-backdrop perfect. More than a decade ago, the ocean views from almost every hole attracted Robert Redford when he was directing the film "The Legend of Bagger Vance." The overall course layout looks like it was naturally carved by the strong ocean winds that challenge amateurs and pros alike.

Famous for hosting the 1991 Ryder Cup, the 7,937-yard Ocean Course will see the game's best players return for the 2012 PGA Championship. Public access to such a high-caliber course — ranked 25th among the top 100 US courses and 4th on the list of top public courses by Golf Digest — is rare. For my father, making par on each of the final three



holes was a vacation highlight.

While the men spent mornings golfing, the rest of us went to the public Beachwalker Park, regularly cited as one of the top US beaches, on the southwestern tip of the island. Several miles of wide, firm sand beaches run the length of Kiawah's southern edge from Beachwalker Park to the Ocean Course, passing condos, mansions, and the Sanctuary, a luxury hotel and resort. (Near the end of our vacation, my mother and I treated ourselves to massages at the Sanctuary spa, a worthwhile indulgence.) Discreet entrance points with narrow boardwalks are spread along the beachfront, many with informational postings about local denizens like the loggerhead turtles

that nest on the beach.

From early morning joggers to late afternoon kite-fliers, the seemingly endless beach was a hub of activity. For my nephew, it proved the perfect playground, populated enough to make splashing around a social affair, but not too crowded. There was ample room to wade in shallow waters, chase seagulls, and build and destroy sandcastles.

Travel inland from oceanside attractions and the scenery changes from windswept expanses to dense forest. Wildlife roam free enough through lush, semitropical vegetation that signs posted at the edge of watering holes warn, "DANGER ALLIGATORS Do Not Approach, Feed or Harass." We never spotted alligators during our many bike rides and runs. Bicyclists, however, were most common on the network of trails.

Undeterred by overcast skies and humidity destined to break, my sister, brother-in-law, and I ventured a ride around the island. Well-marked, paved paths run beside every major road and many minor streets on Kiawah, twisting around golf fairways, ponds, and residential developments. Signs alongside the paths point cyclists toward the beach or golf courses or highlight tree types and wildlife.

Biking is the best, most hassle-free way to see all that the island offers. At each beach entrance point are shaded bike racks.

If you go . . .

Where to stay
ResortQuest Kiawah
115 Freshfields Village
Johns Island
800-554-8222
843-768-2300
www.resortquestkiawah.com
Plenty of vacation rental options; will provide rental bikes, beach chairs, cribs, and other equipment for additional fees. Price of one-week rentals depends on season, starting at roughly \$900.
Where to eat
Mellow Mushroom
309 King St., Charleston
843-723-7374
www.mellowmushroom.com
A child-friendly pizza chain conveniently located in the center of the downtown shopping district.
Blossom
171 East Bay St.
Charleston
843-722-9200
www.magnolias-blossom-cypress.com
In the heart of historic downtown, features dishes with local food and flavors.
Newton Farms at Freshfields Village
515 Freshfields Drive
Johns Island

843-243-3276
www.newtonfarms.net
Supermarket with everyday and gourmet items to stock refrigerators.
What to do
Ocean Course
1000 Ocean Course Drive
Kiawah Island
843-266-4670
www.kiawahresort.com
Cost per round ranges from \$222 to \$338 and depends on high or low season and whether you stay at resort-affiliated accommodations.
PaddleFish Kayaking
888-730-1835
www.paddlefishkayaking.com
Two-hour tours with focus on wildlife suitable for novices and more experienced kayakers. \$50.
Kiawah Beachwalker Park
1 Beachwalker Drive
Johns Island
843-768-2395
www.ccprc.com
The large parking lot at public Beachwalker Park charges \$7 per day for standard vehicles. Multiple boardwalk entrance points allow free, easy access to Kiawah Beaches by bike or foot for those staying on the island.

We pedaled past the guard posts that control access to different sections of the island, wound our way through pockets of dense forest, and watched out for errant tee shots. Halfway through the 90-minute trip, we felt a few drops of rain. "I don't want to get really wet," my sister said as we turned to speed home. Minutes later, a downpour left us drenched. Then we overruled my brother-in-law and got lost. By the time we found the right path back on a rain-soaked map, we were laughing hysterically.

For wanderings around historic downtown Charleston, we opted for a self-guided tour (we thought it would be unfair to subject other tourists to a potentially cranky toddler). We hit the highlights — one-time meat-selling center Market Hall, the colorful merchant houses called "Rainbow Row," Charleston Harbor, the Old Slave Mart — in roughly an hour, then stopped

for ice cream.

The next day, my sister and brother-in-law returned to Charleston for a romantic dinner at Blossom restaurant on East Bay Street while my parents and I babysat. Two nights later, my parents and I returned for a relaxing meal.

Other than those two dinners out, we ate all our meals together in the condo, sharing cooking and cleaning responsibilities. Kitchen duty may not be every family's idea of a relaxing vacation, but having the option worked well for us. It took away the stress of finding dining options that satisfied all ages and tastes among the island's limited selection. Dining in also helped free time for other activities.

And there was plenty to do around the island — for all ages and tastes.

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Our children's import to Haiti was fun

By Amy Miller
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT
PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Perhaps it was the wide grin on Charles's face as he greeted us at Toussaint Louverture International Airport. Or

ESSAY
the way Sister Claudette lovingly served my family bread and papaya juice in her damaged compound. Just as probably it was riding in the bed of a pickup truck, watching street life more colorful than any theme park parade.

Somehow, my daughter, Lane, 13, and son, Benjamin, 8, were OK — more than OK — vacationing recently in one of the saddest places on earth.

After returning from a 20-mile drive that took us through the mud-soaked markets of Carrefour and over the rubble-strewn roads by Cite Soleil, Lane announced that she wanted to be an exchange student in Haiti. Her typically timid brother declared he would fly back on his own to visit our host and friend.

My husband and I had thought that traveling with children to post-earthquake Port-au-Prince would be a humanitarian mission at best, living hell at worst. But we agreed that for his 50th birthday we would go to Hispaniola — a few days in Haiti and then by bus to the relatively affluent Dominican Republic next door.

The decision to visit Haiti's capital was not simple. We had been in the country before — but in the north, where a Haitian-American friend runs a school. This time we would be going to a city that is simmering in a kind of wreckage that tragically passes for daily life.

Our itinerary gave us a day to visit with Charles, who had moved back to Port-au-Prince in



ASSOCIATED PRESS/RAMON ESPINOSA

A student hurdles a barricade left from a protest last week in Port-au-Prince against the government's relief efforts.

his retirement, and another day to see Claudette, in Leogane, which suffered the worst earthquake damage of any city in the country. We knew them through their sister, Lucia Anglade of Long Island, who founded the school we help support in the north.

At the airport, we walked into a bedlam of desperate drivers crazed for a fare until Charles found us and drove us directly to the concrete house he had built himself. He was proud that the building was intact and crouched in the corner of the kitchen to reenact the moments following the Jan. 12 earthquake.

The children were silent as he told of driving around for 48 hours to get people to doctors and help uncover those caught in the rubble. Lane later said she felt sad for Charles, who had worked so hard to create his dream house, only to see the world around him crumble, taking with it electricity, running water, pavement, and hope.

Back in January we had wait-

I don't want to think about [the earthquake's effects] when I'm there. I just want to have fun with them.

LANE, 13,
the author's daughter

ed to hear if our friends had survived. It was three days before Lucia heard her siblings had lived. It took nearly a week for relief agencies to reach Leogane, where Claudette cared for the injured and homeless.

Now, months later, we were in Leogane. On our previous trip, Lane and Benjamin had sat in this same pickup truck, waving to children. Now they sat quietly staring at the piles of garbage that were nearly indistinguishable from the heaps of clothing and vegetables at wet and filthy

marketplaces. Meridian strips were overtaken with makeshift shacks and acre upon acre of tent settlements flanked the roadway.

Sister Claudette was preparing to welcome German diplomats when we arrived. Aspiring nuns scurried about cleaning. The Germans were considering rebuilding the compound, where 130 earthquake survivors are living in tents donated by Rotarians around the world.

Lane and Benjamin were aware of the conditions. We live in small-town Maine, idyllic even by New England standards. They walk to school. We have an acre of lush lawn by our house, which sits by both the village and the forest. We see more friends than strangers in town, where the local ice cream stand offers every flavor you can imagine.

Benjamin described Port-au-Prince as "yucky, horrible, gross." He thought it would take a long time for Haiti to get better. But he wants to go back, because "I want to look around more. I like to see the mountains and people."

Being in Haiti "makes you know what you have and not care so much about a better cellphone or if your iPod breaks," Lane said.

Her love for the place is about people. She had spent one afternoon singing with two other teenage girls who spoke no English but knew all the words to a Beyoncé song.

Lane tries not to think about how much less Haitian children have, how hard their lives are, she said. "I don't think about that because I don't want to treat them special because of that. I don't want to think about that when I'm there. I just want to have fun with them."

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Currents

Mobile site will get you feeling like an Angelino

DowntownLA.com has launched a new mobile site that automatically detects your mobile device and provides easy-to-read information on everything from concerts, festivals, and sporting events to top restaurants and the latest hotel deals. With mobile.downtownla.com, find out what's up at the Museum of Contemporary Art or track down information on everything from the latest street closures to family-friendly activities. You can even get a list of happy hours, broken down by neighborhood, date, and time. Ideal for travelers, the mobile site also provides details on the Metro rail line, DASH bus system, and taxi services, and lists 90 parking lots across the city with full contact info. 213-955-0269, mobile.downtownla.com

Maps to hike the Whites

With hundreds of hikes in the White Mountains, it can be a trick zeroing in on one that suits your family's interests and abilities. Through Oct. 15, the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) is offering free access to 25 maps with detailed, printable itineraries for its top child-friendly routes, including hikes to waterfalls, lakes, and scenic viewpoints, and places to ramble just off the Kancamagus Scenic Byway. Register at www.outdoors.org/wmgonline and enter promotional code WMGO610 for five days of free access to the maps and itineraries. To tap into the AMC's entire database of 500 hiking trails, an annual subscription costs \$12 for AMC members and \$15 for nonmembers. 603-466-2721, www.outdoors.org/whitemountains



The sightseeing London Pass gets you popular attractions such as Royal Albert Hall.

Your ticket to London

If you're heading to England, consider buying The London Pass. The one- to six-day sightseeing pass provides entry to more than 55 of the city's top attractions, including St. Paul's Cathedral, the Tower of London, and the Churchill War Rooms. It also gets you into sporting attractions such as Wembley Stadium, Wimbledon, and the Lord's Cricket Ground, where you will get a guided, behind-the-scenes tour of the grounds and access to the current exhibit, "Swinging Away: How Baseball and Cricket Connect." Passes range from \$60 (adults) and \$40 (children ages 5 to 15) for one day to \$136 (adults) and \$97 (children) for six days. They are available at the Britain and London Visitor Centre on Regent Street and other locations across the city. LondonPass.com includes a map tool to help you plan your visit, details on attractions, and information on special offers for pass-holders, such as free gifts at Harrods department store and commission-free currency exchange spots. 011-44-1644-485020, www.londonpass.com
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