

Families in Business

MAKING FAMILY BUSINESS MATTER

International indulgence

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Having luxury in every aspect of a holiday resort is always a necessity. Margie Goldsmith profiles three top spots for the ultimate getaway

When sophisticated travelers get away from their busy lives, they expect the best in a resort: spacious accommodation, creative dining experiences, and enough activities and services to keep even the most active and demanding guest occupied. Here are three family-run luxury resorts that offer outstanding exclusivity and tranquility – plus the added perk of inimitable personal style associated with the family name.



The American Club

The American Club, the Midwest's only AAA five Diamond Resort Hotel in the small village of Kohler, Wisconsin, once provided housing and meals for immigrant employees who could afford neither. Today, it is a luxury resort with four Pete-Dye-designed golf courses and a private membership club, Riverbend – part of Destination Kohler, the hospitality branch of the \$5.5 billion, 132-year-old Kohler Company.

Herbert V Kohler Jr is the third-generation chairman, CEO and president of the Kohler Company. It was he who created a "hospitality division" which included renovating the American Club, turning the former post office, The Carriage House, into a residential annex of the Club, and building the famous Kohler Waters Spa. A golfer himself, Kohler built four golf courses including Whistling Straits, host of the 2004 PGA championship. Kohler created new furniture, tile, and interior accessories lines; he built a mall of boutique shops, 800 acres of wildlife preserve, stables, a sports and fitness complex, the Kohler Design Center – a 36,000-square-foot design resource – and two years ago he added Destination St Andrews, home to the AAA five Red Star Old Course Hotel in Scotland.

"I don't work for the money," says Kohler, "The mission drives me." That mission is to create products and services that embrace the concept of gracious living around the world. Kohler did not encourage his three children to go into the business, but all three chose to work for the company, and each embraces Kohler's mission in their respective departments: Laura, as president of human resources; Rachel as vice president of interiors; and David as group president, kitchen and bath group.

It's not surprising celebrities such as Kevin Costner, George Bush Sr and famous pro-golfers frequent the American Club. The guest rooms and suites feature state-of-the-art Kohler products and all guest bathrooms include a whirlpool bath. The American Club uses its own furniture and tiles, and Kohler Waters Spa showcases Kohler products, such as shower towers and infinity edge tubs with chromotherapy lights.

Guests not playing golf or enjoying the spa can meander the 500-acre nature preserve and spot deer and wild turkeys, canoe the Sheboygen River, shop in

specialised stores offering everything from antiques to whimsical Wisconsin products; take a factory tour, meet with a design consultant or stroll in the gardens of Kohler Village. Ten restaurants offer fare from epicurean to country gourmet and Italian. The newest addition is the Craverie, a bistro selling handmade chocolates and flavourful low-calorie items.

"What we want," says Kohler, "is for every person who buys a plumbing product or an engine or generator; or who plays a game of golf or stays in a hotel room, to come away feeling strongly positive about that experience; so much so that if that person talks about that experience a year from now or five years from now, invariably that person will smile. If we produce smiles, we've done our job."

The Wakaya Club & Spa, Private Island Resort

For those who want to experience one of the most exclusive resorts in the South Pacific, Club Wakaya Club & Spa, private island resort in Fiji offers complete privacy, over-the-top accommodation, and a tailor-made experience for each of its guests. Such notables as Nicole Kidman, Celine Dion, and Pierce Bronson relish its seclusion, gourmet food, and endless views of turquoise lagoons.

In 1971, while on a trip to Fiji, Canadian-born David Gilmour discovered the 2,200 acre unspoiled island of Wakaya, which, except for being used as a coconut plantation, had been uninhabited for 108 years. Gilmour, an entrepreneur whose ventures have each turned to gold (starting with Dansk Design and including Fiji Water), decided to build a home for himself and his New Zealand-born wife, Jill. He also built roads, luxurious lagoon-facing rooms (bures) for guests, roads and an airstrip, as guests to Wakaya arrive via Wakaya's private plane. Jill, a partner in both the planning and execution and a designer with impeccable taste, created an Asian-inspired design for both the spa and bures, ranging in size from 1,650 to 4,500 square feet. Her vision was to immediately transport family and guests into a world of calm and serenity.

"I'm afraid the travel industry is massively inflicted with 'anticipointment' says David Gilmour. "You travel and find that this has changed and that has changed, and there are more people, and there's more pollution. I decided that as I got older, I wanted one place that doesn't change and that's Wakaya. Jill and I need to come here two times a year minimum. I recharge my batteries, get the psyche moving, and the creative juices flowing."

All activities are included: scuba diving with a dive master (and two tanks per day) nine-hole golf, tennis or croquet with the pro (plus racquets, golf clubs, and mallets), a private hike with a local guide to a Fijian archeological dating back to 700 AD, all meals, alcohol, wine, champagne, snacks, mini-bar, personal laundry, suntan lotion, straw carrying bags and hats for use on the beach, snorkel equipment, deep sea fishing, visit to a local Fijian village school or church service, and a private picnic on the same secluded spot where Rolling Stone Keith Richards fell out of a tree. Now there is a sign beneath the tree, which reads, "Watch for falling stones" with a picture of a man and guitar falling through space. You are dropped off at the secluded spot which includes a dining area set with a tablecloth, flowers, real china and silverware, chilled champagne in an icy cooler (with three more bottles in a hamper), lunch including cold lobster (or whatever you desire). There is a double hammock for two, a straw mat with big fluffy pillows on the sand, two comfy chaise-lounges under a shade umbrella, fresh washing water, and a radio transmitter to use when you want to return to the resort. The only items not included in the Wakaya experience are spa treatments and the private plane transfer.

Stoke Park Club

Once owned by Queen Elizabeth I and William Penn, the Stoke Park Club, just 20 minutes from London, is celebrating its centenary this year. Originally a private residence designed by James Wyatt, architect to George III, the estate was used as a private residence until 1908, when 'Pa' Lane Jackson, founder of the Corinthian Sporting Club, purchased the property and turned it into England's first country club. These days, the resort is considered one of the top Golf and Spa resorts in the world. It includes the 21-bedroom dazzling Palladian mansion of white stone, terraces and cupola, 28 luxury accommodations in the Pavilion (some overlooking Windsor Castle), and award-winning spa, health and racquet facilities. Set on 350 magnificent historic garden and parkland acres, the 27-hole parkland golf course was designed by Harry Shapland Colt in 1908. There are also 13 tennis courts (three indoor carpet courts, four all-weather hard courts, and six Wimbledon-specific grass courts) and the famous Boodles Challenge is held at Stoke Park a week before Wimbledon.

The Stoke Park Club not only attracts its fair share of celebrities (think Nicole Kidman, Johnny Depp, Renee Zellweger, and the entire England football team) but has also figured prominently in two James Bond movies: *Goldfinger*, with cinema's most famous golfing scene, and *Tomorrow Never Dies*. More recently, *Bridget Jones' Diary*, *Layer Cake*, *Wimbledon*, and *Bride & Prejudice* have all used Stoke Park as a location. It has also earned its reputation as a top dining facility with three restaurants: The Park for British modern cuisine, The Orangery for light meals and afternoon teas, and San Marco for classic Italian.

In 1987, the fourth owner bought the Stoke Park Club – Roger King, a well-known London jewellery designer from the 70s, likes old buildings and loves restoring them. He bought the property, a Grade 1 listed building, as a hobby and for his three sons Chester, Hertford, and Witney (each named after a town in England). But it became much more than a hobby as he realised its history and heritage of being the first country club in the UK. He restored Stoke Park Club as the best country club in Europe.

The three King brothers, who are also in the hospital building, packaging, and property businesses, each have equal shares in the club. "We have a partnership business arrangement," says Chester, who runs Stoke Park Club. "We swap every three years." Chester has a degree in marketing, Witney has a finance degree, and Hertford has a legal degree. "We all look at business slightly differently and swap roles depending on what needs to be done," says Chester.

When the Kings took over Stoke Park, only the golf course remained. Over the decades, most of the facilities had been lost: there was no tennis, no residential accommodations, no bar, no spa, and no pool. "We've done a major restoration," says Chester, "And we're very proud of our centenary. It's a very old brand but also has the reputation of being a very contemporary brand. Golf clubs are traditionally stuffy, but ours is a cool, non-stuffy environment. We're like Claridges (a prestigious hotel in the centre of London): we offer very good quality and service, but it doesn't matter what you look like and what you wear.

It goes to reason that, as Stoke Park is considered the top club in England, the Kings are often approached by potential buyers. Although they won't reveal the Club's worth, their biggest competitor's property was recently sold for €165 million. "We won't sell because it's the family's hobby," says Chester.