

Omni Amelia Island Plantation



I feel like I just went to camp, that is—if camp can be a sprawling resort on the ocean. The Omni Amelia Island Plantation has it all. From luxurious accommodations and services--to absolute “bucket list” fun.

Omni Amelia Island first opened in 1972, but it’s debuting an \$85 million dollar redevelopment this Spring. That will include an 80-thousand square-foot conference center, an additional tower of 155 oceanfront rooms and the largest pool deck in Northeast Florida. They will now have both an infinity-edge adults-only pool and a “splash-friend” family pool.

If you have been trying to find a reason to visit Northeast Florida, now you have no excuse. Even though I’ve lived in Florida most of the past 25 years, I haven’t spent anytime on Amelia Island. It’s tucked 32 miles northeast of Jacksonville near the Georgia border. (Trivia: Amelia Island is named after King Edward II’s daughter Amelia. It is the only U.S. location to have been under eight flags: French, Spanish, British, Patriots, Green Cross of Florida, Mexican, Confederate and U.S. That’s why Amelia is sometimes called “The Isle of Eight Flags?”)

After we checked in our spacious room, I looked out the pitch-black window wondering what view we would have come morning. I was pleasantly surprised to be looking directly at a sunrise over the Atlantic Ocean!

I turned the TV on, and the ticker-tape along the top of the screen on the “home” channel said, “Welcome Ray Collins.” (Very nice touch, but awkward for the other guests who aren’t named Ray Collins.)

As a tennis player, our timing to visit Omni Amelia Island could not have been better. I wound up having

dinner with—and then playing tennis with—Hall of Famer Cliff Drysdale. You may not recognize the name, but you would recognize his South African accent from being one of the top commentators in all the major tennis tournaments.

Cliff has taken over the Racquet Park at Omni Amelia Island and brought in his own pros and support personnel. It’s one of over 20 locations his company is managing. He’s developed a real niche with amateur players looking for weekend tennis getaways.

I was fortunate enough to have a nearly private lesson with him at the Racquet Park. I’ve played tennis all my life at a competitive level, but no instructor has ever told me instantly why my serve is so bad:

“Ray, give me a foot less on the toss.”



A foot? My toss is a foot too high?
I wasn't about to argue with the guy
who critiques all the biggest names
in tennis so I gave it a try. Instant
improvement!

The resort shuttle bus system is
always dependable and able to whisk
you around the complex or even to
other parts of the island. We went into
the Fernandina Historic District and
rode in horse-drawn carriage amidst
a 50-block area that is cited on the
National Register of Historic Places.
There are more than a hundred shops
and restaurants around Centre Street.
Fernandina Beach is a premier fishing
and shrimping destination.

Back at the plantation, there is
always something going on—that's
why I began calling it "Camp Omni."
I finally was able to check "kayaking"
off my bucket list. The Omni's recreation
department is second to none. We
also rode—slowly at first—Segway
Scooters around the sprawling property.

The annual Amelia Island Jazz Festival
was also going on this weekend, and
though we didn't make it to the festival
itself—we were in the plantation restaurant/



bar each night when the headliners came back to jam for
appreciative and surprised guests! One night we got an
impromptu concert from Spyro Gyra and the other night
was contemporary pianist David Benoit.

First class all the way at the Omni Amelia Island
Plantation. RAY COLLINS
www.omnihotels.com/FindAHotel/AmeliaIsland.aspx

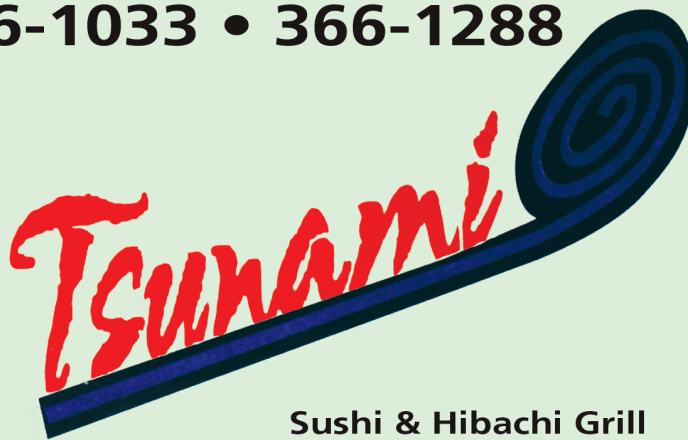


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