



Stay-cation across the Skyway Bridge

If you want to hit hundreds of tennis balls, run until you're winded and feel sore the next morning—I have some recommendations. But then The Renaissance Vinoy in St. Petersburg is probably not the “stay-cation” for you. However, if you want to play a little tennis, get a lesson and/or take part in a drill clinic and explore a major-metropolitan city, take a closer look at this historic jewel half an hour north of Sarasota on the banks of Tampa Bay.

The Renaissance Vinoy Resort & Golf Club has quite a history. It was one of the most famous “Boom Era” hotels built in 1925—but then fell on hard times fifty years later. It re-opened in 1992 and was immediately named one of the Historic Hotels of America by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

But let's get back to the tennis. The resort has 12 HarTru courts complete with lights for night play. Private or group lessons are available. The pro shop will try to line you up with a game as well.

We took part in the weekend morning drill clinics. The Men's hour-long clinic starts at 9 am and is limited to six players. Sign up ahead of time. Cost

is \$12 for the hour. The Women's clinic starts an hour later.

Instructor Victor Horne had a nice way of correcting stroke problems while remaining upbeat and encouraging. He ran us through a series of drills, regularly offering tips along the way:

- He told me I was bringing the racquet back too soon, thereby locking up my feet. He suggested pulling the racquet just back to the shoulder area, two hands on the racquet, poised to bring it back. This was a tip I hadn't heard before.

- He pointed out that my racquet wasn't high enough while waiting for the volley. Raising my arms and shoulders seemed to give me a better ‘cut’ at the ball.

- He also offered encouragement on my ongoing effort to develop a new state-of-the-art open-stance forehand. (Previous pros have convinced me my classic stroke—turning sideways, stepping in and following through over the shoulder—was more like pitching horseshoes and had gone out with the 8-track tape.) It's all about the hip rotation!

Unlike other resorts we've visited where many of the other players have

come from around the world to take part in the tennis program, most of the players we met were from the area.

Besides tennis, there's also a fitness center, a golf course (a short ride away), a day spa, two swimming pools and a marina. It's also a haven for photography buffs—with beautiful landscaping at every turn.

You don't have to leave campus to eat well. The Vinoy has award-winning cuisine and exceptional service. Marchand's Bar & Grill also includes an elaborate Sunday brunch featuring everything from omelettes to a seafood buffet. (Also, check out Marchand's 3-course “Classic Dining Menu” for \$19.25—honoring the year the historic resort was born.)

The best part of this resort is its access to the downtown area. Across the street is beautiful Straub Park, followed by The Pier and trendy Beach Drive. Night-time on Beach Drive with its sidewalk dining and all the people-watching can feel a bit like South Beach.

There are also a number of other cultural choices nearby—from the Museum of Fine Arts to the Salvador Dali Museum. (Twenty-five cents will get you a trolley tour of the downtown area.)

Bottom line—if you want to get out of Dodge for a weekend, play a little tennis and experience another city about half an hour from downtown Sarasota, you can't go wrong with the Renaissance Vinoy . . . the showplace of the waterfront in St. Petersburg.



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