

# Discovering Streamsong Resort



## DISCOVERING: STREAMSONG RESORT

Usually I write about beachfront resorts, waves lapping against the shore or tiki bars. This review will include nothing like that.

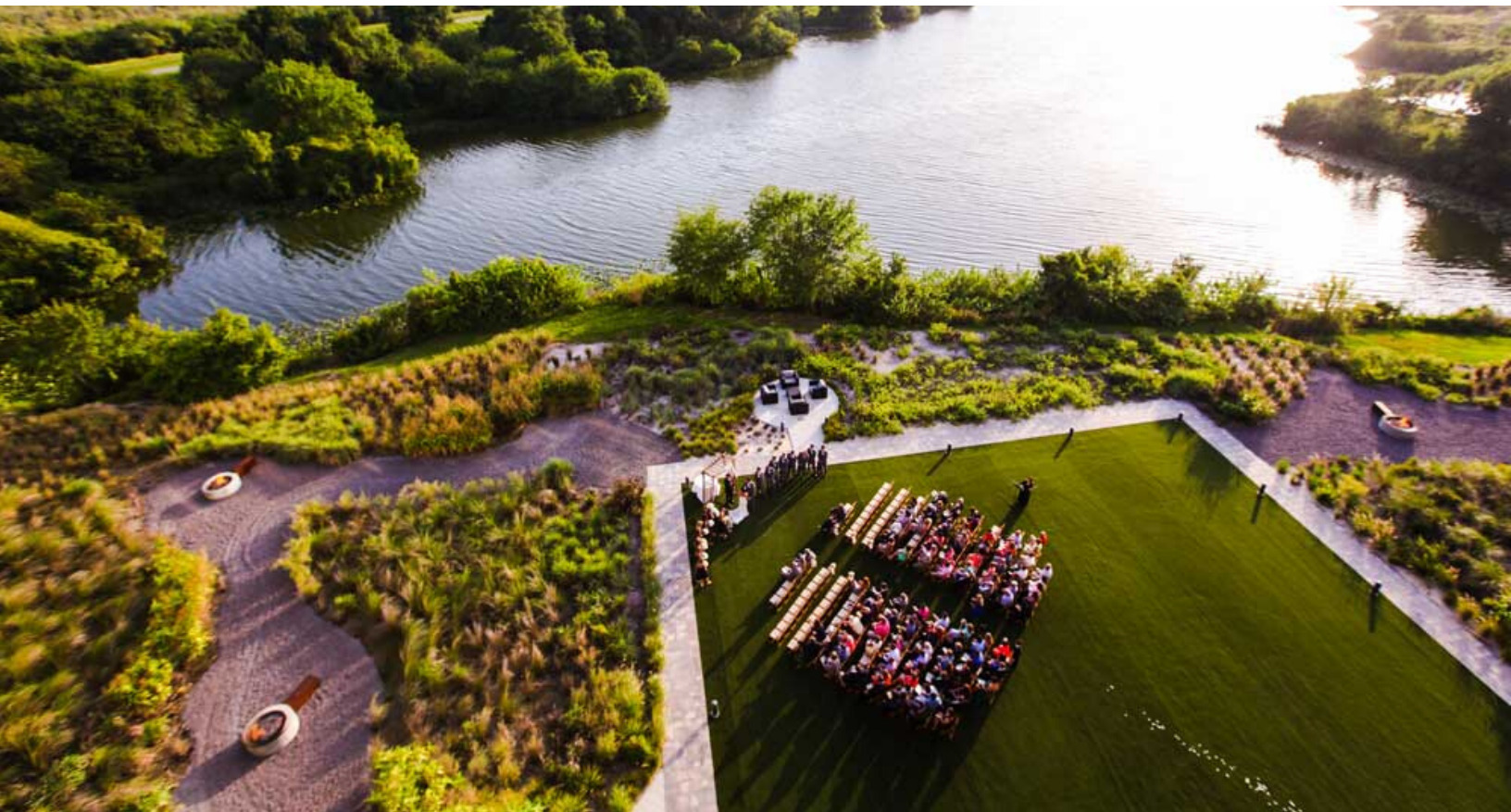
The Streamsong Resort is like no place we've ever been before—and that's not a bad thing.

I've lived in Florida for most of the past 30+ years. I've been to the Keys, South Beach, Southwest Florida, the Pinellas Beaches, Orlando—but I've never spent a weekend near the Polk/Hardee County line!

Like an oasis in the desert, the Streamsong Resort stands out among the millions of acres of farmland in this region, just an hour northeast of Sarasota/Lakewood Ranch.

Mosaic, the world's leading producer of phosphate crop nutrients, developed Streamsong on a former mining site less than a decade ago.

Mosaic wanted to create a luxury resort and golf destination. They not only did that, but they also created some great restaurants—but more on that in a minute.





Streamsong calls their main building the Lodge, but make no mistake, this looks more like a 6-story office building. And the lobby is fascinating. Industrial. Minimalist. Take your pick of adjectives. Wide open spaces overlooking a pretty lake and infinity pool out back.

I've never seen a hotel room like ours. First off, it was the same design as the lobby with floor to ceiling 3-foot-wide wood slats that close into window shades. Tall windows too. To the left is a kitchenette, couch, desk and TV set—and on the other side of the TV set is a matching TV set facing the bed. Erin could watch the Cooking Channel in the living area, and I could watch sports while laying in bed. Who could ask for anything more? But there was no time for TV watching with so much to see around this sprawling campus.

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We knew we were in a special place when we were asked which activities in which we were interested. Parasailing, jet skiing and snorkeling were not among the options. Been there, done that anyway. This time our choices included skeet shooting, archery and bass fishing!

Trey Talley from the Streamsong Recreation Department met us in the lobby and drove us a couple miles to the recreation area. Nice guy, twenties, from the area and couldn't have been more fun or informative. He took our picture early on but wouldn't tell us why. We thought it was some legal thing in case one of us got hurt! (You'll find out why in a minute.)

Archery was first. He gave us pads for our left wrist and smaller pads for our right fingers to help us pull back and release the bow without hurting ourselves. I hadn't tried this since summer camp, and I wasn't any good that time—but apparently Trey is a good teacher because this time I got the hang of it and really enjoyed it. Erin enjoyed trying something new as well. From there, it was over to the skeet shooting gazebo where Trey pushed a button to cause an orange hockey puck to shoot across the horizon in front of us while we took turns trying to hit it. I was surprised to learn I'm "left-eye dominant" and therefore had my left-hand on the trigger so I could look down the barrel with the stronger eye. I think I even surprised Trey with the number of clay targets—I successfully hit. Erin didn't have as much luck, but I think she was mostly fascinated that he could push a button and hockey pucks would fly in front of her.

During the ride back to the Lodge, Trey stopped to show us a nice body of water where we took a picture as the sun began to set in Central Florida. He also told us that many of his several hundred colleagues commute from all over the region--from Bradenton to St. Petersburg to Orlando and most often Lakeland. He says people enjoy working there so much, it's not unlikely to drive an hour each way to be part of the team.





By the way, we found out why he had taken our picture when we arrived back to our room: Trey “texted” the photo to a colleague back at the resort who printed and framed it—and left it for us in our room by the time we returned! Very nice touch. Nice teamwork!

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One of my favorite parts of our weekend visits is when we can shower and change and take the elevator to dinner. No car keys, no wallet and no parking issues!

We went down to the basement to eat at their flagship restaurant called “Sotto Terra.” It’s a chic and modern restaurant with white marble walls and floor and linen tablecloths.

Expert presentations of classic Italian cuisine that include the day’s fresh catch roasted whole in a stone oven and served with hazelnut pesto and eggplant caponata, or tortiglioni pasta with fennel sausage and marinara.

The waiter was not only professional—but also fun. He didn’t seem to mind answering our questions about the resort and the area. People seem to enjoy working there, and it trickles down to a positive energy all around.

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Saturday morning, we went downstairs to the restaurant just off the lobby and enjoyed a nice breakfast/brunch at “P2O5.” We could order off the menu or enjoy the buffet. We had made-to-order omelets as well as bacon, sausage and cereal—well, I did. Erin just had her veggie omelet.

We also ordered strawberry/banana smoothies which we stored in our room refrigerator to have for lunch. We walked off our big breakfast by exploring the area around the hotel. There’s a fire pit behind the building with several chairs. Farther down is an “infinity pool” and hot tub. The nice clerk at the concession stand, Rebecca, gave us each a golf iron and a bag of golf balls to try hitting a target in the middle of the pond. We hit from Astroturf by the back fence of the pool and tried to get it on to the “green,” which was really an island a hundred yards out in the water. I hit it a few times, and Erin was happy to just get the ball over the fence and into the water. Kerplunk!

Farther down the walkway were two tennis courts. We brought our racquets and tennis balls as always and hit back and forth for half an hour. Back to the room, we drank our smoothies and changed for real golf, something the resort is most known for worldwide.



Streamsong has three 18-hole golf courses. We took a shuttle five minutes to the newest course called “Streamsong Black.” Renowned designer Gil Hanse converted this once-empty land into one of the premier courses in the world. In fact, my brother who is a golf snob in Buffalo, came down with his three friends to play the courses at Streamsong and later said it was a wonderful experience and he wants to come back! Quite an endorsement.

Each course has a range on which to loosen up, a practice putting green—and caddies are required. A nice man from Jamaica named Rainford drew the short straw and was assigned to us. Erin has never golfed before when there aren’t toy windmills present—and I hadn’t golfed in years. Rainford was so professional, and never made fun of us as we hit the balls all over the county. Funny, I don’t recall scoring so high before, but then again—this was the first time somebody else kept track of my score for me.)

Afterwards we came back to our beautiful room to rest up, shower and head back out to another fine-dining restaurant at Streamsong.

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Dressed for dinner, we got back in a shuttle van to take another 5-minute ride, this time to “Restaurant Fifty-Nine.” (I did a little digging and found out that’s a reference to an almost impossible golf score I scored more than that on the first 9 holes!)

“Restaurant Fifty-Nine” is a steakhouse that rivals “Fleming’s,” my favorite restaurant back in Sarasota. All USDA Prime beef and fresh seafood. You rarely hear of a resort with two separate high-end restaurants. Bravo, Streamsong!

Food & Beverage Manager Christine Dickman drives in from Bradenton each day; she loves her job and they’re lucky to have her as she has worked at fine-dining restaurants up and down the east coast. Chef Joshua Tanner last worked at one of the nicest restaurants at Disney World and he has since brought his magic to Streamsong.

Chef Josh surprised us with something called “Amuse Bouche,” which is duck prosciutto, poached pear, blue cheese and brown butter hazelnuts. Nothing I would have known to order—but something we both enjoyed. We ordered Florida Stone Crab Claws as appetizers which were prepared perfectly. And for the main course, we had the beef tenderloin filet with roasted bone marrow, mashed Yukon Gold potato, brussels sprouts and bacon. For dessert, Erin had the gluten-free caramel cheesecake with honey-rosemary curd and bruleed strawberry.

I got my standard French vanilla ice cream with chocolate sauce.

After a convenient shuttle ride back to the Lodge, we went up to the top floor of the building to check out the roof-top bar, “Fragmentary Blue.” Ideal place for a nightcap after a fun day of tennis, golf...and eating.

We packed up early in the morning, had the guys at valet parking put my golf clubs back in the car and headed southwest to Sarasota.

Streamsong is only a little over an hour away from home, but it felt like we were in a different part of the country. We recommend it highly! Just don’t bring your snorkel on this trip.

RAY COLLINS



