



**REVIEW VALE RESORT**

# REVIEW VISIT

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## TRAVEL & LOCATION - VALE RESORT

Vale Resort is in Hensol, South Wales, between the cities of Cardiff and Swansea, just a few minutes south of J34 on the M4 motorway. Only 20 minutes in the car from Cardiff airport, two and a half hours from London, and just 45 minutes from Bristol, the resort is set in 650 acres of Welsh countryside, and has a 143 bedroom four star hotel on site. Vale Resort is easily accessible from across the south of England, the Midlands, and elsewhere in Wales.

### Travel Times

Central London (M4) – 2.5 hours

Birmingham – 2 hours

Southampton – 3 hours





## VALE RESORT

A first-class facility with two quality courses, Vale Resort is the epitome of a modern resort.

Driving through the gates of Vale Resort it takes barely a second to appreciate that this is a resort that lives and breathes sport. Learning that it's become the home of choice for Wales RFU, Cardiff Blues, Cardiff City FC, as well as a Ryder Cup Centre of Excellence really doesn't come as a surprise. That's not to say that sport overrides all else. With its spa and award-winning Grill there's an emphasis on relaxing with some of the finer things in life – which of course include golf!

The Wales National course is an impressive and expansive parkland design. Every golfing psychologist will tell you that you should pay as little attention as possible to hazards, but playing Wales National it is particularly hard to ignore the towering trees, the sprawling bunkers, the rocky flower beds and the shapely lakes. Picturesque problems.

*There are some wonderful golf courses in the area and the two at Vale Resort are amongst the very best.*

Complementing Wales National is the Lake Course. As its name suggests, water comes into play often – on no fewer than 12 holes, in fact - as do glorious views of the estate. As a measure of quality, both courses have hosted European Tour sanctioned events but succeed in striking the balance between challenge and enjoyment for the handicap golfer

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## VALE RESORT CONTINUED

If your game needs a little work (and whose doesn't!), around the clubhouse you'll find a driving range, short game area and coaching facilities, so you can iron out a few pre-game wrinkles or indeed attempt to repair them afterwards!

The Ryder Cup five years ago at Celtic Manor brought the golfing world's eyes to South Wales, but it's debatable whether the event's legacy has done justice to the region as a golfing destination. There are some wonderful golf courses in the area and the two at Vale Resort are amongst the very best.

Off the course, the contemporary hotel is spacious and, as a result, gives you plenty of room to breathe away from "real" life – the kind of escapism we're all looking for from a golfing break. Many rooms offer views onto the turning holes of the Lake course, and you're spoiled for choice on places to sit and enjoy a drink or a meal with your golfing partners.

COURSES





**REVIEW WALES NATIONAL**

## WALES NATIONAL

**Established** 2003

**Architect** Peter Johnson

**Yardage** 7,433

**Par** 73 / **SSS** 75

### Parkland panache playing one of the most testing championship courses in Wales

For a course that's just 12 years old, Wales National is far more mature than you'd expect it to be. But it's the scale of the course that is most striking, and not just the monstrous 7,433 yards the card can stretch to from the tips. The trees are tall, the bunkers are expansive, and the water features are certainly more lake than pond. Avoiding the hazards is very much the order of the day if you're to keep your scoring in check, but that's considerably easier said than done.

The Peter Johnson designed course offers a mixture of wide fairways and funnel fairways, driveable par fours and out of reach par fives, doglegs in both directions, and the aforementioned water hazards at different times in line of sight for right and left handed players. In short, it's varied, and that's its great joy. There's no fear of getting bored here.

The length of the course sounds more intimidating than it is in practice as very few people will choose to peg it up from the back tees, and, thankfully, there are several teeing options. Choosing the right tee for your game, you're still guaranteed an enjoyably stern but fair examination.

Wales National is an entirely apt name, as the course is one of the strongest parkland courses in the country and is deserving of its status - and its formidable Standard Scratch Score of 75.

**HIGHLIGHTS & OPINION**



## COURSE HIGHLIGHTS

### Hole No.2

A particularly difficult par five thanks to an especially tight, tunnel-like fairway that descends down the hill between the woodland, this is a genuine three shot par five in to the prevailing wind - even with two decent opening shots you may still find yourself laying up in front of the water with your third!

### Hole No.6

An enticing downhill par four. Big hitters will consider taking on the green from the tee, while for most the choice is a longer tee shot an a flick over the water, or a lay-up much further back followed by a mid-iron approach. Every option opens up a chance for a birdie, but it's just as easy to drop shots. A strategist's delight.

### Hole No.10

Aiming just left of the bunkers from the tee on the signature par five 10th hole, only the very best drive leaves a decision on whether to attack the green. For most, the lay-up will be the right play, but a bunker on the right guards the widest point of the fairway, and a fantastic lake lines the entire left hand side and front portion of the green. Certainly one of the best holes on the course.

### Hole No.13 - No.16

A fine run of holes that opens with a par four that has one of the most remarkable greens you'll see, surrounded by rocky flower beds and tall grasses. The dangerous looking par three that follows plays dauntingly across the water, but the two tier green can be used to your advantage if the pin is at the front. The short par five 15th is a scoring chance but water demands you're brave, as it does again on the dogleg par four 16th that finishes this "make or break" stretch.

## ISPYGOLF OPINION

In the high season, Wales National is in the top bracket of parkland courses. Modern, varied, and very attractive, it's a course that demands length and precision and which tests without ever tipping into brutality. Play well here and you'll feel very satisfied. A true championship course.



A scenic view of a golf course green and bunker surrounded by water and trees at sunset. The green is in the center, with a sand bunker in the foreground. The water is dark blue with lily pads. The sky is a mix of blue and orange from the setting sun. The background is filled with lush green trees and a forested hill.

# REVIEW LAKE COURSE

## LAKE COURSE

Established 1998

Architect Peter Johnson

Yardage 6,436

Par 72 / SSS 72

### Water sprinkled liberally but sensibly, the Lake Course is a fine test in its own right

When a resort has one course that takes star billing, it's usually the case that its sister course is, in fact, a poor cousin. Of course, that's not always true, and it certainly isn't the case at Vale Resort.

Playing the Lake Course you realise very quickly that while it might not be as long and severe as Wales National it has more than enough trouble to demand your full attention. Water, water everywhere!

Most opening holes have a tendency to make the hands shake a little, if only for the fact it's the first shot of the day. Starting off with a long enclosed par three in full view (and striking distance) of a hotel is a doubly daunting prospect. Get away from the first tee, and the course quickly opens out into a comparatively flat but attractive landscape punctuated with young trees, lakes

and streams. Where the undulations do come in to play, notably between holes 6 and 8, and again at 15 and 16, the slopes are marked and the golfing tricky.

The Lake Course's popularity no doubt owes much to the regular opportunities to display golfing heroism, from the driveable par four to the showpiece island green 12th hole, and of course the intimidating "risk or reward" second shot into the last.

The course was Peter Johnson's first design at Vale Resort, although it feels younger than the Wales National course. While playing second fiddle, the Lake Course has held several PGA and Challenge Tour events in its own right, and that tells you all you need to know of the standard of golf required to score well.

HIGHLIGHTS & OPINION



## COURSE HIGHLIGHTS

### Hole No.7 & No.8

Approaching 600 yards from the back tees, the par five 7th's strongest defence is the heavy right-to-left camber that stretches the length of the hole, kicking all shots down the hill towards the rough. Even finding the fairway, the resulting hanging lie makes the second and third shots very ticky, while the humps and bumps guard any shot run onto the green. The putting surface is very long and narrow, so a par here is an excellent result.

Judging the par three eighth is no pushover either, with a massive drop down to the green making club selection a head-scratcher from the tee, especially when facing the intimidating spread of bunkers that guard the front. Enjoy the fine views across the resort but don't be distracted as you'll need to concentrate to find the right part of this extended green.

### Hole No.12

Ordinarily, a 316 yard par four isn't going to give most golfers cause for concern, but throw in an island green and a lake running the entire left side of the fairway, and you'll reduce many to tears. This is the Lake Course's heart-thumping signature hole. Remove the water and

this dogleg left isn't particularly hard, but then that's the idea. It's all in the head (and hopefully not the lake).

### Hole No.18

The final hole - a short par five - will have many weighing up the Hollywood finish over water versus the sensible lay-up. If you get a reasonable drive away over the corner of the dogleg it'll be hard to resist going for it in two, even before factoring in the peer pressure, pride, ego, or last-ditch attempt to save your scorecard.

## ISPYGOLF OPINION

Not to be underestimated, a round on the Lake Course will leave you with just as many thrills and spills to discuss in the bar afterwards as a round on the Wales National. Tales of greens driven, par fives humbled, and watery graves are certain to prove that fun on the golf course comes in all shapes and sizes.



## THE FINAL VERDICT



I knew Wales National was a strong parkland course, and the more I think back on it, the more impressive the variety of holes were. You really need to be on your 'A' game to get it around, with holes such as the 2nd, 6th and 10th really standing out.

I'll confess, I did wonder whether the Lake Course might be the ugly sister, but was very pleasantly surprised, and if I was asked which is the one to play, I'd definitely advise finding the time to play them both.

As for the resort in general, it's a huge facility, almost daunting as you arrive - especially if the international sports teams are on-site - but you very quickly feel at ease and get in to the swing (if you pardon the pun) of relaxing. The hotel room was excellent, and although I didn't have time for a spa or gym session, they looked pretty impressive, too.

All in all, it just shouts "golf break" at you - and I can't imagine anyone leaving disappointed.





*Vale*  
RESORT  
★★★★★