

# CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

With a soon-to-be completed, \$3 million clubhouse to complement a picturesque golf course, Pacific Dunes is ready to stand alone as a major player in the New South Wales coastal tourism hotspot of Port Stephens.

The 16th at Pacific Dunes is a delightful, short par 4 that wraps around a water hazard, inviting golfers to try and drive it close to the green.





The 14th is a testing par 3 measuring 178 metres and has an Augusta National feel with trees towering over a large green complex.

When a golf course designer is faced with a relatively flat piece of land, it is the ultimate architectural test. A landscape bereft of elevated tee shots, spectacular uphill and downhill approaches, sand dunes, valleys or gorges separates good designers from great. This was true for Pacific Dunes creator James Wilcher – once an associate with Greg Norman Golf Course Design but who left to form his own firm, Golf By Design. With few undulations to work with, Wilcher has given golfers two distinct nines – beginning in a woodlands setting with tight, tree-lined fairways before dishing up a wetlands, resort-style experience.

PACIFIC DUNES is 6,403-metre par 72 located two hours north of Sydney’s CBD, and close to the beautiful holiday havens of Port Stephens and Nelson Bay. When Pacific Dunes opened its gates in 2005, mixed reactions had some excited for a tourism boost to an already popular seaside region, while others were sceptical of how a relatively flat woodlands setting would inspire visitors to make the journey for golf alone.

But Pacific Dunes’ simplicity offers an enjoyable layout for scratch golfers and 36-handicappers alike. Wilcher – who designed The Cut in Western Australia and redesigned Elanora Country Club – has cleverly used what undulations were

present to carefully craft a risk-reward course that combats its vertical challenges in two distinct ways:

## 1. Routing and configuration

The routing is well constructed, with Pacific Dunes meandering its way around lakes and through tree-lined fairways to keep the golfer interested for 18 holes. Surprises await the unsuspecting golfer – waters hazards that cut well into fairways, blind tee shots and green complexes that hide the subtlest of breaks. The course is certainly guilty of ‘sleeper holes’ that look simple but will strike the scorecard if your course management is off.

The front nine is set among woodlands, where tee shots demand the utmost accuracy from your game. Bordered by a nature

reserve and conservation area, each hole is tight and tree-lined, so hitting the fairway or first cut of rough is the only way to avoid big scores on the opening nine. The back nine is more open and, for the average golfer, perhaps more enjoyable. However, the wetlands setting presents plenty of water and several hazards can’t be seen from a host of blind shots – notably on the 18th, where a large pond is practically invisible from your second shot and cuts into the fairway just before the green.

The land has been used particularly well on the short par 4s, which visually tempt golfers to get close to the green yet punish anything less than a perfect drive. The enjoyable first and 10th holes are incredibly strategic and almost force golfers to take a hybrid or fairway metal off the tee, while



An aerial shot of Pacific Dunes highlights its wetlands and woodlands influence.

several par 4s wrap around water hazards such as the 15th and memorable 16th. Both dogleg to the left and demand a right-hander’s draw in order to have a wedge in. “People love coming here to play. It’s a well-designed and enjoyable layout that is a fair test of golf for all handicaps. And our regular tee times are conducive to fast play,” says general manager Kurt Linde. “Being just over a two-hour drive from Sydney, and right on the doorstep for Port Stephens golfers, our location makes us an ideal choice for that perfect day out on the course.”

## 2. Conditioning

The conditioning of Pacific Dunes is one of its greatest assets. Not a fairway on the property is anything less than immaculate – the santa ana couch thriving in unseasonal heat. The bentgrass greens are also classy and provide subtle yet dangerous breaks underestimated by many a golfer. Counting Australian tour professionals Dimi Papadatos

and Andrew Dodt as regulars, Pacific Dunes makes an effort to keep the course in championship condition year-round. “When at home in Australia, Pacific Dunes is my golf course of choice. It is definitely one of my favourite courses to play, having played all over the world,” says Dodt, a Pacific Dunes member. The European Tour pro sharpened his game at Pacific Dunes leading up to his victory at this year’s True Thailand Classic – a European and Asian Tour co-sanctioned event.

Last year’s New Zealand Open champion Dimi Papadatos – from the NSW central coast – is also fond of Pacific Dunes’ greens. “I think Pacific Dunes is the perfect test to see where your game is at. I can’t wait to go back and play again on those pure greens,” says Papadatos.

## Off the course

With a world-class, \$3 million country club facility expected to open before Christmas,

Pacific Dunes is ready to stand alone as a big player in local tourism. The course also has a variety of facilities including a 25-metre swimming pool, tennis courts, 4 kilometres of walking trails, a golf shop, and The Dunes Cafe and Bar.

“The new clubhouse is going to be absolutely magnificent and a real drawcard for visiting groups of golfers,” says Linde. For those choosing the Pacific Dunes lifestyle, 135-hectares of masterplanning has current and potential residents excited. With holiday hotspot Nelson Bay just 20 minutes away, fine dining, retail shopping and recreation is at your doorstep.

## Newcastle

Also within 30 minutes of Pacific Dunes are the art galleries, museums and beautiful beaches of Newcastle. Nestled in the heart of the Hunter region, this beachside city has a rich history, proud sporting culture, quirky arts scene and a thriving dining and shopping experience.

## Functions

Pacific Dunes is a fantastic location for work, social or family functions with its beautiful greens and natural water courses. It has two function facilities – the Golf Villa, catering for smaller functions of up to 70 guests, and the Lake View Marquee, catering for functions of up to 160 guests.

## Port Stephens

With 26 golden beaches, a vast blue bay and many beautiful inlets, Port Stephens is an idyllic beach getaway. Freshly-caught seafood, local wineries and waterside alfresco dining is only 30km from lucky Pacific Dunes residents. **G**



A stunning view of the 18th – a demanding par 5 guarded by a large water hazard on the right and gorgeous bunkering.