

Hualalai Golf Club Big Island, Hawaii

Designer: Jack Nicklaus (1995)

Tees	Par	Yardage	Rating	Slope
Championship	72	6632	71.5	134
Regular	72	6032	68.8	129

Overview:

The Four Seasons needed to create a name brand golf course as the centerpiece for their residential resort community on the big island in Hawaii. Jack Nicklaus was retained and did a first class job delivering them a visual and memorable resort course for their guests and home owners to enjoy. This is a user friendly track with wide driving areas, accessible greens, and not a whole lot of deception. They host the opening event on the Apostle Tour each year, so you are likely to remember seeing old guys in January begging against the wind on the last two holes.

The signature feature of this course is that it was built on the black lava fields of the eastern Kohala Coast and Jack's goal was to meld the holes into the up and down flow of the lava fields. The lava creates a harsher version of the gorse or the heather on the Scottish courses setting a stark visual outline on every hole for the lush green of the Tiff Bermuda fairways and greens. If you look up the eastern horizon to the mountains from which this came, you do get a real sense of the topographical flow of the element and how it defines the character of this course.

For the most part, the lava is set off the immediate playing areas and there are only a select number of times where it becomes an integral part of the golfing challenge. The more significant tactical challenge is Jack's generous use of fields of fairway bunkering. From the first hole to the last you will see repeated occasions where an entire side of the hole is bunkered, creating a dogleg effect on it's own. Missing into the sand on that side of a hole can be a scoring disaster.

The course begins with a typical low impact Florida style par 4-wide fairway-open access to a big green-no lava. But you cross the road and enter a lava quarry which prepares you for the full lava look. Number two is a visual bait and switch landing area and then a large lava dune on the right obscures access to a very tight green. The rest of the way is pure lava eye candy. The short par four sixth is a great example of lava outline that can appear intimidating with a green complex set in a lava canyon but there is a collar bunker off the back of the green that keeps balls from getting lava burn. Seven is a unique par five where after you drive to a wide open landing area and play your second down a lava hallway that chokes the fairway framing the required lay up shot.

There is an over-hyped cookie jar with some oatmeal raisin and chocolate chips at the turn but the fresh fruit in the cooler is a refreshing touch before you begin the inward half. The five pars on the back are the most interesting holes of the day. Ten is a serpentine par five that requires full focus on your lay up shot to have a look at a green hidden behind an acre of sand, trees, and lava. From twelve to fourteen you are as close to the

ocean as you are going to get so the wind becomes a major factor in all club selection. Fourteen is another very imaginative par five with a hide and seek green complex that is difficult to negotiate with a wedge in your hand.

The finish is all finesse as you head back toward the clubhouse. A couple of technical par fours before you reach the signature seventeenth, the only hole that is truly exposed to the Pacific. Here you have to parasail one through the sea breeze onto a well protected green-anything left hits lava and heads toward Japan. The finish is a beautiful short par four over ancient Hawaiian fish ponds and a Nicklausian sea of sand into a demanding tight green set.

This is a Four Seasons so all the amenities are first class. A sprawling practice facility is at your disposal with a couple of acres of grass teeing area, pitching green, and a large ambling putting green. Perfect recluse for a five o'clock practice session to sort out the demons you encountered today. There is nothing like the tranquility of downhill ten footers dropping into the cup as the sun dips back into the Pacific Ocean.

Hole-By-Hole Analysis:

#1 Par 4 363/328 Yards

The first hole is a gentle dogleg left that has a generous sampling of fairway bunkers up the left that need to be avoided. Preferred diving line is right center off the tee just inside the two bunkers. Now you want a draw shape to work up into a long green set on a 4 to 10 with a right to left lean to it. Anything in the right center of the green should be an easy two putt to all flag locations.

#2 Par 4 394/357

So where is the lava you are mumbling to yourself as you drive away from the first green. Cross the road and the answer will slap you in the face. Jack has you drive through a lava dump on the way to the second tee for full effect and you cannot help but get a few goose bumps when you look at this stuff up close and personal. The second hole is entirely framed in lava and has a prominent pile just right and short of the green that will definitely shape your play into this green. Standing on this tee the aiming line is not obvious because your eye seems to say play down the left but you really want to hit it directly at the center of the lava on the right and trust that there is enough room for your ball to settle before it reaches there. The green is very slender and it is raised on a table top just on the other side of this right lava cropping. Deep pot bunker behind that will gather approach shots with too much enthusiasm. Because of the lack of depth in this green this is not an easy par no matter what club you have in your hand.

#3 Par 4 396/362

OK, you now believe the lava thing and you will see on this next one how it is typically used for accent not intimidation. This is a long par four but the elevated tee gives you a chance to hit one large down the left center between the fairway bunkers on either side of the driving area. This green is moated three sides by a collar bunker and the lava acts as a visual collar behind the surrounding sand. The green has an accessible line up the right front so I like a gentle draw with you long club working up that line of approach. Green is very deep leans toward you so be aggressive on the shot in.

#4 Par 5 505/463

Probably the easiest hole on this side, the entire hole is surrounded by lava but it really does not come into play except in the lay up area. Drive to center just off of the fairway bunker on the left below you. It is a semi-blind lay up to about 100 yards into a relatively narrow landing area. This is a double green-shares the surface with number eight-but the part you care about is pretty accessible across the end of a long fairway bunker encroaching on the right the last 75 yards. He gave the long hitter a bail out pitching area left of the green if you are so inclined to try to reach in two.

#5 Par 3 174/151

This is a medium size par three with a bit of danger lurking in wait. From the tee you see that the water hugs the putting surface on a diagonal on the right-more carry the further the right you play it. There is a yawning bunker back left to balance the danger so you pretty much need a fade shape that works up into the heart of the green. Safe bail is short left and pitch but there is a large mound deep right that gives the green a catcher's mitt effect so you can consider using that for a back stop and hit it into the back third of the green.

#6 Par 4 359/319

An authentic short four par here but Jack uses the blind look to add a little doubt to both shots. A long bunker flanks the left of the hole most of the way up the hitting area, so you aim at the left edge of the last lava outcropping on the right with a baby draw to seek out the blind landing area. Now this gets very interesting because the green is below you set into a lava canyon-the green tilts away from you and there is a big retention bunker between the green and the canyon wall to soften the danger. One lonely pot bunker is embedded into a promontory mound front right-this masks the back half of the green. To get at a pin on the right you want to hit a lofted club just right of the bunker and let it hit the downslope and feed onto the green. A very dexterous approach is required into this green. I love the presentation of this hole from tee to cup-very unusual.

#7 Par 5 538/492

This is the lava vice grip par five-a bizarre design concept that I really do not buy. From the tee it is a beautiful look-slightly down hill to a very generous landing area. You want to aim at the hallway of lava that heads toward the green since you will have to traverse this on your second. From in front of the opening you have to elevate it over the hallway-work it from right to left since the lay up area on the left is more generous. Now what remains is an elevation pitch to a green set below you with a fierce bunker guarding the front and left. Green has one remaining lava outcropping lodged into the left cheek of the green-the green almost wraps around this-so you may have to curve one to match up to where the pin is placed. Green is very long and very uphill so be aggressive to the pin spot.

#8 Par 3 217/203

This would be his attempt at a bully par three-it is a driver or 3 wood for most of us and into the wind it is a par 4. Another hole encircled by the lava but it really is not in play, the tee shot is somewhat downhill to the other half of the fourth green. Your part of the double green sits on a 5 to 11 angle and has one large sand pit gathering timid draws on the front left of the green. It does seem odd to be hitting all you have on a three par but this hole actually has a bit of charm for a bully.

#9 Par 4 425/382

A long finishing hole for the outward nine, especially if it is into the wind. The hole is a side leaner to the left so your best play off the tee is a hard draw that follows the shape of the hole. Aim at the two spread trees on the right hilltop and turn it down the fairway. You should get forward pitch down the fairway trundling toward the green. Focusing on this green is an optical challenge in that there are no bunkers for frame of reference. The green is slightly raised with some collection areas short on either side. Off the back of this green is an unmanned hospitality station with reasonably tasty cookies and fresh fruit in the cooler.

#10 Par 5 547/517

The back nine opens with one of the more interesting holes of the day-a Z-shaped par five with a good bit of positional tactic. Drive to left center to a very generous landing area toward the big fairway bunker on the left. Your lay up needs to be strong and down the right edge to get a look back up the Z to a green tucked behind a large wasteland of sand, trees, and lava. If you can force it inside of 100 that will give you the cleanest look right up the angle of the green. This green is one of the longest you will see out here so you have to get good measure on your approach to reach the zip code of the flag. For those insane enough to take on the wasteland on the second shot he does provide a retention pitching area short left of the green for anything that clears the trouble and does not reach the green. Quite a visual experience this one.

#11 Par 4 389/345

This is one of the really demanding driving holes on the course. There is a nest of bunkers in the face of the hill on the right that defines this as a sharp dogear right. You have to drive it strong to the top of the hill on the left to get a good look at this very tight green setting. Anything wayward right off this tee is bunkered or in the lava field to the right. If you are on grass you have a shortish iron to a very tapered green set on an 8 to 2 diagonal into the foot of a hill on the left. Lots of sand collar the back of the green and the front right. Lawn dart time-no other way to keep in on this green.

#12 Par 3 145/131

You don't know it but you are getting close to the ocean on these next three, so elevation changes will be drastically affected by the wind now. This is a stupid downhill par three of only 145 yards where he felt compelled to throw a silly element-a large pot bunker-into the middle of the green to create some sense of tension. It really only does this if the pin is back. Big bail out area provided short and right for those who do not want to take on the massive bunker fronting the putting surface.

#13 Par 4 359/330

Opportunity knocking on the next two so get aggressive. Semi-blind landing area for the drive-just slip it between the fairway bunkers with a little drop fade. The second is into a slightly elevated two-tier green set on the 5 to 11 angle to you-big yawning bunkers takes up the entire left side of the green. Short iron in with a little draw curve working up to the flag position is the ticket. Ocean is just over your right shoulder throughout so pay attention to the intensity of the wind in the highest trees.

#14 Par 5 502/493

Bit of a dipsy doodle five par, not dissimilar in shape or strategy to number ten. Your aim off the tee is at the large mound through the fairway on the right. No need to take on the lone fairway bunker on the left unless you are big, strong and have ideas of grandeur and the wind is helping. Lay up is tricky-hit it up the right to about 100 to get an angle back to the left across the edge of the plaza of bunkers he placed in the final turn of the dogleg. Beware of the one containing bunker just to the right of your lay up spot. This is a sprawling green saddled across the top of the plaza, but from the right spot you should have an aggressive short pitch to get it close and have a birdie chance.

#15 Par 4 384/322

From here to the end you are faced with a series of technical holes-nothing overwhelming but you have to play positional golf to make some hay. This is a sharp mid-size dogear left par four with a distracting piece of lava on the corner of the dogleg you need to ignore. Play out to the right and turn it over to end up between two large swaths of bunkers-going over the lava is silly because you will likely get a left kick into the bunker on the corner. Fairly naked green that is extremely long and tilted left so a fade approach will counter the tendency of the ball to move left. Pitching area available on the left.

#16 Par 4 408/369

I think that this is one of the most interesting tactical holes you play. To look at it from the tee it just looks long-especially if the wind is blowing at you-because all you see on the horizon is a vague image of Japan. The hole has almost a zig-zag shape as it turns right and then the green is set back to the left against that dogleg. Drive needs to be strong down the center-it is a must to avoid two bunkers that flank the corner. The big hitter might choose to try to fly the one on the right but it is 240 plus to carry and there is another littler one lurking to the right if you leak it. From the center of the fairway it is in the 175 range to an accessible green working back up to right with bunkers flanking either side. Big bail out spot available short and right. Green is almost 40 long so you can leave yourself a considerable first putt if you are timid.

#17 Par 3 161/143

This is the signature hole-the only one all day where the ocean influence is right in your face. It is a middle range par three-probably plays at least a club longer since the green is exposed on two sides. The green is a humongous anvil shaped which is good and is surrounded on two sides by lava which is bad. There is really no miss left or deep that does not hit the rocks and end up with the dolphins. Best play is a draw over the right bunker that turns into the middle of the green. Lots of elevation change in the surface itself so two putting will be no breeze. Very intimidating hole-very gratifying par if you make it.

#18 Par 4 366/325

This is a very visual finishing hole that lacks length but has lots of distraction from tee to green. Main distraction from the elevated tee box is the six acres of sand he put up the left side. A couple of positional bunkers would have been enough to discourage cutting the corner on this hole but I guess he did not want to take any chances on the discouragement thing. If you position a nice right to left one in the heart of the wide landing area you are looking at a long and narrow green set back to the left set on the 5 to 11 diagonal. One bunker on the right and some mounding in front of it are totally playable so you must approach this green with a

right to left shot. Hit the green in the segment of the flag and you have a real birdie chance since this green is fairly flat and you should not see any putts running away from you.

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