



FEATURES

spike on golf | other features

In the News

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The big question for Sutton: Does Hamilton belong on the Ryder Cup team?

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Franco edges Funk and Quigley for his second PGA Tour win in Milwaukee



Member Shift

Private Escapes, a new luxury travel firm, is offering the lifestyle of the rich and famous at membership fees far lower than many competitors. That makes it much easier for many golfers to experience the best of up-up-upscale golf.

The Private Escapes house at Palmilla is right on the Ocean Course. (Photo: Private Escapes)

By Steve Pike, PGA.com Senior Writer
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Living the lifestyle of the rich and famous is generally reserved for, well, for the rich and famous. Whether it's a chateau in Switzerland, a house on Fisher Island or a condo in Telluride, the other half lives a life that the rest of us can only dream about. Okay, so a wayward golf writer occasionally finds his way into the mix -- but remember, it's part of the job.

Companies such as Private Retreats by Abercrombie & Kent offer the upper crust of society the world's great vacation destinations -- from a beach bungalow in Southern California to a bush lodge in East Africa -- for member prices that often exceed \$500,000. Richard Keith is quite familiar with that world, having been Chief Operations Officer of Private Retreats by Abercrombie & Kent before founding Private Escapes last December.

Private Escapes, based in Fort Collins, Colo., operates along the same lines as Private Retreats, but at a membership price of \$75,000. That's about the same price as a private golf club membership at a lot of places, which is the way Keith hopes people -- particularly golfers -- think about it.

"We've taken all the benefits of Private Retreats and transferred it into a more affordable version," Keith told PGA.com. "What's interesting is we've attracted a lot of high net-worth people who enjoy the more affordable version."

Private Escapes owns homes and condominiums in Las Vegas (Lake Las Vegas); The One & Only Palmilla in Los Cabos, Mexico; Red Feather Lakes, Colo., (Fox Acres Country Club); and Steamboat Springs, Colo. (Eagle Ridge Lodge). Each destination has a golf component. At Lake Las Vegas, for example, members who stay in Private Escapes' condo can play the resort community's Falls and Reflection Bay courses; at Palmilla, the company has a four-bedroom house on the fifth hole of the resort's Ocean Course.

Private Escapes recently added a metropolitan property -- a condo in Trump Tower in New York City. Properties at Third Creek at Incline Village in Lake Tahoe, Nev., and Night Heron Cottages in Kiawah Island, S.C., according to Keith, are currently in the final planning stages. Ultimately, he said, Private Escapes will close its membership at 400 members (it already has more than 55) and will have a portfolio of up to 70 properties in 25 resort destinations around the world.

"Private Escapes is the lifestyle solution for avid travelers, families or individuals who want to travel in style without the burden of heavy restrictions," Keith said. "We function like an exclusive country club aiming not for 100-percent occupancy, but rather on flexibility so that our members can almost always secure their desired reservation, even at short notice or during peak vacation months."

One of the more interesting aspects to Private Escapes is not only that it offers tee-time discounts to its members, but at courses that don't participate in its program, Keith said his company pays 50 percent of the rack rate green fees. It's all part of what Keith calls "affordable luxury."

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Luxury, that is, if you like such amenities as DVD players, plasma TVs, X-Box game systems and golf courses in the backyard. The house at Palmilla, for example, has a Jacuzzi in the master bath and a children's playroom with its own private bath; the house at Steamboat Springs has a Bose theatre system to go along with a 42-inch plasma TV.

"For people who like to travel, we can accommodate them very well," Keith said

Indeed. Just point me to the first tee.

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