

# MIAMI DORAL TRUMP NATIONAL

*Famed for its Blue course, also dubbed, 'The Monster', Doral is firmly set as Miami's ultimate golfing destination.*

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PREVIOUS PAGE -  
OPENING PICTURE:  
Red Tiger Course -  
Hole 14.

RIGHT PAGE - TOP  
TO BOTTOM: Blue  
Monster Course -  
Hole 5; Blue Monster  
Course - Hole 18 with  
Clubhouse.

I lived in Miami in the early 90's and went to the Jim McLean School at the Doral way back when I was a mere hacker. Some might say I still am! But the Doral was the place to go in the 'Magic City' or 'Little Cuba' as it's also known not just because of the Jim McLean School but mostly because of the Blue Monster, the resort's redoubtable main course.

Built by Dick Wilson in 1961, The Blue Monster garnered a menacing reputation as one of the toughest of its era playing host to the PGA Tour from 1962 to 2006 and then the WGC-Cadillac Championship as it still does. But when I was getting to know it, The Doral was down at the heel, had lost its shine and was in serious need of some love. And boy, did it get it - in the shape of none other than present day Presidential hopeful Donald J. Trump.

I had the occasion to interview 'The Donald' when he opened his course in Aberdeen, Scotland, dubbed Trump International Golf Links, and having had a half hour of his undivided intention, excuse me, attention, it has been all the more interesting to watch his progress. As an instance, on the day he announced his bid for the US Presidency, we were teeing it up on his new Ferry Point course in New York City.

Not long before that, I had been commissioned to make a video on The Lodge at Doonbeg in the West of Ireland and they immediately announced they were going bust - and that we would not get paid. Along comes 'The Donald' and buys the place. And we still have not been paid.

Then he snapped up one of my all time favourites, Turnberry Resort and Spa, now simply termed, Trump Turnberry. Everywhere I go, up pops, 'The Donald'. And now that I have finally moved back to the USA - he is running for President.

The thing I have to admit though when it comes to golf properties - something Trump is especially keen on - he has a very good habit of substantially improving them. And this is exactly what he has done with The Doral, now officially known as Trump National Doral Miami.

Roberto Borgatti, my favourite Floridian and golf instructor, and I strolled into the Doral's reception at around 5am having decided first to have a night out on the town in Miami. I have to quickly interject that Miami has come on leaps and bounds since I lived there. The place is thriving, classy, international and vibrant; all the things it once wasn't. It was thrilling to check out such colourful international restaurants, clubs and cafes then charge around town looking for the best Latino nightclubs.

So, feeling a bit bleary from our night out and with a tee time at 8.30am, it was difficult to identify The Doral I once knew. But then they have spent US\$21 million transforming it so perhaps I was justified in not finding my bearings very well.

A warm-up round on the Red Course soon cleared the head and in spite of a certain lack of conviction for the initial holes we were off, up and running. The Red is reputed to be the easiest of The Doral's four courses,

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built at the same time as the Blue but perhaps more with lady golfers in mind. It's shorter and a fairly typical Florida layout with water on almost every hole. It's a lot of fun, good target golf where you plot your way into position and then have fun attacking the greens; the ideal, not-too-taxing warm-up round.

We were on a flying visit so that evening for me at least was all about getting some food and rest (Roberto had other ideas) before taking on the fabled Blue Monster in the morning. Along with the four golf courses, Trump National Doral Miami offers four restaurants; BLT Prime with indoor and outdoor seating and views across the Blue Monster course, a modern American steakhouse also serving nice, fresh seafood; Champions Bar & Grill, more of a sports bar and especially good at cocktails and a sociable ambience and The Palm Grill for simple ceviches and pressed sandwiches. And the Marketplace Cafes for beverages or pastries.

His patronage has hugely improved the buildings - the rooms are all excellent and as we found out, the golf has been immensely upgraded. It seemed to be a useful facility for the many Miami-based companies that use it to entertain their staff and clientele - as there were when we visited.

We were joined by Scottish Golf Writer David Wishart and hired just one caddy, ideal when you're a threesome riding on golf carts. The Blue Monster has had a complete overhaul since I was last here and the difference is evident



from the get-go. Olympic course designer Gil Hanse was brought in to do the refurbishment at the same time as he was working on the Rio 2016 Olympic course.

The high standard of agronomy and green keeping goes without saying but the new Blue Monster now flows with a maturity and grace that the old version did not possess. To all intents and purposes, this is a brand new golf course and an exceptionally fine one at that. Not nearly as brutal as I remember The Blue from before and you can plot your way around here comfortably, making good shots into position and reaping rewards on the approaches. From the tips, I'm sure it's a different matter but for us off the white tees, it was a strong and steady challenge that just kept getting better.

Trump and his team realised they had a great opportunity with the old Blue and seized it. With 300-plus acres to work with, there was room to manoeuvre and yet the changes are subtle; most holes are in the same place but the bunkering and greens have been transformed to challenge the modern game.

The most obvious changes are seen on Hole 15, a par 3 that now has a carry entirely over water to a peninsula green. The next is a reachable par 4 with water stretching down the left side and causing a sense of foreboding from the boxes but with enough room for the good, steady drive. And that's what I like about this new Doral.

Instead of blatantly threatening, it has been modified to cater for middle tee players who can enjoy the challenge whilst being rewarded for good, steady play. I was surprised and delighted how well I played which is more a mark of my past notion of the place as well as the well-considered improvements.

On the 18th, one of the great finishing holes, you are bound to feel a bit anxious with all the water in view to



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the left. Roberto's a good man on these occasions and he reminded us how to take on perhaps the biggest challenge of the day.

“Slow everything down on shots like these and maintain composure,” he reminded. “Visualise where you want your tee shot to land and then do it.” It pays to stay right a touch anyhow as that's the approach angle you want. The shot into the green can be equally daunting


with a line of big bunkers hugging the right side and water in front. There's no bail out, it's all or nothing. Again what a great finishing hole and the closing statement from what is now an exceptional golf course.

As far as the other courses, we didn't have time to play them. There used to be five in all but one has been sold off leaving the Golden Palm and the Silver Fox if you want an extra outing.

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Blue Monster Course - Hole 10; The New Villa Deluxe Guestroom; BLT Prime, Trump National Doral's signature restaurant.**

Also, work on the new spa was just getting started so we did not get a chance to enjoy it but it should open this spring, much refreshed, re-conceptualised as they say here in the States with a “ravishing menu of groovy treatments”.

Designed by Ivanka Trump, Donald and Ivana's lovely looking daughter. Ivanka is Executive Vice President of Development & Acquisitions at the Trump organisation and is involved with all aspects of the company's real estate and hotel management initiatives. She is also behind such enterprises as Ivanka Trump Fine Jewelry. The Ivanka Trump Lifestyle Collection also includes fragrance, footwear, handbags, outerwear and eyewear collections.

The 48 Spa suites will be adorned in shades of ocean blue, furnished with striking gold-leaf accents and modern amenities providing the ultimate in plush relaxation. Ivanka's Spa will be the final touch of the long term US\$250 million transformation of this property. 

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