

GOLF MAGAZINE



It was the dreaded walk of shame. You've been there; we all have. You waltz up to the green with a wedge and a putter — your penalty for missing the putting surface from the fairway — and return to the cart a few minutes later only to realize you forgot that wedge on the fringe.

Annoyed, I muttered to myself, then did that little golf jog back up to the green, making it look like I was hustling but really only moving at a fast-walk pace. I scooped up my 54 and looked back down the fairway, hoping not to delay the next group. But then I remembered: *No group was behind us.* On any hole. The course was ours for the day.

Come to think of it, we had run of the whole property — the houses, the ATVs, the lake, the fishing, the jacuzzi, the skeet shooting, the fitness center and the bar cart. Heck, even the chef was here only for us.

Sure, maybe you've heard of lavish resorts that have golf plus a long list of activities to keep you busy, but have you ever been to one that's all-inclusive and where your group is the *only* one on-site? Yep, your own private resort.

Welcome to [Bunker Hill Farms](#), where luxury retreats meet blissful seclusion — and the itinerary is completely up to you.

A day before we teed it up, we pulled into the gated driveway at Bunker Hill Farms in Woodstock, Ill., about 60 miles northwest of downtown Chicago. An hour later, we were rumbling down remote ATV trails, kicking up leaves and wondering if this was already one of the most fun golf trips we had ever been on (without even having played golf yet).

The ATV rides are how most of the stays here begin. It's the perfect way to see the 450-acre property and learn about its buildings and history. Plus, have you ever driven brand new ATVs before? *They. Are. A. Blast.*

Our first stop on the trail was on top of a manmade hill. We hopped off and climbed stairs to reach the highest point of the property. Here, we learned more about Bunker Hill Farms and how owner Mike Domek and his wife, Amy, bought the land in 2005 to turn it into a vacation spot for their family. It's continued to evolve since.

Domek acquired a nursery — about 40,000 trees — to replant on the land and dug lakes, which are now stocked with perch, walleye, trout and bass. The golf course was built and opened in 2010, and the 7,300-square-foot lodge was completed in 2012. Three years later, the owners bought an additional 250 acres and founded non-profit Bunker Hill Charities. In 2017, they expanded across the road and built the spa silo, spa garden and an event venue with guest lofts. In 2018 they added the shooting pavilion and a year later the six-bedroom cottage. What originally started as 150 acres is now three times that size.



The lodge has hosted athletes and celebrities.

COURTESY PHOTO

For years, Bunker Hill Farms was hardly publicized, accessed via invite-only and mostly used by celebrities or the well-connected. Even people in the small neighboring towns barely know it exists. But when the Covid 19 pandemic hit, organizers decided to pivot and open the property to the public. Business boomed. It's now used for buddies' trips, corporate outings, couples' getaways, family retreats and weddings. For anything, really — a group recently rented it out to play Dungeons & Dragons.

All proceeds go to Bunker Hill Charities, which has granted more than \$2 million to 70-plus agencies in the local community. Much of that money is generated through two of their annual fund-raisers, their [Rockin' the Hill](#) and [Songwriters' Concert](#). Steven Tyler, Tyler Hubbard and Styx are just a few of the musical acts who have stayed and played here. The walls of the two homes are plastered with signed guitars and photos of other musicians who have also spent time on property.



The six-bedroom cottage and spa silo are next to the event venue that can host indoor weddings or concerts.

COURTESY PHOTO

It's an eight-person minimum for your stay, and the property has 13 guest rooms. The damage is roughly \$1,150 a person per day, and that gets you everything — unlimited food and drinks, a personal chef, your own golf course, ATVs, skeet shooting, luxurious accommodations and basically anything else you want to do. The best part? Your only other company is a couple of staffers who are around during the day and dedicated to making sure your stay is as easy and memorable as possible, doing everything from running out to buy something you may have forgotten or fix you a drink. That makes it a truly unique, customizable, all-inclusive luxury experience.

The cottage has six bedrooms, a fitness center, entertainment area, an expansive outdoor seating area (and fireplace) as well as a screened-in porch bigger than most New York City apartments. The lodge across the street has four bedrooms, a jacuzzi, lakes, beaches and the golf course. Neither home skimped on the fine details.



The golf course has eight greens but several different tee boxes, so you won't play the same hole twice during your 18-hole round.

COURTESY PHOTO

Our first day we rode ATVs and then munched on appetizers and sipped on drinks in the old open-air Binz Dairy Farm barn next to the cottage. That space has been transformed into a serene outdoor oasis, with running water, plants, flowers and music of your choice (we went with Chris Stapleton) pumping through the hidden speakers.

The barn was also the site of our first dinner, which was a heavenly four-course meal prepared by the resort's chef, Mario Scordato.

Scordato started his own pasta company and teaches cooking classes, but his primary gig is at Bunker Hill Farms, where he makes guests mouthwatering lunches and dinners. He's a wizard who focuses on local, organic and seasonal and will make you leave desperately missing his sweet-corn risotto and booze-infused fruit.

The next morning (our only full day on-site) began with a light breakfast before we walked a couple hundreds yards to the shooting pavilion, where their expert had us taking turns firing at clay pigeons and targets spread out across the range. Of course, you don't have to do this. There's also yoga and a spa and a pontoon and paddle boards and kayaks and hiking and horseback riding and, for a slight upgrade, even helicopter tours and hot-air balloon rides.



When you play golf, you can even bring fishing rods, just in case you want to take a break when you get to the first pond.

JOSH BERHOW

After a quick lunch — pork tenderloin! (when is that ever served for lunch?!) — we shuttled over to the other side of the property for our tee time. Armed with a forecaddie, we stocked our carts with snacks and drinks and fishing poles because, well, you never know when you might want to cast a few, just to say you did.

The course, designed by Harry Vignocchi, is an 18-hole par-72 that tips out at 6,700 yards. It's almost hidden among the property, and the reversible layout — they call it “unorthodox” — uses eight greens, some of the same fairways and several tee boxes to create 18 different holes. One green — you'll play it as the 5th, 8th and 14th holes — is guarded by water and a stone facade and played from an island tee box. Another hole (the 7th) calls for a semi-blind second shot into a green where the aiming point is just off to the side of a waterfall.



An approach into one of the greens at Bunker Hill Farms.

JOSH BERHOW

The greens are some of the purest you'll ever play. They get less than 250 rounds a year, which is roughly the amount of traffic a popular public course gets in a day. There's a superintendent who has a staff of about a half-dozen who maintains the entire property, including the course.

The freedom is intoxicating. There's no starter or marshal to tell you to pick up the pace or to stop playing as an eightsome. You can play as few or as many holes as you want. Take a mulligan. Re-tee. Skip a hole. You are the king of the course to do what you please.

After golf, we stayed on that side of the property and rode ATVs again (it was such a blast we didn't get enough of it the first time). Then we ate flatbreads, fished and swam out to the massive inflatable in the middle of the lake like we were teenagers again. After a dip in the jacuzzi, our final dinner Scordato served up was his homemade Bucatini and shrimp.

That night we puffed on cigars that are available to guests. We rookies had no idea if any of them were any good — spoiler: they were — but at Bunker Hill Farms, it feels right to indulge.