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Austin

Review: Horseshoe Bay Resort

A Gem in the Texas Hill Country

By [Emily Starbuck Gerson](#), About.com

Overview

While only about a 45-minute drive west of Austin, the 7,000-acre Horseshoe Bay Resort feels a world away. It is located along the banks of Lake LBJ, a massive constant-level lake immune from droughts. This makes the resort a perfect getaway for Austinites when their lakes dry up due to drought (as they did in 2009).

The resort is tucked in the rolling Hill Country and is a peaceful place with a slow pace. Horseshoe Bay was founded in 1971 and was purchased by its current owners, the Jaffe Group, in 1996. Martha Heagany, Chief Marketing Officer, says, "There is something for everybody for every season."

Some people live at Horseshoe Bay year-round and others stay here seasonally. Most of all, it is very popular with travelers and it has several types of accommodations for guests. Heagany says in the summer, the Horseshoe Bay Resort is very popular with families, many of whom stay in the multi-bedroom condos and villas. During spring and fall, it is most popular with golfers and couples who want a getaway, some of whom stay in the hotel. There are weddings here year-round. Anyone who is an official overnight guest at the resort has access to all of the resort's amenities.

The Feel

The first thing that struck me about Horseshoe Bay was how friendly and happy everybody was, from the front desk attendant to the chef at the omelet station at breakfast. At first I thought it was because they knew I was there, but people who didn't know who I was (and people I eavesdropped on) showed true Southern hospitality, and after a while, I got the feeling that's just how people are there. Everyone I spoke to raved about how much they loved living and working in this area. The guests also seemed to all be having a wonderful time. While Horseshoe Bay is a posh resort, it is not stuck-up or pretentious in the least. Expect a family-friendly place with plenty of Texas charm. Charlotte Buikema, the concierge and guest services supervisor, made me feel even more at home. A self-described "mother hen," Charlotte sits near the hotel entrance and has more knowledge of and passion for the Hill Country than anyone I have ever met. Not only can she help you navigate the resort, but she used to manage a Texas winery, so she can tell you about all of the 30-something wineries in the Hill Country (in addition to the best place for breakfast in nearby Marble Falls, every site you must see in Fredericksburg, and so on).

Golf

If you are a golfer, you will be in heaven at Horseshoe Bay. *Golf Magazine* has named Horseshoe Bay one of the best golf resorts in America for its three 18-hole championship golf courses designed by Robert Trent Jones, Sr, who has designed hundreds of courses. The

three courses at Horseshoe Bay are Slick Rock, Ram Rock, and Apple Rock. Ram Rock is known as one of the most difficult golf courses in Texas. Slick Rock is easier. You can find golf gear and attire at the Cap Rock and Slick Rock Pro Shops.

Just a short walk from the Marriott is Whitewater, a beautiful and tropical-themed 18-hole putting course that is par 72. It is made of real Bermuda grass and has waterfalls along the way. If you're lucky, you will spot some flamingos. Heagany says there are only a handful of other putting courses like this in the country.

A Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course is currently under development at Horseshoe Bay, so the resort will soon have four full golf courses.

Other Amenities

The grounds around the Marriott are beautifully sculpted with plentiful amenities to keep both residents and guests busy. Next to the pool is a gorgeous hot tub, which Heagany says is large enough to fit 27 people. There are tall rocks throughout it that look like petrified wood and some have bronze life-size statues perched above them; this in combination with the churning water makes it look like a miniature mythological ocean. Nearby is a small and popular white sand beach alongside Lake LBJ. Adults can lounge in the beach chairs and kids can play at Turtle Beach, a child-friendly wading area. Around the corner is the activity lawn, a large rectangle of lush grass frequently used for planned programs for children, such as Easter egg hunts, bobbing for apples on Thanksgiving, and so on. There are many programs throughout the year for children, and there is even a kids club.

The Bayside Fitness Center features every type of equipment you would need, and there are even televisions on the treadmills. A new, 10,000 square foot fitness center is in the works. Horseshoe Bay also features 16 tennis courts, some specifically for kids (these are the first tennis courts in the country to be specifically designed for children up to age 10). The resort also has a large marina, so if you love water sports, you can rent Waverunners, Cobalt boats, and a variety of other high-end boats and watercraft.

The resort's Bayside Spa features a resistance pool, steam rooms, and dry saunas. Guests can receive a variety of spa treatments, such as massages and manicures. The resort will soon be adding a 20,000 square foot spa that will replace old tennis courts.

One of the resort's most unique amenities is the Horseshoe Bay Resort Airport and Jet Center. It has a terminal building with a luxury passenger lounge in addition to a 6,000-foot lighted runway, which is one of the largest private airstrips in Texas. There are some private homes near the airport that have their own hangars, which look like giant garages attached to the house. This is the first time I have seen such a thing, and it's quite a sight! If you don't have your own private jet to fly in on, you can fly Air Horseshoe, which is a charter jet service.

The Marriott

The Horseshoe Bay Marriott has 385 hotel rooms and suites. It was built only five years ago, so everything still feels very fresh. It used to be corporately run until two years ago; they still follow all of Marriott's standard operating procedures, but all employees are of Horseshoe Bay, so everything is more unique to the resort. The hotel houses the Lantana Bar & Grill in addition to a gift shop, tour desk, real estate desk, concierge, and kid's program and childcare.

The rooms are luxurious and spotless, but are decorated in a familiar way that makes you feel at ease. They all have floor-to-ceiling windows, many of which feature a spectacular view of the resort. My first night at Horseshoe Bay, I stayed in a corner suite with an astounding view of Lake LBJ and the marina. It was spacious and comfortable, with a plush luxury bedding and

a separate seating area with its own television. I enjoyed being able to sit on the couch and relax like I was in my own living room. Adjacent to the hotel are the Paseo villas, which are rentable condos that range from one bedroom to three bedrooms. They feature wet bars, full kitchens, and separate living areas, and are popular with families who need more space.

The Waters at Horseshoe Bay

The Waters are a series of individually-owned luxury condominiums that can be rented by resort guests, as most of the owners do not live at the resort full-time if at all. They are a short drive (or long walk) from the hotel and the other amenities in that area. Fortunately, guests who stay here still receive concierge services and complimentary resort transportation, and parking is free. The condos are all single level, and there are five different floor plans, ranging from one bedroom to three bedrooms. Each condo is professionally decorated and features gourmet kitchens with granite countertops and every type of appliance, dish, and utensil you could need. They also feature high-definition flat screen televisions, washers and dryers, and Apple iPod docking stations. All have large, fully-furnished balconies, which was my favorite amenity.

On my second night at Horseshoe Bay, we stayed in a two-bedroom, two-bathroom condo at The Waters; it was on the first floor and right on the water. It was pristine and beautifully decorated; it looked like a model home (condo owners choose one of several designs that the resort offers) and more than anything, felt like a luxury apartment. One bedroom had a king-size bed and the other had two twins. The beds were all decorated with some of the fluffiest and most comfortable white bedding I had ever seen. The master bathroom was incredibly roomy and had two sinks. From the furnished patio, it looked like we were almost floating on water; on several occasions I sat outside on the patio to absorb the beautiful view and listen to the lapping water. I also loved having a kitchen; this allowed me to save leftovers from meals at restaurants and to make snacks. It was a wonderful touch that a hotel room cannot compare to. The patio had a barbecue, though I unfortunately didn't get the chance to use it.

Dining

Because there is very little dining in the town of Horseshoe Bay itself, the resort has numerous drinking and dining facilities for its guests and residents. During the summer months, the Yacht Club Grill and the Yacht Club Pool Bar are open for casual lakeside dining and drinking. The Marriott also has a poolside bar and grill. The Y Bar and the Bar at Whitewater are two fun places to grab drinks at night. The Cap Rock Bar & Grill offers upscale lunch and dinner and the Slick Rock Bar & Grill has slightly more casual ambiance. The sophisticated Yacht Club is the resort's anchor restaurant and has been around for over 30 years. The Lantana Bar & Grill is the restaurant in the Marriott. Anyone can eat at the Lantana, but you must be an overnight resort guest or club member to dine at any of the other facilities.

The Lantana Bar & Grill serves a killer cobb salad wrap and trout for lunch and dinner, but they also feature an incredible breakfast buffet. While it is a steep \$18 a person, I can say that it's worth it if you are hungry. There is an omelet station where the chef makes your custom concoction, a pile of fresh and crisp Belgian waffles, warm biscuits and gravy, grits, sausage, muffins, bagels, cereals, fruits, artisan cheese, and anything else you can imagine. Heaven. Their Sunday brunch is so good, Heagany says some people come in from Austin for it.

We had our first dinner at the Yacht Club, which is the resort's culinary delight. It is open year-round and has a gorgeous view of Lake LBJ. We started with the fried brie, which was served with honey and crostini. We wish they had served more crostini, but we gulped down what they gave us – the sweet and crispy shell was the perfect complement to the soft cheese. Next, we had the tuna tartare tacos with red caviar on top. They were filled with diced Asian vegetables and served in a crispy wonton shell, which was an unusual but very pleasant twist.

We also tried a version of the tacos with fried tofu instead of tuna, where were surprisingly divine. The escargot with sweet carrot puree is also popular here, though they weren't for me. For my entrée, I had the almond-crusted halibut, which was thick, moist, and flavorful. It was served over a bed of rich and creamy risotto. My guest ordered the rib-eye, which was the size of his plate and cooked to perfection. The restaurant is the same building is the Y Bar, which we noticed was packed with classy patrons having a good time.

The Cap Rock Grill is another fine restaurant at resort, which has an open kitchen and offers beautiful vistas from a two-level deck. For our appetizer, we had a to-die-do-for queso dip with avocado that was served alongside thick and crunchy tortilla chips that were freshly-baked in house. The other highlights of the meal were decadent peanut butter pie with a chocolate topping, and the chocolate-covered key lime pie.

Please note that while this review is fully objective, the accommodations and the meal at the Yacht Club were complimentary. The meal at Lantana and Cap Rock Grill were not.



Horseshoe Bay's Whitewater Putting Course with the Marriott in the background



The Waters at Horseshoe Bay, a series of luxury condos



The Y Bar at the Horseshoe Bay Resort