

Palm Springs Celebrated As World's Golf Capital

By Dave Weretka with Neal Kotlarek

Let's face facts. Palm Springs is to golf what Las Vegas is to gambling and what New Orleans is to Cajun cuisine. While praise is rightly heaped on the Grand Strand in Myrtle Beach and the Golf Gulf Coast in Mississippi, and the desert delights of Scottsdale, Arizona, there is, was and will always be only one "Golf Capital of the World." Drive virtually anywhere across the highways and byways of the Coachella Valley and you'll encounter one of over 130 golf courses that dot this sun-kissed desert landscape. Quality goes hand in hand with quantity here with designs by some of the game's premier names, including Pete Dye, Jack Nicklaus, Greg Norman, Nick Faldo, and Arnold Palmer. Combine the great golf courses with a mean average temperature of 74.6°F and over 300 days of sunshine per year, and you acquire a keen understanding of why over three million people visit Palm Springs annually.

Humana Challenge



While some of these visitors come for the luxury resort accommodations, the swimming pools, the horseback riding and the celebrity sightings, golf has been a major area attraction since back in the days when Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Bob Hope, and Elizabeth Taylor cemented the reputation of

Palm Springs as an A-list desert hideaway. As the story goes, many actors under Hollywood contract had to be available within two hours of the studio as a precaution for last minute film or photo shoots. This community is a little over 100 miles from the hustle and bustle of Los Angeles.

While many of the classic golf courses for the celebrated past remain, new layouts were added at a breakneck pace during the golf boom years. The major golf resorts that lure players to the Great Palm Springs area include PGA West, Westin Mission Hills Resort, La Quinta Resort and Club, and Indian Wells Golf Resort.



Agave Sunset Bar



Humana Challenge

Desert Willow Golf Resort

While first-time guests might not be familiar with this 36-hole property, Desert Willow epitomizes all that's great about Palm Springs golf. Perfectly manicured fairways and bunkers are interspersed with desert vegetation and lakes at the base of the majestic Santa Rosa mountain range. There's even a Chicago connection to the golf offerings, which are managed by Kemper Sports. The Firecliff course opened in 1997 and was. Designed by the team of Dr. Michael Hurdzan, Dana Fry, and PGA Tour champion John Cook, the 7,056-yard course features extensive natural areas and over 100 sand bunkers and waste areas. Voted the area's best public-access golf course for three years in a row by *Desert Golf* magazine, the course is not for the faint of heart nor the errant-off-the-tee. Trouble in the form of the aforementioned sand and waste areas lurks on most every hole. The 410-yard No. 2 features vegetated desert on both sides of a wide fairway, along with a large clover-shaped sand bunker on the right side of the tee shot landing area. From the fairway, the approach shot must avoid a greenside bunker protecting the right of the hole and more desert landscape to the left and beyond the flagstick.

Those looking for a slightly less intimidating challenge will enjoy the 6,913-yard Mountain View course which plays to a down right polite 6,470 yards from the blue tees. Sharing the Firecliff course's design team, this classically-styled track features ample amounts of sand bunkers and water, but most green sites allow for bump-and-run play. An exception to that rule is the 6th hole, a par 5 that calls for a driver and lay-



Aqua Serena Spa

up short of a rock-lined creek that circles around the front and left side of the green. A good second shot here leads to a short-iron approach and a chance at a birdie.

Need some help with those short-iron approach shots? The Desert Willow- Golf Academy maintains a full staff to help

sharpen even rusty games. Director of Instruction Paul Bucy stresses golf fitness along with computer swing analysis and innovative swing drills.

PGA West

Many golf fans were introduced to PGA West when the resort's TPC Stadium course

hosted the Bob Hope Chrysler Classic back in 1987, when then Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill needed a handful of swings to extract his ball from the course's 19-foot deep 16th hole sand bunker. *Chicago Tribune* golf writer Bob Verdi described the course a year later as "a brute of 7,271 yards with water





Villa Lagoon



Hyatt Regency Indian Wells



Paula Creamer



Saguaro Hotel

hazards big enough to require lifeguards and traps containing more sand than Egypt. You don't hire a caddy there, you hire a camel." Course architect Pete Dye seems to welcome the criticism. "Golf is not a fair game, so why build a course fair?" The course has today been stretched to 7,300 yards and has the highest stroke rating (76.1) of all the courses at PGA West. The layout is annual host to the PGA Tour's qualifying school finals and is rated among the "Top 100 Courses in the World" by *Golf* magazine.

The elegant PGA West Resort is home to six golf courses in total, including three that are only accessible to members. The PGA Tour's Humana Challenge is played over two of these—the Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer private courses. Along with the aforementioned TPC Stadium Course, the resort's other public offerings are the Nicklaus Tournament Course and the Greg Norman Resort Course. Both are outstanding.

Hyatt Regency Indian Wells Resort & Spa

Golfers looking for extra pampering should consider booking their stay at this elegant property. Along with 530 deluxe rooms with garden, mountain, golf or pool views, the resort offers a spa and salon, seven swimming pools (including an adult pool with cabanas), tennis, biking, badminton and table tennis courts, along with multiple dining options. The Hyatt's two golf courses are perennially ranked by national golf magazines among the top 20 courses to play in California, Indian Wells serves up two great 18-hole championship courses. The Players Course was designed by John Fought and stretches to 7,300 yards. The resort touts the course, which was host to the 2008 LG Skins Game, as a "core golf" layout with no roads or homes intruding anywhere in the vicinity of the player.

The Celebrity Course was opened in 2006 to rave reviews and features water in all forms—brooks, streams, split-level lakes and even waterfalls.

Guests staying at the resort also enjoy exclusive privileges to schedule tee times at the private Indian Wells Country Club. The

course was the original home to the PGA's Bob Hope Chrysler Classic.

Indian Wells is also renowned as one of the world's premier tennis destinations. The Hyatt Regency Indian Wells Resort & Spa is the former home of the Newsweek Champions Cup. Tennis offerings include three hard-surface courts, tennis instruction and a pro shop.

Desert Springs

This outstanding property serves up 36 holes of championship golf. Both the Palm and Valley courses are family-friendly, as holes provide open tee shot landing areas and open routes to greens. Most every hole provides panoramic views of the Santa Rosa mountain range. Both courses are certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary, which means that there's plenty of flora and fauna to enjoy but, alas, also that certain areas of the property don't allow for ball retrieval. So take extra ammunition!

The Palm course recently received \$1.5 million in renovations, including spectacular white sand bunkers. A mixture of lengthy

par 3s and short par 4s create a shotmaker's paradise. Greens slope from back to front and include several plateau options to navigate.

The Valley course serves up several intriguing challenges, including blind shots to some greens and several downhill approach shots. Leave the driver in the bag when in doubt and avoid the railroad-tie-lined bunkers. One word of advice given from personal experience: Don't send any love to the heart-shaped bunkers on the back of the green on No. 17.

While every golf resort across Palm Springs offers outstanding dining, I made special provisions to sneak away to Rancho Mirage's epic Wally's Desert Turtle during my stay. Executive Chef Richard Pelz serves up a diverse menu that includes a spectacular poached lobster, pan-roasted pork tenderloin and seared duck breast. Desserts in the desert include macadamia nut bread pudding and Baked Alaska.

For information on any of these properties or the Palm Springs area, go to the Palm Springs Convention & Visitors Bureau website: www.visitgreaterpalmsprings.com.

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