

# Try Tucson for Affordable Winter Golf

BY DAN VUKELICH

When the snow flies in Albuquerque, diehard golfers will play on the frozen brown grass of Arroyo del Oso Golf Course, but those looking to play on green fairways typically head to the handful of reliably warm-weather winter locales: Phoenix-Scottsdale, Southern California, Florida, the Gulf Coast, and, in a good year, Southern Nevada.

But a destination that has been largely missing from the national conversation until now has been Tucson, Arizona.

Just an hour and 40 minutes south of Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport on Interstate 10, Tucson has a decidedly younger, more laid-back vibe than its gold-plated cousin to the north, yet it offers just as much, if not more, golf dollar for dollar.

Sure, you could pony up big cash for the better-known high-end Tucson-area resorts — Dove Mountain, Starr Pass and Loews Ventana Canyon — but here are some recommendations for the value-conscious golfer.

## Casino del Sol Resort

Casino del Sol sits on the southwest edge of Tucson on Pascua Yaqui Pueblo land, which makes it handy to Tucson International Airport, about 15 minutes to the east. The resort's latest amenity is a Notah Begay III signature design, Sewailo Golf Club.

The name Sewailo means "Flowerland" in the Yaqui language — which is fitting because rather than native desert, the 7,400-yard course's margins are lined with 30,000 flowering plants that bloom throughout the year.

Begay, a New Mexico native and the only full-blooded Native American PGA Tour winner, and his co-architect, Ty Butler, moved massive amounts of soil to give elevation to what once was a glass-flat desert of creosote bush and cactus.

Sewailo's golf rates have come down from the \$129 peak rate announced when the course opened in 2013. Peak season greens fees for weekend play in early winter come in



Tucson's La Paloma Golf Club, framed by the Santa Catalina Mountains, is one of Jack Nicklaus' earliest signature designs.

at an affordable \$69.

Better yet, the resort offers a smoking deal for a \$665 three-night stay-and-play package that includes two rounds per day — that's per room, not per person — for the upcoming Thanksgiving weekend.

## Arizona National Golf Club

If website photos of this OB Sports-managed golf course look familiar, that's because it was the site of some of the USGA Qualifier scenes in the movie "Tin Cup" where Roy McAvoy's (Kevin Costner's) fill-in caddie stumbles through the torrid heat of a summer round.

The recently renovated Robert Trent Jones Jr. design makes deft use of the jagged boulders and rock outcroppings of the adjacent Santa Catalina Mountains. A round at Arizona National on Thanksgiving weekend can be had for just \$63.

## Westin La Paloma

Speaking of punitive. Let's just say it right now, you don't want to walk this mountainous throwback to the days when Jack Nicklaus set out to ... hmmm ... punish people who hadn't yet won 17 majors (18 if you count the 1986 Masters Jack won two years after La Paloma opened).

OK. That's harsh. But if you play

the right tees on this rollercoaster, you won't be disappointed by one of the Golden Bear's earliest signature designs — 27 holes with elevation changes that would make a mountain goat pant from exhaustion.

Nicklaus' target-golf layout requires lots of nerve and plenty of golf balls, but a check of the resort's website shows an affordable rate of \$149 for peak weekend play in late November (Thanksgiving was fully booked by Labor Day).

## Tubac Golf Resort

Remember the part in the movie when "Tin Cup" Roy McAvoy breaks everything but his 7-iron and Romeo (Cheech Marin) quits as his caddie? That scene was shot in the shade of the third tee of Tubac Golf Resort's Rancho Nine. One look at the Tubac Resort website and you'll see what I mean.

And the scene where Roy, as caddie, bets David Simms (Don Johnson) he can "go for it" and clear the water hazard from 230 yards? That's the 16th hole on the Rancho nine at Tubac. For McAvoy, the movie's low point, the "Who can hit it farthest with a 7-iron" bet, happens in Tubac's parking lot. This is cool stuff.

It's a bit out of town, but the Town of Tubac is a homey, quirky, artsy

town 30 minutes south of Tucson on I-19, almost to the Mexican border. The resort's website offers a \$223 hacienda room stay-and-play per-night rate on Thanksgiving weekend.

## Randolph Park

Anyone looking to retire to Arizona should first play Randolph Park, a Tucson municipal golf complex that will change your mind about the wisdom of retiring to the pricier Phoenix/Sun City/Peoria/Mesa Metroplex.

As much as I love the Valley of the Sun, Phoenix has only one muni — Papago Golf Course — comparable in quality to these two affordable side-by-side beauties smack in the middle of town.

The Randolph Park golf complex — the Randolph North Golf Course and the Randolph Dell Ulrich Golf Course — both served by the same earthy, vintage brick clubhouse — offer plenty of elevation change but without the sense of a mountain looming over you.

Both are parkland in style. The heavily tree-lined Randolph Park North, which opened in 1925, has been the site of multiple PGA and LPGA Tour events. Randolph Dell Ulrich, redesigned in 1996 on the site of the old Randolph Park South course, is more open, which means its east-facing holes offer terrific views of the aforementioned Santa Catalina Mountains.

Now, here comes the best part: price.

Although anything around Thanksgiving was booked when I checked the website, a non-resident could ride either for \$36 for 18 holes in the last weekend in October (the furthest out the booking engine would allow when I checked).

To quote Bill Murray's Dr. Peter Venkman in "Ghostbusters" — "I love this town."

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