

Traverse City

& SURROUNDING AREAS



RESORTS ROLL OUT



Golf resorts in the Traverse City region are rolling out the welcome mat in a big way for women golfers, offering special female-friendly golf schools, leagues, lessons and even expanded apparel choices in their pro shops. And ladies are showing up in droves.

"There's been a huge surge of ladies playing golf in the last couple years," observes Mark Hill, director of instruction at Grand Traverse Resort and Spa in Acme. "Our clinics have really taken off - one sold out in a day last spring. The classes are going like gangbusters; we plan to add some more this year."

Women's golf is also booming at A-Ga-Ming Resort in Kewadin, on Torch Lake, where a new ladies golf league quickly grew to 60 members, according to Chris Hines, director of player development at The Torch and Sundance, the resort's two main courses (the other two, offsite, are Antrim Dells and Charlevoix Country Club).

League president Carol Heles says the resort goes out of its way to welcome women. "A-Ga-Ming has been great," she says. "They block out a course for us every Wednesday morning. They put names on the carts ... they've given us everything we want."

Acting on the philosophy that "golf is based on ability, not on gender," Hines says there is great interest in his ladies' league lessons on Monday afternoons, June through August, that cover chipping, pitching, putting, course management, bunker play and other key skills for novice to advanced players.



THE WELCOME MAT X For Women Golfers

by Susan R. Pollack



Grand Traverse Resort and Spa: The Wolverine

Beyond that, he says, A-Ga-Ming offers five tee boxes on each hole, including female-friendly forward tees, and an "extensive" ladies apparel section in the main pro shop. "Based on feedback, we started adding more smaller sizes and more larger sizes in the last couple years," Hines says. "We now carry five or six brands in extra-small to 2x."

Crystal Mountain Resort in Thompsonville boasts a long tradition of support for women's golf, including two decades of hosting the Michigan PGA Women's Open on the Mountain Ridge course, with its magazine-worthy views.

The 30th event is scheduled this year for June 26-28 and will be preceded, as in past years, by a Pro-Am tournament that annually draws dozens of female golfers from Michigan and throughout the United States and Canada.

"They treat women well here," said Liz Eardley, a league member, at last year's event. "At Crystal I honestly feel treated the same as the guys - and in golf that's not always the case." Stacy Slobodnik-Stoll, veteran head coach of the women's golf team at Michigan State University, has participated in 20 Women's Opens and Pro-Ams at Crystal. Last year, she also brought some college golfers to the resort for a pre-season, team-building warmup.



Crystal Mountain Resort: Betsie Valley

"We continue to come back because we know they support women's golf," says the Golf Association of Michigan Hall of Fame member. "I've always felt like part of the family." Praising the quality and playability of Crystal's two 18-hole courses, Slobodnik-Stoll calls the red or forward tees "very fair and playable" for novice golfers and notes that "there aren't bunkers in the middle of the fairways" or other impediments to play as there are on some tracks. "They did the right things when they designed these courses," she declares, citing Betsie Valley's recent major renovation that features improved tee-box placement and cleared sight-lines.

Slobodnik-Stoll adds that the overall Crystal Mountain experience, with its first-rate spa, waterpark, Alpine slide, Legacy Art Park and other family-friendly attractions is a real treat. And she should know - she always brings her daughter, Olivia, now 20, who not only golfed in last year's Pro-Am but won the women's closest to the pin and longest drive contests.

Others have recognized the quality experience, too. Both Crystal Mountain and Grand Traverse Resort and Spa made Golf Digest's 2021-22 list of the 33 best U.S. destinations for women's golf trips.

Last year, Denise Fleckenstein of Bloomfield Township and seven friends chose Crystal Mountain for their annual ladies golf getaway, reserving a condo for three nights through the resort's group desk. "Everybody was happy," she recalls. "We were able to play both courses and had a lot of fun. We ate dinner one night on the patio at The Thistle, with its beautiful trellis. We felt like we were in Italy."

Fleckenstein also enjoyed incorporating the skills she'd learned at Crystal's three-day ladies golf school, which she attended with a friend earlier that month. "You get a lot of individual attention - they work with you on all aspects of the game," she says, starting with a videotaped swing analysis that lets students see a before-and-after comparison. "They corrected something I didn't know I was doing, the way I was taking the club back. That was very helpful."

Attendees work on their golf club grip and short game skills, such as getting out of sand and chipping from various distances. And they get a chance to apply those skills while playing a game on the course.

Says Greg Babinec, Crystal's head golf pro: "We stress the fundamentals and make sure they have a good knowledge of the short game, a good chipper and a good putter, because that's where golf starts and ends. If you have a good short game, you're a match for anybody."





That's part of the mission, too, at Grand Traverse Resort and Spa, where Golf Academy lessons are tailored to individuals, whether in private sessions or ladies-only clinics, according to Mark Hill, the director of instruction. With a ratio of one instructor per four students, the resort's increasingly popular three-day ladies clinics include both the driving range and course, where they can practice undisturbed, with a lunch break in-between.

"It's a pretty full day," says Hill, adding that the women are ready for the spa, pool, bars or restaurants afterward. "I take the ladies out on the course and teach them the etiquette of golf, terminology and pace of play. The days of standing on the range just hitting golf ball after golf ball are pretty much over."

Last year, Grand Traverse Resort and Spa launched a new 9-hole ladies league, timed for the after-work crowd, and enrolled about a dozen new players "just like that," he says. Extra tee-boxes added recently, mean that all three of the resort's courses - Wolverine (the ladies' favorite), Spruce Run and The Bear - now have five sets of tees, which, Hill says, is helpful both to women and senior golfers.

"And the golf shop has never looked better," he declares. "Our golf pro, Tyler Jablonski, brought in LuluLemon and numerous other lines, in a wide range of sizes. And the women are absolutely loving it."

About the Author:

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