

Texas Journey

"Golf's New Course"

By Larry Olmstead



Today's resorts offer more for players and nonplayers alike

THERE REALLY IS more to life than golf. To a golf junkie, that might sound blasphemous, but for the rest of the public, it's good news. Golf resorts have been working hard to create more ways to entertain guests off the course, from tried-and-true amenities—such as spas, shopping, and gourmet cuisine—to novel activities, including arts and crafts, kids' camps, fishing, and casino gambling.

In fact, the best of the bunch are no longer merely golf resorts— they are travel destinations that just happen to have great golf courses. "It used to be that only a handful of golf resorts offered a wide array of nongolf activities," says Robert Pedrero, longtime publisher of *The Golf Insider*, a specialty newsletter about golf travel. "But because baby boomers want more activities beyond the course—for themselves, their spouses, and their children—almost every destination golf resort today offers a lot more than golf."

Resorts have also expanded golf instruction. Many now have free daily clinics, affordable group lessons, multiday immersion golf schools, and sophisticated club-fitting and swing-analysis services using state-of-the-art video and computers.

There's even golf for the nongolfer. Many resorts are adding putting courses, pitch-and-putt layouts, or shorter par-3 or executive courses, which let kids and novices share in the excitement and interest of golf without the lengthy time, expense, and frustration a full-size course can present to a beginner.

So whether vacationers are looking for a family trip, a girls' weekend, or a guys' getaway, there's a golf resort that's right on par. Perhaps best of all, there are quality choices to fit just about every budget. Check out our finds on the following two pages.



Horseshoe Bay Resort

Horseshoe Bay, Texas

WHY: This is the only golf resort in the nation with three courses designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr. It's located on the shore of Lake Lyndon B. Johnson in the Hill Country.

BEST FOR: Serious golfers, families, and water lovers.

THE GOLF: Ram Rock is hailed as one of the Lone Star State's most challenging courses, while Slick Rock is much more forgiving and Applerock falls in between. For golfers of all ages, there's also Whitewater, a unique 18-hole Bermuda grass putting course, sort of an upscale version of minigolf.

NONGOLF ATTRACTIONS: Water lovers can enjoy Lake LBJ on banana boats, pontoon boats, or sunset cruises. The resort has a white sand beach and several elaborate swimming pools with waterfalls. Clay and synthetic grass tennis courts, a spa, and lush gardens with flamingoes round out the offerings.

LODGING: A Marriott hotel opened in 2004, greatly expanding the lodging scene. One- to three-bedroom condos and hotel-style suites are also available.

MORE INFORMATION: (800) 252-9363; www.hsbresort.com



Westin La Cantera Resort

San Antonio, Texas

WHY: Resort visitors can choose from all of the activities of bustling San Antonio and have the chance to play a PGA Tour venue.

BEST FOR: Families.

THE GOLF: The Resort Course is carved from a limestone quarry and is home to the PGA Tour's Valero Texas Open. The Palmer Course has lakes, waterfalls, and enormous elevation changes.

NONGOLF ATTRACTIONS: Amenities include a fitness center, spa services, a golf academy, a supervised kids' club, and several restaurants. Six Flags Fiesta Texas is adjacent to the resort; golfers can hear The Rattler roller coaster from the Resort Course. The Alamo and Riverwalk are 20 minutes away.

LODGING: The 508-room hotel has rooms, suites, and separate villas. It's won numerous awards from travel magazines.

MORE INFORMATION: (800) WESTIN-1 [937-8461]; www.westinlacantera.com



Arizona Biltmore Resort & Spa

Phoenix, Arizona

WHY: This family-friendly resort has great history, rooms, service, and golf.

BEST FOR: Families, architecture buffs, and the nostalgic.

THE GOLF: The classic Adobe Course is one of the oldest in Phoenix, with a traditional parkland layout that predates desert golf. The course was a favorite of Clark Gable. The newer Links Course is tighter and tougher, with water hazards and deep, abundant bunkers.

NONGOLF ATTRACTIONS: The grounds have eight swimming pools where guests can attend summer "dive-in" movies and enjoy a show from floating chaise lounges. Other options run the gamut from a world-renowned spa to desert jeep tours to hot-air ballooning. The resort's buildings pay homage to Frank Lloyd Wright, and guests can visit his home at Taliesin West in nearby Scottsdale.

LODGING: The array of hotel rooms and private villas and cottages have attracted such celebrities as Ronald and Nancy Reagan, who honeymooned here, and Marilyn Monroe.

MORE INFORMATION: (800) 950-0086; www.arizonabiltmore.com.



Inn of the Mountain Gods

Mescalero, New Mexico

WHY: This golf resort in the wilds of the Sacramento Mountains has outdoor activities of all types.

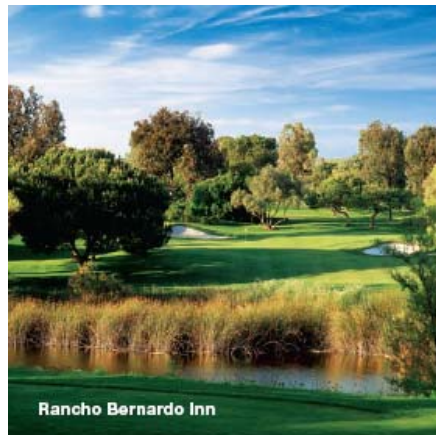
BEST FOR: Outdoorsy folk and hunters.

THE GOLF: The first of the state's tribal courses is now more than 30 years old. Designed by the acclaimed Ted Robinson, the course has numerous water hazards and showcases mountain views.

NONGOLF ATTRACTIONS: You'd be hard-pressed to find another quality golf resort offering big-game hunting. This one specializes in elk. The focus is outdoors, with a sporting clays range, horseback riding, hiking, and fishing. Indoors, there's a full casino for entertainment.

LODGING: Rooms are lavish for the reasonable rates they command, and almost all have mountain and lake views.

MORE INFORMATION: (800) 545-9011; www.innofthemountaingods.com.



Rancho Bernardo Inn

San Diego, California

WHY: With secluded nooks and inviting gardens, this place weds good golf with a romantic atmosphere. It's the only resort in the golf-mad San Diego area to have hosted both the PGA and LPGA tournaments.

BEST FOR: Couples, honeymooners, and gourmands.

THE GOLF: The inn's classic Resort Course is the work of William Bell, who also designed nearby Torrey Pines. Resort guests can play at any of the eight affiliated courses such as the one at Mount Woodson Country Club, which has dramatic terrain and elevation changes as well as views of Mount Woodson Castle, a 1920s mansion.

NONGOLF ATTRACTIONS: The resort has a spa and tennis and fitness facilities, but dining is the highlight. El Bizcocho restaurant's chef Gavin N. Kaysen prepares sumptuous dishes, such as pomegranate-glazed duck and Jerusalem artichoke soup with morels and black truffle oil.

LODGING: The early California-style rooms have private decks or patios, high ceilings, and plenty of space. Suites have wood-burning fireplaces.

MORE INFORMATION: (877) 517-9342; www.ranchobernardoinn.com.