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Great Golf! Arizona's Terrific Tees

It's always tee-time in Arizona. Whether your game is target or traditional, your budget country club or municipal, your favored plant prickly pear or pine tree, the state has something to suit your skill level, wallet, and landscape preference.

The State of the Cart: A Brief History of Golf in Arizona

Once upon a time in the early 20th century, when duffers came to southern Arizona for the warm winter sun, they encountered dirt fairways and oiled sand greens. In mid-century, as golf grew more popular and course designers more skilled, the Sonoran Desert began to bloom with Midwestern-style rolling greens flanked by ponds and trees. Then, in the 1980s, restrictions on water use led to the creation of challenging target courses, with thin ribbons of fairway threading through untamed – and unirrigated – desert terrain.

Today, oiled sand excepted, Arizona offers layouts of every configuration at more than 300 courses, making the state one of the world's premier golf destinations. Two-thirds of the courses are in Greater Phoenix, with many of the rest concentrated in and around Tucson. With a steady influx of golf schools, golf shops, golf vacation packagers, and gated golf communities, the state's high tee-off profile continues to rise. And deep discounts on green fees in summer, as well as air-conditioned carts, mean golf is never out of season in Arizona.

Some Top Tee-Off Spots

Greater Phoenix: With nearly 200 courses, it's tough to come up with a definitive "best " list, but target courses consistently praised include Tom Fazio's challenging Raptor at **Grayhawk** in Scottsdale; the Native American-owned **We-Ko-Pa** on the Fort McDowell Yavapai Reservation, with unobstructed mountain views; and Jay Moorish's South course at **The Boulders** in Carefree and his Monument course at the **Four Seasons Scottsdale at Troon North**, both known for their eye-popping scenery. Traditionalists enjoy the Scottish-style links laid out by Ben Crenshaw and Bill Coore at the **Talking Stick** South course, on land owned by the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community; and the **Arizona Biltmore's** Adobe course, created in 1928 by celebrated golf course architect William P. "Billy" Bell and recently revitalized to the

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tune of \$4 million. Pete Dye designed the **ASU- Karsten** course in Tempe as a bit of a hybrid, adding desert accents to the turfed areas. While winter golf in the Valley of the Sun is often at a higher premium, municipal courses like **Papago** in Phoenix and the Desert course at **Tournament Players Club of Scottsdale** are both inexpensive and much sought after.

Tucson: Of the city's five reasonably priced municipal courses, the flagship **Randolph**, long the site of LPGA tournaments, is a favorite for traditional play, while **Fred Enke** stands out for its central city target layout. More typical of desert course settings are the Santa Catalina foothills, home to Tom Fazio's two **Ventana Canyon** creations. Locals and visitors have long flocked to **Omni Tucson National** for its immaculate Midwestern-style greens; now they'll also be able to play the resort's Tom Lehman-designed desert course, opened in late 2005.

The Rest of the State: In the west, Parker's **Emerald Canyon**, following the shores of the Colorado River, leads duffers on a wild but gorgeous golf ride. Gary Panks had a hand in three top courses to the north, all links-style: **Elephant Rocks at Williams**, ponderosa pine-shrouded greens at nearly 7,000 feet; the South Course at **Antelope Hills** in Prescott, offering great mountain and granite dell views; and **Sedona Golf Resort**, with breathtaking red rock backdrops.

Watching the Pros

Of Arizona's many golf events, the top three are the PGA Tour's **FBR Open** (late January/early February; TPC of Scottsdale), the world's best attended golf tournament; **Chrysler Classic of Tucson** (February; Omni Tucson National), begun in 1945 as the Tucson Open and boasting a \$3 million purse in 2006; and the **Tommy Bahama Challenge** (November; Grayhawk in Scottsdale), which pits four PGA Tour up-and-comers with their international counterparts.

A Few Tee Tales

- In honor of the property's cattle ranching past, cows graze on the greens of the Tubac Golf Resort.
- Scottsdale's 13,000-square-foot In Celebration of Golf hosts the country's largest golf art gallery and has a golf artist-in-residence.

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Arizona Golf
Page 3

- Since 1996, shock rocker Alice Cooper, a Phoenix resident, has been hosting an annual charity-benefit celebrity golf tournament in Scottsdale.
- The Four Seasons Scottsdale at Troon North offers a golf massage that incorporates heated golf balls.

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