

GOLF

COURSES AND TRAVEL

Must-play golf courses in Phoenix/Scottsdale

No. 5 at the Cholla Course at We-Ko-Pa Golf Club

Heat seeking golfers have long zeroed in on the Phoenix metropolitan landscape and for good reason. Three hundred thirty days of sunshine. More than 200 courses with unique and dramatic holes set in the desert landscape. Annual PGA, LPGA and Champions Tour events. Award-winning resorts with 36 holes and public facilities among the country's best. But it wasn't always that way.

Valley of the Sun resident Tom Weiskopf, architect of many of the region's best layouts, explains the area's evolution as a golf destination.

"Thirty years ago when you thought about a vacation to the Phoenix/Scottsdale area, you thought about three things: images of the Wild West mountains, cactus and horses, the Grand Canyon up north, and the good weather. Championship courses weren't part of the package. Today we can compete against any market in the country in terms of the quality of the golf courses and golf experiences."

He's right. Few parts the country can match the lineup of quality courses, resorts and culinary options that you will find in the Phoenix and Scottsdale area. January through early April is prime time for golf, with hotel rates and green fees at a peak. The shoulder seasons (November through December; mid-April through May) bring more available tee

times and a price break. June through October brings the serious heat but also the lowest prices.

[BOOK TEE TIMES: Millions of Rounds at Your Finger Tips](#)

Troon North (troonnorthgolf.com; \$189-\$249): Still the king of the Scottsdale public "must-plays" thanks to a pair of courses that dish out cacti, arroyos, rock outcroppings and stunning vistas of Pinnacle Peak and the surrounding mountains. The Monument course is the more scenic of the two, but Pinnacle is the more cohesive test and is walkable, a rarity among modern real estate-oriented desert courses. A revitalized Dynamite Grille, with a new menu and bar, is now a highly regarded post-round option in the clubhouse.

We-Ko-Pa Golf Club (wekopa.com; \$195-\$225): The two layouts on tribal land owned by the Fort McDowell Yavapai nation just east of Scottsdale equal any in the area. The Cholla course, a Scott Miller design, has incomparable scenery and holes that zigzag artfully through canyons, over ridges and down mountain slopes. The Saguaro course, a 2006 Bill Coore/Ben Crenshaw design, is wide enough that a spray hitter will still find his tee shot. There are few forced carries, so a golfer who struggles getting it airborne can also enjoy. Strong players will bask in the challenge of strategic bunkers, superb risk/reward decisions and cleverly contoured greens. Add elevation changes, mountain vistas and a forest of cacti to the mix and you've got an unbeatable combination.

Southern Dunes Golf Club (golfsoutherndunes.com; \$49-\$179): Located in Maricopa, 25 minutes south of Phoenix's Sky Harbor International Airport, Southern Dunes is a big, bold, 7,300-yard layout and possibly the very best work that Lee Schmidt and Brian Curley have done (Fred Couples consulting). Broad, fescue-framed fairways, artfully contoured bunkers and masterfully crafted undulating greens are framed by unobstructed mountain and desert vistas. Add a green fee that's less than half of some of Scottsdale's trophy courses and you have one of Arizona's best values.

The Boulders (theboulders.com; \$115-\$209): Jay Morrish sculpted two superb courses from the prehistoric rocks that define this property in the charmingly named town of

Carefree. The North course is the stronger, better balanced of the two, but the South has the more spectacular holes, including the par-4 opener and the par-5 sixth, with green sites tucked into six-story high boulder complexes.

Grayhawk Golf Club (grayhawkgolf.com; \$100-\$235): This facility didn't invent the "country club for a day," theme, but it may have perfected it in the 1990s, when Phil's Grill (named for Phil Mickelson) was a beehive for tour pros. Lefty has moved back to his native San Diego, but the 'Hawk still brims with ambiance, excellent service, above-average dining options and classic rock tunes piped to the practice range via faux-rock speakers. The Tom Fazio-designed Raptor course has hosted most of the big events, including the PGA Tour's Frys.com Open (2007-2009), but the David Graham/Gary Panks-crafted Talon course offers more drama, notably at the par-3 11th, where golfers traverse a swinging bridge to reach the back tee, and at the island-green, par-3 17th that's rimmed with colorful flowers.

[BOOK TEE TIMES: Millions of Rounds at Your Finger Tips](#)

Best of the Rest

Gold Canyon (gcgr.com; \$69-\$199): Forty-five minutes east of Phoenix's Sky Harbor International Airport is Gold Canyon Golf Resort's Dinosaur Mountain course, a Ken Kavanaugh design that should be mentioned in any discussion of Scottsdale's best layouts. Home construction in the last decade has detracted from the aesthetics, but the elevation changes, sheer variety of holes and in-your-face encounters with the Superstition Mountains make this worth the drive, no matter where you're staying in town.

TPC Scottsdale (tpc.com/Scottsdale; \$108-\$299): Home to the Waste Management Phoenix Open, the best-attended (and rowdiest) stop on the PGA Tour, the TPC Scottsdale Stadium course is nobody's idea of a beauty queen, but what it lacks in looks, it makes up for in thrills. The island-green, par-5 15th and drivable par-4 17th are two water-tinged, risk/reward greats. For trivia fans, note that the latter is the site of the only ace on a par-4 in PGA Tour history (Andrew Magee, 2001), while the loudest hole in golf,

the par-3 16th, reached its zenith in 1997 when Tiger Woods carded a memorable hole-in-one.

Tiger fans should also check out the one-ton boulder on the par-5 13th that onlookers helped move for him perhaps the heaviest loose impediment in golf history. Across the street is the sibling Champions course, a much less pricey (and walkable) alternative that was hugely improved with an extreme makeover in 2007.

Talking Stick (talkingstickgolfclub.com; \$110-\$175): Though their flat fairways provide less drama than many Valley courses, you won't find a more artfully crafted set of bunkers in town than at Talking Stick, which sports a pair of Bill Coore/Ben Crenshaw-designed tracks on tribal land, complete with mountain views but thankfully no houses. The North is the more strategic of the two, but the South features more trees, making it the better summer course.

Best Bargain

Book 36 holes at Grayhawk Golf Club between April 1st and April 28th and you'll save \$60 off weekday rates and \$110 off weekend rates (and you can play those two rounds over a five-day period rather than the same day if you choose).

Ball Park® Hot Dogs

Buy Ball Park® Hot Dogs Today! Get Legendary Recipes. www.walmart.com/Legends

Worth the Money

At \$299, TPC Scottsdale is the most expensive public course in the area. But check out the Stay & Play packages offered by the neighboring Fairmont Scottsdale Princess before you pay that top fee. It's pretty cool to play a PGA Tour layout you've probably watched on television, and you get a crack at the legendary par-3 16th (minus the deafening crowd noise). And, truth be told, the 15th and 17th are better, if quieter, holes.

More on Phoenix/Scottsdale: [Return to Homepage](#) | [Best Resorts](#) | [Insider Info](#) | [Couples Trip](#) | [Video](#)