

Golfers getting their just Desert

BY DAWNA FREEMAN, FOR POSTMEDIA NEWS APRIL 27, 2012



In this golf-given land of Arizona, there is golf and then there is great golf.

At Desert Mountain — the largest private country club in North America — great golf is just the beginning.

Set high in the Sonoran Desert on 3,200 hectares in the Cave Creek area of North Scottsdale, this upscale master-planned community has been 25 years in the making — offering members not one, not two, but six Jack Nicklaus signature golf courses.

Designed by Nicklaus for tournament and residential golf, the six walkable courses are as distinctive in style and play as the six themed clubhouses and five pro shops.

Renegade, the first course to open, in 1986, is rated one of the most difficult in the United States, says Desert Mountain director of golf Shawn Goblen.

But with double and common greens and combination tee and pin placements, it can test all levels of golfers.

Geronimo, built in 1989, is the most visually intimidating, with canyon plays on the back nine, says Goblen.

In 1995, Apache provided members with a more relaxed game, while the newest Outlaw course, opened in 2003, plays in the Scottish links tradition.

On the doorstep of the Continental Mountain Range is the 1999-built Chiricahua, the highest course with elevations over 3,600 feet.

With striking views down the Phoenix valley, it follows the contours of the land, winding through the cacti-studded Saguaro Forest around native boulders and washes.

Nicklaus considers the spectator-friendly Cochise, host of The Tradition, a senior PGA Champions Tour for 13 years, is one of the most picturesque courses in the world.

It will host the season-ending Charles Schwab Cup Championship Oct. 31 to Nov. 4.

Playing 108 holes of Nicklaus golf is only the beginning. Members can warm up at Arizona's most extensive golf practice facility and improve their golf swing at the most technologically-advanced golf instruction facility in the United States.

The \$1.6 million US Desert Mountain Performance Centre opened in March, says Robert Jones, who was appointed general manager and COO of Desert Mountain Club Inc. when members took ownership in December 2010.

The performance centre is a phenomenal facility that just doesn't exist anywhere else in the marketplace today. This centre will make it easier for family members to learn to play and continue to play."

In addition to using a 3-D Doppler radar launch monitor to measure ball flight and club data, the centre offers video motion golf swing analysis with the world's first real time, marker-less gesture recognition system, which combines full body 3-D visualization with interactive feedback.

Students can view their swing from four camera angles, and take their lesson home to study on a DVD.

The six-bay, 6,500-square-foot centre also has a motion balance lab, a putting lab, a fitness room for physical assessments or therapy and a custom club fitting bay staffed by Cool Clubs.

Phenomenal golf. Panoramic mountain vistas. Spectacular desert views. Superlatives slide easily off the tongue when describing this low-density, 3,000-member community.

Distinctive architecture — from Tuscan to Western ranch to Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired Southwestern contemporary — creates elegant and complimentary clubhouses and residences that blend into the natural environment.

Recognized many times over the past decade for its world-class golf courses and country club community (even the pro shops win awards), the club has grown into an international golf mecca with members from The Netherlands, Switzerland, Scotland, Singapore and Mexico. Americans represent 46 states, while 41 of the 90 Canadian members hail from Alberta.

Until November this year, when Desert Mountain celebrates its 25th anniversary, Desert Mountain Club is offering a limited number of golf memberships without the purchase of a home.

Jones says most of the growth in membership is coming from the domestic snowbelt zones and higher-taxed Californians. "We're seeing people who are deciding to downsize to one vacation home or relocate to be nearer to family."

But more appealing than Desert Mountain's size or location, says Jones, is the wide variety of homes, from lock-and-leave casitas to dreamhome estates.

He attributes the club's viability — it turned a profit last year — to the retention of its members. "People have bought in at the entry level and moved up in community multiple times."

Of the 2,436 planned homes, 1,650 have been built, with another 100 in design or construction. Resale prices from \$500,000 US to \$10 million reflect Arizona's hard-hit housing market.

Available sizes range from 2,000-square-foot cottages and town houses to 12,000 square-foot custom homes on 0.6-hectare lots.

In the club management business for 32 years — 13 at Desert Mountain — Jones acknowledges the toll the U.S. economy has taken on the industry, and the need for clubs to keep up with changing member demographics and values.

"We didn't want golf widows. We wanted the club to connect to the daily lives of our members."

Diverse recreational amenities within the 27 gate-guarded villages include a 19,000-square-foot fitness centre and spa, a youth activities centre, three resort-style pools and nine tennis courts with hard, grass and clay surfaces.

Other member services include six restaurants, an on-site concierge and dog park. Within a year, residents will have a 24-kilometre hiking trail system on the remaining 1,200-hectare parcel of land owned by Desert Mountain.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Until Nov. 1, Desert Mountain Club is offering a golf equity membership that doesn't require the purchase of a property.

An initiation fee of \$140,000 US includes a \$20,000 US club credit for use within four years.

Financing is available. Club members (family members up to age 25) will have access to all six courses and clubhouses, tennis courts, swimming pools, hiking trails, six restaurants, the youth activities centre, the fitness and spa clubhouse and the golf performance centre.

Call 1-800-255-5519, or go to the website at desertmountain.com

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