

# GOLF ODYSSEY

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THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO THE BEST IN GOLF TRAVEL

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## TPC Danzante Bay

A Sublime Baja Alternative to Los Cabos



JOANN DOST

The Villa del Palmar at The Islands of Loreto is a great alternative to Los Cabos

As the shuttle drove us along the winding road from Baja California's Loreto Airport to Mexico's newest golf destination, Danzante Bay, we experienced a sudden sense of awe as we rounded a bend and the resort and the bay burst into view. Beyond the jagged cliffs, buttes and spires of the coastal mountains that change color depending on the time of day, a series of small islands rise out of the blue waters of the Sea of Cortez. The brand new Rees Jones golf course emerges from canyons, descends to the beach, and climbs the mountains to a precipice that juts into the sea. We knew instantly we were in for an unforgettable getaway.

On countless prior jaunts to Baja, the 775-mile-long Mexican landmass that lies between the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of California, we've sampled the bounty of Los Cabos at the southern tip of the peninsula. The beachfront corridor between San Jose

del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas is still one of our favorite destinations, but its popularity has led to an ever-expanding string of real estate and resort developments and the crowds that come from such endeavors.

Danzante Bay is not Los Cabos. Yes, it has the same idyllic weather, but if you long for an escape in a supremely beautiful setting that is quieter, more pristine, and less hectic and yet offers great golf and the opportunity to luxuriate in a sparkling resort with a pampering spa, delicious food, and fine service, you should consider focusing your attention 300 miles farther north on the Baja Peninsula. In the tranquil hamlet called the Islands of Loreto, the Villa del Palmar Resort and Spa has been delighting guests since it opened in 2011. The mountains offer wonderful seclusion from the outside world. It may be the jewel of developer Owen Perry's resort collection, but it has reached a new level

since Rees Jones completed work on the TPC Danzante Bay Golf Club in December.

The golf course is absolutely stunning. Jones considers it the most varied and astonishing golf site he has ever seen. When the world's best holes are discussed, the conversation now includes Danzante Bay's 17th, a cliff-top par three that extends out into the bay. Resort guests who've never swung a club hike up to see the hole firsthand, while trophy-hunting traveling golfers are already making pilgrimages to play it.

When we came to Danzante Bay last December, the golf course wasn't the only thing that awed us. The entire Villa del Palmar resort experience is enchanting. The Islands of Loreto lies within a Marine Preserve that is a favorite hideaway for adventure travelers. There's great snorkeling, scuba diving, fishing, kayaking, paddle boarding, hiking, and horseback riding. You can go on excursions to explore the neighboring islands. Of course, if you prefer pure rest and relaxation, you can kick back at the beach and the pools and allow yourself to be pampered at the gorgeous spa.

Danzante Bay is not the easiest place to get to. Alaska Airlines flies from LAX to the small Loreto International Airport (LTO), but the two-hour flights aren't scheduled every day. Another option is to cross the border at San Diego (shuttle transport available) and use Tijuana International Airport (TIJ). Mexican carriers fly to and from Loreto most days. Once you land in Loreto, the resort will pick you up for the 30-minute shuttle ride to the property.

Danzante Bay enjoys splendid sunny weather all year round. Though September is the "rainy season," it seldom rains in September in this desert locale. Overall, temperatures are slightly cooler than Los Cabos.



The **TPC Danzante Bay (Rating: A)**, which is just a short ride in a golf cart up the hill from the hotel, is one of the world's most beautiful golf courses. Jones' routing fits the land naturally as it rambles over and through varied environments. We've always been smitten by the combination of mountains, sea, and desert that Danzante Bay delivers in spades. Much of the front nine delves into dramatic desert canyons and winds around mountain spires. Midway through the back nine Jones takes us to the beach before the climatic climb to the towering bluff that becomes center stage for the par-three 17th.

While Rees Jones isn't exactly revered by the PGA Tour players (just ask Phil Mickelson) and his courses can be exceptionally tough, he delivered on his instructions to build a challenging but unforgettable course resort golfers of all abilities would enjoy coming back to play again and again. Danzante Bay has it all. There's a drivable par four, heroic all-carry shots over canyon chasms, big drop tee shots, tests nestled in the sand dunes by the sea, and, like most great courses, a strong and memorable finishing stretch. On the rare occasions when it rains, narrow waterfalls race down the canyon walls.

JOANN DOST



The 17th hole is one of the world's most spectacular par threes

The par threes stand out. Tucked in the canyon, the first one-shotter of the day plays around the edge of an arroyo. On any other course, the 13th, which nestles in the dunes and culminates at a green right by the beach, would be a signature hole. Here, that honor goes to the 17th. The hole occupies its own spectacular cliff-top peninsula that Perry originally intended for home sites. Located apart from the rest of the course, it was a late addition to the routing.

Though TPC Danzante Bay bares its teeth when the wind blows, anyone who can elevate the ball should find the course manageable thanks to the five sets of tee boxes. Despite the mountain setting and pronounced elevation changes, the fairways are generous. While the groomed turf narrows on the canyon holes and on the daunting home stretch (holes 15-18), sandy areas and friendly contouring help prevent balls from going into the desert. The greens present large targets and welcome run-up shots. In a nod to the wind and user-friendliness, the putting surfaces are slow and not overly undulating.

The pace of play is four hours, but don't hurry—this is a round you may wish never ends. Carts are mandatory, as the holes are spread out. Note that caddies are available but not required. The only charge for their services is a recommended \$50 gratuity.

This course should only get better as it matures. Paspalum grass is used throughout. When we visited the grass was still a bit sparse in some of the fairways.

Danzante Bay's driving range churns through a canyon. It's another scenic treat. Other practice facilities include a putting green and an 18-hole putting course that is complimentary for resort guests.



**Villa del Palmar at the Islands of Loreto (Rating: A)** is a hidden gem in the *Villa Group* of beach resorts that includes locations in Los Cabos, Puerto Vallarta, Riviera Nayarit, and Cancun. We found the property's bay and red-hued mountain setting utterly irresistible. The rooms and suites are housed in three buildings, each of which is six or seven stories tall with bay and mountain views. The entire property is quite contained. You can easily

walk from the hotel buildings to the beach, hiking trails, spa and fitness center. The abundant, service-oriented, English-speaking staff is friendly and well trained.

We stayed in a bay-facing *Deluxe Suite*. These very large, standard, 645-square-foot units come with two queen beds; a couch and a jetted tub in the living area; a kitchenette equipped with a refrigerator, microwave, two-bunker stove, and blender; a spacious bathroom with a shower; and an impressive balcony.

One-, two-, and three-bedroom suites are also available. These larger units feature fully equipped kitchens and soaking tubs in the master bedroom with a separate master shower.

Rates are available for room-only or all-inclusive stays that include meals and alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. Villa del Palmar offers enticing golf and spa packages.



**The Villa del Palmar (Dining Rating: B+)** features three primary restaurants. The most elegant is **Danzante**, a fine-dining steak and seafood house with Mexican accents and flair. The fish dishes stand out, as the catches pulled from the waters surrounding the resort are extremely fresh. We also really liked the *Chiles en nogada*—meat-stuffed poblano chiles bathed in nogada, a walnut cream sauce and garnished with pomegranate seeds and parsley. Note that reservations are required for Danzante restaurant.

**The Market** is a casual buffet-style restaurant open for all three meals. While the setup isn't anything out of the ordinary, the offerings are bountiful and there's always a chef on hand to prepare eggs in the morning or specialty items in the evening. We took advantage of this to enjoy custom-made fajitas.

**Casa Mia**, the resort's poolside restaurant, is a good option for lunch or dinner. The standard menu features Mexican staples—grilled seafood tacos and fajitas—but on certain nights it transitions to Italian fare. At lunch, the hit at our table was the sea bass ceviche with mango and kiwi, served in an avocado glazed with a peppery red sauce.

Since a majority of guests dine in-house throughout their stay, Villa Palmar's all-inclusive option is extremely popular. Of course, the liquor flows liberally as well. The bartenders love making flaming cocktails, but we found the popular mango, basil, and jalapeño martinis and the tamarind margaritas more satisfying.

**Editor's Note:** In-room dining is also available.



The Villa del Palmar features an expansive, uncrowded beach, five contemporary-styled pools (two are adult-only), and the largest Jacuzzi in all of Mexico.



Mountains, desert, and sea make for a jaw-dropping routing

One of the resort's most impressive amenities is its luxurious, 38,000-square-foot Sabila Spa. Since "sabila" is the Spanish word for "aloe vera," it's not surprising that aloe grown right on the property figures prominently in soaking baths and a variety of treatments.

Above all, the resort offers endless opportunities to revel in nature. The surrounding waters, which Jacques Cousteau called the "Aquarium of the World," are a protected marine reserve. With 900 species of fish populating the waters, the scuba diving, snorkeling, and fishing are excellent. If you go on a fishing excursion, a resort chef will be happy to cook up your catch for dinner.

Danzante Bay is a prime spot for whale watching. You may see blue whales, humpbacks, and orcas. Grey whales come to the Sea of Cortez between January and March to mate and give birth to their calves.

Paddle boarding and kayaking are available at the beach. If you want to explore the nearby islands, the resort's activities desk can arrange tours with outside outfitters. It's just a 15-minute boat trip to other islands, but the tours generally last 2-4 hours and include stops for hiking, snorkeling and photos.

Hiking trails wind through the property's desert hills. There are also two tennis courts, yoga and fitness classes, and salsa lessons. A complimentary shuttle goes to the town of Loreto, where the oldest Spanish mission in all of Baja, the 1697 Mission Nuestra Senora de Loreto Concho, is a major attraction.

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**Villa del Palmar at The Islands of Loreto/TPC Danzante Bay**  
[tpcdanzantebay.com](http://tpcdanzantebay.com)

*If you are thinking of checking out Danzante Bay for yourself, there's no better way to experience this great Cabo alternative than to join fellow subscribers and like-minded golfers on a trip planned by our Golf Advisor Getaway partners and hosted by Matt Ginella, Golf Advisor's Editor-at-Large. For a link to all the details, turn to page 12.*

# Southern Ontario's Headwaters Region

## Bountiful Golf and a Boutique Resort Beyond Toronto

ANDREW HUMENIUK

Golf season in Canada may not be long, but moderate temperatures make for idyllic summer and early fall getaways. On our most recent foray north of the border, we headed to Southern Ontario's Headwaters region, located less than an hour northwest of Toronto. While it may not be as topographically or culturally intriguing as other Canadian destinations, it's a fascinating mini mecca for connoisseurs of golf course architecture.



Osprey Valley Golf's three Graham Cooke designs are all Canadian top-100 layouts

Back in the early 1990's, the creators of the wildly popular board game *Trivial Pursuit* enlisted Michael Hurdzan to build the sculpted and strategic Devil's Pulpit and the links-style Devil's Paintbrush. Both are among the finest private courses in Canada. We'll have a review of the thoroughly entertaining Devil's Paintbrush, which can be played if your home pro arranges a reciprocal round, in an upcoming issue. In the public sphere, Toronto-based course architect Doug Carrick designed three starkly contrasting layouts at Osprey Valley Golf. Nearby Hockley Valley Resort, which has its own sporty Thomas McBroom-designed eighteen, is an ideal home base from which to sample all the layouts in the Headwaters region.

Osprey Valley, a true hidden gem, is the primary story here. The argument can be made that with the exception of Cabot Links, no Canadian multi-course public facility offers better golf. All three Osprey Valley layouts are top-100 Canadian courses. When the Heathlands Course debuted 26 years ago, it's dunes, hollows, and fescue grass created an instant sensation. When the sand-laden Hoot and the parkland-style Toot courses came on board in 2000 and 2001, they elevated Osprey Valley to cult status for in-the-know golfers. The facility offers unheard of bang for your buck. With the advantageous exchange rate, the play-all-day green fee of \$180 CDN (\$200 weekends) is a steal.

Osprey Valley doesn't have accommodations, but twenty minutes away you will find the elegant, family-owned Hockley Valley Resort. Hockley Valley started as a ski resort, but now with its golf course, accompanying winery, very good dining, luxurious pampering spa, and indoor and outdoor swimming pools, it has everything you need for a short getaway.

Osprey Valley Golf and Hockley Valley Resort are both just 45 minutes from Toronto's Pearson International Airport (YYZ) when there are no traffic snarls. J. C. Munro Hamilton International Airport (YHM) is about 75 minutes away, but you can make up some of the extra time because it is a much smaller and easier airport to navigate. We've even used Buffalo Niagara

International Airport (BUF) because of lower fares and car rental rates, though it is a 2.5-hour drive to the Headwaters region.

Just keep in mind the golf season, which typically begins in early May, is short. Osprey Valley Golf's three eighteens close this year on October 13.



The links-style **Heathlands Course (Rating: B+)** is Osprey Valley Golf's original eighteen. Doug Carrick emulated the characteristics of links courses he had studied on expeditions to the British Isles and Ireland. Though there are trees around, they are largely out of play on this wind-battered layout. Fescue-covered mounds and dunes form the corridors of each hole, and cross bunkers and some low stone walls further enhance the links ambience. The ground game is very much in play here, as a conscious decision to minimize watering helps keep the fairways fast and firm. Players who use the fairway contouring and feeder slopes around the greens to their advantage tend to score best.

The wind hurts more than it helps on Heathlands. There's no better example of this than the long, bunkerless 6th hole, where it takes two powerful strikes to reach the green in regulation. The layout spreads out on 165 acres, making it the most confined of the facility's three eighteens and also the most walkable. While the fairways aren't tight, the penal nature of the tall grass, which isn't cut in season, scares many players away. If you spray the ball, be prepared to go through a couple of sleeves or more during the round.

**Editor's Note:** After the Hoot and Toot came on board, the routing plan was altered, but this year Heathlands has gone back to the way Carrick originally intended it to be played.

Osprey Valley's second and third eighteens were built together. In contrast to Heathlands, both feature wide fairways that allow you to swing away with abandon on the tee. **Hoot (Rating: B+)**, Osprey Valley's highest rated course, is the most fun to play. Part of the playing field was built on an old gravel quarry. With naturalistic bunkers, a lake and waterfalls on the back nine, and more than 3,000 transplanted pine trees, it's the resort's most picturesque layout.

Carrick sought to mimic the look and strategy of Pine Valley and Pinehurst from tee to green. Sand covers about 15 percent of the playing field. There are no traditional bunkers (and no rakes, either) here, as all of the sand from the fairways to greens is in waste areas that permit you to ground your club. Hoot's large greens are the most benign at Osprey Valley.

Water, in the form of three lakes, enters the fray on eight of Hoot's tests, including the final three. The par-four 17th, which features an elaborate waterfall, is often called the signature hole, but the manmade water feature seems out of character with the rest of the course.

**Toot (Rating: B)** is a traditional parkland-style layout. The course just hosted the inaugural Osprey Valley Open, the first-ever Toronto-area tournament on the Mackenzie Tour—PGA Tour Canada. While trees line the fairways, the woods aren't thick and the corridors are generous, lending a much more user-friendly aspect to the game. Traditional bunkers help provide definition to holes whose gapingly wide fairways are actually tough to miss from the tee.

Like the other Osprey Valley playing fields, Toot spools over mostly flat ground, though it is spread out and not really conducive to walking. Carrick ramps up the strategy around the elevated greens. Toot's putting surfaces are the fastest and trickiest at the complex. While they don't have a lot of undulation, they tilt from back to front and generally roll at about 11 on the Stimpmeter.

Osprey Valley's practice facilities include a driving range and putting green. Though the clubhouse is somewhat spacious, it's not elaborate. The food offerings are primarily snack-bar fare.

Given Canadians' passion for golf, it amazes us that Osprey Valley is still an undiscovered treasure. With the exception of group outings, the tee sheets are seldom crowded. This year a new annual membership program was implemented, resulting in a spike in play. Nonetheless, you can usually call and get a tee time around the time when you wish to play.



You can play links-style golf on Osprey Valley's original Heathlands Course

The fast pace of play makes playing multiple rounds an especially enjoyable proposition at Osprey Valley. The staff in the golf shop does an excellent job of sending groups off so other groups don't bog them down. It's quite common for players to complete rounds on all three courses with light to spare in June, July, and early August.

**Editor's Note:** Youths sixteen and under play for free when accompanied by a paying adult. Seventeen and eighteen-year-olds are charged 50 percent when accompanied by a paying adult.

**Hockley Valley Golf Course (Rating: B-)**, located right behind the resort hotel and adjacent to the resort winery, is a picturesque but quirky Thomas McBroom design from 1990. While the layout is not in the same league as Osprey Valley, it makes for a convenient warm-up or getaway round if you are staying in-house. Whereas some designers doubted whether an eighteen-hole layout could be built on this confined, hilly site that serves as a ski resort in winter, McBroom created a tight, short layout with small greens. Aside from the first and last holes that hug the valley floor, the terrain is all up and down. Most of the front nine plays uphill. From the green on the 9th hole, a short drivable par four, you can look out over the entire valley. In fall, the colors are gorgeous.

The hilly nature of the playing field leads inevitably to a number of blind shots and awkward lies and stances. Several holes are exceptionally tight, and if you miss the fairway your ball will wind up in very thick rough. One of the quirkiest aspects of the course is that all the bunkers feature ornery grass and clover rather than sand. Back in 1990, the course opened before the bunker sand was delivered. To minimize cost and make for easier maintenance, the resort never bothered with the sand. Alas, all the tall grass often slows the pace of play to between 4.5 and five hours on this scenic, sporty track.



Hockley Valley Golf Course rambles over much hillier terrain than the Osprey Valley layouts

as a limited number of more substantial salads and entrées. We ordered steak frites. While the dish was very good, it hardly seemed like a “large plate” option when just two tiny beef tenderloin medallions came with the frites.

Despite its name, **Cabin**, Hockley’s Valley’s dinner restaurant, is more modern than rustic. The ambience is enriched by an elaborate display of wine bottles, a contemporary fireplace, a 16-foot steel and glass chandelier, the chef’s counter, and the exposed kitchen. While the menu isn’t extensive, the cooking is creative and the plates are nicely presented. We recommend the Arctic char and the pan-roasted chicken. Many

of the seasonal vegetables and herb come from the resort’s organic farm.

## LODGING

**Hockley Valley Resort (Rating: A)** has been the pride and joy of the Adamo family ever since they acquired the property in 1985. They’re built it into a four-season retreat that’s a very popular weekend getaway for well-heeled Torontonians. Though we were eager to take the golf course for a test run, more guests are drawn to the luxurious spa, the sophisticated dining, and the indoor and outdoor pools. The staff provides a warm welcome and personal service. Be advised you may need to book early to get the room and dates you desire. Finally, check for a resort package that can save you substantially over à la carte pricing.

Though the boutique-style resort has been through its share of additions and renovations, an air of romance and bucolic serenity wafts through this rural retreat. The contemporary-styled rooms and suites, many of which feature balconies, look out on the pond, the golf course, or the valley. For heightened elegance, the bi-level *Regal/Vice Regal Suites* feature a spiral staircase that leads up to a king bed, Jacuzzi tub, and spacious bathroom. The lower level has a fireplace and a generous living area. These suites also feature double balconies with sweeping valley views.

## RESTAURANTS

**Hockley Valley Resort (Dining Rating: B+)** has three dining options, all of which share the same kitchen. Every morning, an extensive breakfast buffet is set up in **Eighty-Five**. The stylish **Babbo Wine Bar & Patio**, which comprises the lobby bar and lounge and the poolside patio, serves food from 11 a.m. until the kitchen closes. The menu lists a few small-bite dishes as well

## NON-GOLF ACTIVITIES

Hockley Valley’s full-service spa occupies much of the third floor of the hotel. The facility includes very nice co-ed and women’s relaxation lounges with fireplaces, though it lacks a sauna and whirlpool. Be sure to arrange your services prior to your arrival.

The resort has an indoor pool and a heated outdoor pool. A small workout room, located near the indoor pool, features a few cardio machines and some dumbbells.

If you’re looking for additional outdoor activities, Island Lake in nearby Orangeville is a nice spot for hiking, biking, and running. Canoes, kayaks, and paddleboards may also be rented there.

Two years ago, Hockley Valley Resort opened a full-service winery just a kilometer up the road from the hotel. The Adamo Estate Winery’s most popular varietals are a dry Riesling and a Merlot. Tours, tastings, and small plate bites are offered.

### Osprey Valley Golf

ospreyvalleygolf.com; 800-831-1561 or 519-927-9034  
Green fee: \$128 to \$148 CDN.  
Aerification: none in season.

### Hockley Valley Resort

hockley.com; 866-462-5539 or 519-942-0754  
104 rooms and suites from \$290 to \$500 CDN.  
Green fee: \$65 to \$85 CDN.

# Suncadia Resort

## Splendor in the Cascade Mountains

We'll admit that when it comes to golf in Washington, we're smitten with Gamble Sands, David Kidd's wildly fun desert links above the Columbia River in the small town of Brewster. Alas, it's just one course, and it's a four-hour drive from SeaTac Airport. To get the most out of our travels, we sought additional worthy golf that could conveniently fill out a Gamble Sands itinerary or stand as a discreet getaway on its own. Last month, we spotlighted the Club at Snoqualmie Ridge, a stunning Jack Nicklaus private that has a stay-and-play arrangement with Salish Lodge & Spa perched spectacularly at the crest of Snoqualmie Falls. This month, we shine our lens on Suncadia Resort, a Destination Hotel, which is a convenient stopping point between SeaTac and Gamble Sands.

Suncadia somehow flies under the radar, even though it is a 36-hole retreat with contrasting courses designed by Arnold Palmer and Peter Jacobsen-Jim Hardy. Palmer's Prospector Course, a classic Pacific Northwest test that debuted in 2004, is the more challenging of the two and gets the most play from traveling golfers. Jacobsen and Hardy created the resort-style Rope Rider in stages, and it finally opened in 2011. The user-friendly layout incorporates elements of the old coal mining operation that used to rule the site. There's also a private third eighteen within the vast Suncadia property, the Tom Doak-designed Tumble Creek Golf Club, but it is so exclusive that resort guests aren't allowed anywhere near it.

Golf is just one of Suncadia's attractions. The resort, which has changed hands a few times since its creation in 2003, extends over a whopping 6,000 acres in a Cascade Mountain landscape replete with rivers and trails waiting to be explored. Suncadia's menu of outdoor activities is nearly infinite, but if you want to relax and recharge, the resort's Glade Spring Spa is an attraction in its own right.

Suncadia is **Destination Hotels & Resorts'** sister golf property to the likes of Stowe Mountain Resort in Vermont, Landsdowne Resort near Dulles Airport, Sunriver Resort in Central Oregon, and Wild Dunes Resort outside of Charleston. We stayed in the boutique Inn at Suncadia, which conveniently houses the golf shop of the Prospector Course. The romance of the Inn makes it an ideal choice for couples. Families gravitate to the centerpiece Lodge at Suncadia, while those seeking more privacy for a group or family getaway can opt for a Luxury Vacation Home.

SUNCADIA RESORT – A DESTINATION HOTEL



Both nines of the Prospector Course finish behind the Inn at Suncadia

Suncadia sits between the small mining towns of Cle Elum and Roslyn. The latter served as the town of Cicely, Alaska in the hit 1990s television series *Northern Exposure*. The resort is just off I-90, some 90 miles east of SeaTac airport. If you are planning on visiting Gamble Sands, the quickest route from Suncadia is via US-97 North. Much of the scenic 140-mile journey proceeds alongside mountains and the Columbia River.

Suncadia's golf season runs from mid-April to late October, although the interval when both courses are open is much shorter. While play begins on Rope Rider in mid-April, Prospector starts a full month later. Whereas Rope Rider shuts down at the beginning of October, play continues on Prospector through the end of that month.

At 2,500 feet above sea level, this mountain retreat enjoys a short spring before summer sets in. Temperatures get into the 80s on warm days. One great advantage Suncadia has is that since it is on eastern side of the Cascade Range, the mountains block off the wet marine airflow. When it's rainy in Seattle, it's quite likely to be dry and sunny at Suncadia.



Suncadia's first golf course, **Prospector (Rating: B+)**, is an Arnold Palmer design that presents a classic Pacific Northwest test. Since Palmer's team carved the routing through a forest, each hole is secluded in its own woody corridor. While there's some elevation change throughout the routing, nothing is especially dramatic except for the signature par-four 10th. The 10th begins at the highest point on the course and presents a glorious panorama before a big drop tee-shot takes players

down to a sheltered fairway. Rows of mounds in the fairways and rough and elevated grassed protrusions in the bunkers mimic the peaks of the surrounding mountains.

We especially liked the elegant doglegs that present risk-reward challenge. Pinseekers may need to go directly over ponds and deep bunkers, but there's always a way to get to the greens without a forced carry. Just be wary of the ever-present winds of the eastern Cascades that complicate club selection.

Prospector opens in mid-May because it takes longer for the course to recover from the winter. Even after it opens, the first month of play is usually cart-path-only until the playing field fully dries out. Pace of play is typically around 4.5 hours, but on busy days a round can easily push five hours.

Prospector has a driving range and a putting green. The range currently only allows hitting with irons. The golf shop is located in the Inn at Suncadia and the Inn's bar/restaurant is an attractive place to unwind after the round.

**Rope Rider (Rating: B)**, a Peter Jacobsen-Jim Hardy creation, occupies the site of an old coalmine. The course name refers to the miners who balanced themselves on roped coal carts that navigated through dark, steep mine shafts.

In contrast to Prospector, Rope Rider is a wide-open, user-friendly resort layout. While the front nine plays amidst ponderosa pine and deciduous trees, the woods seldom intimidate because the fairways are so generous. On the even more exposed, fescue-framed back nine, the dominant feature is a massive 120-foot-tall, 200-yard-wide mountain of coal tailings called "Tipple Hill." The final three holes wind around this hill that is unlike anything we've seen incorporated into a routing.

Jacobsen and Hardy installed numerous player-friendly design elements at Rope Rider. The course, which tops out at 7,291 yards, is actually 200 yards longer than Prospector, but four regular sets of tee markers and a set of youth tees ensure everyone can take it on from a manageable distance. Lies on this predominantly flat course are usually level. If you can find your ball in the tall fescue, you'll likely have a recovery shot. Bunkering is benign, as many of the traps are shallow and not in the most threatening locations.

Walking is permitted, but given the distance between the clubhouse and the 1st tee and a couple of other long hikes between green and tee, carts are recommended. Jacobsen and Hardy created nine-hole, six-hole and three-hole loops that start and finish by the clubhouse to provide a variety of playing options, though Suncadia only sells nine- and 18-hole rounds at Rope Rider.

Rope Rider lacks a driving range, but since rounds start near the Rope Rider Golf Park, players have an opportunity to drop a few balls and hit wedges. The park features a six-hole short course (holes are 85-120 yards) comprised of six tee boxes and three bunkered greens. Players hit from each tee box once but target



Prospector's signature 10th hole showcases the Cascade Mountains

each green twice. The golf shop insists the putting surfaces are mowed like the greens on the regulation courses. This facility is complimentary for resort guests.

Rope Rider's golf shop is housed next to an antique shop within the Swiftwater Cellars winery/restaurant building.

**Editor's Note:** Rope Rider is closed for maintenance on Tuesdays and Prospector is closed on Wednesdays.

**Tumble Creek Golf Club**, a circa-2005 Tom Doak design, is Suncadia's private eighteen. Doak normally doesn't do courses around real estate, but he made an exception for this 7,300-yard minimalist layout. Towering pine trees line the fairways of this parkland-style course that has small greens. Play is extremely sparse and there are no reciprocals at this gated club.



We stayed at the cozy and romantic **Inn at Suncadia (Rating: A-)**. The gorgeous lobby features a large fireplace, a stylish bar that is the centerpiece of the Inn's Gas Lamp Grille, and a rousing view of the golf course. Checking-in is a personalized, concierge-style experience; we were immediately upgraded to a more spacious room and granted a late checkout. The recently updated rooms and suites are rustically elegant. Amenities include gas fireplaces, soaking tubs, and balconies with rocking chairs. Note that the Inn is not staffed in the early morning or later evening. If you need anything during these hours, you'll have to get assistance from the front desk of the Lodge.

Most resort guests stay in the family-friendly **Lodge at Suncadia**. This six-story hotel is reminiscent of the lodges in Washington's national parks. Accommodations range from standard hotel-style rooms to studios, one- and two-bedroom suites, and penthouse suites. Most units feature kitchens, gas fireplaces, and balconies. A

few have outdoor hot tubs. The largest (2,500-square-foot) three-bedroom penthouse sleeps up to 10. Although the Lodge units are privately owned, they all feature uniform comfortable decor.

Suncadia also has a rental pool of privately owned **Luxury Homes** that are ideal for families or groups seeking more privacy. These two- to six-bedroom residences are part of the expanding Suncadia village community. Decor and amenities vary from house to house. You can get full details of each property on the Suncadia website. Note that in order to gain access to the resort facilities, you must rent a home directly from Suncadia.

Suncadia imposes a resort fee of \$33 to \$108 per night, depending on the size of the accommodation. The fee covers transportation within the resort, fitness center access, Wi-Fi access, local calls, and more.



We were surprised **Suncadia (Dining Rating: B)** doesn't have more restaurant options. The casual, family-friendly flagship restaurant, **Portals**, located in the Lodge, is open for all three meals. Dinner staples include burgers, ribeye steak, and wild king salmon. The best tables are by the picture windows that showcase a view of the mountains. The adjacent **Fifty-6 Degrees Lounge**, which has indoor and outdoor seating, features creative seasonal cocktails and the Portals' menu.

The **Gas Lamp Grille**, located in the lobby of the Inn at Suncadia, is open from 11 a.m. to either 6 or 8 p.m. every day but Wednesday. This is also Prospector's 19th hole. The limited menu includes brie, a couple of salads, burgers, fish n' chips, and three kids' dishes.

We enjoyed our best meal at **Swiftwater Cellars** in the Rope Rider clubhouse. Seating options at this restaurant/winery include the restaurant proper, a fireside lounge, and the large terrace. Though the grilled beef tenderloin is the house specialty, we gleefully tucked into the succulent *Pioneer Coffee Crusted Rack of Lamb*, served with roasted parsnips and Brussels sprouts. We paired it with Swiftwater Cellars' most popular wine, the Proprietary Red, a Cabernet Sauvignon with hints of ripe raspberry preserves. Note that Stillwater Cellars is under separate ownership from Suncadia Resort and does not allow charges to be billed to resort rooms.



Tipple Hill is the dominant feature on the Rope Rider Course

For less expensive off-property options that exude local charm, head to Roslyn. Your first stops should be **The Brick**, for happy hour, comfort food, and historic ambience, and the **Roslyn Café**, which famously appeared in *Northern Exposure* and features very good, creative cooking.



One of Suncadia's hubs is the Swim and Fitness Center, which is centered on a lagoon. Facilities include indoor and outdoor pools and a superb workout area. You can rent kayaks, canoes, and paddleboards to use in the lagoon. The resort also just unveiled its brand new Nelson Farm Pool, where features a lazy river in addition to a large outdoor pool and whirlpool.

The resort boasts 50 miles of paved bike paths and a full array of hiking trails. It's fun to rent a mountain bike or moped and explore the resort, the mountains, and Roslyn and Cle Elum. The mopeds max out at speeds of around 35 mph. Suncadia also hooks guests up with local outfitters for guided fly-fishing excursions (half-day drift trips on flat-bottomed boats are quite popular), horseback riding, ATV tours, and tours that explore the mining history of Roslyn.

After all these active pursuits, the resort's very fine Glade Spring Spa beckons with its full range of treatments and a tranquil outdoor glade with mineral soaks and a sauna.

#### **Suncadia Resort**

destinationhotels.com.suncadia-resort; 866-904-6300  
 Prospector 866-715-5050; Rope Rider 509-649-6450  
 330 rooms, suites, and homes from \$245 per night.  
 Green fee: \$59 to \$129.  
 Aerification: none in season.

# Making Golf Better: Small Changes Make For a Big Difference

Golf isn't just a sport or a game. It's also a service industry—part of the hospitality trade. Anyone who travels and sees a lot of golf courses knows how important small things are when it comes to making a day at the golf course memorable and worthwhile. That's especially the case in such a competitive environment where there are too many courses and consumers have lots of choices. Those who benefit from the “flight to quality,” flourish. Those who don't, die.

So, here's a guide to getting small things right—and wrong.



The Cradle is Pinehurst Resort's new nine-hole Gil Hanse-designed short course

## Minimize the Welcome

Maybe some golf guests need orientation. But I've been victimized by well-intended chatty hosts to the point of distraction. At Doral one time, prior to the present ownership, the guard at the front gate talked me up in my car as a line of approaching vehicles backed up onto the street. Equally annoying is the long-winded speech on the first tee by the starter/ranger who all-too-often presumes you've never played the game before or driven a cart. Less isn't more. It's just less in such situations.

## Early Amenities

I'm always stunned by golf resorts that don't make a full breakfast available before 7 a.m. What, after all, is the point if you can't properly eat before early golf? A place that doesn't accommodate early golf tells me it's not serious about its golf course. The same could be said for a range that doesn't open until after the first tee times. How much trouble could it be to set out a few golf balls for the folks who want to get a start on their golf day?

## Interesting Practice Grounds

It used to be that a warm up range with flags at 100-150-200+ was adequate. Now expectations have come to include multiple, green-like targets starting at 50 yards. In-city clubs that didn't make the mistake of selling off land for quick revenue a few decades ago now find themselves able to add short-game areas and the occasional par-three layout, even if it's only three or four holes. It's all a way of capturing trade, keeping it on the grounds for an extra hour or two, and spawning a grow-the-game initiative where it works best—at the course itself.

## Flag Colors

This is a big thing with me. I detest the red/white/blue scheme for golf courses. It's a bad formula, invariably set up on a rotating basis of front/middle/back each three holes. Besides, as a color value, blue blends into the background. With golfers having all sorts of access to various yardage guides, more help isn't needed. Besides, whatever happened to old-fashioned judgment as an element of the game? Yellow is far and away the best color for a flag for contrast and starkness. Checkered flags, with half of it white or black, are hopeless. French Lick Springs-Dye Course does a lot of things right, but its half white/half green course flag isn't one of them.

## Simple Information

Years ago, at the Jack Nicklaus-designed National Golf Club in Southern Pines, I stumbled for the first time upon fairway sprinklers denoting yardages to the front of the greens. This necessitated additional use of a pin sheet for the day—a process I found time consuming and pretentious, since it assumed play to the hole and not more sensibly to the center of the green. I know a lot of places think that daily pin sheets add an elite level of professionalism to the round. To me, it's unnecessary morning work for the staff and a waste of time (and paper) for all but a handful of players. Simple yardages to the center of the green should suffice, as long as they are painted on clearly; facilities where the sprinklers include distance to the front and back of the green end up shrinking the print size and are harder to read quickly. By the way, when Pinehurst Resort took over The National and rebranded it as Pinehurst No. 9, they removed those yardage

sprinklers and replaced them with the resort's trademark mid-fairway discs (blue-200, white-150, red-100) and red/white/yellow flags for the greens.

### Barber Poles

Some people think they are cheesy. I love them as 150-yard markers for their ease of spotting and the fact that at public courses they immediately orient a tee shot.

### Par-Three Set Up Variety

This is a big reveal. I see too many courses where the set up for my tees—whatever they are, it doesn't matter—leads me to hit three 8-irons and a 6-iron to the par threes. Equally annoying is the need to set up a hole at, say, 160 yards each day because that's what it says for some color marker, so when the hole is cut up front they move the tee back and when the hole is back they move the tee up front. Instead of playing it 160 yards all the time, how about varying "the same hole from the same tee" so that one day it's 140 yards and the next day it's 180 yards?

### Optional Carts/Optional Walking

Public facilities will often include the price of a cart in the green fee because it saves on having to charge (and hand over to collectors) the state sales tax. They also figure that "everyone rides anyway." Actually, this ends up providing incentive for more people to ride than would be the case if they decided to buy à la carte. Please, let consumers decide. And don't tell me, as many operators do, that they include carts because it facilitates pace of play. Folks who walk know how to keep up because they tend to be traditionalists who grew up walking. Better yet, provide pull carts (at a modest fee, if need be) and encourage walking as an option.

### Chatty Caddies

I'm a former caddie and know a good looper when I have one. I also know when they talk too much and think they need to entertain you in order to justify their three-digit fee. At most resorts the caddies are way overpaid. Contrary to popular sentiment, the No. 1 rule in caddie-dom is not "show up, keep up, shut up." Actually, it's "know thy player and provide service accordingly to their individual needs." Some players need hand-holding and extreme counseling. Others simply need the occasional read of a putt and yardage to the center (and whether it's better to miss short or long).



In Las Vegas, Rio Secco stopped using T-Mates female caddies in 2016

### Real Service

As a former service worker at every level (caddie, taxi driver, restaurant, hotel) I recognize real help and am gracious about tipping for service. But if I get swarmed after a round by someone ready to clean my clubs I always ask them if they have a dry end to the towel and not just a completely wet one because I don't want wet clubs getting packed off for travel lest they rust. That's pretty basic common sense, yet I almost never find those swarming helpers properly equipped. A really thoughtful place would outfit its parking lot staff accordingly.

### Marshals Who Marshal

What's the point of being told the pace of play is 4:15 unless there's someone out there capable of urging slow pokes along—politely, of course? Kudos to those facilities with tactful rangers who are accessible and forward thinking, and who occasionally act as ball spotters on those holes where wayward tee shots are commonplace.

### Millennial Discounts

This deserves a separate column, but the golf industry is toying with fiscal suicide by offering discounts to folks at the far end of their productive work lives who have (presumably) accumulated some retirement funds, IRAs, and/or a nest egg. Meanwhile, your average millennial is asked to pay full fare when everyone knows they have no assets other than their immediate wage. How about some creative budgeting to offer the most financially-stressed sectors of the population a meaningful incentive to play?

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## COMING IN THE MONTHS AHEAD...

Treasures of the Scottish Highlands; Dorset Field Club in Vermont; Michigan's Gull Lake View Golf Club & Resort; and Kiawah Island Golf Resort

## SECRETS FROM THE WORLD OF GOLF TRAVEL

### The Greenbrier Adds a Short Course to its Golf Lineup

If you tuned in to any of the PGA Tour's annual stop at The Greenbrier in July, you saw the venerable West Virginia retreat in all its glory. This historic resort is about to add still more luster to its golf lineup when The Ashford Short Course comes on board at The Greenbrier Sporting Club on August 22. Unlike other offerings at the Sports Club, this nine-hole par-three test will be available to all resort guests.

The new layout is yet another example of the trend of resorts and clubs to build short courses that can be played quickly, are great for honing your game, and exude a more low-key and relaxed ambience than regulation courses. The Ashford Course checks off all those boxes while fitting in seamlessly with The Greenbrier's historic aura. Resort Superintendent Kelly Shumate designed a strategic layout with shared greens, template holes such as Punchbowl, Redan, and Reverse Redan, and a finishing test that is a version of the famed 9th at Myopia Hunt Club.

Holes range in length from 76 to 112 yards on a flat valley floor. The greens will be maintained to the same standards and roll comparably to the putting surfaces on the Old White, Meadows, and (private) Snead eighteens.

Walking is mandatory on The Ashford Course. It's an easy walk—greens and tees connect together and there's very little elevation change. Rounds should take less than an hour to complete.

The Greenbrier expects The Ashford will be used as a warm-up for those who have rounds on the regulation courses, and by those trying to shore up their short game. The resort also hopes it will be favored for family outings where children and novices can learn the game.

A shuttle will take players from the main hotel to the course. Note that non-member tee times are limited. Resort guests will be able to commence play each day during an hour-long block in the morning and from 2 to 3 p.m. in the afternoon.

[greenbrier.com](http://greenbrier.com)

### Adena Golf & Country Club Abruptly Closes

Just as we were about to go to press we learned of the sudden closure of Adena Golf & Country Club, an exclusive private club that we featured in our April issue. The move came without any warning, as a sign appeared on the Adena gate and the club website immediately disappeared. The Adena Golf Course, which owner Frank Stronach laid out around and through two quarries in Ocala, had gained recognition as one of Florida's finest eighteens.



Limestone rock formations lend intrigue at Big Cedar Lodge

Playing conditions were always pristine. A superb staff ensured everything was just right for members and guests. Adena welcomed pro-to-pro reciprocal rounds and was even contemplating transitioning into a boutique resort. We hope, somehow, Adena can be resurrected.

### Golf Advisor Getaways—Next Up Arcadia Bluffs and Big Cedar Lodge

If you want to take the uncertainty out of planning your next golf trip, come join a guided Golf Advisor Getaways excursion to one of the world's premier golf resorts. Golf Advisor's travel experts have crafted unforgettable VIP itineraries so you can simply relax and enjoy the experience. Not only will you play outstanding courses, you'll revel in luxurious lodging, gourmet dining, and rich amenities. The hosts of these getaways are Matt Ginella, Golf Advisor's Editor-at-Large, and *GOLF ODYSSEY*'s golf architecture editor, Brad Klein. This year's lineup includes: **Arcadia Bluffs** (August 27-29); **Big Cedar Lodge** (September 9-12); **Reynolds Lake Oconee** (October 21-24), and **TPC Danzante Bay** (December 6-9). For details and questions, visit [golfadvisor.com/getaways/](http://golfadvisor.com/getaways/) or call or email Chelsea Brummett at 407-516-6874 or [Chelsea.brummett@golfchannel.com](mailto:Chelsea.brummett@golfchannel.com).



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Golf Advisor Getaways' Danzante Bay trip is December 6-9