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NEW MEXICO

There's a new age of golf in New Mexico

By Ken Van Vechten
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Georgia O'Keeffe knew a good thing when she painted it, and paint she did -- a magical landscape called northern [New Mexico](#). Today, strokes of a different form are in order, and for sun-bleached desert golfers accustomed to Vegas or [Phoenix](#) or [La Quinta](#), a New Mexico getaway is the equivalent of having three guys surnamed Woods, Woods and, um, Woods filling out your best-ball foursome. The prices are astonishing, the golf is righteous and the weather is superb. And that altitude? Hitting a 9-iron 156 yards uphill to a back-left hole tucked behind enough bad stuff to make Odysseus finch is never a bad thing.

Paa-Ko Ridge Golf Club

1 Clubhouse Drive, Sandia Park

(866) 898-5987, www.paakoridge.com

What's notable: The highest-rated course in the state, many say.

What's cool: It's a tossup between the vistas and the golf itself.

What it costs: \$59 to \$114 (Summer 2009 nonresident 18-hole adult rates)

Who designed it: Ken Dye

Paa-Ko is the type of course any avid golfer, regardless of ability, would be satisfied to play daily, though it devours a larger-than-usual number of balls. The course darts in, out and about the juniper and pine woodland, with nothing flat or boring or typical. The perched greens are a thing to behold, while a newer nine introduces Western mountain rangeland into the equation. It also offers more than the standard number of holes (27). In a word: joyful.

Pueblo de Cochiti Golf Course

5200 Cochiti Highway, Cochiti Lake

(505) 465-2239, www.golfcochititoday.com

What's notable: No urban intrusions. Not a one.

What's cool: Locals call it "Heaven with a ZIP Code."

What it costs: \$28 to \$62

Who designed it: Robert Trent Jones II

Whereas Paa-Ko is of the mountains, Cochiti is textbook New Mexico -- high desert and pinyon, mountains on every horizon,

cobalt sky, marshmallow creme clouds. The course is rife with Jones family imprimaturs -- room to roam off the tee and strategic short par 4s. It is rumored a 14-handicap recently played Cochiti, shooting a 39 on the front nine and tallying a total of 90 and he didn't even get mad. Land of Enchantment indeed.

Black Mesa Golf Club

115 State Road 399, Espanola

(505) 747-8946, www.blackmesagolfclub.com

What's notable: Picture the Dakota badlands, with a golf course draped over them.

What's cool: The road there goes through Santa Fe (tip: Café Pasqual's).

What it costs: \$82 to \$89

Who designed it: Baxter Spann



With folks lazing about the veranda of the ranch farmhouse-style clubhouse, there's a sense of some bizarre warp in the space-time continuum. At any point you just know Laura Ingalls is going to saunter by shouldering a set of Mizuno irons and a 460-cc driver. Such is the rural charm of this place. But all the Saturday night hoedown sociability ends on the first tee, as 18 holes of frolic and fun lie in wait. The course is tough, and a winner.

Pinon Hills Golf Club

2101 Sunrise Parkway, Farmington

(505) 326-6066, www.fmtn.org/pinonhills/

What's notable: The fact that there is a golf course this good this far off the beaten path.

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