

GOLF

Golfers embrace heat when fees, crowds drop at Arizona courses

Phoenix Summer Golf Deals and Desert Survival Tips



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Corrections & Clarifications: *Grayhawk general manager Joe Shershenovich's name was misspelled in an earlier version of this article.*

Bob Laxton stood on the fairway at Cave Creek Golf Course in Phoenix and assessed his upcoming shot.

It was 10:30 a.m. on Wednesday, July 8, and already the temperature was hovering at 101 degrees.

"Where's the shade?" said Laxton, an avid golfer and grounds crew worker at the course, explaining his heat strategy. He was playing with other workers on a day off.

"There's a few trees out here so first and foremost you have to find the shade, then track the water," he said. "I go through about two Styrofoam cups each 9 holes so I'm staying hydrated, but I love it out here."

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Laxton is among a hearty breed of Arizona golfers who, undaunted by the heat, take to the links during summer, willing to brave the triple-digit heat in exchange for lower green fees and fewer crowds.

Rates at golf courses throughout the Phoenix area typically drop significantly during summer compared to peak season in winter and early spring. And that presents an opportunity for summer golfers, even at some of the premier courses in the Valley, where winter rates and crowds can be a bit too much.

Throw in a covered golf cart, enough water and sunscreen, and it's all fine for many golfers.

"You stand on the fairway it's not as hot," said Joe Shershenovich, general manager of the Grayhawk Golf Club in north Scottsdale, which includes two high-end courses and is open to the public. "Guaranteed it's cooler on any part of our course than in the desert or any part of the city."

That attitude is shared by Jim De Witt, an avid golfer the past nine years who also was playing at Cave Creek on that July 100-degree day.

"More people should come out here," De Witt said of the city of Phoenix course at 19th Avenue and Greenway Road. "It's cooler out here at Cave Creek than it is in the parking lots of these shopping centers and what not."

Arizona's golf industry had a \$6 billion economic impact, based on a 2021 study by the Arizona Alliance for Golf (AAG). In all, 16.6 million rounds of golf were played that year, while supporting nearly 66,200 jobs that provided \$2.3 billion in wages and generating \$518 million in state and local tax revenue.

During summer, as crowds lessen and rates drop, golfers find it far easier to secure tee times, even coveted morning starts.

That's something Todd Tanksely, who also works at Cave Creek, finds attractive about playing in the summer.

"There just aren't any crowds, man," said Tanksely, who was playing a round. "The summer is great, you get more bang for your buck, you can really just enjoy playing, take it all in, and for me it's a chance to get in the lab. But it's really just fun golf,

when the course gets packed in the winter it just becomes a slog, now, I can enjoy it."

Aaron Doss, another Cave Creek employee and regular golfer, embraces the game this time of year.

"It's just quiet," Doss said. "It's so peaceful and I think sometimes as golfers you lose that in the winter when these courses are packed."

At Cave Creek, a Phoenix municipal course, summer weekday rates are as low as \$29 in the morning and \$24 in the afternoon, with carts extra. That compares to more than \$70 during the winter.

Grayhawk's in-season rates can cost a few hundred dollars, but fees around \$85 will get you on one of the top Scottsdale courses on a July afternoon.

Grayhawk is owned by Dallas-based Arcis Golf, which operates nine courses in the Valley that are open to the public, including Kokopelli in Gilbert, where morning and afternoon tee times around \$30 can be found during summer compared to \$85 to \$100 for prime tee times in February. Summer 9-hole morning deals include breakfast.

At McDowell Mountain Golf Club in north Scottsdale, another Arcis course, afternoon times for \$44 with cart are available for Arizona residents on weekdays. That compares to \$75 for an afternoon time and \$100 or more for a morning time in February.

Robert Pancratz, facility manager at Cave Creek, noted other specials are often offered at the muni on top of posted rates.

"Our fees come down from what the high point of the season in January, February and March," Pancratz said. "We reduce those rates about 40%. We have very inexpensive rates for the kids; we're only charging about \$12 right now for kids to come and play."

Shershenovich noted special add-ons or deals on top of posted rates are common in summer.

“Consumers are smart so they’re always looking for value,” Shershenovich said. “There’s facilities adding meals, packaging things like that, that make sense this time of year, and people love it.”

Shershenovich noted that summer deals are designed for local residents.

“The benefit really goes to the residents,” Shershenovich said. “The people that live here really get from middle to late April through the summer. With the daylight, the availability, and the access, that’s what they want, and what they get excited about.”

It’s that access that has summer golfers like De Witt coming back for more.

“In the wintertime you just sit around and wait,” De Witt said. “In the summer I’m usually done in two and a half hours. Don’t get me wrong, it is hot, water helps a ton, but I’d have to be sick to not come out here.”

Shershenovich said summer golf is starting to attract more visitors looking for deals at prime courses.

“If you would have told me 10 years ago people would be traveling to Arizona in the summer as a destination, I would have found that hard to believe,” Shershenovich said. “And summer golf is a big part of making Arizona that summer destination.”

