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## Some new golf courses opened in 2017 are faring better than others: Here's what your reviews say

Brandon Tucker | December 26, 2017



*No. 2 on the nine-hole, par-3 Chief Egan course at Retreat & Links at Silvies Valley Ranch*

The golf development business certainly had a noticeable pulse in 2017. Courses of all sorts opened from coast-to-coast, as well as internationally. They include premium private clubs, destination courses, total rebuilds on older courses, short courses and munis.

We're even seeing golf courses as centerpieces of residential developments gaining steam in the thought-to-be-overbuilt markets like Arizona and Florida.

Our Golf Advisor staff visited many of these [new courses in 2017](#). And for those we weren't able to get to (yet), golfers like you did and provided insightful reviews.

Some of these new courses are being universally praised. In other cases, they opened too early or aren't living up to the hype quite yet. Here's a snapshot:

### **Streamsong and Silvies Valley Ranch highlight new resort courses**

[Streamsong Black](#) is by many accounts the most notable opening of 2017, thanks to being designed by Gil Hanse and the third leg of what is becoming one of the top remote golf getaways in North America, yet is probably the most convenient being 60-90 minutes from the Tampa and Orlando metros.

We've received four reviews of the Black so far and they're all 5 stars. Ethan Zimman, a Virginia Local Golf Advisor, was particularly blown away by the massive greens:

Old Macdonald at Bandon Dunes usually lays claim to having the largest average green size in North America. However, the greens on the Black course are on HGH (Hanse Growth Hormone). There are greens on the Black course that make greens on Old Mac look like a postage stamp. Not to mention they are wildly undulating. Overall, the course is great. But at least know what you're getting into before you get overly excited about 4-putting all day.

While Streamsong was the most covered course opening in 2017, perhaps the most curious is in eastern Oregon at Silvies Valley Ranch. The Dan Hixson design is reversible but with additional wrinkles to it (Jason Deegan explains it better than I can in his column).

Deegan visited the opening and played the course both ways. In his reviews, he preferred one routing over the other. We're curious if anyone else out there made the trip to this ambitious and remote getaway in 2017. If you have, we'd love to hear from you.

Back to civilization in the Midwest, Michigan is a golf market that is famously over-supplied, yet keeps introducing new, high-profile courses. [Stoatin Brae](#), the newest of six courses at the Gull Lake View resort in southwest Michigan, continues to receive up-and-down reviews. Some think the Renaissance Golf Design layout is too tough and needs more grow-in time, while others adore it. The fairest review of the eight we've received so far is a 4-star review by 'Doveman':

Very nice course that will continue to improve over the summer and in the coming years. Fair layout. The greens ran smooth but not overly fast. By design it is a rugged, natural, links style golf course. No trees to speak of, rolling hills, some blind tee shots. Not much else like it in southwest lower Michigan. It all adds up to a very enjoyable round of golf. Worth it.

Meanwhile, in western Pennsylvania, Nemaocolin Resort revealed the brand new [Shepherd's Rock](#). Mike Bailey [attended the grand opening](#). The layout is a remarkable one, but reviews by the general public have not been terribly kind so far. Wrote "[Torodeleste](#)":

Played here while visiting Nemaocolin. After two rounds on Mystic, my wife and I decided to give this new course a chance. Having recently opened, it is very immature. Fairways and greens are not developed. Therefore, many crazy bounces and uncertain rolls on greens. The degree of difficulty combined with these factors led to many unfair holes. However hard it was, it was also beautiful. Not for average golfers as the elevations and side hill lies will wear them out. My wife loved Mystic but will not return to Shepherds.

### **Residential courses debut in Arizona, Florida**

More than just resort courses are opening. Residential community courses are coming back, too. Two located in top golf destinations received an eye-popping amount of reviews, and the vast majority were very positive.

In the Phoenix West Valley, the follow-up to what is now called The Founders Course at Verrado is the [Victory Course at Verrado](#). With over 130 reviews this year, its overall score is 4.4/5 and course conditions were the strongest subcategory (off-course amenities are lagging). Arizona Local Golf Advisor 'dhume419' is a fan of his new area course and wrote:

Victory has become one of my favorite courses...The landscape on the front nine is like playing on the moon. The stark scene with grey, white and tan rocks and washes all around gives this place a unique look and feel. The course is rife with interesting holes and layouts too. From the No. 2 par 3 where you feel like you are shooting to a green lined with rock statues to the finishing No. 18 where you shoot from an elevated tee across water and then progress to a green seated in a rock cathedral, there are unique touches to just about every hole. The fairways and greens are immaculate and have been each time I have played. I just enjoy the experience and look forward to the round each time I play here.

Back east in the Tampa area, [Lakewood National](#) is a brand new layout by Arnold Palmer design and part of the growing Lakewood Ranch community. Over 180 reviews have been written in 2017. Both conditions and layout are 4.5/5 while Staff Friendliness is 4.8/5. Wrote '[Heronscourt](#)' in October:

A cracking course which is apparently going to be supplemented with another 18 holes. It's a new course and fairway and greens condition is superb, greens at 10 on the stimp. Pace of play will never be great as there a number of long travels between green and next tee. The 4 star rating for course layout reflects this and the fact that there are a couple of silly greens with extreme slopes which are totally ridiculous and mean that part of the green is totally useless. Nevertheless we'll play there again until as with so many other courses it becomes fully private.

### **Premium muni: Bayou Oaks South at City Park**

We're still awaiting the Chuck Corica municipal course rebuilt by Rees Jones to reopen in Northern California, but another long-awaited muni rebuild finally opened this spring: [Bayou Oaks South at City Park](#). I had the chance to tour the design a week before it opened, but had to leave my clubs in the trunk. Golf Advisor has received 10 reviews so far. A muni operated by TPC with a premium price tag, and moreso for non-residents, some reviewers seem to think it's overpriced. The best review comes from '[BigBoudreaux](#)' who wrote:

First time playing the new Bayou Oaks course and man was it a beauty. The greens were in pristine condition and rolled true. The fairways and bunkers were immaculate. I loved the huge low hanging oak trees and the way the course followed all of the natural lagoons. The club house is brand new and really compliments the course well. The course is still young, but I would say that it needs "Landscaping additions"- Pine needles or mulch under the oaks, flowers and marsh grass to liven up some holes. The driving range is getting an upgrade, but right now its a cow pasture.

### **Short-course delights**

Pretty soon, the story in golf travel will be resorts that have yet to build a short course. It's a fantastic trend, and you wonder what took so dang long to do it. Pinehurst added The Cradle, while Big Cedar Lodge added Mountain Top. [Mountain Top received one 5-star review](#):

Wife and I played this walking only course and had a ball. This is the perfect course to play with your spouse or children that have some golfing experience. You have a choice of where to tee off to make yardage fit your game. Longest hole is just over 200 yards at the tips. Scenery is fantastic and you can see the two new courses being built in the distance. Nice pro shop and restaurant. You know its a great course when the on-course restroom had heat and AC!

In Scottsdale, Arizona, the 18-hole executive course [Mountain Shadows](#) was entirely rebuilt, and reviews have been pretty positive so far, particularly for Pace of Play (4.5/5). Said 'Vingolfer':

This is the first time I've played Mountain Shadows since its major renovations. The course is really short - no holes more than say 150 yds. Course is beautifully maintained, play is fast, and the experience pleasant. I booked here because I am getting back into golf after a year hiatus. If you like par-3 golf or need to re-introduce yourself to the game this is the course for you!

### **Private courses**

One wonders if the recent tax reform passed by congress in late-2017 will spur high-end spending and more club investment. A few notable privates opened this year, with the most notable being Trinity Forest in Dallas. I was fortunate to play it this spring as part of a [springtime private clubs hot streak](#). I really enjoyed it, but it [wasn't easy](#):

Despite having a caddie, I felt a little brain overload standing on some of the tee boxes. There are a lot of bunkers and angles to consider. Everything isn't as in front of you as some of C & C's resort courses, and the ball can certainly roll on zoyzia fairways meant to have some fire in them. That said, this is a members club, and one that local PGA Tour players are already joining (in fact, one was in the clubhouse when were there), so a little bit of nuance and complexity in the design is certainly warranted.

Meanwhile, The Glacier Club debuted in Colorado. Mike Bailey [attended the opening](#) and awarded it five stars in his review.

### **New reasons to get your passport**

Our staff made it to three new golf courses outside the country in 2017, two of which opened very late this fall.

First off, you may remember the bizarre developments in Bahamas at Baha Mar. It was originally planned as a TPC facility but the property folded and took a couple extra years to get to the finish line. What has emerged is a high-end resort experience. [Golf Channel's Nick Menta visited the course for us](#) and detailed their push for "all-inclusive golf:

The \$275 green fee is plenty high on its own, incentivizing you to spring for the \$325 all-in package, which comes with your choice of rental clubs — PXG, Itobori, Titleist, TaylorMade, Callaway — ProV1 golf balls, an engraved bag tag, and a drink in a take-home thermos. The club would prefer you to take advantage of the all-in experience, and it's absolutely worth the moderate up-charge if you were already willing to pay the greens fee. Bottom line: if you're willing to spend the money, go for the full package. It's a substantially better value.

On Mexico's Baja California peninsula, Rees Jones (yes, he's a busy guy) unveiled Danzante Bay. Our Mexican golf expert, Senor Deegan, updated his [Top 10 courses in Mexico](#) and Danzante is right in the mix.

Lastly, during my staff and I's recent visit to Dominican Republic, we took an afternoon detour from Casa de Campo to [La Romana Golf Club](#). While a little rough around the edges, the course is a bargain compared to D.R.'s top shelf and has some promise as well as four oceanfront holes. Deegan and I awarded the loop three stars. Even this brand new resort facility added a 9-hole short course — a trend that's catching on big-time in 2017.