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Golf Outposts: Which remote golf destinations in America are worth the effort to find?

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At 161 yards, the sixth hole on Bandon Dunes is one of the shortest par 3s at Bandon Dunes Golf Resort. (Jason Scott Deegan/Golf Advisor)

The trend of building new golf courses in the most rugged, remote and outlandish locations in America continues.

This summer, I traveled to two golf courses so new that my GPS couldn't get me to either of them. When I tried to turn on a road that I thought led to the Sand Valley Golf Resort in Nekoosa, Wis., I was greeted by a sign that read "Road No Longer Exists" with the proper directions to the resort. A month later, I was sure I was lost en route to the Retreat & Links at Silvies Valley Ranch in Burns, Ore. I'd already driven three hours from Redmond/Bend International Airport. There was still no sign of civilization, only mountains, rocks and sagebrush as far as my eye could see. Turns out, it was right around a corner less than 10 minutes away.

To find these new resorts, golfers have to be modern-day explorers, a Ponce de Leon with clubs. The only way developers can find cheap land with the proper aesthetics - two requirements to building new courses in today's climate - they must go off the grid. Nobody recommends a *build it and they will come* business plan, but seeking out a new golf outpost remains one of the joys of the game.

The world is filled with remote golf destinations - Tasmania's [Barnbougle Dunes](#), King Island's Cape Wickham, Scotland's [Machrihanish Golf Club](#) on the Mull of Kintyre, Ireland's [Ballyliffin Golf Club](#), New Zealand's [Cape Kidnappers](#), and Canada's [Banff Springs](#) and [Jasper Park Lodge](#) in Alberta, and the Nova Scotia trio of [Cabot Links](#), [Cabot Cliffs](#) and [Cape Breton Highlands Golf Course](#). America has its share, many of them fairly modern. The word 'remote' means several things in this story: Not only are these destinations a challenge to get to by plane or car for those who don't live in the region, but there is not much else around them, either, in the way of more courses or other signs of civilization. It's just wilderness, desert or mountains and little else. In some cases, golfers must drive several hours to find the nearest course.

With that explanation out of the way, here is my latest version of 'Deegan's Dozen', 12 of my favorite remote golf destinations in the continental United States. They're all well worth the effort to find.

Bandon Dunes Golf Resort, Bandon, Ore.



Best way to get there: Golfers on the East coast can get to Ireland and Scotland easier than they can to Bandon. It's a five-hour drive from the Portland International Airport, three hours from Medford Airport, and just under three hours from the Eugene Airport. It's only 35 minutes from the Southwest Oregon Regional Airport, a tiny outpost on Coos Bay in North Bend, but North Bend (OTH) only offers seasonal routes through Denver and a couple times a week year-round from the San Francisco International Airport.

Courses: [Pacific Dunes](#). [Bandon Trails](#). [Bandon Dunes](#). [Old MacDonald](#).

Resort: Developer Mike Keiser's vision for a links golf destination in southern Oregon has exceeded everyone's expectations. In the eyes of many, it has overtaken Pebble Beach Resort as America's top golf destination. All four courses - plus the 13-hole, par-3 The Preserve - offer views of the ocean. Wild weather can make the walking every round difficult but memorable. Everything - the menus, the caddies, the accommodations - was built with buddies trips in mind.

Michigan's Upper Peninsula



Best way to get there: The Marquette County Airport (64 miles) is the first choice for reaching The Island Resort & Casino in tiny Harris unless you want to make it a fall trip that includes a Packers game (the Green Bay Austen Straubel International Airport is 111 miles south). This is the best home base for the 'Perfect 4-Some' golf package that will tour the best courses of Michigan's unique U.P.

Courses: Greywalls course at Marquette Golf Club. TimberStone Golf Course at Pine Mountain, Sweetgrass Golf Club. Sage Run.

Resort: The Hannahville Indian Community's casino resort is nice, but it's the diversity of the golf that is the region's calling card. When it opens in 2018, Sage Run will be the second Paul Albanese design at the resort. With a signature island green, Sweetgrass, the host course of the Island Resort Championship, a Symetra Tour "Road to the LPGA" tournament, will be tough to top. TimberStone is the ultimate backwoods course with tight, tree-lined fairways that climb up and down a ski hill. Greywalls, a Top 100 course by Mike DeVries, delivers views of Lake Superior and rugged, rock-walled fairways.

Retreat & Links at Silvies Valley Ranch, Burns, Ore.



Best way to get there: For the Top 100 chaser, flying into the Redmond Airport in Bend means you can play the [Nicklaus course at Pronghorn](#), [Crosswater at Sun River Resort](#) or [Tetherow Golf Club](#) on either end of the trip. There are two routes to get to Silvies, the 167-mile scenic route through the Ocho National Forest (where I almost ran out of gas) or the slightly longer (183 miles) but higher-speed-limit Highway 20 through Burns. It's a three-hour-plus drive either way, even from the Boise Airport in Idaho (221 miles to the east).

Courses: [Craddock course](#), [Hankins course](#). [Chief Egan](#) nine-hole, par 3 course.

Resort: This 34-room Old West escape shares 140,000 acres with a working cattle and goat ranch in the high desert of eastern Oregon. Your phone won't work, so put it away for some star-gazing, Polaris tours, goat herding, gun shooting or good ole R&R. A spa, fitness center, pool and [McVeigh's Gauntlet](#) (a seven-hole extreme course) are scheduled to open in 2018. Dan Hixson's reversible Craddock and Hankins courses are playable and scenic but need a bit more grow-in time. The golf season is super short at such high elevations with crisp mornings even in summer.

Streamsong Resort, Bowling Green, Fla.



Best way to get there: The Tampa International Airport (65 miles) is probably first choice over the Orlando International Airport (90 miles) overrun by families with children.

Courses: [Streamsong Red](#). [Streamsong Blue](#). [Streamsong Black](#).

Resort: Hidden among the old phosphate mines of central Florida, Streamsong has brought together the holy trinity of modern minimalist architects - Tom Doak (Blue), Gil Hanse (Black) and the team of Bill Coore/Ben Crenshaw - to thrill golfers with dynamic, walking-only courses that play like inland links with sand dunes to boot. The Black debuts this fall, so it will be interesting to track the chatter about which course is the consensus favorite of the masses. The 216-room Lodge has a contemporary feel and nice rooms with a few unique design twists. Twelve other guestrooms are available in the clubhouse.

Lajitas Resort & Spa, Lajitas, Texas



Best way to get there: The closest commercial airport to Lajitas is the Midland International Airport (250 miles away), which has nonstop flights from Dallas, Houston, Austin and Albuquerque, N.M. Resort Air Services (www.resortairservices.net), a Dallas-based private air charter, has started offering service to the private airport at Lajitas. Its Embraer FJ-135 aircraft can accommodate groups up to 30 passengers, providing service from Dallas, San Antonio, Houston or from other locations in Texas.

Course: [Black Jack's Crossing](#).

Resort: Lajitas embraces its remote locale in the Big Bend National Park in southwest Texas. A host of activities, like skeet shooting, hunting, jeep tours, rafting, mountain biking and fishing, complement the golf. Replacing the original course lost to flooding several years ago, Black Jack's Crossing (named for Gen. John Pershing) is far better. The routing by Lanny Wadkins showcases more than a half dozen elevated tees, where views extend 50 miles in almost every direction. Lining the paspalum fairways are an endless array of mountains, buttes, mesas and other rock formations ('lajitas' means 'flat stones').

Sand Valley Golf Resort, Nekoosa, Wis.



Best way to get there: The Dane County Regional Airport near Madison (90 miles) is the closest option, but if you want to hit The American Club in Kohler and/or the [Erin Hills Golf Course](#) in Hartford along the way, the General Mitchell International Airport in Milwaukee (174 miles) could work, too.

Courses: [Sand Valley](#). [Mammoth Dunes](#).

Resort: Keiser has created something from nothing in a hurry in central Wisconsin. The sandy, rolling hills and dunes - formed centuries ago with the draining of a glacial lake - are ideal for golf. All of the courses will be walking-only, much like Bandon Dunes. The Coore/Crenshaw course and nine holes of David MacLay Kidd's Mammoth Dunes debuted in 2017 with an unnamed 17-hole par-3 course by Coore/Crenshaw coming soon. Seventeen rooms attached to the clubhouse are less expensive than the more spacious accommodations in several nearby lodges. While you're here, you might as well branch out to see [SentryWorld](#), [Wild Rock](#) or [Lawsonia Links](#) like I did on [a great Wisconsin golf trip this summer](#).

Northern Michigan's top 100 duo: Arcadia Bluffs and Forest Dunes



Best way to get there: Traverse City Airport is only 50 miles from Arcadia Bluffs in Arcadia and 67 miles from Forest Dunes in Roscommon.

Courses: Forest Dunes Golf Club. The Black and Red courses at The Loop at Forest Dunes. Arcadia Bluffs Golf Club. The South course at Arcadia Bluffs (a [preview here](#)).

Resort: Northern Michigan is littered with grand golf resorts and past Top 100 selections, but the hottest names are currently Arcadia Bluffs and Forest Dunes, not only for their highly coveted original courses but their new additions that are essentially one-of-a-kind in resort golf. The two properties are 109 miles apart without much else around them: Arcadia Bluffs on the shores of the Lake Michigan and Forest Dunes buried deep in the Huron National Forest. The South course by Dana Fry/Jason Straka will open in 2018, showcasing the linear lines (think square greens and rectangular bunkers) of the Chicago Golf Club. Arcadia Bluffs just opened a second lodge this summer to add more rooms, similar to what Forest Dunes has recently done in expanding accommodations. Most golfers who play The Loop by Tom Doak forward one day and backward the next can't get over how different the same piece of land feels.

The Prairie Club, Valentine, Neb.



Best way to get there: When I visited in 2012, I flew into Eppley Field in Omaha (317 miles away), so I could see the Michigan-Nebraska play college football that October weekend. Great Lakes Aviation, a small commercial service available in several large international airports, flies into Pierre Regional Airport in South Dakota (152 miles away) and the North Platte Regional Airport in Nebraska (132 miles away). A private runway is located in Valentine 17 miles away.

Courses: [Pines course](#). [Dunes course](#). [Horse course](#).

Resort: Inspired by the famed [Sand Hills Golf Club](#), the private course by Coore-Crenshaw in Mullen, Neb., the Prairie Club was built from Cleve Trimble's 2,500-acre ranch property in the Sandhills near the South Dakota border. Wild, blowout bunkers and maddening greens define the dueling par-73 designs dating to 2010. The Pines, designed by Graham Marsh, dives into the narrower confines of a ponderosa pine forest hugging the Snake River Canyon. The Dunes, routed by Tom Lehman and Chris Brands, boasts some of the widest fairways in golf. Golfers playing the 10-hole, short Horse course by Hanse call their own shots, playing from any tee to any green on the site. Guests hunker down in the 31-room lodge, 12-room Bunkhouse or one of the four cabins overlooking the canyon.

The Lodge at Primland, Meadows of Dan, Va.



Best way to get there: While the Charlotte Douglas Airport in North Carolina (124 miles) is the largest airport with the most flight options, the Piedmont Triad Airport (70 miles) in Greensboro, N.C., and the Roanoke Regional Airport (80 miles) in Virginia are closer. Even the nearest runways for private jets - Blue Ridge Airport in Martinsville, Va., and the Mt. Airy-Surry County Airport in Mt. Airy, N.C. - are still 45 minutes away. Primland has an exclusive relationship with Summit Helicopters of Roanoke, Va., if you want to make a memorable entrance to the resort and also offers discounts to customers of NetJets.

Course: Highland course.

Resort: The design by Englishman Donald Steel is fraught with danger, from rattlesnakes to one of the highest slope/ratings (150/75.1) in the country. The surrounding scenery of the Blue Ridge Mountains cures all the stress of a bad score. The cedar and stone Lodge will feel like home with its 26 spacious rooms and suites. For a truly special experience, stay in one of the three Treehouses overlooking Kibler Valley and Dan River from an elevation of nearly 2,700 feet. Outdoor lovers can hunt or shoot sporting clays, try fly-fishing or tennis, kayak, ride ATV trails, or go hiking, biking, geocaching and even tree climbing. By night reach for the stars with a "Tour of the Universe." The Primland Observatory, atop the silo of the Lodge, houses the largest telescope on the East Coast.

Minnesota's Iron Range



Best way to get there: Is there a best way? The Duluth International Airport (60 miles) is the closest with the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (208 miles) and the Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport (147 miles) doable for those who want to hit other Top 100 courses in Brainerd (read about [my recent trip here](#)) or a few business meetings in the Twin Cities.

Courses: [Quarry at Giants Ridge](#). [Legend course at Giants Ridge](#). [Wilderness at Fortune Bay](#).

Resorts: The Superior National Forest in the Iron Range of Minnesota has attracted outdoor lovers for decades. Golf came roaring onto the scene from 1997-2004 with the construction of three courses designed by Jeff Brauer and now managed by Troon Golf. The Quarry, the state's top public course, was built on the site of an old sand and gravel mining operation in Biwabik, Minn. It is served by the 67-room Lodge at Giants Ridge, along with one- to four-bedroom condos. The Wilderness at Fortune Bay in Tower, Minn., roams the shores of Lake Vermilion. The 173-room casino hotel features 25,000 square feet of gaming. The biggest gamble will be anybody who books a fall trip hoping to see the leaves changing color and getting gob-smacked by unpredictable weather instead.

Sugarloaf Mountain Resort, Carrabassett Valley, Maine



Best way to get there: The winding mountain roads make the Portland International Jetport (119 miles) and Bangor International Airport (102 miles) feel farther than they are. Both drives take about three hours. The private Sugarloaf Regional Airport, Carrabassett Valley, is seven miles away.

Course: Sugarloaf Golf Club.

Resort: The largest ski area east of the Rockies is also home to one of Robert Trent Jones Jr.'s earliest achievements, the Sugarloaf Golf Club. Riding 300 feet of elevation change, this mountain brute (151 slope) ranks among the five toughest courses I've ever played and also among the most beautiful. RTJII named the first six holes of the back nine that frame the Carrabassett River the "String of Pearls", one of the great nicknames in golf. The drop-shot tee balls on the par-4 10th hole (90 feet) and par-3 11th hole (125 feet) are simply exhilarating. A 119-room hotel, condos and an inn keep guests comfy in this extreme environment.

The Oasis at Death Valley, Death Valley, Calif.



Best way to get there: Death Valley feels light years from the neon lights of the Strip, but the McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas (118 miles) is the surest bet to get there. LAX (272 miles) is a long ways away.

Course: Furnace Creek Golf Course.

Resort: Xanterra Parks & Resorts has changed the resort's name and is spending plenty on capital improvements in 2017. Over the course of the year, both the AAA-rated four-diamond, 66-room Inn (1927) and 244-room Ranch (1933) properties will undergo major improvements and enhancements in accommodations, public spaces and facilities, accessibility, landscaping, energy and conservation. Playing the lowest course on the planet (214 feet below sea level) attracts many golfers to this outpost. The course, dating to 1927 and redesigned by Perry Dye in 1997, has already received a major renovation, creating more natural "waste" bunkers, landscaping and "hazards." The 6,236-yard, par-70 layout is playable now, but should be ready for prime time in spring 2018.