

[Top 20 Golf Destinations in America](#)

Patrick Koenig

August 4, 2019

This is the first official pjkoenig ranking of America's best public golf destinations. I urge you not to take this lightly. All of the spots listed here MUST be considered when planning any proper golf buddies trip. Maybe your brother is getting married, or maybe your best friend from college just got divorced. Perhaps you just want to get weird with your golf buddies. In all of these situations, a golf trip is required and it is a big deal.

For this ranking, only public destinations are considered and all private golf clubs will be completely ignored. When planning a trip for 8 or more golf buddies, it would be foolish to assume that greater than 1% of the golfing population can put together a day of 36 holes at Shinnecock Hills and National Golf Links on Long Island. As you can imagine, this caveat eliminated a lot of great golf destinations.

This list is much more than a quick slideshow of the traditional destinations. This list has been carefully calculated and avoids bias as much as humanly possible. I even managed to overlook the food poisoning that I received at Pinehurst in 2018.

I simply filled in the numbers and let the destinations fall where they may. The list below takes the following 5 criteria into consideration and they are weighted accordingly. The full matrix is at the end of this post.

- **Golf (50%)** - As it should be, the actual golf is the most important criteria on this list. Quantity and quality of golf are both of premier importance.
- **Entertainment (20%)** - From live music to local dive bars, you gotta find something to do after the sun goes down. A wide variety of options is also important. Not everyone likes to get blacked out drunk and line dance to country music.
- **Value (15%)** - Most large groups of golfers span across a pretty good income range. A destination is going to move up the list if you can bring your hilarious, but homeless buddy Steve and still manage some good golf.
- **Convenience (10%)** - Getting to the destination and getting from course to course is considered in this criteria. Nobody wants to ride with your buddy Bill while he farts in the car for 7 hours. A lot of big cities were eliminated given the difficulty of keeping the trip golf centric.

- **Golf Experience (5%)** - How cool are the overall golf vibes? Does the destination have a fun short course? Are there goat caddies? It is the unique and fun aspect of the game that is measured here..
-

#20 - Michigan

It could actually be a crime to put an entire state this good at the bottom of any list. However, it is important to keep in mind that even making a list this exclusive is a massive accomplishment. When it comes covering the state of Michigan, you have a handful of great golfing areas. Here are the hotspots.

- Arcadia Bluffs - perhaps the most scenic golf course in Michigan has a new friend with the new south course opening in 2018.
- Boyne Highlands - The Heather & Arthur Hills both deliver some heat.
- Forest Dunes - Tom Doak's reversible golf course, The Loop, and Tom Weiskopf's classic design.
- Grand Traverse - Jack Nicklaus' The Bear

Depending on how you set up the trip, there can be a decent amount of traveling involved on a buddies trip to Michigan. I scoured the entire state over two weeks on the RGV Tour. Check out [the recap here](#).



The aptly named Arcadia Bluffs in Michigan.

#19 - Coer D'Alene, ID

I told myself, I wasn't gonna do it. Don't use the floating island green as the poster boy for this destination. But I did it anyways. It's just such a cool thing that everyone should experience. It's not just the floating island green that will get your attention, all of the par 3's at Coeur D'Alene Resort are top notch. A round at nearby Circling Raven makes this a serious destination. Aside from the golf, you have a casino nearby and one of the country's most beautiful lakes available for water sports. There is also a quaint little downtown for eating and shenanigans. We rocked the karaoke scene pretty hard. You can read about the full experience on the [blog recap here](#).



The floating 14th at the Coeur D'Alene Resort Course.

#18 - Streamsong Resort, FL

Although this little slice of golf heaven is rather difficult to get to, it holds everything that a group of golf buds could desire. Most importantly, it has some seriously good golf. The new Black course by Gil Hanse adds to an already impressive lineup of the Red and Blue courses designed by Coore & Crenshaw and Tom Doak, respectively. With on course lodging, Streamsong ups the convenience factor with stay and play options for booking.



Gil Hanse's Black course at Streamsong



The red course shines.



The Blue course's signature 7th hole.

#17 - Myrtle Beach, SC

For good reason, Myrtle Beach has been on the golfer's map for decades. With options for beach activities and summer time goodness, you will have a swinging good time in Myrtle Beach without playing any golf at all. Fortunately, there is plenty of good golf to find in the area. Here are my go to courses in one of my favorite states.

- Caledonia and True Blue - Two outstanding Mike Strantz designs. If you can only play one, play Caledonia.
- Barefoot Resort - Fazio, Dye, Norman, and Love designs await your golf party.
- The Dunes Golf & Beach Club - One of RTJ's finest designs. Private club that allows unaccompanied play through www.myrtlebeachgolf.com.

You can read about these courses and more on my RGV Tour journey through [South Carolina](#).



Mike Strantz's Caledonia.

#16 - Kiawah Island Resort - SC

Number 16 on the list is a personal favorite of mine. Ever since I first played the Pete Dye designed Ocean Course as a kid, I have been smitten with the bold oceanside layout. If you only play the Ocean Course itself, your group is guaranteed to have an experience that they will remember for years. Fortunately, the resort has 4 other great options to round out your golf experience with Cougar Point, Osprey Point, Turtle Point, and Oak Point. The point is... there is plenty of good golf to play at Kiawah Island.



Kiawah Island's Ocean Course.

#15 - Big Cedar Lodge - Branson, MO

The Big Cedar Lodge in Branson, MO is an up and comer on the list of golf destinations. With a lot of the construction coming in the last several years, the finished product will be a serious golf force on the golf trip list. Check out this hot fire course lineup.

- Ozarks National - Coore & Crenshaw design
- Payne's Valley - Tiger Woods design
- Buffalo Ridge Springs - Tom Fazio Design
- Top of the Rock - Jack Nicklaus designed par 3 course
- Mountain Top - Gary Player designed short course

Since Big Cedar Lodge is technically a Wilderness lodge, golf is not the main focus. A quick scan of the "things to do" section revealed about 20 non golf related activities.



A giant sinkhole has been excavated in front of the range at The Top of The Rock.





#14 - Palm Springs, CA

When you look at Palm Springs from an airplane, you see a desert landscape punctuated with seas of green. As you examine those green seas closer, it becomes very clear what the city's priorities are. Hundreds of golf courses tell you that Palm Springs love it's golf. With so many options to chose from, how do you decide? Here are my top 5 public Palm Springs golf courses.

- The Classic Club - An Arnold Palmer design that has hosted the Bob Hope classic numerous times.
- Escena Golf Club - A high quality Jack Nicklaus design
- Desert Willow Golf Club - The Firecliff course is one of my favorites in the area.
- Silver Rock Golf Club - An Arnold Palmer design set right up against the mountainside.
- Indian Wells Golf Club - The Celebrity and Players course. You know which one you are.



Silver Rock is one of my favorite picks for Palm Springs golf.

#13 - Sand Valley, WI

Sand Valley is a part of the Dream Golf umbrella that includes places like Bandon Dunes and Cabot Cliffs. So it is safe to say that the formula for success is alive and well at Sand Valley. With 2 championship layouts and a short course already in place, this destination will only improve as time moves forward and new golf is added. The lodging is also deliciously close to the golf courses and the dining is just as tasty. On my last visit, I had the cheese curds for three consecutive meals. Check out my full recap from my latest [visit here](#).



Coore and Crenshaw's Sand Valley

#12 - St George, UT

Some of the most visually striking golf courses in America are in the St George, UT area. With amazing National Parks nearby, you've got a pretty cool opportunity for an all world golf destination.

- Sand Hollow - The top of my list. The back nine is like nothing else in the country.
- Wolf Creek - If there is such a thing as a golf roller coaster, this course would be it.
- Sky Mountain - Sleeper pick alert!! Views this good do not come under \$50. I walked it for \$32.
- Coral Canyon - Another good looking gem.



The 14th hole at Sand Hollow

#11 - Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail - AL

Throughout the fine state of Alabama you will find a sprinkling of high quality golf courses all designed by Robert Trent Jones. It is the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail and It is without a doubt, the greatest value for golf in the entire country. There are 10 golf courses in total and you probably won't have time to play them all, so you will need to plan your route accordingly. You can read about my selections and the time we spent on the [trail here](#).

We decided to parlay our golf trip with an Auburn v Clemson football game. It was tailgates, Motel 6's, and too many visits to the Waffle House. It was a slammin' Alabama good time.



The opening hole on Capitol Hill's Judge course. One of my RTJ favorites.

#10 - The Greenbrier - White Sulphur Springs, WV

The Greenbrier is the oldest resort on this list and it's a great place to soak up some golf history ambiance with your golf bros. The Greenbrier is the site of the 1979 Ryder Cup and is the old stomping grounds of Mr. Sam Snead. It's also one of the few places that the public can play an original Seth Raynor design. For the golf architecture fanatics in your group, this should be a big deal.

Head on out to Slamming Sammy's after your round on the Old White TPC or the Meadows course.



The Old White TPC course at The Greenbrier.

#9 - Silvies Valley Ranch, OR

At Silvies Valley Ranch they have caddies that are goats. That is right I am talking about goat caddies. This fact alone should be enough for you to start planning your trip. But Silvies takes it a step further by providing some incredible golf to go along with those goats. Dan Hixson has designed a reversible championship course that plays wildly different depending on the day. There is also a challenge course and a 9 hole par 3 course. The only bad news is that this destination earns the honor of the most difficult destination to get to. You can read the entire story [on the resort here.](#)



Bruce the goat caddy eyes and assesses the golf action.



#8 - Bend, OR

It's the second destination in Oregon on this list and if you know anything about golf destinations, you know that it won't be the last. There is a ton of really good golf packed into the Bend area. The top hits are below.

- Pronghorn Resort - Nicklaus has designed a real beauty in the high desert.
- Brasada Ranch - When golfing with your bros at Brasada, It's customary to say "Hey nice shot, Brosado!"
- Tetherow - You will either enjoy the challenge of this David Mclay Kidd design or you will curse his name and throw your clubs in the lake.
- Crosswater - A big and bold Cupp and Fought design.
- Sunriver - Two beauty's with the Meadows & Woodland Course

You can view the full list of Oregon [courses here](#). I got em all covered.



The Nicklaus Course at Pronghorn.



Brasada Ranch



The finishing hole at Crosswater.

#7 - Las Vegas, NV

As much as you might want to ignore Las Vegas as a serious golf destination, you simply cannot do it. Aside from the neon lined fairway called Las Vegas Blvd, there is a lot of high quality golf to be played in the area. Here is my quick list of the places that should be considered on your Vegas golf blowout. I would also recommend throwing your hungover buddies into a rental car and driving the hour out to Wolf Creek. If you can't find some fun afterwards on the boulevard, then I don't know what to tell you.

- Coyote Springs - Underrated Nicklaus course but worth the hour drive.
- Shadow Creek - \$500 green fee and must stay at an MGM property. Time to cash in your blackjack winnings.
- Cascata - The nearly \$300 green fee will set you back, but at least it's not \$500
- Paiute Golf Resort - The Wolf, The Sun, and The Snow: 3 Pete Dye designs worthy of the 30 minute drive.
- Bal Hai - Close enough to see the strip but not close enough to slice your drive onto it.



Tom Fazio's Shadow Creek



Paiute's Wolf Course



Nicklaus' Coyote Springs

#6 - Pinehurst, NC

Even at #6, I was surprised that Pinehurst didn't finish higher than it did. With the resort recently making improvements to course #2 and the opening of a great little par 3 course called The Cradle, the resort has really brought itself up to speed with the modern golfer. In addition to the resort, which has 9 golf courses, there is also a wealth of other options that I would list as must plays.

- The Dormie Club - Coore & Crenshaw design. Never heard one bad word about it.
- Tobacco Road - A bold and fun Mike Strantz design. Might be the most fun golf course in the world.
- Mid Pines - Donald Ross masterpiece.
- Pine Needles - Another Donald Ross masterpiece.



Pinehurst gives you a nice little carry bag to use for your round at The Cradle par 3 course.

#5 - Scottsdale, AZ

Golfers like to visit Scottsdale for the PGA Tour's Waste Management Open in January or Baseball's Spring Training in March. Either way, Scottsdale is an obvious destination of choice for those stuck in the doldrums of winter across the rest of the country. With so many courses to decide from, I am here to make things easy.

- We-Ko-Pa - Two of the best public golf courses in the desert await. This is my top of the list.
- Troon North - The Pinnacle & Monument courses are often referred to as the best public options for golf in Scottsdale. Troon doesn't disappoint.
- Wickenburg Ranch - Don't forget to play the short course, Little Wick as well.
- Ak Chin Southern Dunes - This one is worth the 30 minute drive.
- TPC Scottsdale - Go for the final four holes. You won't remember the first 14.
- Quintero Golf Club - Some seriously fun and scenic golf holes from Rees Jones

4 years ago, I wrote one of my first blog posts about a golf bros trip to Scottsdale. [Read it here.](#)



A double rainbow over the 11th hole at Southern Dunes



Wickenburg Ranch



We-Ko-Pa is my go to option for public golf in Scottsdale

#4 - Lake Tahoe, NV

Scoring high in the value and entertainment categories is the stunningly blue Lake Tahoe. However, the location is perfectly suited for a serious golf buddy blowout. Just rent a house in the area on VRBO or AirBNB and golf your little heart out. With casinos in the south lake area and a more reserved, quiet vibe up north, Tahoe works for just about everyone. Lake Tahoe is a serious powerhouse destination. You can read about [my latest visit to Tahoe here.](#)

- Edgewood Tahoe - Home of the American Century Celebrity Golf Championship. A true Tahoe gem.
- Old Brockway Golf Course - Former hang out of Frank Sinatra & Dean Martin. Scene of the first Crosby. A 9 hole must play.
- Old Greenwood - A solid Jack Nicklaus design. A local favorite.
- Grays Crossing - A Peter Jacobsen/Jim Hardy designed championship golf course.
- Coyote Moon - Some fun holes, some weird ones, great views abound.



The 16th hole at Edgewood Tahoe

#3 - Pebble Beach, CA

With green fees consistently over \$300 for the top golf courses on the Monterey Peninsula, this destination does not score high in the value category, but quite frankly it didn't matter. It's Pebble freakin' Beach. Dubbed by many as the greatest meeting of land and sea, Pebble Beach is every bit as good as you have heard it to be. Here are the must plays in the greatest zip code in golf. It's 93953 in case you were wondering.

- Pebble Beach Golf Links - Probably worth the \$550 green fee.
- Spyglass Hill Golf Course - I've heard many local caddies say that they believe Spyglass is better than Pebble Beach.
- Pacific Grove Golf Links - The front nine will leave you wondering, the back nine will blow you away. \$39 for twilight is a ridiculous deal.
- Bayonet & Black Horse - Not on the Pacific Ocean, but close enough.
- Spanish Bay Golf Links - Listen to bagpipers pipe their bags as the sun goes down over the Pacific Ocean.
- Poppy Hills Golf Course - A renovation in 2013 brought back Poppy Hills into relevance.



The 17th at Pebble Beach Golf Links



The 2nd and 3rd holes at Spyglass Hill



The 14th hole at Spanish Bay



Pacific Grove Golf Links is on my list of must plays in Monterey.

#2 - Destination Kohler, WI

Wisconsin is the best state for public golf in the United States. It's got the premier golf courses, the unique courses, and several value courses all in the mix. I just can't get enough Wisconsin.

Right at the epicenter of the Wisconsin golf storm is Kohler, Wisconsin. You have the Straits and Irish courses at Whistling Straits and the River and Meadows courses at nearby Blackwolf Run. If that's not enough to satisfy the golfer's soul, here are 3 other locations that deserve a visit.

- Erin Hills - US Open stunner
- Lawsonia Links - It's gotten some well deserved attention in recent years, but this classic design should not be missed.
- Sentry World - The world famous flower hole will blow you away.

You can read about my first visit to [Wisconsin here](#).



The flower hole at Sentry World features a new floral design each year.



The 16th hole at Erin Hills



The 16th at Whistling Straits

#1 - Bandon Dunes

At the top of the list it's Bandon Dunes in a runaway victory. With the anticipated addition of Bally Bandon Sheep Ranch in 2020, Bandon Dunes is only getting better. It's gonna take a golf miracle to oust this destination from the top of the list any time soon.

Bandon checks all of the boxes and checks them hard. Let's closely examine the winning performance in our five categories.

- Golf - Bandon Dunes has outstanding variety mixed with tremendous quality.
 - 4 top 100 golf courses all in the same place.
 - The Punchbowl - A massively fun putting green course
 - Bandon Preserve - The country's best par 3 golf course.
- Entertainment
 - The Bunker Bar
 - McKee's Pub
 - If you are feeling really adventurous you can head into downtown Bandon. Arcade Tavern is where the action is.
 - The fire outside of McKee's
 - Night golf
- Value - \$250 per round with a replay rate of \$125. Your 3rd round of the day is free and Bandon Dunes will give you \$100 if you manage to play a fourth round on that same day.
- Convenience - Not hard, but not easy to get to. Once you are on the property, everything is quick and easy.
- Golf Experience - Everything about Bandon Dunes is tailored to be about the game of golf. It's golf as it was meant to be.



	Golf - 50%	Entertainment - 20%	Value - 15%	Convenience - 10%	Golf Experience - 5%	Total
Bandon Dunes	10.00	8.20	9.30	9.50	9.30	9.45
Wisconsin	9.70	8.80	8.90	9.20	9.40	9.34
Pebble Beach	9.90	8.10	8.10	9.50	9.10	9.19
Lake Tahoe	9.30	8.90	9.10	9.30	8.80	9.17
Pinhurst	9.50	9.00	8.10	9.60	8.70	9.16
Scottsdale	8.90	9.80	8.60	9.80	9.50	9.16
Las Vegas	8.80	10.00	8.80	9.20	9.60	9.12
Bend	9.40	8.40	9.20	9.30	8.50	9.12
Silvies Ranch	9.50	8.70	8.80	8.30	9.30	9.11
Greenbrier	9.10	8.90	9.00	9.50	9.40	9.10
RTJ Golf Trail	9.10	8.50	10.00	9.20	8.50	9.10
St George	9.00	9.00	9.10	8.90	9.10	9.01
Sand Valley	9.60	7.50	9.00	8.40	9.20	8.95
Branson	9.20	8.80	8.20	9.10	9.00	8.95
Palm Springs	8.90	8.90	8.50	9.70	9.40	8.95
Kiawah Island	9.50	7.90	7.90	9.20	8.80	8.88
Myrtle Beach	8.50	9.20	9.10	9.40	9.00	8.85
Streamsong	9.50	8.00	8.00	8.20	9.30	8.84
Coeur D'Alene	9.10	9.00	7.10	9.10	8.90	8.77
Michigan	9.30	7.50	8.20	8.90	9.20	8.73