

CLIFFTOPS, CRAGS, AND CAN YONS: RED ROCKIN' GOLF

Golf in St. George, Utah may be under golf's radar right now, but her best-kept-secret status is emerging into a destination with unbelievable golf. With a red rockin' terrain that is out of this world, reasonably-priced green fees, terrific dining options, and a number of nearby national parks, this truly is a must-visit for any golfer.

The cream of the crop is the Sand Hollow Resort's spectacular 27-hole facility. Stunning mountain vistas and native red rocks surround the blend of challenge and exuberance. The Championship Course was designed with former PGA Tour player John Fought; it tests all of the shots in your bag and all of the space between your ears. The layout is as vibrant as the panorama with red sand in each of the bunkers and greens that are ominous with undulation. The back nine features holes that simply take your breath away, and if you are not careful, Sand Hollow will snatch your ProVI too.

The 432-yard 12th hole is implausible for a Chicago golfer. A red rock fortification and a prodigious cliff frame the dramatic par 4. Save you selfie moment for the approach shot. A picture from the edge of the cliff to the green will serve as a lasting memory of this unfathomable hazard. The long approach to a well-guarded, multi-tiered green may just leave you in tears if you are above the hole. At the elevated tee on number 13, you will find a riveting 300-yard, drivable par 4. Take a deep breath; this hole belongs on a picture calendar. The par-3 15th hole offers a variety of tee boxes, but you should select the markers between the enormous rock outcroppings. This is an unbelievable perspective to a dance floor that appears to be hanging off the bluff. If you make it through this stretch with the same ball, then you will no doubt waltz back into the clubhouse for your favorite cold drink.

The state of Utah has yet to host a major tournament on the PGA Tour, or the Ryder Cup, but believe me, Sand Hollow would be an incredible podium to stage what the world's best could do on this dazzling design.

Sand Hollow is also home to a fun, 9-hole links course. At almost 3,700 yards from the tips, this is a tamer layout than its big brother, but it is certainly no pushover! A unique option in playing here is to try tackling the course with a set of replica hickory golf clubs, which are available in the pro shop. The "Hick Sticks," as they are affectionately called, encourage



you to enjoy playing the game with the tools from the game's golden age. With the best 19th hole see-scape in golf, finish your 27-hole day in Sand Hollow's modern clubhouse with a tasty meal seasoned with fresh commemorations of visual rapture on the course.

With its impressive red rock backdrops, thought-provoking greensites, and expansive views of Snow Canyon State Park, The Ledges Golf Club offers first-class golf that is harmonious with the rugged southern Utah landscape. Matt Dye, the nephew of the one and only Pete Dye, designed this 7,200-yard track. Undulation and sweeping views of the canyon are at the forefront of this dynamic layout. The greens can be slick and quick, with a variety of tough pin positions making them a bit on the "Dye-a-bolical" side. An interesting side note: Utah native and Champions Tour Star Jay Don Blake likes to hone his game at The Ledges. Be sure to experience the 19th hole known as the Fish Rock Grille, and named after a cool rock feature on the course that resembles a fish. And there are indeed some great seafood items on the menu!

Acclaimed golf architect Keith Foster laid out one of the best courses in Utah at Coral Canyon Golf Course. The course begins with two par 5s, and the opening hole is fair and reachable in two swings. A birdie here can get your round started in the right direction. The second hole calls for precision from tee to green, and par is a great score. There are a number of elevated tees on this entertaining design providing breathtaking views of Bryce Canyon's snow-capped, pink spires in the winter and Zion National Park's green springtime bloom. This course is certainly one of the tops in town, and a must-play on your visit to St. George.

There are a couple of other courses that will surprise your wallet because they are municipal facilities. Green Spring Golf Course is a wild ride up and down and around the outskirts of the nearby town of Washington. The front nine features a couple of incredible shots over the canyon at holes 5 and 6. The back nine gets a little more target oriented with a number of well-placed water features and mountainous terrain that seamlessly blends into the local landscape.

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A picture from the edge of the cliff to the tee will serve as a lasting memory of this unfathomable hazard.

There She Is! Miss America 2015

Kira Kazantsev had a busy year. Crowned as Miss America 2015, the New York native crossed the country for 365 days, logging 20,000 miles per month and sometimes participating in as many as nine events in a single day. With that kind of non-stop schedule, one could only assume that Kazantsev quickly learned to maintain her composure through every tough question and every mishap. And that was pretty much the case until she stood on the tee of the BMW Charity Pro-Am last May. “I was terrified,” she admits. “When I competed in the Miss America competition, I knew what to do and was ready to handle any questions the judges gave me. But when it comes to playing golf on national TV, I was afraid I’d shank a ball into the gallery and hurt someone!” she says with a laugh.



Kira and the gallery survived the experience and she is busy perfecting her swing to take on three of South Carolina’s finest courses again this month when the BMW Charity Pro-Am tees off May 19 - 22. The event is the only tournament on the Web.com Tour in which amateurs and celebrities are grouped with Web.com Tour professionals in a four-day better-ball competition over three courses.

An avid junior player, Kazantsev took up golf at age 4 and played competitively

from ages 7 to 12 across Texas, where she lived at the time. “I moved (to California) and lost touch with the sport,” she says. Kazantsev would go on to graduate from Las Lomas High School in Walnut Creek and attended Hofstra University in New York with a triple major in political science, global studies and geography. It was after she earned the Miss America crown that she was asked by a schedule planner if she played golf. “It turned out that I was the first Miss America in 20 years who answered ‘yes,’” she says.

That single answer ignited a flame Kazantsev forgot existed. She took lessons from PGA Professional Jim Detrixhe at Riviera Country Club in Pacific Palisades, California, and fell in love with the sport all over again. “Jim was the perfect instructor for me,” Kazantsev says. “His thought

process is ‘swing the club’ and that’s it! You can’t have 5,000 different thoughts going through your head when you’re addressing a shot.”

The strongest parts of the 24-year-old’s game are driving and chipping. “But that can vary widely depending on the day!” she says. “I’m going through some changes in my game right now. But when I hit it well, I really enjoy driving the ball. “The

weakest part of my game is putting,” she volunteers with a sigh. She then adds that watching Ernie Els’ troubles on the first green at this year’s Masters reminded her of golf’s fickle nature. “Things can happen,” she says.

Kazantsev has a short list of favorite golf courses that includes the Bay Course at Kapalua Golf in Lahaina, Hawaii; the three courses in Greenville that host the BMW Charity Pro-Am; and the Resort Course at La Cantera Hill Country Resort

SHE GOT GAME

Neal Kotlarek

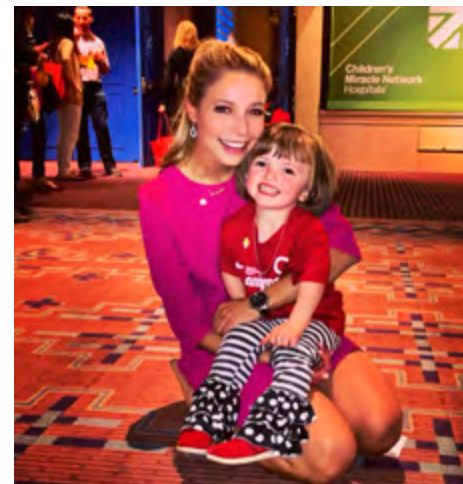


in San Antonio, where she played during her years as a competitive junior golfer sponsored by Nike.

One of her golf highlights was meeting legendary South African golfer Gary Player whom she found to be truly inspirational. “Everyone drinks beer on the golf course, right?” she asks rhetorically. “Gary drinks green juice! He’s 80 and he plays great golf and travels across the world. Makes you think, right?”



While Kazantsev has now yielded her tiara to Miss America 2016, Betty Cantrell, she remains active in an array of causes she supported during her reign. Indeed, the fingernail on her left ring finger is painted purple as a constant reminder of her social platform “Put the Nail In It,” her vow to end domestic violence. In that role, she represents Safe Horizon, the nation’s leading victim-assistance organization. “One in four women is an abuse victim,” she says. “It’s obviously important that awareness of this issue be raised to end domestic violence and cyber-bullying.



While also serving as national ambassador to the Children’s Miracle Network, Kazantsev has recently made a bold career move. She had been accepted at Notre Dame Law School and had intended to use the \$50,000 prize money she earned in the Miss America Pageant to pay for classes. But new opportunities in broadcasting have kept her in Los Angeles for the time being. “Law school will still be there down the road,” she says philosophically.

A side benefit of Kira’s decision to stay in California is, of course, year-round golf and continued access to her golf coach. “One of the most interesting aspects of golf is that your swing is always changing as the physics of your body change,” she says. “So the only way to counteract those adjustments is to keep practicing.”

Good advice; who is going to argue with Miss America?

Red Rockin’ Golf in St. George

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When you get to Sky Mountain Golf Course, you just know you are going to have fun here. The driving range is simply breathtaking as you hit balls towards the stunning Pine Valley Mountain Range, and even a bad shot is improved by the enjoyable view. The layout is scenic, challenging, and in outstanding condition. Don’t be fooled by the yardage; even at 6,400 yards from the back tees, the undulation and subtle doglegs will definitely keep you on your toes. I have played numerous muni courses around the United States, but I’ve never encountered any municipal tracks like Green Spring and Sky Mountain ... simply amazing.

Thanks to nearby St. George Airport, getting there is more convenient than you may think. SGA serves major carriers United and Delta. You can also fly into Las Vegas for an easy 90-minute drive to this clean, safe, and pleasant part of the country.

St. George is what Scottsdale, Arizona, used to be. It is not overwhelmed with tourists, and your dollar goes a lot further on the ten public-access golf facilities. Most of the

major hotel chains can be found here, including Clarion Hotel and Suites and Marriott’s Towne Place Suites. Both have beautiful pools with much-needed whirlpools to sooth your golfing muscles. There are plenty of dining options available—be sure to take a ride to The Painted Pony for an upscale menu, while casual attire is always welcome at George’s and Cliffside, which sits majestically above St. George. Be sure to get to Anasazi Steakhouse, where you can cook your steak from your seat on a heated volcanic rock. Anasazi’s beef is so tasty, so hot, and an enjoyable experience that your taste buds will not forget.

The ideal way to get the most out of your St. George excursion is to visit www.RedRockGolfTrail.com and www.StGeorgeUtahGolf.com. Both sites offer packages that include golf, accommodations, dining, and area attractions, plus additional information on St. George, Zion National Park, and the surrounding area.

Yes St. George is on our radar, and I am sure we will see a lot more Cubs hats on our next visit.

