



IMuch like the swallows of Capistrano, each year the human species *winteris avoidus* migrates to the Southwest in search of warm climates and green fairways. This past winter, I researched this migratory pattern and the Arizona habitat of these intelligent creatures. After nesting in plush resorts, devouring local cuisine, and playing Golden Tee-like courses, it's clear why the Sonoran Desert is a permanent fixture on their seasonal travels.

Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort and Spa

The people of Arizona know a thing or two about water. Still in use today, irrigation canals established by the Hohokam people in 300 B.C. gave birth to desert agriculture and allowed the Pima and Maricopa tribes to flourish. Living in peace, the two tribes provided a sanctuary for westward travelers. Not much has changed as their generosity can be still be found at the Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort and Spa in the Gila River Indian Community.



Resorting Arizona

By TR Pearson



As Arizona's only Native American-owned resort, Pima and Maricopa traditions are incorporated into every aspect of the property from the architecture to the fine dining ingredients to the herbal spa treatments. If you need help deciphering the 10-panel mural in the lobby, ask for Ginger Sunbird Martin, the nation's only "Cultural Concierge," for a complimentary tour through her nation's history. Or, pick up an Interpretive Trail Guide and walk the 2.5-mile replica of the Gila River. If you're lucky, you might see the wild horses that roam the land and give the resort its namesake.

Perceptive visitors to the clubhouse at the Whirlwind Golf Club will notice the domed ceiling represents an overturned Pima basket in a whirlwind pattern. Managed by Troon Golf, the two courses designed by Gary Panks – The Devil's Claw and The Cattail – opened in early 2000. Since only 92 acres of the 242-acre course is grass, you will become very familiar with indigenous plants like regal saguaro cacti, palo verde, and cottonwood trees. As Mike Hurd, manager of Whirlwind Golf said, "The most generous amounts of turf are in the landing areas, which makes the course painless to play, but not necessarily easy." Not necessarily safe either. When searching for a wayward ball in desert shrubbery, I inadvertently awoke a sleeping coyote. Unimpressed with my bogey save, the docile animal trotted off to another patch of shade. I guess it was too hot to chase any roadrunners that day.

Troon North

With 200 golf courses in 31 states and 31 countries, Troon Golf is the world's largest operator of luxury courses and resorts. Headquartered in Scottsdale, their bounty of courses in the area will satisfy the hungriest appetites. I feasted on the Pinnacle course at Troon North, 13 miles outside Scottsdale, with course GM, Lon Grundy. The 7,025-yard track, designed by Tom Weiskopf, has so many huge boulders stacked on top of each other it looks like he got help from Fred Flintstone. Sometimes the rocks are so close, you can catch a lucky bounce off their natural backstop if you juice one. The views of Pinnacle Peak do more than create nice scenery; they also provide quality aiming points. On many holes, Lon would advise, "just to the left of it" or like on the par-4 407-yard 10th hole, aptly named the Pinnacle, "go straight at it."

In the Midwest, tree branches swat errant drives down to earth; out here the pesky arms of the large Saguaro cactus will do the same. Riddled with bullet-like wounds, the resilient plants cast warning signs to players thinking about cutting corners, especially at the 539-yard par-5 11th hole. Troon North definitely has not cut any corners making the Pinnacle and the Monument the #1 and #2 "daily fee" courses according to the *Arizona Republic*.

The Phoenician Golf Club

Another Troon Golf property not to be missed is the impressive Phoenician Golf Club. Set at the base of the Camelback Mountains, players pick 18-hole combos from three nines named after Desert, Oasis, and Canyon landscapes. Deciding between desert views, palm tree lined fairways, or water-filled ravines can be a difficult task, but pristine conditions on each will ensure satisfaction in any combination. I went for the popular Desert / Canyon pairing for the dramatic elevation changes and sweeping views of Scottsdale.

At only 6,068 yards from the tips, I expected an easy loop. The only easy shots I had were with my camera.

Starting on the Desert nine, the first test came at the 303-yard par-4 3rd hole with its knee-knocker pitch to a peninsulated green. My course selection hit pay dirt on the par-3 6th hole as 360° views of Scottsdale, Paradise Valley, and the Superstition Mountains provided an inspiring backdrop. The Canyon loop works its way up the southern slope of the camel's back, continuing the splendid views of the area. On most par-3s boots would be better suited than spikes, as many tee boxes require a decent hike up the mountain. The finishing hole on the Canyon is a 525-yard dogleg-right with water running the entire length on the right side of the fairway, creating a horseshoe around the green. If you ever wanted a Tin Cup moment, here's your chance.

Westin Kierland Resort and Spa

Paying homage to Scottish immigrants who helped build Arizona's railroads, mines, and towns, the theme at the Westin Kierland Resort is the "Essence of Arizona." With well-manicured lawns, huge pools, a 900-foot lazy river, and a director of fun, I mistook the essence to be relaxing and sun tanning. Within steps of an upscale shopping center, the Kierland Commons, the all-inclusive desert oasis educates and entertains from sunrise to moonlight.

My research of the *winteris avoidus* peoples began at 5:00 am in a Fore-Max training course with fitness director Steve Heller. With PGA clients like Jeff Quinney and LPGA player Grace Park, Steve designed the program to do three things: make golfers stronger, longer, and more flexible. Recognizing your abilities and personalizing your workout, Steve's exercises are brutally challenging but extremely rewarding. The joke among the class was the program is called Fore-Max because you won't be able to walk afterwards for four days max. Good thing the Kierland Golf Club has specially designed Segway PTs for use on the course. I passed on the Segway and hopped into an air-conditioned golf cart with the director of golf, Kipp Bates.

The final Troon property of the trip, the Kierland Golf Club has three 18-hole combinations named after the property's indigenous plants. The Acacia, Ironwood, and Mesquite offer unique characteristics as diverse as



the vegetation. Starting on the traditional-style Mesquite, Kipp pointed out "you'll see a lot more natural grass here than at other courses." This means lies are more comparable to links than desert hardpan.

The Acacia nine plays around the grounds of the Resort. With a ton of desert wash and more sand than Egypt, it is a difficult track, but extremely enjoyable because of its flawless condition.

My studies and documentation of the nomadic habits of snowbirds closed with the "Saturday Night Scotch Tasting" in the Ali-Shonak Library. Beverage manager David Kent guided us through the various scotch regions and delicious flavors of single and blended malts. As the sun set over the McDowell Mountains, we sampled an assortment of Johnny's finest, including some Blue. We took our favorite potion out to the grounds for the daily playing of "Scottish Pipes." As bag-piper Michael McClanathan emerged down the fairway, haunting the air with rhythmic winds, I enjoyed a cigar that was hand-rolled by the on-site *torcedores*. This proved my thesis. Resorting Arizona is like finishing a round with an albatross. Maybe better.

Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort and Spa

5594 West Wild Horse Pass Boulevard
Chandler, AZ 85226
602-225-0100
www.wildhorsepassresort.com

Troon North

10320 East Dynamite Boulevard
Scottsdale, AZ 85262
480-585-7700
www.troonnorthgolf.com

The Phoenician Golf Club

6000 East Camelback
Scottsdale, Arizona 85251
800-888-8234
www.thephoenician.com

Westin Kierland Resort and Spa

6902 East Greenway Parkway
Scottsdale, AZ 85254
800-354-5892
www.kierlandresort.com