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Monterey County's Must Play Golf Courses

MONTEREY COUNTY, CALIF. — Monterey County's dramatic ocean scenery, pristine pine forests and historic communities continue to beckon adventure-seekers, seafarers, artists, writers and vacationers. Monterey is a golfer's heaven, with Pebble Beach Golf Links and 25 additional golf courses at their fingertips. This Golf Mecca has hosted five U.S. Opens, four of Golf Magazine's Best Public Courses You Can Play in California, and boasts a coastal backdrop that will leave you well short of appropriate adjectives, the greater Monterey region is an awe inspiring place to play for any caliber golfer.

To set the stage, the Monterey Peninsula's stunning landscape begins with entering the County on the Northside – immediately visitors are surrounded by enormous dunes and artichoke fields, then travelers enter into Instagram worthy coast line views of a crescent beach and dense pine forest. The approach from the south on Highway 1, is even more inspiring -- the slender two-lane highway winds its way between jagged mountains and the highlands above the Pacific Ocean, taking you through Big Sur to the famed peninsula.

Must Play Bucket List Courses

Pebble Beach Golf Links (pebblebeach.com, 800-654-9300)

There is not much left to say about the course ranked first on 2015 Golf Digest's America's 100 Greatest Public Courses and second on 2014 Golf Magazine's Best Courses You Can Play in the U.S. The alluring setting, the golf history played out on its fairways and greens, and the immeasurable wow factor all place it in the incomparable category on every golfer's bucket list. If you don't have time for a round at least make time for a drink or bite to eat in the Lodge's famed Tap Room (local tip: visit in between meal hours for better access to all the golf memorabilia on the walls).

Spyglass Hill (pebblebeach.com, 800-654-9300)

Home to conceivably the best five opening holes in golf, this Robert Trent Jones Sr. designed course debuted in 1966 and is ranked 11th on 2015 Golf Digest's America's 100 Greatest Public Courses. Continuously regarded as the most challenging course used in the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am, the course will bring you to your knees with sea views, sand dunes and elevation changes on those first five holes, and then challenges you even more on the heavily wooded back nine.

Bayonet Golf Course (bayonetblackhorse.com, 831-899-7271)

Ranked 16th on 2014 Golf Magazine's Best Courses You Can Play in California, Bayonet has benefited greatly from a complete renovation in 2008. Originally designed in 1954 on what was then the Fort Ord military base by a U.S. Army General; Bayonet's tight fairways lined with gorgeous views of the Monterey Bay make this Seaside course the toughest track in the area. Stay and play packages are available with multiple local hotels such as Casa Munras, Embassy Suites Hotel and the Captain's Inn in Moss Landing among others.

Black Horse Golf Course (bayonetblackhorse.com, 831-899-7271)

A decade younger than the adjacent Bayonet course, Black Horse is a bit more forgiving after the 2008 renovation that included the creation of a brand new par 3 (the 15th hole) on the back nine.

The Links at Spanish Bay (pebblebeach.com, 800-654-9300)

Ranked sixth on 2014 Golf Magazine's Best Courses You Can Play in California and 56th on Golfweek's Best Resort Courses 2015, this layout, was designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr., Tom Watson and former USGA president Sandy Tatum. After a breath taking round of classic links golf, take in an unforgettable sunset while relaxing around the fire pits on the back patio as a bagpiper serenades the fading sun.

Premier Resort Experiences

Quail Lodge & Golf Club (quailodge.com, 831-624-2888)

Quail Lodge & Golf Club fresh off its \$24 million dollar renovation was originally designed by Robert Muir Graves in 1963 (and recently refined by Todd Eckenrode) and offers 6,449 yards of sunny Carmel Valley golf. This resort course is located adjacent to the lush Carmel River and encompasses over 830 acres with alluring valley vistas.

This resort has much more to offer other than world class golf; located less than 10 miles from Carmel by the Sea and the Pacific Ocean, you will find abundant sunshine with an average temperature of 71 in the summer and 78 in the fall. Surrounded by the Santa Lucia Mountains and one of the finest wine regions in the world, you will have elegant dining options, wine tasting, spas, antique shops and art galleries at your fingertips; as well as trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding at nearby Garland Ranch Regional Park.

The lodge features California Ranch style décor, plush deluxe king rooms, heated pool, three tennis courts, bocce ball, 9-hole putting course, and for the adventurous, there is the Land Rover Experience Driving School. Casual elegance is the theme at the onsite restaurant Edgars. Whether you're dining after a round or just coming in for lunch, Edgar's offers fresh ingredients harvested from local organic farms that are hand selected by Chef Kenneth Macdonald.

Was there a recent upgrade to Nicklaus Club that we need to mention?

Best Bargain

If you are looking for a good deal in a great location, look no further than amid the natural sand ridges at **Pacific Grove Golf Links** (pggolflinks.com, 831-648-5775, \$25-\$52) just outside the gates of 17-Mile Drive.

You can walk the course for less than \$50, enjoy the back nine ocean views and all the front nine bay views you can handle. This traditional course's iconic scenery includes playing past Point Pinos Lighthouse; the oldest continually operating lighthouse on the West Coast at the 10th hole. There's not much length at this 5,727-yard, par-70 course but the back nine imitates a seaside British Isles feeling as closely to being in the UK than any course you will find in the United States.

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ABOUT MONTEREY COUNTY

Monterey County offers ample opportunity to make every moment count. Nestled on the iconic Central Coast of California, it is easy for visitors to arrive via scenic Highway 1, highway 101, or by flying into the Monterey Regional Airport. Life-enriching experiences abound in this area that boasts 99 miles of prime Pacific coastline, the world's finest aquarium and marine sanctuary, 46,000 acres of premium vineyards, more than 40 tasting rooms, and 26 golf courses including the famed Pebble Beach Golf Links. Monterey County stretches from the artichoke fields of Castroville through Monterey Peninsula and down the pristine Big Sur coast, all the way to the Salinas Valley. For travel and accommodation information and to request a free copy of Monterey's official Travel Guide visit SeeMonterey.com.