

Winter Getaway-The Valley of Sun The 2019 Media Classic



With around 300 days of sunshine annually and over 200 golf courses, the Phoenix area is the perfect place for a winter getaway. Pictured above is the O'odham Course at Talking Stick Golf Resort.

It is always nice to get away from Alberta winters to some fun and sun in the Arizona desert. Fortunately for the Mrs. & I we get an annual invite to head south from the Media Classic organizer, Bill Huffman to leave the snow behind to join a great group of international golf writers in the Valley of Sun.

200 plus golf courses, shopping galore, numerous outdoor activities and events await your arrival – there's always things to do, or if you prefer grab a good book and chill out on a patio or around a pool.

This year's Media Classic was hosted at the Mountain Shadows Resort in Paradise Valley (www.mountainshadows.com), this iconic resort first opened in 1959 and had many Hollywood visitors thru the years'.



The Mountain Shadows Resort was our home base for our trip and is a true delight. Modern décor, great amenities and views set the tone for this iconic desert retreat.

The resort started a makeover in 2014 with all the work finished in 2017, the very modern interior and spacious guest rooms welcomed us home for the week. Meals on site were terrific at both Rusty's and Hearth'61. We had great service and we enjoyed our stay at the resort very much.

This year, Bill outdid himself with the help of Troon Golf for our practice round on the Sunday before the event. We were given the option of playing one of five terrific courses. Included in them were The Boulders, The Phoenician, Westin Kierland, Whirlwind or Longbow. I chose to head out to east Mesa and play Longbow Golf Club, a par 72 gem designed by Ken Kavanagh.

The course is consistently ranked as a top course in the area and for good reason. Very scenic and challenging course as it winds its way thru the desert landscape – very fair test of golf and I enjoyed our day at Longbow. www.longbowgolf.com



Located in North Mesa, Longbow Golf Club is just minutes from Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport and Old Town Scottsdale. Longbow Golf Club is consistently named one of the top 20 courses you can play in Arizona (Photo courtesy Longbow Golf Club).

The Tournament officially kicked off on Monday at Talking Stick Golf Resort (www.talkingstickgolfclub.com) which is home to two wonderful courses.

The O'odham & Piipaash courses. We were hosted on the O'odham course a par 70 Bill Coore & Ben Crenshaw design that plays to 7133 yards at the tips and 5532 yards from the front tee boxes. It is a great layout that runs thru the Sonoran Desert with generous fairways, slightly crowned greens giving you the option to fly the ball onto the green or play more of a bump and run shot from close proximity to the green.

We had some interesting weather later in the day close to the end of our round as the sky turned dark grey/black and a brief hail storm delayed our round briefly. It was the first time I had ever seen hail in Arizona, but it didn't deter us from waiting out the storm and finishing our round.

There is also a wonderful practice area, fully stocked pro shop and great clubhouse to enjoy a bite to eat & beverage after your round. The course very easy to get to and friendly folks make Talking Stick a rewarding day of golf. The Resort is the home base for the world renowned Vision 54 Coaching program co-founded by Lynn Marriott & Pia Nilsson.

After our round at Talking Stick we were hosted by Four Peaks 8th Street Brewery in Tempe. It is a local favorite and we found out why, a terrific meal served up for us as well as a sampling of some of their brews. We took a tour of the brewery and learned a little about their history, which was a great way to finish off day one of the Classic. Check them out if you are in the area, you won't be disappointed. Day two of the Classic took us on a little road trip from the resort to the

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We Ko Pa Golf Club in Fort McDowell, home to the Saguaro and Cholla courses.

We were fortunate to play the Saguaro course, a par 71 designed by Coore & Crenshaw who had a great property to work with as the natural terrain led itself to challenging yet fair test of golf. You will most likely use each club in your bag during your round.



Stunning look at the 8th hole on the Saguaro Course which was designed by Bill Coore & Ben Crenshaw (Courtesy We-Ko-Pa Golf Club).

There are four sets of tees available from the 5061 yard forward tees up to the Saguaro (tips) at 6966 yards. Scenery is spectacular as you wind your way thru the 18 holes, generous landing areas and greens rolling very well the day we played. Great practice facilities, clubhouse and pro shop on site make We Ko Pa an awesome place to tee it up.

After our round we headed up the road a ways to Rosa's Ranch at Fort McDowell Adventures (www.fortmcdowelladventures.com) for a Cowboy cook-out. What an awesome place, they went above and beyond with the food and hospitality. There is lots to see and do and we would highly recommend a visit, to the Ranch. It is a great place for the whole family. The final round of the tournament was hosted right at Mountain Shadows on the 18 hole par 3 course on the property and

trust me when I say it's not a little pitch and putt track.

The holes range from less than 100 to 200 yards with a total length of just around 2300 yards. For those steamy Arizona days carts are available, but it is a easy course to walk and will take you about three hours to play all eighteen holes. On this course, your tee shots are the least of your concern, the quick undulating greens will require some proficiency in putting to escape without the occasional 3 putt. I really enjoyed our last round at Mountain Shadows, it is a great track and it was in perfect condition. Following golf we were hosted by the gang at Mountain Shadows for lunch on the patio.



Courtesy: Mountain Shadows Resort

The Short Course at Mountain Shadows Resort is a picturesque and fun course with holes ranging from 75 to 193 yards in length.

As another classic came to a close and it was time to say our good byes and think about heading back to Alberta. Organizer extraordinaire Bill Huffman gave us all something to look forward to as he announced that plans for the 2020 Classic were well underway and we could be heading to Tucson...

If you are looking for that winter get away the Mrs. & I would highly recommend Phoenix area and hope to journey south once again in the winter of 2020! With so many great courses available in the area I still have many more courses to try out - There is never a shortage of great courses and sunny days in the Valley of Sun.