

# Rising Star

**Tucson, Ariz., offers winter visitors a winning trifecta: awesome scenery, great golf and spring training for the White Sox.**



**By Dave Gould**

**I**n the optimistic year of 1945, big-league baseball and professional golf each staked a claim in the frontier town of Tucson, Ariz.

That year marked the debut of the Tucson Open, played at El Rio Golf and Country Club and won by Ray Mangrum, who finished one stroke ahead of Byron Nelson. For the owners of the Cleveland Indians and New York Giants, it was a time of site visits and negotiations that set the stage for both teams to enter the Arizona sunshine two winters later, the Giants at Phoenix and the Tribe down in Tucson.

Spring training headquarters have an air of permanence about them now, but back then new sites were selected on a whim and then abandoned nonchalantly. While Eastern-based teams like the (New York) Giants and Red Sox had trained in California for long stretches beginning in 1907, Arizona had hosted just one ballclub for just one brief stay, the Detroit Tigers in '29.

The White Sox, with their South Side underdog status, are the proper Chicago team to train in this high-desert city of 800,000 residents. Always a free-thinking alternative to establishment Phoenix, Tucson is a university town surrounded by national parks and forests and well



*Above: No. 9 at Randolph Golf Course; opposite page: No. 1 at Arizona National.*

COURTESY CITY OF TUCSON

attuned to its archeological and political history.

Its stadium, Tucson Electric Park (TEP), is considered pilgrimage-worthy by hardball geeks who “collect” minor-league ballparks. Grandstands

run the length of its left- and right-field foul lines, but the outfield seating is au naturel—two grassy areas on either side of a concession shed. Families spread out blankets there and let their kids play pick-up games



# TUCSON



**1 TUCSON RODEO.** Check out a sport that's slightly more brutal. The Rodeo Grounds are handy to Tucson Electric Park, and its late-February annual dates are timed to coincide with the time when pitchers and catchers report.  
[www.tucsonrodeo.com](http://www.tucsonrodeo.com), 520-741-2233

**2 COLOSSAL CAVE.** This naturally formed cave extends into the mountains approximately 600 feet and descends approximately 40 feet below the entrance. It stays a constant 70 degrees Fahrenheit and remains dry year-round. Tours run approximately every half hour.  
[www.colossalcave.com](http://www.colossalcave.com), 520-647-7275

**3 LOEWS VENTANA CANYON RESORT.** Tucson's most deluxe golf resort alternates public play on its Mountain and Canyon courses on even and odd days. At 107 yards, Mountain No. 3 is Tom Fazio's most fascinating short par 3.  
[www.loewshotels.com](http://www.loewshotels.com), 520-299-2020

**4 WESTIN LA PALOMA RESORT & SPA.** The stylish setting of this busy, high-end resort must have put Jack Nicklaus in a fun-loving mood. His three nines here swerve up and down the desert terrain in downright rollicking fashion.  
[www.westinlapalomaresort.com/golf/index.htm](http://www.westinlapalomaresort.com/golf/index.htm), 520-742-6000

**5 ARIZONA NATIONAL GOLF CLUB.** Sweeping views of Tucson's topography, including distant glimpses of Mexico, make this a logical first stop on any golf tour. Designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr., the 6,785-yard layout is now the home course of the University of Arizona Wildcats.  
[www.arizonanationalgolfclub.com](http://www.arizonanationalgolfclub.com), 520-749-3519

**6 GOLF CLUB AT VISTOSO.** An award-winning course at the base of the two mountain ranges, Vistoso is a visual feast of Saguaros, ocotillo and mesquite—but a strategic puzzle as well, with slick and tightly bunkered greens.  
[www.vistosogolf.com](http://www.vistosogolf.com), 520-797-9900

**7 RANDOLPH GOLF COURSE.** Players aren't confined to "target golf" on the North Course, a 7,000-yard chestnut that is part of the city-owned golf network. The course is the former host of the PGA Tour's Joe Garagiola Tucson Open and currently is the site of the PING/Welch's LPGA Championship.  
[www.tucsoncitygolf.com/randolph.html](http://www.tucsoncitygolf.com/randolph.html), 520-791-4161

## OFF THE MAP

**GATES PASS.** A winding uphill drive west on Speedway Boulevard leads the way to this lofty and memorable overlook. Views are of Tucson to the east and Tucson Mountain Park to the west; the panorama is especially hard to beat at sunset.  
[www.emol.org/tucson/gatespass](http://www.emol.org/tucson/gatespass)

**KITT PEAK NATIONAL OBSERVATORY.** This is located an hour's drive from the ballpark, out where the desert sky is suitably dark. Nightly observation programs in the visitors center provide access to the world's largest collection of optical telescopes.  
[www.noao.edu/kpno](http://www.noao.edu/kpno), 520-318-8726

**CANOA HILLS GOLF CLUB.** Most golf tours of Tucson include a Green Valley course. Many consider Canoa Hills the finest track there—with its distant mountain views and its sinewy routing along an ancient river valley.  
[www.canoahillsgolfclub.com](http://www.canoahillsgolfclub.com), 520-648-1881

while grown-ups follow the action on the field. An Arizona Diamondbacks AAA club, the Sidewinders, is TEP's primary tenant.

Tucson's golf heritage is one for which the city can be proud.

With the exception of one year, the PGA Tour's Tucson Open (now the Touchstone Energy Tucson Open) has been an annual event since the mid-1960s. One of the tournament's most celebrated moments came in 1991 when Phil Mickelson, then a junior at Arizona State University, won the event as an amateur. He was the first amateur to win on the PGA Tour since Scott Verplank at the 1985 Western Open, and no amateur has matched that accomplishment since Mickelson beat Tom Purtzer and Bob Tway by a shot.

Both the men's and women's teams at the University of Arizona have experienced their share of moments in the national spotlight. The men won the Division I NCAA Championship in 1992 and the women in 2000.

The list of former Wildcats reads like a Who's Who: Jim Furyk, Don Pooley, Dan Pohl, Robert Gamez, Rory Sabbatini, Annika Sorenstam, Lorena Ochoa, Natalie Gulbis, Marisa Baena, U.S. Amateur champions Eric Meeks and Ricky Barnes, and two-time U.S. Amateur Public Links winner David Berganio, Jr.

Being some 2,400 feet above sea level, Tucson is cooler than Phoenix, its summer sizzler to the north. The average temperature in Tucson doesn't climb above 60 until April, so whether a visitor's spring passion is baseball or golf, it's sometimes a chilly affair.

Visting golfers can't go wrong with a round at Randolph Golf Course, located by the nearby Tucson Electric Park. Not only is Randolph GC the current host of the PING/Welch's LPGA Championship, but it also was a former site of the PGA Tour's Joe Garagiola Tucson Open. Additionally, it's the longest golf course in the city of Tucson.

For post-round visits, Nimbus Brewing Company, the Cowpony Bar & Grill and The Shelter, a retro-cool

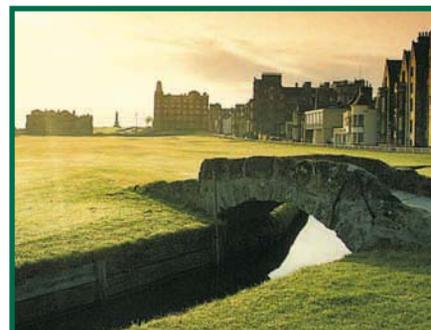
lounge on East Grant Road, are a few of the comfortable hangouts scattered on the periphery of the university.

Those who want a close-up of Tucson's most intense rock mecca without leaving your comfort zone should stop in for a libation at the Tap Room, an urbane watering hole attached to the high-decibel Club Congress.

It's possible to overdo the deep-fried and messy Mex fare, and when you do, Tucson's fine-dining establishments can set things right. Steakhouses here run the gamut, from rustic Old West spots like El Corral and Li'l Abners, to the white tablecloths and jazz trio ambience of Sullivan's.

Like any college town, Tucson has its excellent pizza joints—but visiting Chicagoans probably ought to wait until they're back home for that. 🍕

*Dave Gould is a freelance writer who lives in Sandy Hook, Conn.*



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