

SANTA FE

Sizzles

*One of the most compelling cities in the West now boasts golf good enough to match its culture*

**BY MATT WARD**

**T**he allure of Santa Fe is legendary. The capital city of New Mexico is routinely mentioned in travel magazines as one of the top places in the U.S. to visit, thanks to its intersection of history, culture, small-town western cosmopolitan flavor and the sheer beauty of the surrounding terrain. In addition, there is a rich diversity that lies at the heart of this incredibly intoxicating community. Native Americans, Spanish colonists, Europeans and Americans have all played a role in Santa Fe's continuing evolution. It's the main reason why such a wide array of visitors, from art lovers to outdoors adventurers to gourmands, eagerly look forward to returning again and again.

There is art everywhere in Santa Fe, including on the sides of buildings (above). Far right: Black Mesa Golf Club weaves through dramatic desert terrain.



CORRIE PHOTOGRAPHY; INSET, PAT BROCKWELL



The identity of Santa Fe was well-established long before golf travel blossomed into a multi-billion-dollar industry. With all of its powerful draws, Santa Fe — which translates to “Holy Faith” in Spanish — will likely never be a purely golf-centric destination such as

Scottsdale, Pinehurst or Bandon Dunes. And you know what? That’s okay. Because there is so much to see and do here, and great golf is just one part of the equation. Golfers who do visit will find a host of quality courses that are accessible, affordable, and offer yet another way to enjoy the New Mexico landscape.

Heading the list is **Black Mesa Golf Club**, located 20 miles northwest of downtown in the small community of La Mesilla. Black Mesa opened for its first full season in May 2003, and as you pull into the parking area via a snake-like entrance road you’ll notice a charming western windmill alongside a rudimentary clubhouse. The message is clear: The course is the principal show, not the ancillary items.

Built on land owned by the Santa Clara Pueblo, a Native American nation, Black Mesa lies at an elevation of 5,400 feet, with various elevation changes of up to 125 feet. This high-desert locale gives Black Mesa an arresting physical beauty in complete harmony with nature, as piñon trees hug tight to the ground and dovetail with native brush and sandy areas. The 7,307-yard layout is bolstered by a dizzying array of holes that require courage to take the risky play and smarts to avoid the big number. A total of 105 bunkers add to the challenge.

Excellent holes abound at Black Mesa, but pay special attention to the engaging short par-four seventh with its risk/reward tee shot and baffling green, which features a pronounced left-to-right tilt. There is also the mesmeriz-

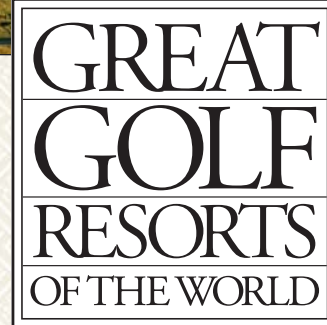


The Santa Fe Opera House provides an idyllic setting for music lovers.

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Before a round at the Marty Sanchez Links de Santa Fe (right), enjoy the food offerings at one of many local cafes.



ing par-five 16th hole, nicknamed “stairway to seven” because the slightest miss means a quick double-bogey or worse. Take a look back after reaching the green, high on a promontory — the mesa in the nearby distance is the course’s namesake.

Designed by architect Baxter Spann in concert with General Manager Eddie Peck and Superintendent Pat Brockwell, Black Mesa has been recognized for its excellence by several publications, including *GOLF Magazine* (No. 47 on Top 100 You Can Play), *Golf Digest* (Best Affordable Course, 2003), and *Golfweek* (No. 60 on the Top 100 Modern Courses). It is certainly worth multiple rounds, and should anchor your visit to the golf courses of Santa Fe.

In order to properly sample Santa Fe you need to stay near The Plaza — the heart of town. There are a number of superb lodging alternatives, but one of the very best is the **Hotel Plaza Real**. Situated just off The Plaza,

the hotel instantly removes you from the hustle and bustle of the main streets as you pass through its doors. The interior courtyard provides a quiet seclusion and the architecture neatly weaves a thread of Native American, Mexican, Spanish and American influences.

Before heading off for more golf, be sure to fortify your appetite at one of the outstanding food establishments in and around The Plaza, among them the **French Pastry Shop** on East San Francisco Street. Breakfast starts at 6:15 a.m. — perfect for early-rising golfers — and the shop boasts plenty of sinfully good treats, along with coffee that is second to none. All pastries are made on premises — you’ll just need to walk the added pounds off when playing.

Or you can try the **Tecolote Café** — about two miles from The Plaza and located off Cerillos Road. The breakfast burritos are out of this world, and they do such a brisk business that they close at 2 p.m.

To learn more about the history and development of Santa Fe, pay a visit to the **Palace of the Governors**, also just off The Plaza. The nation’s oldest continuously-used building was originally the seat of government for Spain and was since designated a Registered National Historic Landmark in 1960 and an American Treasure in 1999.

Need to exercise your credit card? Try **Simply Santa Fe**, directly on The Plaza, for a stylish connection of Native-American jewelry, southwestern clothing styles and a myriad of other items woven with a western motif.

Santa Fe has long been known as a city that draws connoisseurs of the arts. Less than a mile from The Plaza is **Canyon Road**, home

## Santa Fe Facts

### Golf

Black Mesa GC, 505-747-8946, [www.blackmesagolfclub.com](http://www.blackmesagolfclub.com)  
Marty Sanchez Links, 505-955-4400, [www.linksdesantafe.com](http://www.linksdesantafe.com)  
Towa Golf Course; 505-455-9000, [www.citiesofgold.com/towa-golf](http://www.citiesofgold.com/towa-golf)

### Food

French Pastry Shop, 505-983-6697  
Tecolote Café, 505-988-1362, [www.tecolotecafe.com](http://www.tecolotecafe.com)  
Gabriel’s, 505-455-7000, [www.gabrielsrestaurant.com](http://www.gabrielsrestaurant.com)  
Bobcat Bite, 505-983-5319, [www.bobcatbite.com](http://www.bobcatbite.com)

### Sights

Santa Fe Opera, 505-986-5955, [www.santafeopera.org](http://www.santafeopera.org)  
Palace of the Governors, 505-476-5100, [www.palaceofthegovernors.org](http://www.palaceofthegovernors.org)  
Art Gallery District, [www.canyonroadarts.com](http://www.canyonroadarts.com)

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Right: Wolf Creek Golf Club  
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to a multitude of galleries that showcase a broad sampling of art, paintings and sculptures. This stretch is a must-see for any Met Area native who appreciates walking around SoHo and Chelsea on a weekend afternoon.

The music scene is also alive and well in Santa Fe. On the way to Black Mesa you'll pass the **Santa Fe Opera House**, with its enchanting open-air auditorium. Catching a performance under the stars during a summer night is one of the real treats of this distinctive and magnificent setting. Two miles north of the Opera House is **Gabriel's**, where you can sit outside and enjoy a margarita while your waiter makes your guacamole tableside.

All that sightseeing might have you thirsting for more golf, and you won't have to go far. Just eight miles from The Plaza is **Marty Sanchez Links de Santa Fe**. The facility is owned and operated by the City of Santa Fe and offers an 18-hole layout along with a companion nine-hole short course that plays to a par of 28. Don't be fooled by the muni

connection — Marty Sanchez sports wide enough fairways to be hospitable to mid-handicap players, yet has sufficiently long yardages and difficult hole locations to test the more discerning player.

If you happen to tour Santa Fe in the morning with golf scheduled in the afternoon, be sure to head to the **Bobcat Bite** for lunch before teeing it up. The Bobcat Bite is Santa Fe's premier beef restaurant with a particular emphasis on the All-American hamburger. The establishment is just minutes from The Plaza on the Old Las Vegas Highway. Seating is quite tight but the atmosphere is vintage local flavor — rugged motorcycle types with their Harleys outside alongside tourists and regulars — and the food truly seals the deal. Believe it or not, the facility got its fanciful name when the original owners hand-fed bobcats approaching from the nearby countryside.

Halfway between The Plaza and Black Mesa is the **Towa Golf Course**, part of the

**Towa Golf Course** (opposite) traverses ridges and canyons. Galleries on Canyon Road (below) are good enough to please art aficionados.



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forthcoming Buffalo Thunder Resort. The Pueblo of Pojoaque, a Native-American tribe, are moving ahead with a four-star destination resort that will include a 390-room Hilton Hotel, a luxury spa and fitness facility, several restaurants, entertainment venues, and a new upscale casino. Construction is expected to be completed by the fall of 2008.

The Towa Golf Course, which will be the centerpiece of the resort, opened six years ago and was originally planned as a 36-hole complex. Only 18 holes are currently open, with the Piñon Nine, designed by Hale Irwin, and Boulder Nine, designed by William Phillips, available for play. Tentative plans call for the Valley Nine, also designed by Irwin, to open in 2008. A Butterfly Nine is also planned.

By far the best hole at Towa, and one of the most spectacular holes in all of New Mexico, is the 631-yard first hole on the Piñon Nine. Your journey starts from an elevated teeing ground that feels like the perch of an eagle's nest. The hole bends slightly to the right — miss the fairway by too much and you'll provide your personal donation to the Towa golf ball supply. The marriage of striking scenery and architectural details are in full bloom here.

And that can aptly sum up a golf trip to

Santa Fe, where spring is the perfect time to visit a beloved tourist city that is just awakening to its potential for golfers. ■

**Matt Ward** writes from his home in Clifton, New Jersey.

### Other Golf Options Near Santa Fe

Venture 50 miles south from Santa Fe via State Highway 14 — also named the Turquoise Trail — and play **Paa-Ko Ridge Golf Club** in Sandia Park. The 27-hole layout by architect Ken Dye is carved out of mountainous terrain bracketed by majestic pine and fir trees that provide each hole a large measure of seclusion from each other. Call (505) 281-6000 or visit [www.paakoridge.com](http://www.paakoridge.com) for more information.

Just a 70-mile drive northeast of Santa Fe is the town of Taos — a smaller version of Santa Fe with an equally impressive selection of stores and shops tied together by art and culture. **Taos Country Club** is a fair test of golf where afternoon winds can whip through the property. Call (505) 758-7300 or [www.taoscc.americangolf.com](http://www.taoscc.americangolf.com).

