

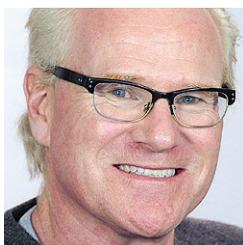
Golden Bear leaves mark in the Baja

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QUIVIRA GOLF COURSE:
Come to peninsula for the views — and stay for the play



Andrew McCredie

IN CABO

LOS CABOS, Mexico
Considering Hernán Cortés' first sighting of what is today the southern tip of the Baja California Peninsula took place three decades after James IV lifted the ban on playing golf imposed by his grandfather in 1457, it's quite possible the Spanish explorer turned to his first officer and exclaimed, "Now that would be a great place for a golf course!"

OK, perhaps but unlikely, given the conquistador's fixation with toppling the Aztec Empire at the time. Fortunately, another guy with his own unique obsession realized the potential in this place where desert meets sea, and so set about carving one of his Jack Nicklaus Signature Design layouts into the granite cliffs. The Quivira Golf Club opened in 2014, much to the delight of owners and guests of the exclusive Quivira Los Cabos community, and hotel guests of the oceanfront Pueb-



The Jack Nicklaus-designed Quivira Golf Course in Los Cabos, Mexico is as much fun to play as it is spectacular to look at.

lo Bonito Resorts. That's because to tee it up on the par-72 course, you have to be one or the other.

After spending a recent morning playing the course, I'd suggest you book a room at the resort or befriend one of the many Canadians who have winter homes in the Quivira Los Cabos neighbourhood, as it is simply spectacular.

Of course, that can be said for

many 'resort' golf courses. There is no shortage of jaw-dropping images in magazines and on websites depicting sun-drenched fairways, verdant greens and stunning backdrops to lure you in. Unfortunately, the only things that will be dropping when you're actually playing are balls fished out of your bag, as the majority of these drop-dead gorgeous courses are just plain unfair and in some

cases almost unplayable. It's as if the designer figured the scenery alone is worth the steep price of admission.

Thumbing through a glossy brochure of the Quivira course the night before my sunrise tee time, I suspected just such a golfing experience. How could you not when confronted with wildly fanciful hole layouts perched atop high granite cliffs, etched through equal parts sand dunes and scrub des-

ert? Clearly the three 'comfort stations' located along the layout — offering gourmet Baja cuisine cooked right in front of you and smiling bartenders serving up local concoctions from scratch — were intended to comfort your aching ego, battered as it would be from a ballooning scorecard and a diminishing ball count.

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The first of three 'comfort stations' is positioned near the end of the 1.1-kilometre cart path between the fourth green and the fifth tee box.

Quality of course on par with gorgeous property

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"A hockey stick on that par three, Señor? This reposado will make you feel better."

But the next morning a funny thing happened on the way to that first comfort station, dubbed the 'Cliffs' owing to its oceanside perch some 85 metres above sea level. We'd played the first four holes, and although a good challenge, all four were fair and rewarded good tee shots and approaches. None of this great-tee-shot-but-lousy-fairway-lie nonsense.

Of course, as we made the 1.1-kilometre cart-path climb between holes 4 and 5 (yes, over a kilometre drive, making that first margarita of the morning all the more refreshing) the jury on the course's playability was still out as we were about to encounter the real teeth of the course: the signature cliff-top par 4 5th and the par 4 6th. Standing on the tee box of each, the views are inescapably

stunning, reminding me of Manale's 12th hole.

Happily, I didn't lose balls on either hole (something that can't be said of the Lanai course's 12th and its 200-yard carry across the blue Hawaiian ocean). It's one thing to have a picture of you teeing off on one of these signature holes for the memory bank; it's another to actually have a chance at par or even birdie. Thank-you Jack.

The rest of the round proceeded in much the same fashion: breathtaking scenery, fair and well-routed holes and tasty and refreshing offerings at the remaining two comfort stations ('Oasis' at the half-way point, featuring the culinary talents of the Pueblo Bonito Resort chefs and a deluxe tequila bar; and 'Cañada,' located at the 16th's tee box and providing an elevated and all-encompassing view of the final holes and the beachfront resort).

Adding up my score in the well-appointed beachside clubhouse over a cool drink at the end of the round, the final tally certainly betrayed my 'north-of-100'

score I fully anticipated the night before. And while I did lose a couple of balls, that was more owing to shanks into cactus-filled scrub and the 'rattlesnake' warning signs than from a poorly designed course.

Full credit to the Golden Bear and his design colleagues, as under less-skilled hands this unique and world-class property could have been yet another 'looks awesome, plays terrible' resort golf course.

Better yet, Jack and his team are back on site laying out another 18-hole track just north of the existing course, with construction starting this summer and the first ball expected to be teed off in 14 to 16 months.

Quivira Golf course rates range from US\$275 to US\$380 depending on time of day, and high-quality Taylor-made club rentals are available. Visit quiviraloscabos.com/golf for complete details.

(Look for my story about Pueblo Bonito Pacifica Golf & Spa resort in this Sunday's Travel section.)

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At the highest point of the course sits el Faro Viejo, built in 1905.