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Pronghorn's 'Ultimate' Option

Destination club membership puts private home, incredible golf in reach

By mid-June, the weather in Bend, Ore., is simply stellar. Warm days, cool nights, clear skies and amazingly little chance of rain beyond the occasional afternoon thunderstorm. This is the *other* Oregon — high desert, the doorstep to a vast Outback where, a few generations ago, settlers planted their roots on 40-acre parcels. It's flat-out gorgeous, and when you're taking in the view of the Cascades to the West and the limitless "out there" to the east from a Tom Fazio-designed tee box tucked into a cove of ghostly junipers, it verges on mystical.

The same is true in mid-April, though snowflakes are still part of Bend's meteorological recipe. You've got to roll with the crazy changes in temperature that often lead to delayed or wiped-out tee times. But such "rolling" flattens out a bit when you're surrounded by 3,500 square feet of hardwood, Italian tile, flat-screen TVs, four bedrooms, four bathrooms, two dining rooms, Wolf appliances, two-person hot tubs, two-car-plus-golf-cart-size garage and several flagstone patios looking out over a Jack Nicklaus Signature course and the

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Golf privileges for Ultimate Escapes members staying on property are available on both Pronghorn layouts, the semi-private Nicklaus Signature Course and private Fazio course.

Nicklaus (pictured): Up to two tee times per day for eight players at the member guest rate of \$100 per player, plus \$20 cart fee. Guest rounds available for \$100. All tee times requested by the Destination Host to a member of Pronghorn's golf staff. Once tee time is made, confirmation is sent to Destination Host.

Fazio: Certain members must be contacted regarding play, with at least one-week notice required (call Ultimate Escapes for details). A Pronghorn pro will determine tee-off time so as not to interfere with regular member play. Rate is \$325 per player (three guests per tee time). Host is assigned to each group for \$150.

glistening bright white Three Sisters beyond.

Such was my life over two nights in an Italian villa-style home at Pronghorn, easily

one of the top private clubs to open in the West the past decade. Located a few miles northeast of downtown Bend and minutes from the region's main airport at Redmond, Pronghorn is a modern masterpiece among private clubs, rarefied luxury wrapped in blessed remoteness. And with an Ultimate Escapes vacation club membership — which range from a \$70,000 to \$450,000 buy-in with \$8,000 to \$16,000 yearly dues for 14- to 60-day stays at dozens of resorts worldwide — such luxury is within reach year-round.

Thanks to temporary member-in-disguise privileges at Pronghorn's two tracks (not to mention access to its huge clubhouse, spa, restaurants, swimming pool and other amenities, along with an on-property concierge who's happy to set up flyfishing and skiing excursions, or dinner reservations in town), a round with Nicklaus Academy Director of Instruction Mike Lewis on Pronghorn's out-of-this-world Tom Fazio course would finally materialize under chilly, breezy skies. The snow was long gone and Pronghorn's incredible crew had the course

in killer early season shape; the recently aerated greens were healing nicely and rendered most downhill putts makeable. Final score for FG? A respectable 83 with one birdie (after driving the downwind par-4 14th) and several solid up-and-downs on Fazio's fascinating green complexes, most of which are tucked between blasted-out volcanic rock and twisted junipers — with one, the already world-famous and utterly unique par-3 No. 8, perched above a 30-foot-deep fissure bookended by quarter-mile-long lava tubes.

The Fazio, which opened in 2007 to instant raves, lends itself well to a walking round. Just remember to wear layers, no matter what the calendar reads; in fact, layering is paramount in this history and view-rich part of the West, where the Cascades and high desert converge and dreams come to bloom among the fragrant pines and sage. Summer daytime temps run in the mid-80s and 90s, though at 4,500 feet in elevation, nighttime temps can dive toward freezing. So you've got extreme weather, even with 300-plus days of sunshine each year, to go along with the extremely alluring views.

"Yeah, this is definitely a special place," Lewis said as we strolled to our tee shots on one back-nine fairway. "I thought my native Utah was as beautiful as the West gets, but Oregon — it's just incredible up here."

Meanwhile, the Nicklaus — considered by most members to be the tougher test — debuted in 2005, also to raves; the final stretch, especially back-to-back 5-pars at 15 and 16, is the Bear at his best. They combine to offer an experience that has attracted buyers from all over the nation and continues to convert a few more every month, even in today's crowded and economy-strained market.

Now Pronghorn is more accessible to the public thanks to a new area-wide golf consortium wherein all 29 public courses, from venerable Crosswater at Sunriver to year-old Tetherow, are mounting a massive national and regional marketing effort. Tee times will be available on the Nicklaus course nearly every day. But if you're in the market for a worry-free second-home arrangement, Ultimate Escapes is the way to go at Pronghorn.

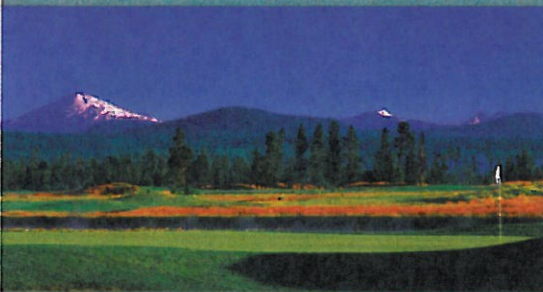
It doesn't take long to settle in and enjoy the "Ultimate" getaway. In fact, we couldn't resist taking a few balls out to the 17th tee

Tasty Oregon Bites

A few of FG's favorite freelancers chime in with reports from famous places along Oregon's trail, and the news from both Sunriver and Bandon No. 4 is tempting.

Crosswater Solid for Summer

It's Saturday, April 18, and Crosswater at Sunriver is back in business after a six-month winter slumber. The course is virtually empty — except for me and two friends. The sun is shining, the sky impossibly blue. It feels like 80 degrees, though it probably isn't. Elk, deer, gophers and geese are enjoying the warmth, apparently unaware that yet another golf season has begun. As the numbers playing the course increase, the fauna will retreat into the forest or take to the skies. For now, however, they seem happy watching three unsteady golfers making their bogeys as distant Mt. Bachelor stands sentry.



I've never been to heaven, but I suspect it can't be all that far away — a couple turns down the lazy

Deschutes River perhaps, or just the other side of snowy Bachelor.

Jim Ramey, Crosswater's director of agronomy, has had the good fortune to call Sunriver home since 1974. After 20 years at the resort's Meadow and Woodland courses, he moved to Crosswater, where he seems content to live out the rest of his life. "There's nothing like it," he says. "The air, the water, the snow, the scenery. I never looked back once I arrived, and there's nowhere I'd rather be."

Despite the obvious gratification of living and working in so wonderful a place and being custodian of a golf course noted throughout the land for its impeccable condition, something is quietly bothering Ramey. Five greens didn't make it through the winter so well, and besides having an elite membership that has come to expect the very best of its superintendent, the course will once again be hosting the Champions Tour in August. "We've a pretty severe climate here," says Ramey. "We're at 4,200 feet. You got lucky on opening day. We've had a few snow flurries since then. Turf loss is inevitable."

Months later, summertime has arrived in full, and Crosswater is back where Ramey wants it. The course is in phenomenal condition. And the only thing missing is you. —Tony Dear

How Does Old Mac Stack?

Old Macdonald, the newest course at Bandon Dunes, probably won't win the *If you could only play one more round at the resort, on which course would it be?* debate. On the other hand, as the caddies and cognoscenti alike are saying, it might prove the most difficult and best of the lot.

I recently played the 10 holes currently open to public play (\$110). The entire 18 is expected to be ready early next summer.

Set mostly between a long ridge of sand and the gnarly Pacific Dunes in what amounts to a large playfield, Old Macdonald doesn't embrace the ocean the way Bandon Dunes does. Neither does it have the feeling of being dwarfed by the dunes and blowout bunkers of Pacific Dunes nor even the classic Oregon feel of Bandon Trails. Instead, the course is a memorial to C.B. Macdonald, America's great golf architect, and to his love of the classic holes of Europe, the Redan, the Alps, the short, the long, the beguiling Biarritz. Only this time, Tom Doak and Jim Urbina did Macdonald's work. It reminds me of Chambers Bay — smooth and subtle, a course that will buoy average players while bollixing better ones. Big, grand, seductive and a tribute to golf's roots with stuff like a 21st century hell bunker, for me it was as edifying as it was challenging.

As Yogi might say, if you miss it, you'll miss it. —Blaine Newnham

on the Nicklaus while our shrimp skewers — purchased by the concierge along with a load of other groceries, and prepared in advance by Pronghorn's chef — sizzled on the home's built-in outdoor grill 30 yards away. A stiff, cold Cascade breeze guided the

very first 7-iron swing greenward and within 10 feet of the cup.

Maybe warming up is overrated after all. But Central Oregon as a golf destination and Ultimate Escapes as a vacation option, however, are definitely not. —VW