

THE GOOD LIFE: ORLANDO AND SCOTTSDALE TRAVEL

Sun Spots



*Relax at The Fairmont
Scottsdale's expansive
rooftop pool.*

FAIRMONT SCOTTSDALE



www.vsga.org

by Joan Tupponce

Shake off your offseason slumber by enjoying great golf and some splash at south by southwest getaways

I'M NOT A WINTER PERSON. NEVER HAVE BEEN. NEVER WILL BE. That's why I always try to schedule a winter vacation to a destination where weather forecasters have never talked about temperatures dipping into the teens or the prospect of shoveling snow.

In my quest for warmth and sunshine during those dreary months of the year, my husband and I have stumbled across two locales that suit my needs – Orlando, Fla., and Scottsdale, Ariz. Both are safe havens from winter storms; places that save my sanity.

ILLUMINATING APPEAL

On one recent expedition to Orlando I discovered the **OMNI ORLANDO RESORT AT CHAMPIONSGATE** (www.omnihotels.com; 407-390-6664). A luxurious four-star property, the Omni is surrounded by 1,200 acres of wetlands. Its location is just minutes away from all the popular attractions in central Florida, including Walt Disney World Theme Parks and Downtown Disney Pleasure Island.

The resort includes a 15-acre recreational area with a formal pool and private poolside cabanas that include televisions, a fully stocked mini-fridge and complimentary smoothies and fruit. It also has a full-service European-style spa, two heated outdoor pools and an 850-foot lazy river.

The hotel's massive lobby provides a wall of windows with a panoramic view of the recreational area and the golf courses. There are two courses to choose from – the International and the National. Both were designed by Greg Norman.

The enticing links-style International course

is surrounded by southern wetlands and woodlands and is hauntingly reminiscent of the British Isles with bagpipers playing on the 10th tee during sunset. The National, a challenging American-style course, is a scenic showcase, boasting four consecutive holes, Nos. 7-10, lined with lush orange groves. The lighted Champions nine par-3 course is ideal for golfers who want to work on their short game in the evening.

The resort was highlighted in the June 2006 issue of *Condé Nast Traveler* as one of the top four golf resorts in Orlando among all 100 golf resorts worldwide. It is the home of the world headquarters of the David Leadbetter Golf Academy where notables such as former major championship winner Nick Price and Michelle Wie have fine tuned their games.



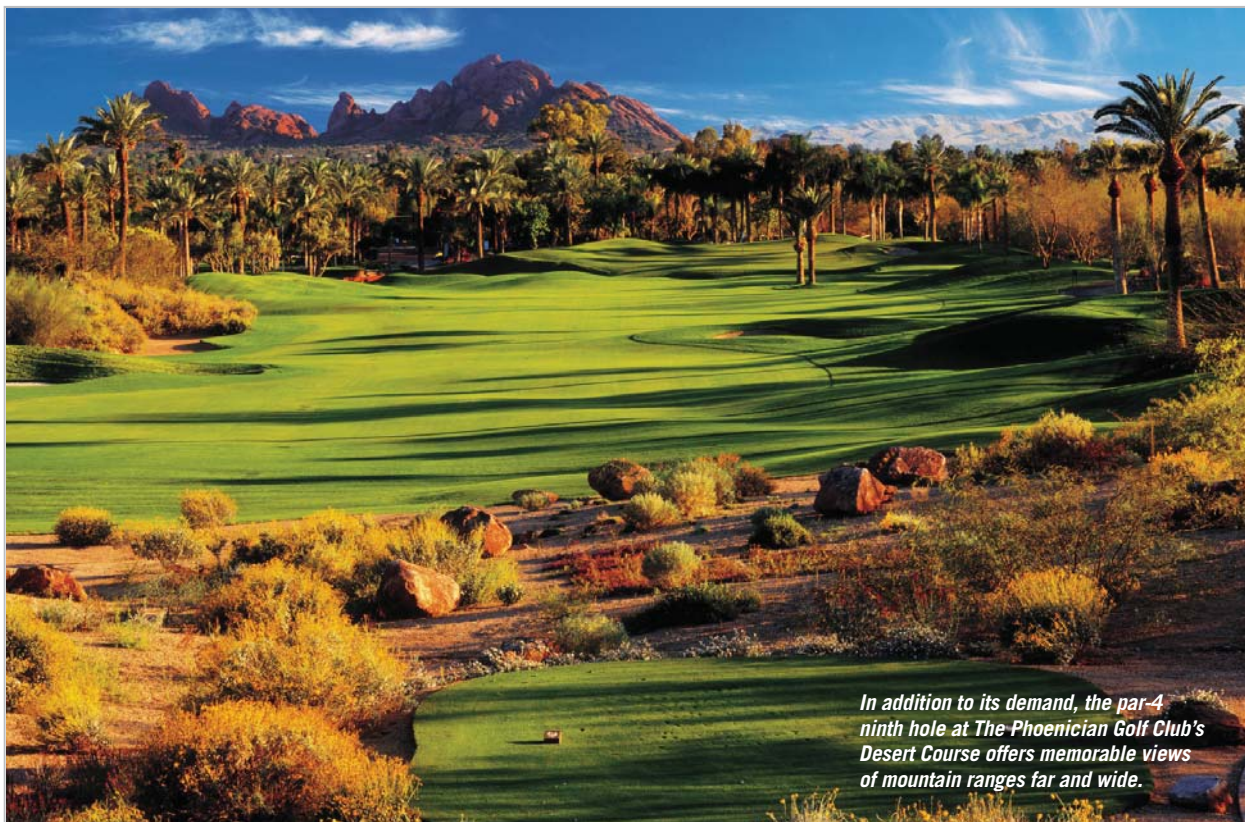
OMNI ORLANDO RESORT AT CHAMPIONSGATE

Great golf is one of the recreational options at the Mediterranean-styled ChampionsGate resort.

SPACIOUS LUXURY

Prying ourselves from the great outdoors to head to our room was difficult but once there we were pleased with what we found. The rooms at the hotel are beautifully decorated with plush contemporary furnishings and great views – ours had a view of the pool and lazy river.

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In addition to its demand, the par-4 ninth hole at The Phoenician Golf Club's Desert Course offers memorable views of mountain ranges far and wide.

THE PHOENICIAN

In addition to the regular classifications of guest rooms, the resort also offers guests the choice of booking at stay in one of The Villas at ChampionsGate. After seeing the villas I promised myself that we would stay in one the next time we made to the resort.

Villas feature luxurious interiors that include a large dining room, marble floors, terrace, den, kitchen and wet bar. They create the atmosphere of home with all the benefits of a resort. Private balconies provide golf and water views so guests can enjoy the natural beauty of the area.

TRIP TO SAVOR

One of our favorite pastimes whenever we travel is eating. During our stay at the Omni we dined at ZEN, one of the resort's five diverse dining experiences. We chose the Zen Experience, a sampling of everything on the Pan-Asian menu, from Sweet Potato Tempura and Steamed Dim Sum Shrimp to Singapore Noodles and King-Do Pork Chops. The dinner was extraordinary. My husband even sampled a flight of sake which he found enjoyable but different from his usual martini.

The resort's spa was also a welcome diversion. It offers everything from a full

body massage to a Fiji Sugar Glow Body Exfoliation, an overall hydrating massage and Fiji cane sugar body exfoliation that leaves you with a youthful glow. I'm not sure if I was glowing but I was definitely relaxed after visiting the spa.

PERFECT WARM-UP

Relaxation is also on tap in Scottsdale at two of our favorite destinations – The Phoenician and The Fairmont Scottsdale.

A 250-acre recreational wonderland, **THE PHOENICIAN** (www.thephoenician.com; 800-888-8234), a AAA Five-Diamond resort, is as spectacular in its design as it is in its service. It is a visual masterpiece with lush gardens and dramatic desert terrain against the backdrop of Camelback Mountain. The resort embodies the spirit of the Southwest that we love so much.

It is a slice of heaven for golfers, offering three nine-hole golf courses – the Oasis, Desert and Canyon. They encompass 150 manicured acres of lush fairways with different elevations and natural obstacles. The Golf Club also includes a putting green, driving range and chipping area.

Because we visited Scottsdale during one

of its hottest periods, we chose to cool off in the aquatic paradise that features nine swimming pools – one even has a 165-foot waterslide. The resort's main pool, where we spent most of our time, is inlaid with hand-crafted iridescent Mother of Pearl tiles. One day we splurged and booked a poolside, private cabana with ceiling fan, fresh fruit and bottled water at our disposal. What a treat that was on a 105-plus degree day.

TEEMING WITH ARTISTIC BEAUTY

The resort's interior features are as magnificent as its outdoor attractions. The entire property is a testimony to the beauty of fine Italian marble. The quantity of Carrera marble in The Phoenician equals two quarries the size of Camelback Mountain.

Rooms are spacious and beautifully decorated. One of our favorite activities when we visit the hotel is to wander through the resort to view its \$25 million art collection. Some of our favorites are the life-size Native American bronze sculptures by the late Allan Houser. The collection also has rare European paintings and antiques prominently displayed throughout the resort.

Out west, TPC Scottsdale and a host of other family activities satisfies the traveler's needs for a varied resort experience.



FAIRMONT SCOTTSDALE



TIME TO UNWIND, INDULGE

Activities at The Phoenician are diverse, from afternoon tea to Shiatsu and meditation at The Centre for Well-Being, the resort's 22,000-square-foot spa. A peaceful sanctuary from the world with filtered sunlight and cascading fountains, The Centre for Well-Being offers an array of massage and bodywork therapies as well as one-on-one meditation sessions.

One of the facets of this resort that we found appealing was its culinary treasures that include Il Terrazzo, an authentic Italian restaurant featuring cuisine from all regions of Italy. We opted for a more casual, upscale dining experience at Windows on the Green where we enjoyed Southwestern fare that starts out with a to-die-for fresh tableside guacamole. We were also quite taken with Café and Ice Cream parlor where we enjoyed homemade ice cream and the Canyon Pool Grill which has a tasty tuna sandwich.

A DESERT TO CRAVE

Our trip to Scottsdale also included a few days at the AAA Five Diamond **FAIRMONT SCOTTSDALE** (www.fair-mont.com/scottsdale; 866-540-4495). The resort's

Spanish colonial style architecture reflects the history and culture of the Southwest. The open walkways and courtyards spill into the main courtyard area with an amazing pool and waterfall that flows down layers of stone.

Guest rooms are oversized and comfy with views of the lush, flower-filled courtyards and the McDowell Mountains. The resort has 125 Casitas with fireplaces and a new personalized service called the Fairmont Gold, an exclusive area with only 66 guest rooms, three parlor suites and a large private lounge.

Major sporting events have played a significant role in the resort's history. The hotel has hosted many of the world's best golfers during the PGA TOUR's FBR Open at TPC Scottsdale, which sits adjacent to the hotel. Guests can play either the new Randy Heckenkemper designed Champions Course or The Stadium Course. The Champions Course features a par-71, 7,124-yard layout with the only Emerald Green greens and teeing areas in the state of Arizona. The Stadium Course is woven into the Sonoran Desert with breathtaking views of the McDowell Mountains.

OFF-COURSE ENDEAVORS

The Fairmont Scottsdale is also home to the Willow Stream Spa where I had a stress relief massage. The 44,000-square-foot spa is magnificent. It even has a private rooftop oasis pool that was as relaxing as my massage. The spa also has a "Fit to a tee" program for golfers that includes a 30-minute, full-body workout with a 30-minute session of assisted stretching.

All of that exercise creates an appetite although it really doesn't take much for us to feel the need to eat. The Fairmont has several offerings including The Grill where we found fresh seafood and steaks and Chef Michael Mina's AAA Four Diamond Bourbon Steak restaurant. The menu includes a variety of prime cuts from certified all-natural Angus beef as well as American and Japanese Kobe beef. Be sure to check out the blue-cheese scalloped potatoes or the duck fat fries.

With winter on my door step, I think it's time for a trip south or southwest.

Author Joan Tuppence is a writer from Richmond and a frequent contributor to Virginia Golfer.