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LA TEE BREAK

Business and leisure visitors to Los Angeles have one more reason to enjoy their stay here – municipal golf courses! The City of Los Angeles boasts the largest publically owned golf course system in the US that is easily accessible to tourists reports **Norman Sklarewitz**.



On the wall of his office located near Los Angeles International Airport, the Japanese executive of a major trading company has a large map of the metropolitan Los Angeles area. Inserted in the map are a number of red tacks. A visitor noticed the markers and casually asked if they indicated the location of his suppliers or key customers.

The businessman smiled, "No, they are my favourite golf courses." Since he's an avid golfer himself, who lives to entertain guests from Asia for a round or two, his use of the map as an office decoration isn't too surprising. What impresses his visitors is the sheer number of public and private golf courses located right in the city of Los Angeles and in communities of the surrounding Los Angeles County.

"A golfer coming to the LA area needs only to pack his or her shoes and gloves," says Noel Lucky. "Golf clubs are available at every club; they have all the resources

anyone needs." Lucky is president of her own company involved with golf marketing and, for the record, has a 4.7 index. Along with the extensive list of public courses, in her view, Los Angeles has "some of the finest private clubs in the US".

Business and leisure visitors to Los Angeles know they can enjoy a long list of activities and facilities - top-notch hotels and resorts, fine dining, high-end shopping and non-stop entertainment. But the opportunity to get in a round or two of golf relatively close to most hotels used by visitors is a very pleasant surprise. Lucky feels that a visitor who wants to include a quality golf experience in a trip

to Southern California will enjoy a "broad variety of courses on which to play."

What few visitors know is that the City of Los Angeles owns and operates the largest collection of municipal golf courses in the United States and when it comes to the communities within the sprawling Los Angeles County, it lays a parallel claim to having the largest publically owned golf course system in the US.

To be specific, the County of Los Angeles offers golfers 19 courses scattered around the sprawling area at 17 locations. Of these 19 are 18-hole regulation courses and one with 27 holes - a regulation

"He also points out that the course has tee placements ranging in length from 50 to 180 yards that offer new golfers an inviting setup, and experienced golfers the opportunity to play every type of short and mid-range shot imaginable."

The Terranea Resort, which cost \$500 million to develop, has stunning views over the Pacific Ocean.



Terranea's 8-hole par 3 course offers both new and experienced golfers an inviting setup.

18-hole course and another regulation 9-hole course. In addition there are three 9-hole courses plus several par threes. For its part, Los Angeles City offers visitors a choice of seven 18-hole courses, three 9-hole courses with the remainder par 3 or special courses.

For visitors, particularly from Asia accustomed to travelling hours in order to play and then paying high fees, the benefits of LA's municipal courses are hard to believe. It's no surprise that these courses come in for plenty of use. James Ward, golf manager for the Los Angeles Department of Recreation & Parks, reports that some 900,000 rounds were played at the city's courses last year. Most popular of these was the Rancho Park course that saw some 100,000 rounds played last year.

Rates charged at both the LA City and County courses vary by time of day and day of the week but are uniformly modest. On city courses, the range of fees for

non-resident golfers goes from \$23 for 18 holes to \$46 on the weekends or holidays. Play on a 9-hole course ranges from \$16 to \$22. Visitors can book tee times eight days in advance on the internet.

Fees on the county courses are also quite low. Play on a regulation 18-hole county course on weekdays is only \$26 and \$35 on weekends. Nine hole fees are \$16.75 weekdays and \$21.75 on weekends. Par 3 play fees are \$12.50 and \$15.50 for 18 holes and just \$7.25 and \$8.25 for nine holes.

Scattered throughout the metro LA area are, of course, a number of exclusive country clubs. Mainly these restrict play on their courses to members but outsiders who are invited by members are also eligible to play.

THERE ARE, however, luxury resorts that welcome non-guests. One of these is the Terranea Resort. Located on a picturesque bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean some 20 miles south of LAX, the

resort just opened two years ago and cost some \$500 million to develop. Its 9-hole, par 3 course is part of the resort complex that covers 102 acres and includes a 382-room resort plus 82 condo villas.

Todd Eckenrode, course architect, describes the course as providing "elevation changes, green contours, artful bunkering, unobstructed sight lines, unparalleled views, excellent playing conditions and a wide range of classic strategic elements." He also points out that the course has tee placements ranging in length from 50 to 190 yards that offer new golfers an inviting setup, and experienced golfers the opportunity to play every type of short and mid-range shot imaginable.

Green fees Monday through Thursday are \$40 and \$46 for play on Friday, Saturday, Sunday and holidays. A walking cart is \$5 and clubs are available for rent.

Just another five minutes drive further south on the same Palo Verde Peninsula takes golfers to the oceanfront Trump

National Course. Located 20 miles from downtown Los Angeles, it promotes itself as the "most expensive golf course ever built." With a price tag of more than \$250 million, that's a claim not likely to be challenged.

The 18-hole par 71 course was designed by Pete Dye and the Donald J. Trump Signature Design. A recent first time player there described the course as "great but difficult. Bring lots of balls." It's also



Donald Trump is behind the Trump National Course that is billed as the "most expensive golf course ever built."

not inexpensive. Green fees vary according to the time of day. Start your play at 6 pm and the fee is \$80 but from 7 am to 10:50 am you'll pay \$275. In between the fees are \$160 and \$215. Included are a GPS-equipped golf cart, practice balls, valet parking and locker room service.

Another high-end course is the Palos Verdes Golf Club. It has a 6,219-yard 18-hole par 71 course. While an otherwise private club, Palos Verdes accepts reservations from non-residents, but for weekdays only play and with starting times at 1 or 2 pm. Greens fees are \$225. Best to call ahead to the Director of Golf since policies regarding play by non-

members are subject to change.

JUST A 20-minute drive from downtown Los Angeles is the Industry Hills Golf Club at Pacific Palms. Located on a 650-acre site beneath the San Gabriel Mountains, the resort boasts two 18-hole courses - one named after the American World War II general and former US President Dwight D. Eisenhower. The other is named after the famed woman Olympic athlete and winner of 92 golf tournaments - Babe Didrikson Zaharias.

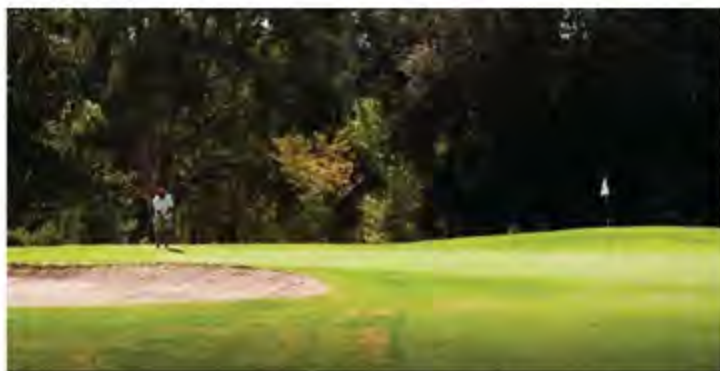
Both courses were recently renovated at a cost of \$22 million. All fairways and bunkers were replaced and a new

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Because it's relatively close to downtown Los Angeles, the links at Indian Hills Golf Club are a special favourite with visitors.

The Palo Verde area is home to three of LA's best and most scenic golf courses. The \$450-million Trump National Course runs along a bluff.



Among the seven 18-hole courses owned and operated by the City of Los Angeles is the Balboa Golf Course in the San Fernando Valley community of Encino.

irrigation system installed. The 'Ike' course is 7,200 yards and a par 72. The 'Babe' course is 6,826 yards and par 71. The Industry Hills Golf Club considers itself a "complete destination conference & golf resort" considering the fact that it includes a 292-room hotel, 45,000 square feet of meeting and event space, two restaurants and a spa along with a short game area, four putting greens, a 64 stall lited driving range plus, of course, a pro shop, golf related amenities and locker rooms. Not surprisingly, between them the two courses see some 90,000 rounds of play a year.

Greens fees at Industry Hills Golf Club include golf carts and are attractive. They

range from \$50 for the Babe course and \$65 for the Ike course on Mega Monday and \$70 and \$80 Tuesday through Friday with a \$49 Super Twilight rate after 4 pm on up to weekend and holiday rates of \$100 and \$105 respectively. Discounts for seniors over 50 years are available Monday to Thursday and non-members may reserve tee times up to seven days in advance. The Club even has Chinese and Korean speaking operators available to take reservations.

FOR VISITORS wanting to get in a few rounds during a Los Angeles visit but totally unfamiliar with what courses are available, locals have a suggestion: just

ask your hotel concierge. At the Hyatt Regency Century Plaza, its Les Clefs d'Or concierge, Alden Millken regularly accommodates international guests eager to get in some golf but at a loss as where to go.

One suggestion he makes is the city's Rancho Park, which is less than five minutes away from his property. But for someone seeking a more elegant setting, he often recommends Robinson Ranch Golf Club. It's some 25 miles to the north in the Angeles National Forest and features two 18-hole courses. The concierge can, of course, arrange for transportation to any area course.

When it comes to a favourite public LA course, Brian Keith, a financial consultant, picks Rancho Park. "It's close in and rarely gets too crowded," he says.

In his work, he comes in contact with visitors to LA from Asia and Europe and, without exception, the golfers among them are highly impressed with Rancho Park. "They are so surprised at how expansive the park is, how well maintained the course is and how efficient the staff is in keeping players moving along." While most aren't that concerned about greens fees, they are also pleased to realise how low they are. Still, like most golfers, Keith has one complaint: it's still a challenge to break 100. ■