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Where Horses Run Free

Wild Horse Pass Resort - Where Golf Meets a Cultural Landmark

By Glen Turk



Wild Horse Pass Resort in Chandler, Arizona is not your typical golf resort. Like all resorts Wild Horse Pass has golf courses, rooms to rest your head, and amenities such as restaurants and spas. But unlike any other resort in North America Wild Horse Pass has an incomparable story to tell as the resort serves as a living tribute to the legacy of the Gila River Indian heritage and culture. Sure other resorts have tradition, but none can match a history that dates back to 300 B.C. and the genuine story of struggle and resolve that has led the Pima and Maricopa tribes to this point.

Every great story needs an equally adept story teller and Wild Horse Pass has a true ambassador in Ginger Sunbird Martin. It was during an hour interpretive tour that I broadened my horizons and was able to get a sense of a people and a land that have stood the test of time. "There is so much personal pride because we are a proud people dying to share our story," stated Martin, the resort's Cultural Concierge. "We want to speak about our 60 day corn, the famous Pima cotton and our irrigation systems

still being used today by the state's local water company. This really speaks to our engineering expertise long before anyone arrived. We have been on our original homelands for over 2300 years, now that is impressive to me," explained the Arizona State graduate.

Every detail of the over 372,000 acre resort is a tangible tribute to the Maicopa and Pima Indians and should be viewed with detail. The double door glass entrance shows off the southwestern motif to the fullest and sets the tone for your glorious getaway. Truly Wild Horse Pass is three parts resort, two parts museum. "What sets the Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort & Spa apart is our emphasis on showcasing the Pima and Maricopa culture which makes us leaders in cultural sustainability. We have received multiple awards recognizing our efforts, including; National Geographic Traveler TIA Odyssey "Geotourism Award for Sustaining an Indigenous Culture or Community," explained Stephanie Heckathorne, Wild Horse Pass' Director of Sales and Marketing.

Before we get too far into the story, I'm sure you're interested in hearing about the golf at Wild Horse Pass. The resort features two courses under the Whirlwind Golf Club moniker, **The Devil's Claw** and **The Cattail**. Both are operated by Troon Golf and are the epitome of great resort golf with large landing areas and generous green complexes. Head Golf Professional Jason Sanders discusses the subtle differences between the two. "Both courses are player friendly and challenging at the same time, which is a lot tougher to design than people can imagine; designer Gary Panks did an amazing job! Devil's Claw is a little shorter, but the deep bunkers and three-tiered greens are menacing. Cattail stretches to almost 7400 yards, has water coming into play on 6 of the 18 holes, and wraps around The Wild Horse Pass Resort," concluded Sanders.

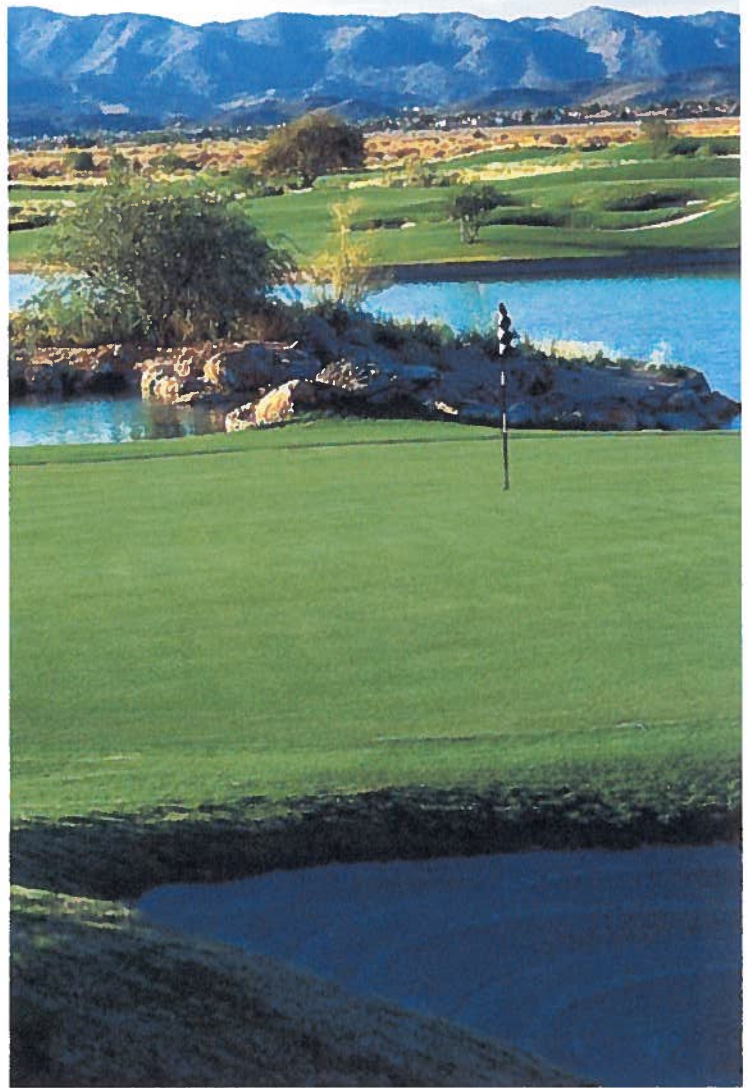
Overall I was extremely impressed by how many memorable holes are on both properties. The aforementioned Sanders discusses two of his favorites on the Devil's Claw layout. "I really enjoy the 7th and 13th holes on the Claw course. The 7th is a unique par-3 with a forced carry over water and a waterfall feature to the right of the green. The 13th hole is a fun par-4 that long hitters can try to drive the green when the wind is behind you."

The Cattail Course features bold water hazards and a collection of fantastic par-3's. It's hard to narrow 18 phenomenal holes down to two, but that's why the word "Pro" is on Jason Sander's business card. "On Cattail, I love the 5th and 15th holes. The 5th is another risk reward hole, with bunkers and water coming into play down the entire left side. If you can fly a good portion of the danger, you can be looking at putting for an eagle two on this par-4. Hole 15 is a beautiful par-3 with an elevated tee; your ball must carry over a deep canyon, but it is not a long shot just a scary one!"

In terms of accommodations, the 500 rooms at Wild Horse Pass all have views of either the golf course, Estrella Mountains, or the Gila River. I'm sure it won't take you long to figure out which view I had. Speaking of the Gila River, Wild Horse Pass features a 2 1/2 mile replica which meanders through the property with scenic boat rides that shuttle guests to and from the golf course and casino.

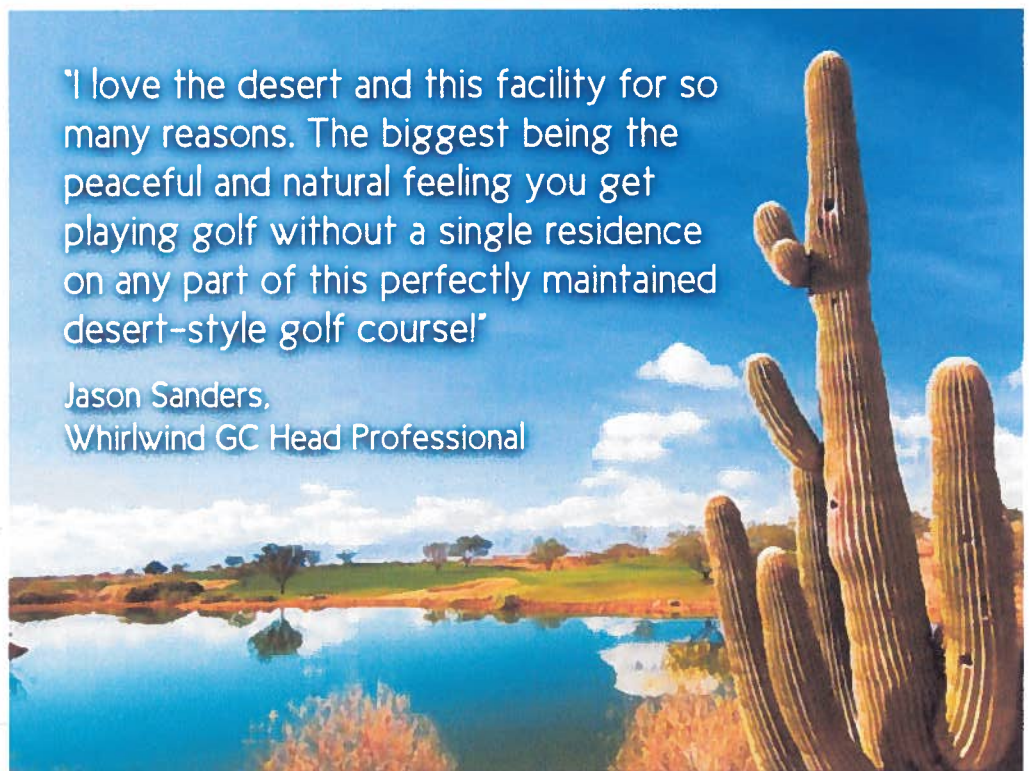
The newly completed **Wild Horse Pass Casino** is just off the

Immaculate greens and numerous water hazards define both courses at Whirlwind Golf Club.



"I love the desert and this facility for so many reasons. The biggest being the peaceful and natural feeling you get playing golf without a single residence on any part of this perfectly maintained desert-style golf course!"

Jason Sanders,
Whirlwind GC Head Professional



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1-10 expressway before you reach the rest of the property and offers slots, table games, and a non-smoking Poker Room. Lodging is also available at the Casino with their 10 story skyscraper.

And trust me, it's not just about the two great golf courses at Wild Horse Pass. All interests and diversions are accounted for at Wild Horse and it starts with Rawhide, an 1880's replica town that features year round taste of the old west. If horses are your passion, the Gila River Indian Community constructed a 6,500 person Rodeo Arena, and the Koli Equestrian Center, a perfect place to view the breath-taking scenery that surrounds the resort.

If you've ever read any of my work before you'll know I'm in heaven when dining outdoors. Wild Horse Pass' **Kia Restaurant** (which is Pima for Seed) offers outdoor (and indoor if you must) seating overlooking their massive Hanyo Pools in a relaxed environment

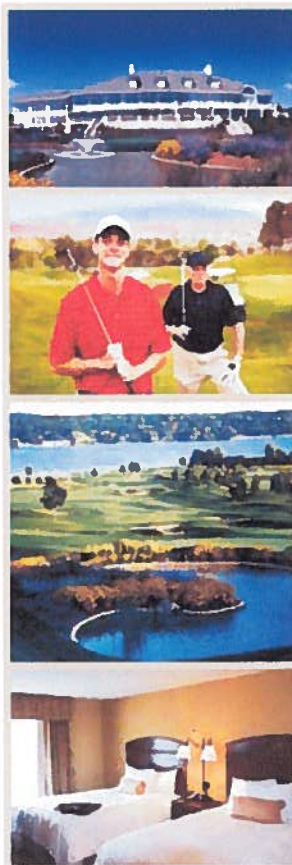
The omnipresent Estrella Mountains greet golfers on all 36 holes at Wild Horse Pass Resort



that's hard to put into words. As one of only 17 Five-Star restaurants in the nation according to Forbes Travel Guide and the only one in Arizona, you know the food is even more superior than the setting. The distinctive cuisine can best be described as "Native American with Global Accents" as Executive Chef Michael O'Dowd has worked diligently to learn traditional recipes and present them in a new setting.

While at the resort, be sure to visit the **Aji Spa**. The heritage of the Gila River Indian Community continues into the spa through the artwork and décor which includes an **Olas Ki**. This historic dwelling was used to provide shelter in the winter. At the spa today, you'll find one serving as a meditation room where you can attain calmness and solitude. Treatments are abundant and varied from manicures to seaweed wraps, but you almost can't pass on a spiritual healing treatment by Belen Stoneman. A member of the community, Stoneman is a shawoman and has the power to heal naturally through communication with spirits. A little bit of the Arizona desert is sure to make it's way home with you in the Indigenous Collection of spa products. Cultivated by the community, a full line of soaps, shampoos and lotions will recreate a memory of your spa experience.

From the outside, Wild Horse Pass Resort has all the trappings of any other top echelon destination in America. But when you explore just a bit deeper you'll find it has so much more. If you're a golf fan and a history buff I can think of no better place to vacation than Wild Horse Pass. For more information, visit their website at www.wildhorsepass.com or call 1-800-946-4452.



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