

COURSE REVIEW



savor the culture

and revel in the Gary Panks greens



BY JACK TALMAGE

Sometimes we just need to get away for a weekend and go play some golf. Fortunately Arizona abounds with all sorts of wonderful and unique resorts. So

many choices that when my friend called and cried out "Road Trip", I had to find someplace special that would satisfy all our demands. The resort needed to be close enough to drive there and still allow for an afternoon round, should offer a fine dining experience, perhaps a little nightlife, a spa for sore muscles, and as an added benefit have 36 holes for some variety. A quick look on-line for what might fit these requirements produced a short list that included The Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort and Spa on the Gila River Indian Community, just south of Phoenix. After visiting the resorts well crafted web site, we were sold and made reservations for the following weekend.

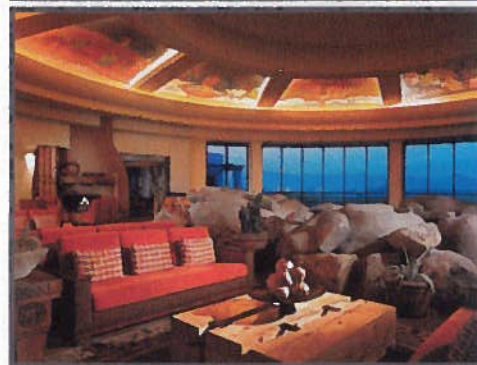
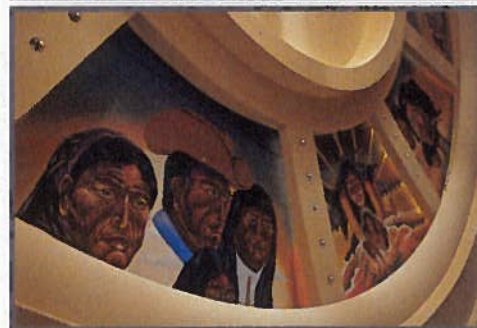
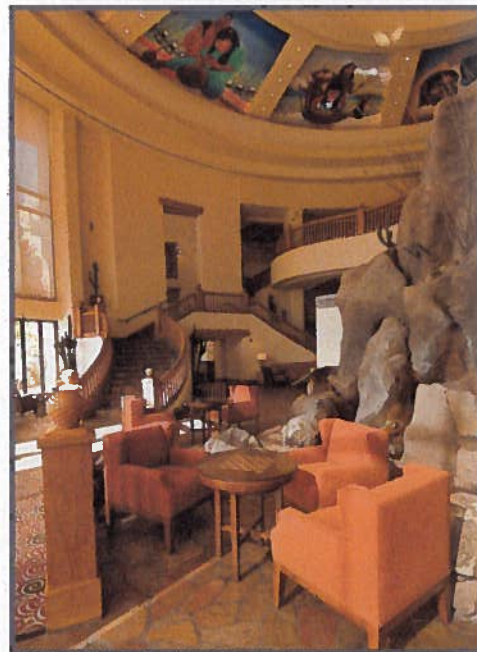
Following the short drive from Tucson, west on I-10 to exit 162 (Wild Horse Pass Blvd), the sense of arrival from that point told us this was going to be some place special. We drove the winding 2-mile drive through the desert, past the championship Whirlwind Golf Club, the Aji Spa, the casino, and along the

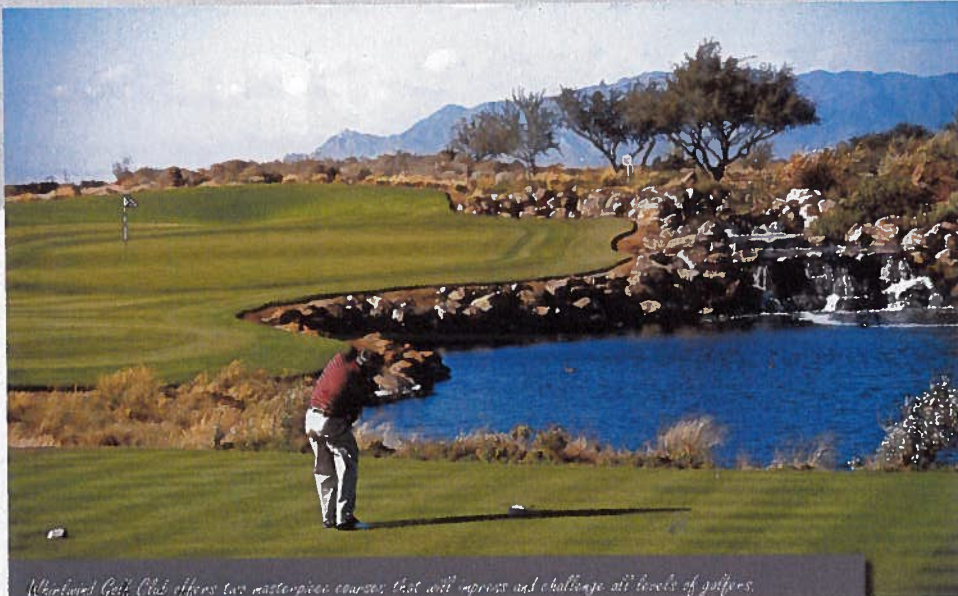


"The Devil's Claw course features dramatic mounding and elevation changes, while the Cattail course offers deep canyons and lots of clear blue water".

replica of the mighty Gila River that was once the lifeblood of these lands. Entering the resorts lobby you start to get a sense of the culture that presides over the property. You immediately notice the large domed and artistic ceiling that is made up of ten panels that represent various facets of Tribal life along with the traditional artwork that seems to be everywhere. Important to note is that the area is home to both the Pima and Maricopa Tribes. Each Tribe celebrates its own heritage in their arts and crafts, with the Pima specializing in basket weaving while the Maricopa have honed their craftsmanship in pottery.

The Whirlwind Golf Club at the resort is managed by Troon Golf, a recognized leader in operating golf courses around the globe. There are two masterpiece courses designed by Gary Panks that will impress and challenge all levels of golfers. The Devil's Claw course features dramatic mounding and elevation changes, while the Cattail course offers deep canyons and lots of clear blue water. The same culture and sensitivity to the land that is visible at the hotel carries over to the golf experience as well. Each hole is named after a significant legend or landmark of the Pima or Maricopa Tribes. Only plants that are indigenous to the Gila River and the surrounding desert are used on both golf courses. Fairways are generally forgiving off the tee. Trouble starts with some of the carries over washes and well placed bunkering. The greens are truly a joy to putt, fast and smooth and the contours allow for some really interesting pin placements, tucked in-between greenside traps or sitting on top of small crests in the greens...don't over read your putts.





Wildhorse Golf Club offers two masterpiece courses that will impress and challenge all levels of golfers.

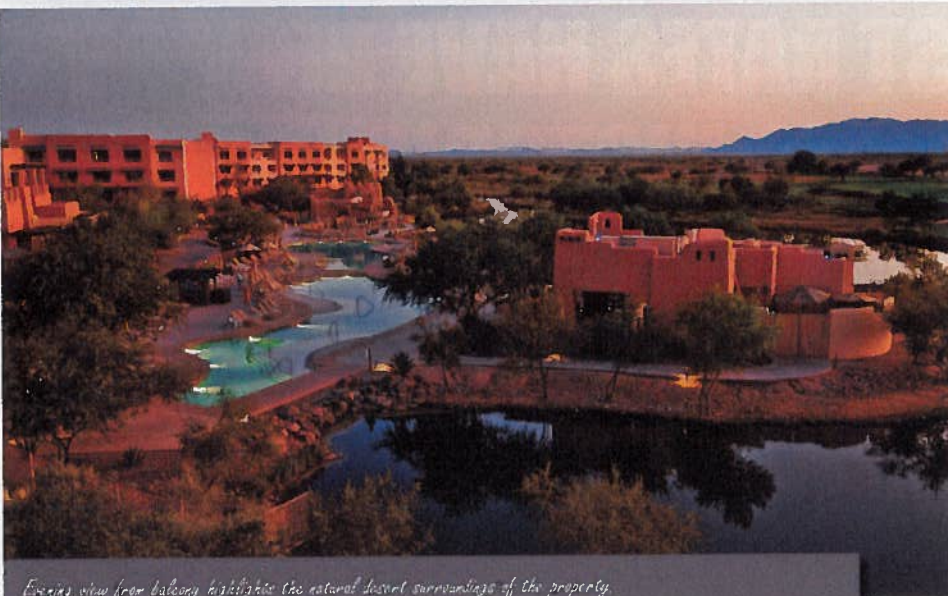


As with any destination resort, Wild Horse Pass offers several dining options, and they should all be experienced. The main dining room, Kai, which means "seed" in the Pima language, is truly a five star dining experience. Starting with the menu itself, each is adorned with a unique watercolor painting created by a local artist. What is offered inside the menu gets even better. The chef worked with many of the elders of the Tribe to talk about what they ate and how it was prepared, very authentic dishes with specialized and local ingredients. There is a lot to say about dinner and not enough room on this paper...I can only tell you, don't miss the grilled tenderloin of Buffalo....and make sure you listen to their expert wine pairings. You can't go wrong in the attention of the service staff at Kai.

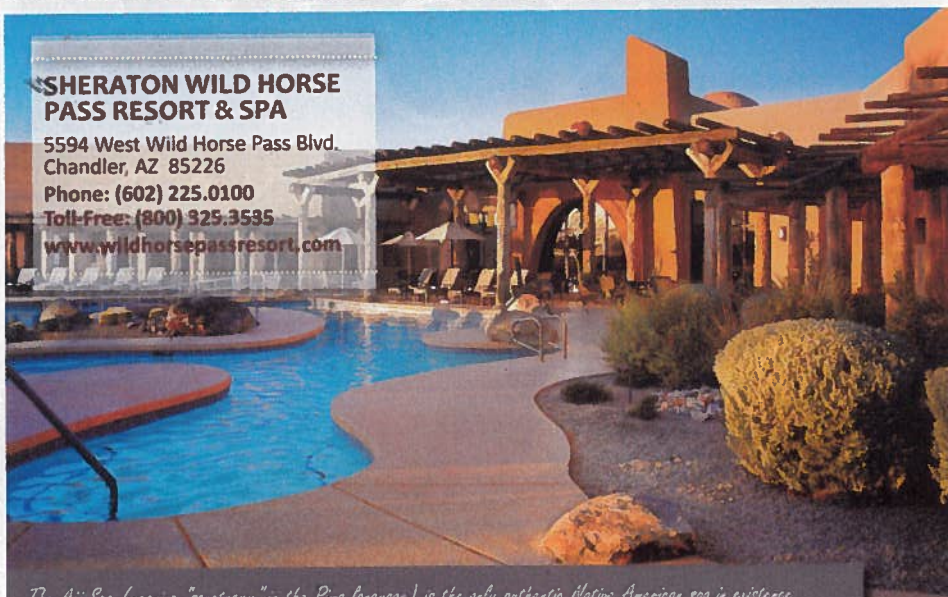
After dinner, there are several choices for entertainment. Those of us who like to gamble a little can visit the nearby casino (and you can even get there via river taxi, how cool is that). Or you may choose to stop on the way and wander the streets of the old western town of Rawhide, complete with shops, saloons, western characters re-enacting gunfights, and a rodeo every night.

What visit to a resort would be complete without spending some time at the Spa? Aji (meaning "sanctuary" in the Pima language) is the only authentic Native American spa in existence. The Pima and Maricopa cultures, like with the rest of the resort are reflected throughout the facility in the artwork, furnishings, and style. There are a wide variety of treatments available using indigenous materials and activities designed by the cultural caretakers of the Tribes. What a great place to relax and rejuvenate yourself, to prepare for yet another day at this marvelous resort.

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Evening view from balcony highlights the natural desert surroundings of the property.



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The Aji Spa (meaning "sanctuary" in the Pima language) is the only authentic Native American spa in existence.