

“GOLF AT THE RITZ” by Cori Brett, *Special to the AWGA*



The 9th hole at The Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain (Tortolita). Photo by Russell Kirk

I couldn't wait to see the brand new Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain, located in Marana, just 30 miles north of Tucson. It contains a 250-room luxury hotel, Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course, fancy spa – the works. The glamorous resort opened in late December 2009. Take that, doom and gloom!

At the Ritz-Carlton Golf Club we amateurs have the opportunity to play where the pros play. The top 64 golfers in the world will tackle the course for the second year at the Accenture Match Play Championship in February. Saguaro and Tortolito together comprise the championship course. Wild Burro, the third nine, is expected to be in play sometime in 2010.

With five different sets of tees to choose from, I played from the Green tees at 5,300 yards. The Tour tee stretches the course to 7,800 yards. Generous fairways wind along—and sometimes over -- desert washes. A stunning forest of saguaro cactus frames many of the holes as it climbs the craggy foothills of the Tortolito Mountain Range, surrounding the resort. Everyone talks about the greens, typically elevated and requiring uphill approaches. They're quite large with lots of undulation. My ball developed a nasty habit of rolling right off until I figured out how to hold the green. This is a course I definitely want to play again!

Although the course will eventually be only for members and resort guests, the public is currently welcome to play through 2010. You'll find some good deals on golf and spa packages during this introductory period. www.ritzcarlton.com/dovemountain

The secluded location led to a feeling of splendid isolation. There are no gas stations, convenience stores or shopping centers within several miles of the resort. In addition to golf, hiking is a big attraction, with 20 miles of charted trails in the adjacent foothills.



The 3rd hole at The Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain (Tortolita). Photo by Russell Kirk.

When I arrived at the hotel, I was drawn to the haunting sounds of Native American flute music that seemed to drift up towards the mountain peaks. A lone flautist entertains guests each day at sunset. The hotel blends into the natural mountain terrain with an understated elegance. We enjoyed the creative dishes prepared by Chef Joel Harrington at CORE, the signature restaurant. I couldn't get enough of the avocado fries: slices of avocado, coated with a finely ground Japanese snack mix coating and deep fried, served with a poblano chile dipping sauce.

Ritz-Carlton's famously attentive service pampers guests and their pets too. Pets are welcomed with dedicated rooms, gourmet treats, and even a dog-walker on property. But the Spa and Fitness Center is for people only. Its round lobby with high ceiling and soft colors opens up to a full range of healing treatments and an outdoor infinity pool with a tanning island in the center. The Spa is open to the public.



The Spa at The Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain. Photo by Chris Cypert.

Golfers can check out the new Ritz and see the Accenture Match Play Championship at the same time. The tournament takes place February 15-21. My favorite viewing location is between #9 Saguaro and #1 Tortolito. See you there!

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