



Featured Golf News

With Nine Courses, Hot Springs Village Has Golf Covered

By: [Steve Habel](#)

In the Ouachita Mountains of Arkansas northeast of the historic city of Hot Springs and its famous bathhouses sits Hot Springs Village, a 26,000-acre community that's a standalone municipality among rolling hills, towering pines and myriad lakes.



Pinta Nine's Sixth Hole at Isabella

It's the largest gated community in the United States - with a population of about 13,000 - and is home of nine challenging golf courses, including the four top-rated tracks in the "Natural State."

All nine courses were designed by the firm of Maryland/Virginia firm of Ault, Clark & Associates and opened over a 32-year stretch. The oldest course, De Soto, debuted in 1972, and the newest, Grenada, first accepted play in 2004. The courses each have their own flair; some are more central to the community's lakes and ponds while others wind through remote forests and over hills, but all give a great sampling of the demanding terrain Ault and Clark had to work with.

During a recent trip to the region, we played four of Hot Springs Village's courses - Cortez, Grenada, Diamante and the 27-hole Isabella. It was remarkable that we were only able to scratch the surface of the community's golf offerings.



Nos. 1, 8 and 9 at Cortez

Water-Festooned Cortez Demands Accuracy

Opened in 1977 as the second of the community's courses, Cortez is located in the northern section of the village. The par-72 course plays to 6,672 yards and has just two par-4s (both on the back nine) that play more than 400 yards.

Despite its relative brevity, this beauty is not to be taken for granted as its routing winds through trees and brings water into play on nine holes. Many holes also involve elevation changes and the greens complexes on Cortez require accuracy.

Perhaps the best stretch is Nos. 8-11, where you get a little bit of everything and a lot more difficulty than some can stomach. The 173-yard, par-3 eighth is all-carry over a huge lake to a shallow, well-protected putting surface. The ninth, a 393-yard par-4, heads straight uphill off the tee and on the approach adding 30-some yards to each shot.

No. 10 is one of the village's toughest holes, a 425-yard par-4 that moves downhill then back up and around a tree at the turn. The fairway is rolling and off-camber, making the approach to a green protected by two bunkers especially trying. Take full stock of the course from the tee at the 512-yard par-5 11th, which moves off an elevated tee box to a bumpy fairway. A large pond along the right enters play on the approach, even if the golfer decides to lay up short.

Also noteworthy is the 178-yard, par-3 17th, one of the most recognizable holes at Hot Springs Village that is found on many brochures and postcards.

With a rating of 72.3 and a Slope of 130 from the tips, Cortez is fun but tough. Here it's not length but positioning that counts. The course asks players to hit the landing areas and greens or face the consequences.

Cortez was renovated in late 2006, which provided a new irrigation system, re-grassed the entire course, corrected drainage issues and rebuilt several tees and greens.



The 9th Green on the Santa Maria Nine at Isabella

Up & Down at Isabella

While no rollercoaster, 27-hole Isabella has almost as many twists and turns as that joyride. After it debuted in September 2000, Isabella was ranked as the top course in Arkansas by Golf Digest and the Arkansas Business Journal. The original 18, now the Nina and Pinta nines, features wide fairways, beautiful scenery and five sets of tees; in 2006 the Santa Maria was added to give Isabella loads of flexibility.

Differing from the older Cortez, the meat of Isabella's challenge is its brutish two-shotters; two on each nine-hole configuration stretch more than 440 yards from the tips.

Nina plays 3,486 yards and its three toughest holes are the par-4s at Nos. 7, 9 and 3. The 454-yard third moves hard right-to-left and downhill before ending at a shallow putting surface; the 431-yard seventh skirts a pond and winds leftward to a button-hook green; and the 452-yard ninth is narrowed at the landing area and in front of the green by huge bunkers.

Pinta, carded at 3,575 yards, turns the distance up a notch but also brings more water into play, especially on the 334-yard, risk-reward sixth, which can be reached if the player is precise and long. The side ends at a 461-yard par-4 bunkered left of the landing area and with an elevated green guarded along the right by a pond.

Just when you things couldn't be tougher, Ault and Clark came up with Santa Maria, which plays at an even-longer than carded 3,630 yards from the tips - and that's including the 158-yard, par-3 fourth. Santa Maria also features the 580-yard par-5 fifth with its 43-yard deep green, and ends at the amazing 487-yard, par-4 ninth, which has a kidney-shaped green just 20 yards deep.

The Pinta/Santa Maria pairing is the longest (7,205 yards from the tips) and hardest by rating (75.1) and Slope (137), but all three nine-hole combinations rate as 74.4 or better with Slopes of at least 132. Isabella is a fun course and a pleasure to play anytime.



The 18th at Granada GC at Hot Springs Village

Granada Has the Best Views & the Golf is Great

The newest course in the village's family is Granada, a rollicking good time at 7,115 yards from the tips. Here Ault and Clark fashioned lengthy fairways and generous landing areas between creeks and the ever-present forest, all crossing rolling land.

How expansive is Granada? Almost seven miles of cart paths are needed to traverse the par-72 track, which actually plays shorter than the yardage. Opened in fall 2004, Granada is arguably the most scenic course in the village and one of the community's brightest stars as well.

The first five holes set the table, especially the risk-reward, 330-yard par-4 second and the 505-yard, par-5 fifth. In between the 450-yard, par-4 third - with a stand of trees bordering its left and a tough bunker right of the landing area (where there's still 200 yards left to the green).

Three of Granada's par-3s are at least 205 yards, and the par-5 15th weighs in at a whopping 586 yards, with water, trees and sand all impeding progress. One of the best and most difficult holes on the course is the 465-yard par-4 17th, which has a green that yawns 55 yards from front to back.

The final four holes at Granada, with three par-4s of 420 yards or better surrounded by the massive par-5 16th, make for a great finishing run to the clubhouse. This is a course that can be enjoyed but has to be taken seriously, as approaches left short and the ever-present danger of three-putting can complicate things.



Diamante's No. 17

Play Diamante if You Can but Brace Yourself

The only true private course at Hot Springs Village is Diamante, which has been ranked as high as the fourth-best course in Arkansas by Golf Digest. Diamante opened in 1995 and was considered the top track in Arkansas by Golf Digest from 1997 to 2002. Its unique design plays like five Hot Springs Village courses in one.

Stretching 7,560 yards from its back set of five tees, Diamante challenges both low- and high-handicappers. The venue features Zoysia fairways, giving golfers tee-like lies, and the bentgrass greens average 6,500 square feet in size.

Diamante is a brute but is manageable if played from the correct tees. From the backs, the course has five par-4s that play 472 yards or more, all four par-3s are more than 205 yards (including the 233-yard fourth), and the 651-yard par-5 11th, the longest three-shotter this journalist has ever played. The track carries a 76.5 rating and a Slope of 144 from the tips.

A suggestion: move up a tee box and to experience Diamante at no more than 6,935 yards. There, it still carries a rating of 73.3 and a 134 Slope. In 2009, Golf Digest found Diamante as the 38th most-difficult course in the United States. Private Clubs magazine pegged Diamante as a "Monster Course" in 2006 and included it as one of the "10 Toughest ClubCorp Courses."

Additionally, in 2006, the course's 17th hole (a risk-reward, 315-yard par-4) was voted by readers of the Arkansas Democrat Gazette as their favorite two-shot hole in the state. Diamante hosted the Nationwide Tour's First Tee Arkansas Classic for four consecutive years from 2001-04.

If you have a chance to tee it up at Diamante, jump at it. Four hours later you'll be whipped, but glad you took the exam.

For more information on Hot Springs Village and its nine courses, visit <http://www.hot Springs Village.com/infocourses.htm>.

Off the Courses at Hot Springs Village

Hot Springs Village offers much more than golf. It also has an award-winning tennis center and 11 lakes for swimming, boating, fishing, canoeing and other aquatic activities. Also on tap are more than 26 miles of nature trails and outdoor swimming pools, as well as a fitness center with an indoor pool. The village also boasts a 650-seat performing arts center, library, community center and indoor family games area.

Twenty-five percent of the village's land is dedicated to green space, so there are many areas left in their natural state. The village has one of the nation's lowest crime rates, with 24-hour security and seven gated entrances. The community also has its own fire, police and EMT/ambulance services.

Steve Habel is one of Cybergolf's world correspondents, contributing news stories, features, equipment and book reviews and personality profiles from his base in Central Texas. He is also works as a contributing editor for *Horns Illustrated* magazine, a publication focusing on University of Texas sports, covers the Longhorns for CBS Sports, is regional editor for *Texas Golfer* magazine and files stories for *Golf Oklahoma* magazine, *Texas Links* magazines and *Golfers Guide*. Habel's main blog (www.shotoverthegreen.blogspot.com) features news on golf and the Longhorns, and another (www.checkinginandplayingthrough.blogspot.com) chronicles his many travels, on which he has played more than 350 golf courses since 2009. Habel is a member of the Golf Writers Association of America and the Texas Golf Writers Association.

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