



Golf in Indian Country - 2019

by Matthew S. Robinson

There are currently 71 tribes in 20 states that collectively have 80 golf facilities with casino-affiliated courses. These tribally-owned facilities have a total of 107 golf courses with 1,755 holes. Table 1 presents tribally-owned, casino affiliated, golf courses by state.

California has 13 tribes with 14 tribally owned/operated golf facilities and 20 courses with 333 holes; Arizona has six tribes with eight golf facilities and ten courses with 171 holes; Michigan has six tribes with six golf facilities and nine courses with 162 holes; New Mexico has six tribes with seven golf facilities and 13 courses with 153 holes; while Washington State has seven tribes with seven golf facilities and seven courses with 126 holes. Minnesota has six tribes with six tribally owned/operated golf facilities and six courses with 108 holes. At the same time, Oklahoma has five tribes with seven tribally owned/operated golf facilities and eight courses with 135 holes.

With respect to greens/guest fees at tribally-owned golf courses, Connecticut has the highest cost range of fees (\$140-\$250), as well as the highest average green/guest fee at \$193. Nevada has the second highest average green/guest fee at \$140 with fees ranging from \$55 to \$199. Arizona has the next highest average green/guest fee at \$125 with fees ranging from \$10 (the lowest of any state) up to \$240 (the second highest of any state).

As many gaming markets around the country mature, golf at Indian casinos continues to grow, albeit at a much more moderate rate than previously experienced. As presented in Table 2, between 2004 and 2009, the number of golf courses at Indian casinos increased by more than 33 percent, while the number of golf courses at Indian casinos increased by more than 47 percent between 2009 and 2014. Over the past five years (2014-19), the number of golf courses at Indian casinos increased by 7 percent.

- In 2015, the Kalispel Tribe of Indians, which through its Kalispel Economic Development Authority owns and operates Northern Quest Resort & Casino in Airway Heights, WA, purchased Spokane Country Club, re-opening it as the 18-hole Kalispel Golf and Country Club.

Table 1

Golf Courses at Indian Casinos – By State

State	Tribes	Facilities	Courses	Holes	Green/Guest Fee		
					Low	High	Avg.
Arizona	6	8	10	171	\$10	\$240	\$125
California	13	14	20	333	\$33	\$149	\$95
Connecticut	2	2	3	54	\$140	\$250	\$193
Florida	1	1	3	27	\$70	\$70	\$70
Idaho	2	2	2	36	\$65	\$105	\$85
Kansas	1	1	1	18	\$75	\$75	\$75
Louisiana	2	2	2	36	\$69	\$94	\$82
Michigan	6	6	9	162	\$35	\$150	\$81
Minnesota	6	6	6	108	\$44	\$125	\$77
Mississippi	1	1	2	36	\$100	\$100	\$100
Nebraska	1	1	1	18	\$70	\$70	\$70
Nevada	2	3	5	90	\$55	\$199	\$140
New Mexico	6	7	13	153	\$42	\$125	\$80
New York	2	4	6	99	\$20	\$225	\$107
North Carolina	1	1	1	18	\$89	\$89	\$89
North Dakota	1	1	1	18	\$55	\$55	\$55
Oklahoma	5	7	8	135	\$15	\$129	\$66
Oregon	3	3	3	54	\$55	\$64	\$58
Washington	7	7	7	126	\$52	\$109	\$78
Wisconsin	3	3	4	63	\$29	\$64	\$49
20 States	71	80	107	1,755	\$10	\$250	\$91

Source: KlasRobinson Q.E.D.

- In May 2016, the Santee Sioux Tribe of Nebraska celebrated the grand opening of its much anticipated 18-hole Tatanka Golf Club at Feather Hill at its Ohiya Casino & Resort in Niobrara, NE. The property won *Golf* magazine’s “Best New U.S. Resort Course” for 2015 and placed second among *Golf Digest’s* “Best New Public Courses” in 2017.
- In September 2016, the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, through its Marine View Ventures, purchased the 18-hole North Shore Golf Course in northeast Tacoma, WA.
- In January 2018, the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians announced the purchase of Temecula Creek Inn, which includes a 130 guestrooms, a restaurant, meeting and function space, and a 27-hole golf course. The property borders the Pechanga Indian Reservation.
- In April 2018, the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, which owns and operates Little River Casino Resort near Manistee, purchased the 18-hole Bear Lake Highlands golf course in Bear Lake, MI.

• In June 2018, the Hannahville Indian Community celebrated the opening of Sage Run, the second 18-hole golf course at its Island Resort & Casino in Harris, MI. It's first 18-hole golf course, Sweet Grass Golf Club, is ranked among the top 20 "Best Courses You Can Play" in Michigan by *GolfWeek*.

Table 2 **Golf Courses at Indian Casinos – Historic Growth**

Period	% Change		% Change		% Change		2004
	2019	(2014-2019)	2014	(2009-2014)	2009	(2004-2009)	
Tribes	71	6.0%	67	48.9%	45	40.6%	32
Facilities	80	8.1%	74	51.0%	49	44.1%	34
Courses	107	7.0%	100	47.1%	68	33.3%	51
Holes	1,755	8.9%	1,611	49.2%	1,080	41.2%	765

Source: KlasRobinson Q.E.D.

• In October 2018, the Lummi Nation, which owns and operates Silver Reef Hotel Casino Spa in Ferndale, WA, announced the purchase of Loomis Trail Golf Course in Blaine from Resort Semiahmoo LLC. The course is ranked among the top 10 "Best Courses You Can Play" in Washington State by *GolfWeek*.

• In February 2019, the Nez Perce Tribe, which owns Clearwater River Casino & Lodge in Lewiston, ID, completed its purchase of Clarkston Golf & Country Club in nearby Clarkston, WA.

• In March 2019, the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa purchased the 18-hole Big Fish Golf Club located adjacent to its Seven Winds Casino, Lodge & Conference Center in Hayward, WI.

• In April 2019, the Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians, which owns and operates Black Oak Casino Resort in Tuolumne, CA, announced the completed purchase of Mountain Springs Golf Club & Restaurant in nearby Sonora. Upon completion of maintenance and repairs, the course will re-open as Teleli Golf Club.

In addition to the purchase of golf facilities and new course development, there have also been tribally-owned golf course closures.

• In April 2017, Redding Rancheria Economic Development Corp. ceased operations at its 9-hole River Tasalmi Golf Club in Redding, CA, due to economic reasons. After entertaining several purchase offers, the Rancheria decided to repurpose the property into a park.

• In July 2018, Elk Valley Rancheria closed its 9-hole Del Norte Golf Course in Crescent City, CA, due to increasing operating costs and a declining number of golfers at the course. The property is currently for sale.

• In September 2018, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs closed its Ka-Nee-Ta Resort & Spa near Warm Springs, OR, which included its 18-hole Ka-Nee-Ta Golf Course.

Over the past five years, with the exception of Sage Run – the second course at Island Resort & Casino and Tatanka Golf Club at Feather Hill at Ohiya Casino & Resort, the expansion of golf at Indian casinos has occurred solely through the purchase of existing courses. While not all purchase prices are disclosed to the public, it is estimated that the price for an existing, operating golf course has ranged between \$50,000 and \$250,000 per hole. In comparison, the cost to develop a new golf course is estimated to start at \$500,000 per hole and can take up to five years to commencement of actual operation – including design, permitting and construction. Development of a signature golf course is estimated to start at \$1 million per hole.

While golf is not an appropriate ancillary component at every casino, it can increase the length of stay, as well as provide an additional means of attracting and accommodating conferences and conventions, particularly for Indian casinos with adequate overnight accommodations and meeting and function space. At the same time, golf courses take up a significant amount of real estate and are expensive to operate, let alone build – if financing can even be identified. Rather than develop all-new golf courses, tribes are increasingly considering the purchase of existing, operating courses. Depending on the cost and relative proximity to the Indian gaming operation, such existing golf operations may provide a cost-effective, viable alternative for tribes looking to incorporate golf into their entertainment offerings. ♣

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