

and expertly designed around a variety of flat sand areas and deep, cavernous bunkers. More info can be found at poppyhillsgolf.com.



Hole No. 1 at Poppy Hills (Photo: Courtesy of Poppy Hills)



Hole No. 12 at Poppy Hills (Photo: Courtesy of Poppy Hills)

Quail Lodge and Golf Club has been around more than 50 years and went through a “refinement” in 2015.



Pistons' Stanley Johnson
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01:15

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This course does not have Pacific Ocean views, but there's no loss. Sunk into the Carmel Valley and set against a backdrop of the Santa Lucia Mountains, Quail Lodge is a terrific layout.

Some exposed rock cliffs add to the rugged look outside the boundaries of the course, but the playing surfaces are in terrific condition. "Lush" was the word that continued to pop out while walking with a push cart on the back nine in mid-March. And when the Pacific coastline is under fog, which happens often, the Carmel Valley is clear and also a little warmer.

The lodging area underwent a huge renovation, to the tune of \$28 million, making for a nice stay at somewhat lower costs than beachfront property about 5 miles away.

Quail Lodge is not a tricked-up course. The layout flows freely and naturally, and no two holes look alike. The valley is fairly flat, so you won't experience huge elevation drops. But other visual cues make the layout fun. The 10th tee should grab any golfer's attention, as the rock-side hills butt up against the tee and help visually frame a drive that needs to avoid a large tree to the left.

Bunkering on the course is somewhat artistically designed but not difficult to avoid. That said, wayward shots that find sand will provide very challenging outs. Another nice feature is that the course yardage maxes out at 6,464 yards, so even if a golfer tackles the tips, it shouldn't be a grueling round. More information can be found at quailodge.com/golf.



Hole No. 16, par-four, at Quail Lodge (Photo: Courtesy of Quail Lodge)



Hole No. 16, par-four, at Quail Lodge (Photo: Courtesy of Quail Lodge)

The **Del Monte Golf Course** claims to be the oldest continuously operating golf course west of the Mississippi River, after being established in 1897. Proudly hanging in the walkway is a life-size photograph from 1917 that shows the caddies of the day - including Phil Mickelson's grandfather as a youth.

In all honesty, Del Monte is not a destination golf course, but it is a great place to get in nine or 18 holes on a nicely kept parkland-style course with quality bunkering.

The course is walkable, as are most courses designed and built in the era of horses and hand tools rather than bulldozers and dump trucks. There are no water hazards. The ocean can be seen often on holes 9-11.

In a similar fashion to Quail Lodge, the tips at Del Monte only reach 6,365 yards. It was the original site of the California State Amateur and still hosts other notable amateur events in southern California.

Del Monte is owned and operated by Pebble Beach Resorts -- as are Spyglass Hill and the Links at Spanish Bay -- so more information on each can be found at pebblebeach.com.



Del Monte Golf Course (Photo: Tom Lang Special to the DFP)

Stay in the village of Carmel-by-the-Sea

Just a few par-fives down the pristine beach from Pebble, nestled into the oceanfront hillside, sits the village of Carmel-by-the-Sea -- perhaps best known for electing actor Clint Eastwood as mayor 30 years ago this month. This year is the centennial celebration of Carmel-by-the-Sea, so 2016 will be filled with special events.

Comfortable, tranquil and relaxing describe Carmel-by-the-Sea. With dozens of clean, tight back alleys and passageways leading in and around every building downtown, there are no dead ends for pedestrians -- just cool surprises around every corner. The overall feel is part historic European village, part Alice in Wonderland storybook, part old English charm and part midcentury modern. It all adds up to a real get-away-from-it-all.

Settlers from day one never wanted house numbers, which still holds true today. It forces residents to get their mail at the post office, the town gathering place. Yet for tourists, there are hundreds of shops, a wine tour, a bakery established in 1904, a large artist population, unique book stores and coffee shops, rare gardens, and restaurants of every conceivable kind -- including the chance to reserve Van Gogh's Table, the actual table used by Vincent van Gogh later in life and brought over from Europe to Casanova Restaurant.

Modern amenities abound in the town's lodging options, but there are no modern exterior hotel designs. Ranging from cottages to B&B's to multiple-story hotels -- one owned by actress Doris Day -- each option will provide a unique experience. I stayed in Einstein's Cottage, where Albert Einstein resided on a trip to Carmel to pose for some photography. More lodging information can be found at stayincarmel.org.

Another feature of Carmel-by-the-Sea is the residents' love affair with four-legged friends. Dogs are welcome in virtually every business, restaurant and hotel in the town. More information about a unique California experience is at carmelcalifornia.com.