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Live where you play in golf paradise

BY BARB LIVINGSTONE, CALGARY HERALD MARCH 22, 2013 9:50 AM

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STORY

PHOTOS (10)



The warm climate at Desert Mountain in Scottsdale, Ariz., means patios in homes in the golf resort are like outdoor rooms. This one has a fireplace (click on the photo for our 10-picture tour).

Photograph by: Photo , Desert Mountain

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — It is a golf lover's version of paradise.

Six champion Jack Nicklaus-designed golf courses, a state-of-the-art golf performance centre that can either start you on the path to golf or improve your existing game, modern clubhouses with top notch and varied restaurants ... and, oh yes, the opportunity to live where you play.

Desert Mountain, in the far north end of Scottsdale, is a 3,200-hectare residential community first established in 1986 when developer Lyle Anderson, with his partners, bought up eight ranches in the area around Carefree, Ariz., adjacent to the Tonto National Forest.

What now exists is the largest private country club in North America — possibly in the world — and one that was purchased by its members in 2011.

The golf courses, and the community that surrounds them, reflect the Sonoran desert, studded with natural cacti like the giant saguaros.

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There are about 187 listed homes ranging from Sonoran Cottages at \$555,000 US (golf equity membership included) at 2,234 square feet to a Saguaro Forest custom spec home listed at \$8.9 million for 11,800 square feet.

Along with resale opportunities there are 119 custom estate lots listed, ranging from \$95,000 for about 20,484 square feet of land to one listed for \$1.97 million for 137,126 square feet (about 0.24 hectares, or three acres) of property.

"Lot values are going to be rising as there will never be another Desert Mountain," says Don Breidenbach, managing broker of Sotheby's International at Desert Mountain.

"We won't see the economic climate where you can buy 8,000 acres (3,200 hectares) and build six golf courses. You can't get the land, and if you could, you couldn't afford it."

And while golf is obviously a major focus at Desert Mountain, Bob Jones, chief operating officer/general manager of the club, says it is definitely not the only one.

"We have developed the balance of other things that make it more of a staycation. It is a lifestyle you buy."

While the original average age of members at Desert Mountain used to be 62, Jones says that average dropped in 2007 to 2008 to 52 or 53, an age when many still have children who also want other things to do than golf.

Those other things include: private hiking trails that will eventually encompass 24 kilometres throughout the development; a nine-court tennis complex featuring hard, clay and grass courts; 19,000-square-foot fitness centre recently renovated for \$1.9 million, with cardio and weight training equipment, group exercise classes, personal training, and a spa; youth activity centre; three swimming pools; a dog park; and an on-site concierge.

Among homeowners from about 16 countries seeking the Desert Mountain lifestyle are Canadians, particularly Albertans, who took advantage of the drop in property values during the recession in 2008.

Today, there are 88 Canadian members at Desert Mountain, almost half of those from Alberta and the majority of Albertans are from the Calgary area.

The second strongest province of buyers is Ontario, which has traditionally bought second homes in Florida.

Jacques Ahsmann, a 66-year-old retired businessman from Calgary, says lifestyle was behind the purchase of the Desert Mountain home he bought with his wife several years ago.

While he had been coming to golf in the Phoenix area for a decade with his brother-in-law, the family had always seen Hawaii as the place for any second home.

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Then, one year when his mother-in-law died in the Netherlands, they were unable to get back to that country promptly.

"We couldn't get off the island and we didn't arrive till 50 hours later."

In Phoenix, he says, there are about eight flights a day that will get him from Phoenix to Calgary in less than three hours.

Still, he says it took him some time to find the right place. Then someone suggested Desert Mountain, saying Ahsmann needed to "buy yourself a lifestyle."

Ahsmann says he knew Desert Mountain was the right one the minute he drove in.

"It is a unique place."

While he hasn't played golf for over a year because of a torn muscle, he plays "aggressive tennis" every day, hikes, swims and his wife adds yoga and Pilates to the couple's list of interests.

And while Arizona doesn't have the ocean of Hawaii, Ahsmann says the desert "grows on you. I love the climate, the nature, we can see the valley and the mountains and even on a cooler day in winter, the sun comes out."

In fact, he has become such an advocate for the area, at least five visitors to his home have also bought in Desert Mountain.

"You just don't ever have to leave here to have a good time."

IN SHORT

Besides the stunning six Jack Nicklaus Signature golf courses, Renegade, Cochise, Geronimo, Apache, Chiricahua and Outlaw — with multiple pitching, chipping, putting and bunker areas, plus four practice ranges, six restaurants and five golf shops — there is the \$1.6-million US, 6,500 square-foot Jim Flick Golf Performance Centre.

Its six bays include indoor/outdoor facilities and a full body 3-D visualization and feedback system.

You can view your swing from four camera angles while at the same time trying the centre's specialty golf clubs, accessing the putting lab, or being assessed in the fitness room.

There are clinics, one-one-one training and everything else you need, no matter what your golf level.

A golf equity membership may be purchased from the club with or without the purchase of real estate.

Visit desertmountain.com/nicklaus-golf, or desertmountaingolf.net/

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Project: Desert Mountain.

Area: North Scottsdale, Ariz. **Prices:** The Cochise lots range from \$95,000 to almost \$2 million US.

Information: Visit desertmountain.com

IT'S NO MIRAGE

There are building lots and resale properties available in Desert Mountain throughout the 27 villages that make up the development around its six golf courses.

The 3,200-hectare community in north Scottsdale, Ariz., has about 1,660 completed homes and borders the Tonto National Forest in the Sonoran Desert.

Its elevation ranges from 2,500 to 3,500 feet above sea level, offering cooler desert temperatures year-round.

For more information on real estate, potential buyers can visit a sales centre at the entrance to Desert Mountain, call 1-480-488-2998, or go to desertmountain.com