Where members of the Resident and Fellow Affairs Committee recommend their favorite scenes outside UCSF.

Golf in California

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Here in San Francisco, we are fortunate to live in one of the premier golf areas of the world. As a native Northern Californian and as someone who has played a fair amount of golf, I wanted to share some of my recommendations on practicing and playing golf in the San Francisco area.

Driving Ranges
Before scheduling that dream round, one should make a few trips to the practice range. I personally like grass ranges; the only public grass range in SF is located at the Presidio Golf Course and even then, they limit access to grass depending on weather and day of the week. The other downside to this range is hitting downhill (better than uphill!) plus the often intense wind. Other choices for golf ranges down the Peninsula include San Bruno, Mariners Point and Burlingame. Each of these has artificial mats but you may also be able to pay extra to hit off grass. In Marin, Peacock Gap has a nice grass range with good balls. The other choice in Marin is McGinnis, located off of Smith Ranch Road.

Lessons
I often am asked about lessons; my answer varies according to level of player. As someone who has taken a lot of lessons in my life (including flying across the country to find the perfect instructor) I have plenty of opinions about teaching pros, swing theories, etc. Bottom line is I won’t commit to an answer in this article but am happy to give advice in person!

Golf Courses
There are a number of ratings searchable on the internet for golf courses in Northern California. Below I list my recommendations by category.

Best Courses for Beginners
• Mariners Point (a par three executive course)
• Lincoln Park (and what a view on #17!)
• McGinnis Park (a par three executive)
• Best Public Courses Within 30 miles of SF
• Harding Park—hard to beat if you are a City resident!
• Half Moon Bay- 2 courses to choose from, the Ocean (with better views and newer), the Old Course; both of these are somewhat pricey but fun to play
• San Geronimo—I think this makes the 30 mile limit, located out on Sir Francis Drake towards Pt Reyes; this course is in generally good shape, is relatively inexpensive and often has nice weather when SF is fogged in.
• Stanford Golf Course—Well, kind of public if you can know an alumnus. This course has a wonderful layout, in good shape and features great weather.
• Poppy Ridge- This is an NCGA course so if you are a member, you can play here for about $50. There are 3 nines, all are very well maintained. This may be outside of 30 miles but worth the trip!
• Best Private Courses Within 30 miles (Note, many faculty are members, you just have to identify them and then twist their arms!)
• Olympic Club: 2 full courses and an executive course. The Lake course is a top 10 course. Access will be limited in 2012 as it will be hosting the US Open in June.
• San Francisco Club: A Tillinghast design, this is a top 50 course.
• Meadow Club: A McKenzie design and located in Marin, this is a very special place!
• Lake Merced CC: A wonderful layout with challenging holes; it will host the US Junior Girls in 2012.
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Best Long Weekend Trips for Golf

Monterey: Nothing beats the Monterey Peninsula for golf. Public play choices include Pebble Beach, Spyglass, Spanish Bay (all quite pricy), Poppy Hills (another NCGA course and for NCGA members, moderately priced), Del Monte, Bayonet. One can also play at Pacific Grove Golf Links, the “poor man’s Pebble Beach”. Consider going over highway 17 on the way down or up and play Pasatiempo just outside of Santa Cruz (another McKenzie design). One tip would be to join the Dukes Club; membership gives you discounts to playing Del Monte, Spyglass and Spanish Bay. You can find out more details on the internet. Also, don’t bother with the Peter Hayes nine holes layout at Pebble Beach!

Bandon Dunes: Well, maybe this beats Monterey. They now have 4 incredible courses, with terrific accommodations. This trip is great for golf buddies; non-golfers would get bored much too easily. Consider booking off season to get better rates as one can sometimes luck out on the weather in March and November. Downside is that there is absolutely no easy way to get there; I have as yet to leave home and get to the first tee in under 10 hours! Bring some money for the poker games in the Bunker Bar!

Sierra Nevada: There are wonderful courses in the Lake Tahoe and Reno areas and non golfers would have much to do for entertainment.

Other Thoughts
Consider a day trip to Sacramento—courses there are cheaper to play and in the summertime, you can get out of the fog belt! My personal favorites are Teal Bend, Whitney Oaks, Turkey Creek. And if you are up in this area, you have to stop at Haggin Oaks; It has the most amazing golf store in Northern California. Don’t miss the separate golf shoe store!

Stevenson Ranch near Turlock; I have always enjoyed this course in the Valley; you can find special rates and the course is designated as an Audubon Signature course, with very nice views of birds and wildlife on the premises. Somehow, shooting a bad score here doesn’t feel so bad!

San Juan Oaks near San Juan Bautista: This course winds through the hills in a rural setting and has a very nice ambiance. And then, you can stop at the San Juan Bautista bakery and have a nice dinner in town!

Eagle Ridge near Gilroy
Cinnabar Hills in San Jose: 3 nines to choose from.
The Bucket List for Serious Golfers, i.e. somehow, someway, figure out how to play these courses.
Pebble Beach (Public)
Spyglass (Public)
Cypress Point (Private)
San Francisco Club (Private)
Olympic Club (Private)
Pasatiempo (Public)

I hope you enjoy these courses and please, do feel free to send me an email or stop by my VA office for any questions!