

A Guide To **GOLF** In Our Own Backyard

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Indiana does not generally fit the golfer's notion of paradise, like, say, Florida, Hawaii, or even Myrtle Beach. We are missing the temperate climates, the sandy dunes, and the ocean breezes that conjure up the golfer's idyll. But Indiana is actually a great place to play golf, precisely because most people don't think of it that way—within an hour and a half of Bloomington there are fabulous, upscale golf courses that are, with a few exceptions, affordable, accessible, and, best of all, uncrowded.

To the east of us is the longtime classic Otter Creek, in Columbus. To the south, French Lick, with its venerable Donald Ross course and a newer and much more expensive Pete Dye course, the exception to the rule of Indiana golf's affordability. North of us is the challenging sand-trap nightmare at Heartland Crossing, the Pete Dye Course at Brickyard Crossing that lets you play right through the Indy 500 speedway, and more.

But Bloomington golfers don't need to drive an hour and a half to find first-rate golf. As the courses featured here show, we have attractive, inexpensive, enjoyable golf right in our own backyard.

Bloomington-area golfers have a great selection of local courses that are accessible and affordable. The latest addition is the Ridge Course, the new nine holes at City of Bloomington's Cascades Golf Course. Here a local golfer follows his drive on the 4th hole, a par 5.



(left) The first hole of the Quarry nine at Cascades is a sharp dogleg left. It requires a second shot over a creek (not visible here) to a typically small Cascades green.

(below) Golfers on the way to tee off on the 4th hole of the Ridge nine.

ROLLING MEADOWS Golf Course



(above) The 16th and 17th holes at Rolling Meadows force the golfer to avoid huge ponds.

(bottom) A view of the picturesque 6th hole from the 7th fairway.



The 18 holes at this course in Spencer provide golfers with a pleasurable round, with more design variety than any of the other Bloomington-area courses. It has bentgrass fairways and greens that make for a finer playing surface than the fescue/rye grass combination that is more common to the area. The golfer is presented with quite a variety of holes, especially the par 3s and 5s. Of the 3s, the 2nd and 8th holes both have huge elevation changes, as the golfer has to drop his or her ball to greens a considerable distance below. This contrasts to the par 3 number 17, which requires about a 150-yard carry over across a large pond that reaches from tee to green.

The par 5s are also eye catching. The 7th requires shooting up a ridge to a steep, sloping green at the top of a long hill, while the 9th continues the journey back down with a tee shot over water, then a curvy fairway and elevated two-tier green. The most challenging hole is undoubtedly the 16th, a dogleg-left par 5 that has water along the entire left side. It requires a straight drive and exacting second shot. Anything hit left at all on this hole is in the pond, and right means recovering from rolling hills that define the fairway.

CASCADES Golf Course

Bloomington's municipal course has 27 holes. The older 18, the Quarry and Pine nines (built in 1928 and 1931 respectively), are the site of the annual city tournament, now held in the month of July, which regularly draws the best golfers in the area.

These original 18 are golfer-friendly. They are not too long and the fairways are generous. Rewards go to the golfer with a sharp short game who can get up and down from around Cascades' smallish greens.

The new Ridge nine added in 2000 is a completely different story. The fairways are bordered by dense woods and there are significant elevation changes on several holes. It has a much newer feel in the design and layout of the holes. Whereas the Quarry and Pine nines are quite open—you can see most of the course driving along North Kinser Pike on the way to Bloomington High School North—the Ridge nine sits back from the road and its forested setting blocks views of the other holes.



With 27 holes, it is almost always possible to get on at Stone Crest. The course has a spacious, open feel and is enjoyable by golfers of all levels. It is also a good option to consider for those who want to build a dream house with a fairway for a backyard.



STONE CREST Golf Course

This 27-hole layout is located about 15 minutes south of Bloomington off Highway 37. The golf course anchors a slowly growing housing development and is the choice of golfers who want uncrowded, pleasant golf at an affordable price.

The course got off to a rocky start in its early years with a reputation for inadequate maintenance. New ownership has changed all that with a strong grounds program and a pro shop where the staff is friendly and helpful.

The three nines have their differences, with the most challenging being the North Course, which has water on several holes. The East Course is longer and also has lots of water. The West Course meanders through hills with views of surrounding farmland. It is the most forgiving of the three.



INDIANA UNIVERSITY Golf Course

IU offers its students, faculty, and staff, as well as the general public, two very different golf experiences. It has what is arguably one of the better par 3 courses around (although the second hole is actually a short par 4). It is an excellent track, open and highly accessible for the beginner, or for the experienced player wanting to sharpen his or her short game.

The 18-hole IU Championship Course is relatively long with tree-lined fairways. It is a strong test, and it can be punishing for the novice golfer. A strong slice or hook on most holes will have you hunting for your ball in some pretty unforgiving woods. There are no water hazards or fairway bunkers on the course, but the trees and a few greenside sand traps present plenty of challenge for the average golfer. IU has the longest set of par 3s in the area; each is over 200 yards when the tees are back, and some of the long par 4s on the back nine, especially holes 12 and 16, make even very good golfers happy to escape with pars.

(inset) The 18th fairway at IU, like most of its holes, demands a drive that stays out of the stands of mature trees that line the fairways.

(bottom) Another hole that demands careful placement is the 8th, with its steeply sloped green.





(left) The 6th hole is a monster par 5. It is out-of-bounds left with a giant tree guarding the right. Then it's a long second shot over a creek to set up an approach shot that hopefully misses the large ball-grabbing tree on the right side of the green. A par here brings smiles, a birdie bragging rights.

(center) A soldier statue stands guard over a fairway and a cluster of tombstones dating from the 1800s.

(bottom) A golfer blasting out of a sand trap onto the 8th green.

BLOOMINGTON COUNTRY CLUB



This is the only course in the area that is not open to the public, but the club is receptive to new member applications. What do you get for joining? Bloomington Country Club (BCC) members enjoy a course that looks pretty easy but is deceptively difficult.

however, is a combination of a friendly golf community that knows and respects the game and relatively low play so that members can golf just about any time they want without worrying about getting a tee time.

Among BCC's members are touring pros Jeff Overton and Craig Bowden and former two-time USGA Mid-Amateur Champion Spider Miller.

(inset) Like most of the area courses, BCC has fine practice facilities, including the usual putting green and driving range, but it also offers its members a two-green short-game training area.

(below) A member has to negotiate one of the huge pine trees that protect the left side of the 18th fairway. They make a real challenge out of what would otherwise be a nice birdie hole for a good golfer.

The biggest challenge is its small and very fast greens, some with severe slopes.

It is not uncommon for BCC golfers to have putts roll right off the green or at least to have "come back" putts that are longer than their first ones.

This is the only course in the area with zoysia grass, which turns brown after the first frost but holds up through the punishing heat of August when many of central Indiana's fairways struggle. The real draw of BCC,



EAGLE POINTE Golf Resort



The former Pointe golf course on the edge of Lake Monroe has been renamed and significantly upgraded in recent years. The course winds its way through the condominiums and houses of "the Pointe" development and offers a fine test of golf skills.

The course plays longer than some of the other area courses, with notable challenges on its par 5 holes, particularly numbers 5 and 18. On the 10th and 18th holes, the golfer is required to shoot over huge ball-eating ponds, complete with waterfalls. While the course is close to Lake Monroe, about the only water one sees are the ponds on the course and the nearby swimming pools used by the Pointe residents.

The course is walkable, but most golfers use carts, which are included in the green fees, as there are some longish walks between holes, and especially back to the clubhouse from the 18th green.

