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COURSE REVIEWS

Arbutus Ridge Golf Club brings inexpensive, good golf and food to Vancouver Island

By *Chris Baldwin*, Senior Writer



Courtesy of Arbutus Ridge G.C. Arbutus Ridge Golf Club's 18th is one tough, confounding hole.

COBBLE HILL, B.C. - When a group of **Arbutus Ridge Golf Club** regulars noticed a Yankee taking pictures of a four-legged creature off one of the holes, they couldn't resist.

"What? You've never seen a horse before?" one cracked.

Hey, if you're from British Columbia wonderland, it may be the most mundane thing in the world to see a horse just outside a backyard barn not far from the fairway or four deer sniffing around a raised green, not fazed in the least by the sight of golfers taking the tee. For many of us who live in cities and get stuck in traffic commuting every day, it's pretty cool, though.

You don't expect to find these things at Arbutus Ridge at first either. This is a golf course that plays through a community. Heck, there's even a big, indoor tennis bubble that shares the course's parking lot. It's not exactly a sense of near isolation.

But then you get out on Arbutus Ridge, and you're still seeing so many deer that you wonder who called for the Bambi convention.

That's the thing about Arbutus Ridge, this place is going to surprise you. Rounds begin with visions of recording your career low score and end with one of the most wicked finishing trios you'll find on any island not featured on "Lost." Nos. 16, 17 and 18 could put hair on a deer's chest (if they didn't already have hair there).

You're not sure what to expect from the clubhouse restaurant either and walk in and get a tasty, affordable Sunday brunch packed with the kind of items (king crab claws, anyone?) that scream anything but typical golf course grub. And the view from the floor-to-ceiling windows goes back up 18 and toward the mountains on the horizon.

This is dramatic dining at relaxed prices.



Chris Baldwin/WorldGolf.com

Though, maybe not as dramatic as getting to shoot off the clubhouse balcony back down at the 18th green. Arbutus Ridge frequently lets groups who book an outing do this as something of a closing thrill perk. It's sort of an unofficial extra hole, the balcony hole.

It all plays into Arbutus Ridge's best attribute. This is a golf course where it's really fun to hang around - whether to grab a meal before or after your tee time, get some extra work in on the range or just shoot the breeze with the Canadian locals who tease you about your reaction to a horse.

If you're tired of stuffy resort courses, Arbutus Ridge could be your salvation.

In fact, some locals like the vibe so much that they linger even though they don't actually golf. The restaurant - the Satellite Bar & Grill - serves more non-golfers in an average day than golfers.

"It's not my fault they built the best restaurant in town at a golf course," one gray-haired regular told me.

Arbutus Ridge is in something of a small town, amid Vancouver Island wine country. But it's only a

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40-minute drive from downtown Victoria - and shorter than that if you're staying out at Westin Bear Mountain Resort.

In a Vancouver Island golf trail that includes 11 golf courses, almost that many different types of towns and plenty of opportunities to do something outside your usual golf trip itinerary (setting a few days aside for [fishing at a spot like Painter's Lodge](#) for example), Arbutus Ridge makes a natural, easy stop.

Yet, it's still a course that isn't close to overrun by tourists, one that everyone else who's ever visited Vancouver Island will not have stories about playing on.

"We get a number of golfers from Victoria," said Ken Langdon, regional sales manager at Arbutus Ridge. "But we'd like to get more."

The Verdict on Arbutus Ridge Golf Club

If you're looking for a fun, relaxed day on your Vancouver Island trip, Arbutus Ridge will deliver. The greens fee max out at \$59 high season (running through Oct. 5), so no one will be too stressed about the price. The slope rating on this Bill Robinson design comes in at 123, so no one's trying to beat you up.

Until maybe that finishing kick.

No. 17 is a par 3 where you're shooting down toward a green with water on three sides - and on this day, plenty of deer sniffing around. No. 18 is a 426-yard par 4 that has you shooting straight uphill on your first shot and hoping you'll have a chance at the well-guarded green below the clubhouse on your second.

Arbutus Ridge veterans are known for suckering first timers they bring into No. 18 dinner bets. The wager sounds easy to someone who hasn't played Arbutus Ridge before. All you have to do is par this par 4 and your buddy buys your meal. Anything over par, and you're footing the bill.

Let's just say, the Arbutus Ridge regulars don't have to pick up many dinner checks.

"This hole always somehow gets me," Langdon said as he lined up on 18, no doubt echoing the view of many, many players who've come before him.

Then, Langdon laughed. It's just golf. The food's still going to be good no matter how 18 goes. Around here, they remember that.

July 29, 2008

Any opinions expressed above are those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the views of the management. The information in this story was accurate at the time of publication. All contact information, directions and prices should be confirmed directly with the golf course or resort before making reservations and/or travel plans.

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Courtesy of Arbutus Ridge G. C.
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