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Planet Putter Brandon Tucker's Best of 2010 in golf travel awards

By *Brandon Tucker, Senior Writer*

My travel in 2010 brought me to about 100 golf courses, 100,000 miles in the skies and four passport stamps.

This included some serious golf benders, like in Michigan, Tucson, Ariz., and the California-Nevada High Sierras, where my golf-per-day ratio was about 2-to-1 -- right where I like it.

After sorting through all my photos and notes from a jam-packed year, I've narrowed down as much as I could. So here is the best of 2010.

Best new golf course

There aren't many these days, but my pick goes to the new Ridge Course at Predator Ridge Golf Resort in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley. The Doug Carrick design is a gorgeous, player friendly complement to the infamous Predator Course.

Runner-up: Hamilton Island Golf Club in Australia's Whitsunday Islands: Set on its own island, its setting is spectacular, tip-toeing along the teal waters of the Great Barrier Reef.



The new Ridge Course at Predator Ridge Golf Resort.



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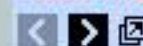
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Best service and amenities

The Frank Lloyd Wright-designed clubhouse at [King Kamehameha Golf Club](#) on Maui is a spectacle, but the staff earns its place, too. They know you by name by the time you pull up and somehow found my girlfriend's ring lying in the grass on the driving range long after we were gone.

After the round, you have the choice of hot or cold scented towels (we chose hot since the sun was setting and it was a pretty windy round).

In the locker room, the sauna has its own TV. My favorite perk? Kamehameha is a high-end club with great halfway house prices: \$3 beers and \$6 sandwiches.

Best course to take your slice

When watching the American Century Classic on NBC, it isn't blatantly obvious that Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course has one dogleg right after another. That can't possibly be coincidence for the slice-on-demand celebs.

Best golf course redesign

When I played the oceanfront [Makai Golf Club at St. Regis Princeville](#) on Kauai two years ago, I thought it had a lot of untapped potential. I got to see it this spring following the renovation project, and it fulfilled my expectations.

Thanks largely in part to firm and fast playing conditions, and other holes that were made more dramatic (most notably the par-4 13th), it's my go-to course on Kauai.

MVP (Most Valuable Partner)

"Esquire" magazine's Tom Chiarella, my best-ball partner playing in the group behind me, carded an ace on the 13th hole at [Puakea Golf Course](#). Thanks in part to his net "0," we won our group's cash prize by a shot -- and drank on his dime all night.

Most unexpected animal encounter

When you walk off the tee of and ascend over a hill to the fairway, you expect to encounter bunkers or gorse -- not two giant cows lounging right in the landing zone like at the par-5 17th hole at Pennard Golf Club in Wales. Along with roaming sheep and horses, they have the right of way here.

Best golf lesson

A [Zenolink lesson](#) in northern Michigan at Crystal Mountain Resort with Director of Instruction Brad Dean helped to finally get my left hand grip away from showing four knuckles. After about 20 years of playing with a strong left-hand grip, now it actually looks pretty conventional.

Best rain check

Step into the Village of Pinehurst's [Tufts Archives](#), where you can find all sorts of Donald Ross memorabilia and hard-to-find books. I cozied up with a design buff's guilty pleasure, the out-of-print "Confidential Guide to Golf Courses," by Tom Doak.

Best comfort stations

They could put the comfort stations at Gozzer Ranch Golf Club in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho in the middle of Coney Island and they would fit right in: root beer and popcorn machines, sweets and all kinds of other goodies have your body shaking in withdrawal about three holes after you leave one of them. The caddies at "Gozzer" call them "10 pound rounds."

Best long-haul flight

I managed to receive an upgrade to Business Class on Qantas Airlines from Los Angeles International Airport to Sydney, Australia. A 14-hour flight never flew by so fast. I watched "Godfather II" on my personal screen, curled up entirely flat for eight hours to sleep, woke up and watched "Rocky" over breakfast, and before I knew it we were there in the morning. For being almost double the flight time, I felt better arriving in Australia than I ever have arriving in the morning in Europe.

Top state love affair

I've taken three trips to Idaho in the summertime, and it gets better every time. I love the mountain air, friendly people, (relatively) affordable prices and all the things you can do outdoors.

My trips this summer included wake boarding on Lake Coeur D'Alene and trap shooting at the [Sun Valley Resort](#), among many other outdoor pursuits.

There are better pure golf states, but for all things great outdoors, Idaho is on the short list.

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Jason Scott Deegan:

- ✦ My 2010 Travel Awards Part 3: Golf Grub, the tasty final chapter



Brandon Tucker:

- ✦ In a time of mega deals, how come you haven't joined a private golf club yet?



Best 'play while you can' private course

The Timilick Club in Truckee, Calif., is a phenomenal new mountain design in the High Sierras and easily my favorite course in the area. The development came a little late to the private club and real estate party and allowed public play for 2010 while they fill memberships.

Hole I most want a mulligan on in 2011

The famous par-3 third hole on the Mountain Course at Ventana Canyon Golf Club in Tucson, Ariz., a Tom Fazio design. It's just a 100-yard shot from a tee perched atop rocks to green tucked aside boulders and desert all around.

I chunked my first sand wedge straight into the junk. Then I juiced a second wedge straight over the green for a nice "X" on the hole.

There were about 1,000 ball marks on the green, and none of them were mine. I will be back.

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Brandon Tucker is a Senior Writer and Special Projects Editor for the TravelGolf Network, where he contributes not only golf and travel articles, but photo essays, videos and more. His golf travels ... [read more...]

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