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Quivira 7th hole

High-Wire Act

Cabo's Quivira is golf's ultimate hair-raising adventure

by JOE PASSOV

Sometimes all we want from a golf experience is a tranquil walk in the park. Occasionally, however, we crave a pulse-quickenning thrill ride. For the same reason some choose to go skydiving, watch a horror movie, or drive in Manhattan, the lure of a potentially perilous round of golf can be irresistible. Noah Webster wasn't a golfer, but the dictionary he begat defines "hair-raising" as "causing terror, excitement, or astonishment," and the golf course that best fits that description is Quivira in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico.


Designed by Jack Nicklaus and opened in October 2014, Quivira checks every box for Pueblo Bonito Resorts' guests and members. The alarm bells ring with a glance at the back of the scorecard, where there is an admonition: "Rattlesnakes, other dangerous animals and spiky plants are part of the environment at Quivira Golf Club, that is why searching for balls and walking through the native areas, is under player's responsibility." A warning, and the round hasn't even started.

Nicklaus thoughtfully—thankfully—eases us into the experience with a flattish quintet of Scottsdale-by-the-sea, desert-accented holes. Early on, however, you peer up the mountainside and wonder, "Are we really going up there?" Yep. The fun begins with the five-minute-long, switchback-filled, vertigo-inducing ride from 5 green to 6 tee. (To accommodate new construction in 2022, Quivira's holes were renumbered, with the old 18 now No. 1, the old 17 disappearing, and a new 17 that quickly became the new 18. For those who remember the wild, short par-four 5th, it's now the 6th.)

Clinging to the edge of the world, the back tee at the 310-yard 6th scares the timid player merely walking down the sliver of dirt path to reach it. The prudent play calls for a layup to a plateau

island fairway bracketed by cliff and beach far below to the left and by rock-encrusted mountain to the right. Sure, the green is drivable on this dogleg left, but many are seized with fear that an overly aggressive follow-through might cause a plunge into the abyss.

Yet, even with a successful layup, the green is somewhere "down there," visible to some, not to others. For those who can see it, call it a mixed blessing. The putting surface juts into the Pacific via a cliff edge like a fantasy calendar hole. Staring down at the 200 feet of nothingness left, back, and right is momentarily disorienting, because it's unlike any target you've ever aimed at on a golf course—and that's with a wedge from a sidehill lie. Compose yourself quickly because another dizzying descent arrives at the postcard-worthy, 180-yard par-three 7th.

More crazy, hairpin-cart-path turns and heart-pounding shot demands occur at the par-five 11th, par-three 14th, and par-four 15th. At times, the Quivira journey is wacky, but given the wow factor, it's undeniably wonderful. At the 2014 Grand Opening, Nicklaus understated it perfectly when he said, "I thought it was a very challenging yet spectacular piece of property." Even for the follically challenged, Quivira is the ultimate hair-raiser. 

Three Other Peril-Packed Layouts

New Zealand's **Cape Kidnappers** dazzles with a fistful of dizzying holes draped atop slender fingers of cliff-top fairway 450 feet above Hawke's Bay. Of the 650-yard par-five 15th, its designer Tom Doak noted that the left is marked as out-of-bounds, "to stop someone from trying to play a shot and falling to their death." Peering over the edge from the fairway or green is not recommended for weak stomachs.

Volcano Golf Course on the Big Island of Hawaii isn't particularly demanding at 6,552 yards from the tips, but it can be treacherous due to its location adjacent to the active Kilauea volcanic crater. Golfers who played through Kilauea eruptions in May 2018 and again this past June were free to use flowing lava, spewing ash, and the possibility of toxic sulfur dioxide gas as acceptable excuses for three-putting.

Sun City South Africa's **Lost City Golf Course** is a mostly bucolic Gary Player resort design except for one feature: The 198-yard par-three 13th plays across a vast pit teeming with six-foot-long crocodiles. At the hazard's edge is the most unnecessary sign in golf, which states in part, "Warning! Entry to the crocodile enclosure is strictly prohibited. Do not attempt to retrieve golf balls from the croc pit."