

# TRAVEL SPECIAL MEN'S JOURNAL

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# 100 SUMMER ADVENTURES

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## Missouri's New Golf Mecca

**PAR-3 GOLF COURSES** are often built as an afterthought — nothing more than glorified practice areas with worn-out Astroturf tee boxes and greens so rough the ball hops like a bunny rabbit all the way to the hole. Not so for Top of the Rock at Big Cedar Lodge, a par-3 course and true golfing destination on Missouri's southern border.

Big Cedar's owner, Bass Pro Shop magnate Johnny Morris, commissioned the Nicklaus Design course atop an Ozark peak that boasts panoramic views of Table Rock Lake from nearly every tee. All nine glorious holes are striking and said to be inspired by the course

at Augusta National. Four tee shots require healthy overwater carries, and the sixth green is situated on an island that players reach via a pontoon boat. Even though the course is short, it presents a significant challenge for players at every skill level, including the ones on the PGA Champions Tour. Mountain winds gust frequently, bedeviling tee shots, while subtle breaks require a player's full attention, even on short putts.

You'll want to kill some time at the practice area, too. An elaborate driving range designed by Arnold Palmer and an 18-hole putting course by Tom Watson make even the warm-ups seem like a bucket list experience.

One of the complaints about golf is that it's time-consuming. Because this is a short course, a round should take a little over an hour for nine holes and about two and a half if you replay for 18. So if you tee off early, you can be back at Big Cedar just in time for a savory biscuits-and-gravy breakfast worth the caloric splurge.

After fueling up, there is more golf to play. The resort's 18-hole, par-71 course, Buffalo Ridge, was designed by Tom Fazio and is one of the best in the state of Missouri. Formerly Branson Creek Golf Club, the track plays a shade over 7,000 yards from the tips. Recently, Morris tapped Fazio for a substantial and nearly complete renovation to enhance players' exposure to the Ozarks' natural

The view of Table Rock Lake is a stunning setting for an epic round.

beauty, with numerous waterfalls, caves, and exposed rock formations. A new clubhouse and halfway station evoke down-home charm mingling with the uber-luxe vibe that has made Big Cedar famous; and later this year, the resort plans to open a 12-hole, family-friendly circuit. It was designed by Gary Player to be unintimidating for beginners and to help bring new players to the game.

If you still have some energy, the resort serves as a base for a number of adventures, including guided bass fishing on Table Rock Lake, shooting at Big Cedar's academy, or fly-fishing at the Orvis School at Dogwood Canyon, a stunning 10,000-acre preserve created by Morris and aggressively stocked with rainbow trout. —NICHOLAS HEGEL McCLELLAND

### INSIDE INFO

**Big Cedar Lodge** is just north of Arkansas, about an hour from Springfield, Missouri. Rooms go for \$179 a night. Nine holes at **Top of the Rock** run \$135, and you can replay the course on the weekend for \$90. A round at **Buffalo Ridge** on Friday or Saturday costs \$110. Book ahead to ensure a tee time.