



Clockwise from left: Sky Mountain's 1st hole; Sand Hollow's 18th; St. George Utah Temple, which was dedicated by Brigham Young in 1871.
Opening spread: Entrada at Snow Canyon's 2nd hole



St. George has managed the neat trick of being both obscure and obvious as a golf destination. In fact, locals and visitors alike tend to talk up the town by describing what it's not: It's not as expensive as Scottsdale, not as crowded as Las Vegas. It's neither as hot as Palm Springs in summer nor as cold as wherever you're fleeing from in winter. It's not as far as Naples, not as buggy as Myrtle Beach, not as remote as Bend.

Nestled among sage-covered valleys, rumbled bluffs of red rock and jagged outcrops of black lava in the high desert of southern Utah, St. George was long known chiefly as the off-ramp to Zion National Park. Called "Yosemite in Technicolor" for its dramatic cliffs and canyons carved from multi-hued sandstone, Zion is the second step on what's known as the Grand Staircase, an epic layering of sedimentary rock that begins at the bottom of the Grand Canyon to the south and marches up through geologic time to Bryce Canyon National Park to the north.

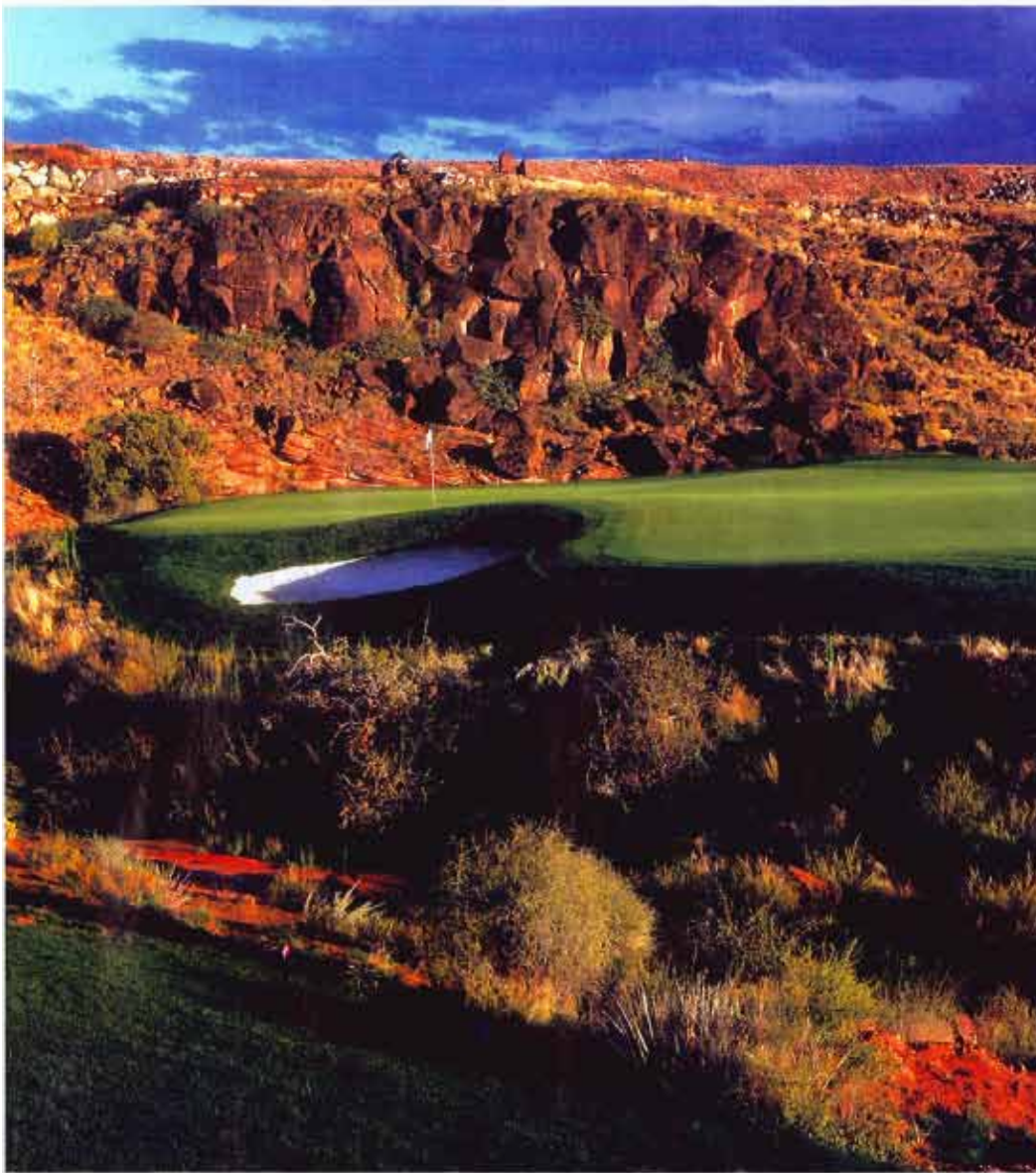
With mild winters, plenty of room for growth and enough water (for now) to nourish it, it's no surprise St. George has

been among the nation's fastest-growing metropolitan areas for two decades. Visitors and residents come for the same reasons that drew Mormon leader Brigham Young, who made his winter home in the town that got its start in the 1860s as a cotton-growing mission, hence the area's nickname, "Dixie." Long a second-home destination for Salt Lake City residents, St. George is beginning to attract notice throughout the West.

So here's what St. George, Utah, is for golfers: a small, quiet, friendly burg with plenty of scenic, challenging holes—fitting for a town named after the patron saint of England. It's open-range golf, too: Many courses feature sweeping vistas of what's inadequately called "Color Country."

Take Sky Mountain Golf Course, for starters. It's the course closest to Zion, in proximity and viewscape, and serves nicely as a picturesque and player-friendly introduction. At 6,312 yards, the 1994 Jeff Hardin muni is hardly the area's longest or toughest track. But yard for yard, it's surely the most scenic. Located in Hurricane, 15 miles north of St. George, the course spreads across a furrowed bluff overlooking the Virgin River, with views of red-rock outcrops crashing up against the

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A TASTE OF MESQUITE

Separated by barely more than a state line, St. George and Mesquite, Nevada, play well together in a ham-and-egg sort of way. One is straitlaced and rolls up tight at night; the other is an all-in 24-hour town. Many golfers stay in Mesquite, a mini Vegas, for the gaming and the package deals offered by the area's casino hotels, and head up the scenic 40 miles along Interstate 15 to St. George for more golf.

But the golf in Mesquite is just as good as it is across the border. Wolf Creek Golf Club is the showstopper. Word is, owners Cory and Chad Clemetson sketched out the holes over breakfasts together. I can't imagine what was on the menu, but they have served up an extreme-golf routing that takes you up, over, through and around a gully-riddled desert plateau. There are signature holes all over this 6,994-yard layout (8th hole, above).

Oasis Golf Club, etched into a similar gully-washer landscape, is another good bet. Pick the Palmer course over the newer Canyons. As at Wolf Creek, you'll hit from a number of elevated tees down to narrow canyons carpeted in green—the fragile silt-stone slopes are off-limits, so reload instead of tramping after errant drives. There will be lots of them, especially if the wind is blowing. —S.S.

Missing the green of the 15th hole at the Ledges of St. George will present a tough up-and-down challenge.

slopes of Pine Valley Mountain beyond. You may find yourself taking more pictures than shots.

Sky Mountain has an ambitious, well-heeled new neighbor in Sand Hollow Resort, a master-planned community taking shape amid the sand dunes. In time will come homes, vacation villas, resort hotel, spa and water park. But first comes the golf, which arrives this spring in the form of an 18-hole Championship course and 9-hole Links, both by rising designer John Fought.

Taking into account the blustery winds that gave Hurricane its name, Fought has gone the minimalist route. The 7,316-yard Championship layout follows the lay of the land, with wide, rumpled fairways spreading across the sagebrush flats, and bentgrass greens surrounded by huge aprons. Fought worked straight out of the Royal Melbourne school of design until the 12th hole, where the course disappears down along the rim of a red-rock canyon.

It's this chain of four cliffside perils, starting at the elevated tee on the 452-yard 12th, that golfers will remember. Hit to a ledge of a fairway perched between a red-rock cliff rising on the right and a sheer drop-off to the left. The 178-