

hidden gem



Rollick & Roll at the Golf Club at Cinco Ranch

By Rebecca MacDonald

Houston is not known for its elevation changes, which is one of the reasons it's such a pleasure to play at the Golf Club at Cinco Ranch in Katy, just 20 minutes due west on Interstate 10 from downtown Houston. The 18-hole, par-71 golf course features a rollicking, rolling layout that offers pleasant relief from the mostly flat Houston landscape. Another plus: while the course does wind its way through a housing development, it manages to avoid that feeling you get at all too many residential community courses that you're playing in someone's back yard.

The developers at Cinco Ranch, a large, master-planned community (are there any haphazardly planned communities left?), provided plenty of room for architect Carlton Gipson to design a layout that is both inviting and challenging. Rather than encroaching on the course, the homes that can be seen from the fairways are set back well enough to provide plenty of room off the tee. It's a nice change, there's nothing like declaring a ball lost when you can see it perfectly well through the wrought iron fence of some homeowner's back yard.

Don't let those tee shots go too wild, however, the omnipresent water on 16 of the 18 holes is an unforgiving reminder that the fairways are there for a reason. It starts on the first hole, a 310 yard par 4, with grassy mounds on both sides that invite the ball to roll back to the center. For some reason, our group declined the invitation. It's not a particularly tough hole, but if you wander far from the rather tight fairway, you'll find yourself in trouble. Hit your tee shot left, and you'll be facing a blind shot from behind a stand of trees, over a hill to the raised green. Water runs along the right side of the hole, a theme you'll be all too familiar with by the end of the round.

You'll regain your confidence when you look down the broad, straight fairway on number two. There are a couple of fairway bunkers on the left side off the tee, but they're close in and don't present much trouble. More water runs along the right edge of the fairway, inviting slicers to take a dip, but it's far enough right that you can hit a fade and still avoid getting wet. There are no greenside bunkers, so as long as you avoid the water on the right, you'll stay out of trouble.

The par-3 third hole is where it starts to get interesting. At 101 yards, it's not a difficult distance, but the green is well guarded by a water hazard on the right, and a large, greenside

bunker on the left. The green slopes toward the water from left to right, so the best shot here is to hit to the left side of the green and let it roll down.

Pull out the driver on the par-5, 438 yard fourth hole. The fairway is wide, but your best bet is to aim it left. The water that lines many of the holes lurks unseen from the tee box down the right side, and on the approach, there is a very large bunker on the right side of the green. Enjoy the scenery on number six, another par 5 measuring 396 yards. Here, the water runs down the left side of the fairway, and a little wooden bridge takes you over the canal to the tee box. On sunny days, a plank floating in the canal is home to at least a dozen turtles catching some rays. Aim carefully off the tee, there is a fairway bunker on the right, and a well-struck tee shot down that side will roll into it. Only a narrow strip of fairway can be seen between that bunker and the large water hazard on the left. After that, the fairway widens out again, but on the approach to the green, a large bunker sits smack in the center, about 100 yards out. You can choose to lay up short of the bunker and then hit over it to get to the green, but there is also a narrow strip of fairway that runs to the left around it.



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If you can play in from this side, you'll have a safer approach.

Finishing out the front side, the number 3 handicap ninth presents another interesting challenge. There are bunkers all down the right side of the fairway, and water further down on the left comes into play on the second shot. On your drive, stay to the left side of the fairway, so you can hit away from the water on the approach. However, there are three large fairway bunkers down the right side, so be careful about straying too far to the right. On the approach, line up carefully! The water curves in from the left, and there is a bunker on the right front of the green. The small landing strip of fairway in between the two hazards is very narrow.

The back side starts off with a straight, broad par 4 that is much less threatening. There is a very large bunker on the front left side of the green, so use your course management skills and play down the right side of the fairway. As long as you stay out of the fairway bunker on the far right, you'll have an easy approach into the green.

Number 11 is another hole where it pays to strategize. Be careful off the tee, if you hit it long, you risk rolling

into the water that crosses about 200 yards down the fairway. That same water encroaches on the green from the left, if you've played down that side, you'll have to carry it to get to the green.

If you can fly the left bunkers on number 13, a par-4, dogleg left, you'll have a much shorter approach shot into the green. Aiming to the right is the safer shot, but requires a longer approach. Water crosses the fairway about 90 yards from the green, so be careful to either lay up in front of it or take enough club to carry it.

Another dogleg left, this time a par 5, awaits on number 15. Again, there is a bunker waiting at the corner. Long drivers can cut the corner and go over it, but the safer shot is out to the right. On the second shot, another large fairway bunker waits on the left. An approach from the right provides a better angle into the green, which curves back around to the left.

Shot placement is critical on number 16, a par3 measuring 96 yards from the forward tees. The green is long horizontally, but shallow, with two very large bunkers in front and one in back. This is one hole where you really need to know the distance you hit your clubs.

Number 17 provides relief with a straight, scenic par 4. Water runs all the way down the right side of the hole, and on the left-hand side is the canal. The fairway is broad, but not extremely so, just hit a nice and easy straight shot.

The eighteenth is a beautiful finishing hole, and doesn't allow you to ease up on your focus. There is a carry over a ditch off the forward tees, take time to admire the pretty bridge as you cross it. More water, and bunkers, guard the left side of the fairway. On the approach, more water awaits on the right side of the green.

After your round, enjoy lunch in the Lone Star Grill and Bar, and take a walk through the pro shop, which offers a good selection of women's shoes and apparel. The friendly atmosphere, along with the beauty of the Cinco Ranch course, will entice you to return soon for another round. 🏌️

Course Facts

FROM THE FORWARD TEES

Par: 71 Length: 5,167
Slope: 118 Rating: 70.3

RATES

Mon-Thurs: \$34
1:00-4:00 pm: \$25
Friday: \$49
1:00 - 4:00 pm: \$30
Sat-Sun: \$59
1:00 - 4:00 pm: \$39

All Days Super Twilight: \$16
Discounts available for residents.

RESERVATIONS

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