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GOLF TRAVEL

Leaving Las Vegas

By JOE PASSOV

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In Las Vegas, if it's action at the tables or sports books you're craving, stick with heart-of-the-Strip locales. For the best Sin City golf experiences, however, you've got to get out of town. Shadow Creek, a half-hour north of the Strip and the top golf venue for high-rolling MGM/Mirage whales, shut down last week for a seven-month refurbishment. Fortunately, a spectacular new layout opened in May to pick up the slack. The Chase at PGA Golf Club Coyote Springs may be awkwardly named, but the course is seamless from start to finish.

The experience starts with a 45-minute ride up U.S. 93 through barren, if eerily attractive desert. If you continue straight instead of turning right where 93 meets State Route 168, you're headed straight toward the U.S. Air Force's highly secretive Area 51. There's nothing quite so mysterious about The Chase. This is a wonderfully low-key Jack Nicklaus design, with fast, undulating greens, an array of strategically deployed tattered-edge bunkers and just enough bells and whistles in the form of lakes, waterfalls and mountain views to lure potential home buyers to the new PGA Village at Coyote Springs.

For low handicap golfers, The Chase is a handsome brute from the black tees at 7,471 yards. And it is an enjoyable treat for everybody else, thanks to fairways wide enough to accommodate the wind, yet firm enough to yield considerable roll. A course-savvy caddie is assigned to every group, but neither he nor the U.S. Air Force could track

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my soaring slice at the 439-yard, par-4 ninth, where a man-made waterfall and the Sheep Mountains highlight the left side of the hole. No matter. Someone -- or something -- kicked my ball back into the fairway. Another mystery deep in the Nevada desert.

(\$200 per player, including cart, access to driving range and one caddie for each foursome; the summer fare, \$120 per player, available starting June 9.)

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