


At home on the range

Golf resorts and communities are going above and beyond with sleek tech and eye-popping amenities



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 The Palmer Practice Park at Balsam Mountain Preserve in North Carolina. Courtesy of Balsam Mountain Preserve

One of the keys for a golf course facility's success is to get members and guests to spend time at the club before and after their rounds and even when they're not playing the golf course.

Providing excellent food and beverage service helps in that area. But another, often overlooked amenity that can keep golfers at the club is a dynamic practice facility.

Ranges with worn-out range balls, poor turf or mats-only teeing areas, undefined targets and little or no short-game area are going to attract only the most dedicated range rats and a few players just looking to warm up before a round. But in recent years, you may have noticed many facilities, from municipals to private clubs, are stepping up their practice areas in a huge way. They're adding technology, putting or short courses, and extensive instruction centers. Others are getting creative and making their range acreage multipurpose.

Investment in practice is smart business. According to Jason Becker, co-founder and CEO of [Golf Life Navigators](#), 89 percent of more than 12,000 prospective club members surveyed say a club's practice facility is very important in making their decision on where to join.

"Golf enthusiasts who are seeking their ideal golf lifestyle in the Sun Belt rank the practice facility the no. 1 most important golf operation to their decision tree -- by far," said Becker.

Fortunately, there are many clubs and courses that do this well. Over the years, places like [PGA Golf Club](#) in Port St. Lucie, Fla., [Orange County National](#) in Orlando, and [Bandon \(Ore.\) Dunes Resort](#) have large, extensive practice facilities, where you can not only work on any part of your game, but the overall experience is almost enjoyable as playing golf. In the years since, more and more clubs both private and public have added new wrinkles to their facilities.

Balsam Mountain Preserve, Sylva, N.C.

At Balsam Mountain Preserve, a private residential community near Asheville, a new concept in practice and fun just opened. To go along with the [18-hole Arnold Palmer Signature Course](#) there, Balsam Mountain Preserve recently debuted its Palmer Practice Park. The new five-acre park offers a par-3 course, driving range and pitch and putt with six greens and three bunkers.

The park also features multiple teeing grounds, creating an unlimited number of ways to set the course up each day. The idea is to promote a low-pressure, smaller-scale game designed to appeal to golfers of all abilities.