

## Bethpage Black, NY



New York's Long Island is home to some of the nation's most exalted private courses. In Nassau County, closer to Manhattan, are gems like Garden City, Piping Rock, The Creek Club and Deepdale. In Suffolk County, further to the east, are legendary names like Shinnecock Hills, National Golf Links, Maidstone, and newer facilities like The Bridge, Friar's Head and Sebonack. But what of the requirements of the public or traveling golfer? Fortunately the entire **Bethpage** golf facility, with its quintet of colorfully named courses, can sate the desire of even the most avid player.



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Farmingdale, New York is home to [Bethpage State Park](#), with its 'rainbow coalition' of fine golf. The Red, Green, Yellow and Blue are all worthy venues, but mere understudies to the famed Black Course, one of the most intimidatingly memorable public courses in the nation, and where this discussion begins in earnest. However a word must be said about the affordability of these great facilities. There are many public or resort courses of great repute that welcome anyone to the first tee, but the associated green fees make places like Pebble Beach, Pinehurst, various destinations in Scottsdale and Hawaii out of reach of many middle class golfers. But Bethpage is different. The Black Course tops out at \$150, and some of the facility's courses can offer you change back from a \$50 bill. Now that's really and truly public golf! It's no wonder that for decades, avid players literally camp out in the parking lot the evening before they plan to play, hoping to secure a tee time on one of the nation's marquee public courses.



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The walking-only Black, “An extremely difficult course which is recommended only for highly skilled golfers” (according to the menacing warning sign near the first tee) is among the finest creations by renowned “Golden Age” course architect A.W. Tillinghast. Considering other courses in his oeuvre include Winged Foot, San Francisco Golf Club, and the lesser-known New Jersey gem Somerset Hills, (all fixtures in various Top 100 Course lists) that’s high praise indeed.



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Created in 1936, this is one tough octogenarian. Its status as a two-time host of the U.S. Open, and future host of the PGA Championship (2019) and Ryder Cup (2024) proves it. Known for its grand, practically epic scale, The Black provides wide driving corridors, gargantuan bunkers, and plenty of elevation change. It’s a course full of highlights, very few weak holes. Among the best would be one of the finest par-5 holes in the nation, the daunting fourth hole, 530 uphill yards, with a Gobi-like expanse of sand bisecting the fairway. Tillinghast himself said as much. “It should prove one of the most exacting three-shot holes I know of anywhere. In locating and designing the green, which can only be gained by a most precise approach from the right, I must confess that I was a trifle scared myself, when I looked back and regarded the hazardous route that must be taken by a stinging second shot to get into position to attack the green.” Another fine hole is the par-3 eighth, mercifully playing downhill, as opposed to the seemingly unrelenting series of uphill

approaches elsewhere on the course, and fronted by a menacing pond. The popularity of the Black only confirms what golfers have often said about themselves: Those who play the game in earnest are masochists. The penal nature of this wonderful course, the vast expanses of sand, thick rough and all the peril that awaits illustrates this point dramatically.

This isn't to say the other golf options aren't worth a traveler's time. Put it this way: Bethpage does 300,000 rounds annually. If all, or even most of those rounds were on the Black there wouldn't be a blade of grass left, it would be a massive pile of dirt. The Green Course is the original of the quintet, originally called the Lenox Hills Course. Featuring gentler terrain and small greens, it's considered ideal for the novice and casual golfer. The Blue Course is another Tillinghast design, though it was reworked in 1960 by Alfred Tull to provide room for the Yellow Course. The front nine is more challenging, featuring some steep slopes, while the inward nine isn't as daunting. The Red and Yellow courses complete this unique ninety-hole golf buffet. The former is another Tillinghast design, lots of long par-4s and one of the hardest opening holes on Long Island. The latter, dating from 1958, is the shortest, and generally considered the easiest of the quintet, just under 6,300 yards from the back tees.

Speaking of easiest, it's an easy choice to visit [Trento](#), a stylish Italian bistro in Farmingdale with lots of great options. Blackened swordfish, Chilean Sea Bass, a succulent veal chop, and all the traditional pasta and parmigiana dishes are popular features.

There's no guarantee patrons will absolutely love their experience at another fine Italian restaurant named [Absolutely Mario's](#), but the odds are excellent. The unusual moniker comes from the mantra of owner Mario Garcia, who throughout his career, would respond to any customer's request, no matter how difficult or trivial, by saying 'absolutely.' His take on rack of lamb, filet mignon, chicken Marsala, salmon Bianco, and numerous other specialties will have many customers absolutely making encore visits to this homey Farmingdale institution.