

Western Massachusetts



Unless you're hankering for a visit to the Basketball Hall of Fame, there aren't many reasons to visit greater Springfield, Massachusetts. But if the golf spirit moves you, grab a National Rental Car at nearby Bradley International Airport, just across the Connecticut state line, and head twenty minutes north to the Bay State. There is one thing the region known as the Pioneer Valley can offer the wider world. A trio of fine public-accessible courses that will challenge the skill, sustain the interest and buoy the spirit of any traveling golfer. They are located within about an hour of each other, and no more than forty-odd minutes from Springfield itself, The Ranch, The Orchards and Crumpin-Fox are excellent reasons to visit an area that is probably more famous for having a pair of Bob Lanier's size-22 sneakers on display at the Hall than for any golf offering most players have heard of.



The Ranch, Southwick

The Ranch is in the country town of Southwick, west of the city. The capacious property is located at the former country retreat of the Crane Paper Company, barons of the bond-paper industry and developers of cloth embedded stock that became a U.S. Treasury Standard for counterfeit-resistant currency. The Damien Pascuzzo design is both brainy and sporty, rumbling along the base of a north-south ridge, then spiraling into wooded uplands. The course narrows and widens, rambles uphill and down, the closing holes on each nine as steeply canted as any blue ski run one might find at a nearby Vermont ski hill. Bunker styling is diverse, although most are oversized. This is as pleasing a walk through the New England woods as one can imagine.



The Orchards, South Hadley

The Orchards is located in the college town of South Hadley, best known as the home of Mount Holyoke College, but within striking distance of Smith, Amherst, and the University of Massachusetts, among others. This is a Donald Ross antiquity from 1922, and boasts the tournament legacy that the other featured courses cannot hope to replicate. Along with lesser events like the U.S. Women's Junior Championship and the Massachusetts Amateur it also hosted the U.S. Women's Open in 2004, where Meg Mallon won her second Open, besting Annika Sorenstam by two shots. There's plenty of action to be found on a course that measures less than 6,600 yards, albeit spread out on a generous 160 acres. Creeks that both bifurcate and frame the rumpled fairways provide some of the challenge. Quirky lies, funny bounces and stands of thick hardwoods provide more, and the Ross-designed greens do the rest.



Crumpin-Fox Club, Bernardston

Finally, **Crumpin-Fox Club** in the border town of Bernardston, just south of the Vermont state line and not ten minutes from Interstate 91, is likely the best of the bunch. Envisioned by Roger Rulewich, who worked under Robert Trent Jones for decades, this is a show-stopping series of hard-bending par-4s, plunging, or across-the-ravine par-3s, and one of the most scintillating par 5s in the northeast. The mighty 8th is hemmed by woods on the right, and an evil lake the length of the left side. Bubba could smite his pink driver and have a go in two, Rory the same. Most of the rest of us have to whack it twice down the fairway, and then take a short or mid-iron over aqua to find the putting surface. With placement more important than power, the driver is holstered more often than most visitors would like. But unless one wishes to spend much of the day among the shadowed hardwoods bracing the fairways, 3-woods and hybrids are the more prudent choice from the tee.



Northampton, Main Street

Thirty minutes south of Crumpin-Fox is the lively college town of Northampton, with an honest-to-goodness Main St., a bona fide walking downtown, and a surfeit of lively eateries, taverns, ice cream shops, etc. Eastside Grill, Joe's Café and Spoleto are fine choices, and don't forget Herrell's Ice Cream for dessert. There's much less to recommend further down the road in Springfield, but the standard for decades has been the Student Prince and the Fort, specializing in hearty German cuisine.