

ESCAPE USA



The par-3, 3rd hole - True Blue Golf Club.

Grand Strand Golf

Visit the place also known as ‘The Golf Capital of The World’

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Murrells Inlet at sunset.

This is the scene. It's a hot and humid June afternoon at Myrtle Beach airport in South Carolina, and after loading my golf clubs and luggage into the back of my hire car, I drive south on Hwy 17, along the 60-mile stretch of coastline known as the Grand Strand. Situated at the northern end, is the Vegas-like atmosphere of Myrtle Beach itself with its sizzling nightlife, shopping malls the size of small towns and endless giant billboards advertising seafood buffets, live shows and theatre. Located only a dozen or so miles further south, but feeling like a world away are the tranquil enclaves of Murrells Inlet, Pawleys Island and Georgetown that still retain their 19th-century rhythms.

One common denominator is that there are around 100 championship

golf courses located in the Myrtle Beach and Grand Strand region. Greg Norman, Robert Trent Jones, Jack Nicklaus, Tom Fazio and Pete Dye are just a handful of big name designers who have laid out stunning tracks - some face the beautiful Atlantic Ocean while others line the picturesque Intracoastal Waterway. Throw in several courses that are listed as 'America's Top 100 Courses To Play', Golf Magazine's 'No.1 Value Golf Destination' and 'No.1 Buddy Golf Destination', plus a great climate, excellent seafood and a plethora of outdoor activities, and it's little wonder that Myrtle Beach is billed as 'The Golf Capital of the World'.

My home-away-from-home to play a quartet of top-notch courses is the Inlet Sports Lodge, located in the laid-back



A fisherman prepares a freshly caught dorado at the harbour, Murrells Inlet.



fishing village of Murrells Inlet, about 17 miles south of Myrtle Beach. This comfortable and convenient base offers golfers a unique blend of Lowcountry luxury and sophistication mixed with rustic Southern charm. Well-appointed resort suites and studios boast pine wood floors, mini-kitchens with full-sized refrigerators and pressured body jets showers. It's been a long day of travel since my 6.am flight from Manchester to Atlanta with a connection to Myrtle Beach, and after a cold beer and a bite to eat, I drift into a deep sleep under the gently whirring ceiling fan in my room.

THE DUNES GOLF & BEACH CLUB

It's 7.30am the following morning at the Dunes Golf & Beach Club right in the heart of Myrtle Beach. A row of golf carts are lined up near the clubhouse as friendly staff organise groups of golfers and their clubs. Some players hone their putting skills on the practice green while others loosen up on the nearby range - there's a palpable buzz in the air. Opened in 1948 and designed by legendary golf architect Robert Trent Jones Sr. this is one of the oldest and

best courses in the area, and showcases Trent Jones's signature elevated greens complexes and deep bunkering among gently rolling hills.

"Keep an eye out for gators on the course," says the starter as I prepare to tee-off on the 425-yard, par-4 1st. "I've seen them on just about every hole on the course but especially the 13th." My thoughts immediately turn to the golf movie Happy Gilmore where Chubbs loses his hand to an alligator, but thankfully I'm soon distracted by other creatures I spot, including fox squirrels, racoons, turtles, kingfishers and vultures. With all the abundant and colourful wildlife around I find it difficult to concentrate on my golf - and at any moment I half expect David Attenborough to emerge from the lush green foliage with film crew in tow.

The front nine of the Dunes is parkland in character with fairways bordered by splendid mature trees, whilst the back nine plays along salt marshes, tidal creeks and Singleton Lake. The par-5 13th, known as 'Waterloo' is the Dunes' famed signature hole and one of the world's greatest golf

Entrance to the Dunes Golf & Beach Club.



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Golfers head to the par-4, 11th -
Dunes Golf & Beach Club.



Alligator on the fairway of the par-5 13th -
Dunes Golf & Beach Club.



The Inlet Sports Lodge
at Murrells Inlet
makes an excellent
base for golfers.

holes. Playing 640-yards from the gold tees, this challenging three shotter is a severe dogleg wrapping clockwise around Singleton Lake, which is both a consideration on the drive and subsequent shots. There are numerous ways to reach the two-tiered green surrounded by deep bunkers, and risk-reward comes into play no matter what route you take - not to mention the alligators usually seen basking by the water's edge.

TRUE BLUE PLANTATION

The second course I play is True Blue Plantation, ranked as one of the 'Top Ten Golf Courses in Myrtle Beach', and situated in Pawleys Island about fifteen

minutes drive down Hwy 17 from the Inlet Sports Lodge. Built on the site of historic True Blue Plantation, a famed 19th-century indigo and rice plantation, this dramatic Mike Strantz layout winds its way through pristine salt marshes, wetlands and maritime forests, and features plenty of elevation change, large-scale fairways, scrub-filled natural sandy areas, lakes and undulating greens. Emphasising the natural beauty of the area, it incorporates native grasses and vegetation to maintain much of the character of the property.

Right from the superb 624-yard par-5 opener where all three shots flirt with sculpted sandy waste areas, wetlands and a twisting creek, to the trio of

“Emphasising the natural beauty of the area, it incorporates native grasses and vegetation to maintain much of the character of the property.”

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Golfers enjoy a cold beer from the clubhouse overlooking the 18th green—Caledonia Golf & Fish Club.



The par-4, 13th hole – Caledonia Golf & Fish Club.



18th green and clubhouse – Caledonia Golf & Fish Club.



© Brian Oar- Fairways Photography



© Brian Oar- Fairways Photography

watery closing holes, the challenge of True Blue never lets up. Strantz's artistic use of water and numerous abstract waste bunkers with hardly a weak hole along the way, means this captivating and aesthetic design stands out amid many other offerings along the Grand Strand. From the bag-drop and well-groomed grass range, to the complimentary after-round ice cold towel and shaded verandah overlooking the 18th hole, everything about True Blue oozes quality and relaxed Southern hospitality.

CALEDONIA GOLF & FISH CLUB.

A Dustin Johnson drive away from True

Blue is another classic Myrtle Beach golf experience - the Caledonia Golf & Fish Club. Voted the "Fifth Best New Public Course in America" upon opening its gates in 1994, the accolades have never stopped rolling in for Mark Strantz's first design on the Grand Strand. It feels like a journey back in time as I drive along the grand entrance lined with rows of centuries-old live oaks draped with Spanish moss to reach the Old South clubhouse. Often compared to Augusta National for its exquisite style, floral beauty, and velvety fairways and greens, Caledonia has a sleepy ambiance that embraces its Southern roots.

Built on the site of an old rice plantation



Golfers head to the tee of the par-4 6th - True Blue Golf Club

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Local wildlife- Caledonia Golf & Fish Club.



Par-4, 9th - the Heritage Club.

© The Heritage Club

and overlooking the picturesque Waccamaw River, Strantz has artfully crafted the site's streams, ponds and moss-covered oaks to create a hugely enjoyable test of golf. There's some lovely course details such as the duck species (Pintail, Mallard and Wood Duck) to mark the tees and scorecards, and the duck nesting boxes on posts that act as 100-yard distance markers. Amid the scenic backdrop of blooming flowers and colourful shrubs are some memorable holes such as the picturesque par-3 11th with a snaking creek to the green, the par-4 13th that doglegs around a giant oak tree and the wonderful closing hole.

The par-4 18th borders the Plantation's old rice field, and requires a precise drive that sets up a difficult second shot - a forced carry onto a green at the foot of the clubhouse, where its tradition for onlookers sitting in rocking chairs sipping their drinks, to respond appropriately and sometimes bet on the results of player's shots. Fortunately, my crisply struck 9-iron over the corner of the lake to the putting surface evokes some clapping, and after making par, I pull up a rocking chair on the clubhouse porch, enjoy a cold beer, and take in what must be my all time favourite 19th-hole.

HERITAGE CLUB

For my final round I join Chris King, President of Kingfish Communications and Jeff Monday, Tournament Director for Myrtle Beach Golf Holidays outside the stately clubhouse of the Heritage Club in Pawleys Island. "There's a lot of meat on the bone out here" says Chris as we head to the first tee of this challenging Don Maples 1986 design. Over 600 acres of giant magnolias, 300-year-old oaks, freshwater lakes and marshes have been transformed into spacious, rolling fairways and large contoured greens, surrounded by landscaped areas of wildflowers and flowering shrubs.

Water comes into play on several holes including the very tricky par-3 13th where the tee shot is all carry over water, and the par-4 14th where an intimidating



Myrtle Beach coastline.

© Julia Lynn

drive over the corner of a lake to a narrow landing area is followed by a second shot over more water to the green. The Heritage Club is a fun layout where you'll need plenty of game to score well. Besides the great company, my lasting memory of the Heritage is the monster 100ft birdie putt I make from the bottom of the severely undulating green of the par-4 12th - its the type of golf shot that will keep me going for years.

There are so many top-drawer courses in the Myrtle Beach region that its impossible to mention them all. A few more notables are Tidewater Golf Club (surrounded by the curves of the Intracoastal Waterway and scenic salt marshes of the Atlantic Ocean), Pawleys Plantation Golf & Country Club (a classic Lowcountry Jack Nicklaus Signature course), Waterway Hills (a 27-hole Robert Trent Jones Sr. design where the golf experience begins with a gondola ride across the Intracoastal Waterway to the clubhouse), and World Tour Golf Links which features holes inspired by famous



Treasure Island Golf is one of many adventure golf courses in Myrtle Beach.

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The Marsh Walk at Murrells Inlet.



Clubhouse interior –
the Heritage Club

DEAD DOG SALOON ON THE MARSH WALK – MURRELLS INLET.



courses like Pinehurst, St.Andrews and Winged Foot.

Two of the most exceptional stay-and-play golf resorts along the Grand Strand are the Legends Resort and Barefoot Resort & Golf. Guests at the Legends Resort have a choice of three varied courses: Heathland (a Tom Doak gem), Moorland (designed by P.B Dye), and the Parkland (modelled around the style of golf architects Alister MacKenzie / Augusta National and George Thomas / Riviera Country Club). At Barefoot Resort & Golf, golfers know they will be treated to some of the finest golf architecture in the world with a choice of four onsite courses

designed by Tom Fazio, Davis Love III, Greg Norman and Pete Dye.

AWAY FROM THE COURSES

In between rounds of golf I explore the charming and historic fishing village of Murrells Inlet and its crown jewel - the Marsh Walk. What began a few decades ago as a dream for a simple creek-side boardwalk has now grown to arguably the single most visited destination for food, live music and scenic coastal views along the entire 60-mile stretch of the Grand Strand.

Several distinct waterfront restaurants and bars, from fine dining to more rustic

establishments serve sushi, fusion, wood-fired pizza, premium steaks and fresh seafood straight from the boat. Some recommended places to drink and dine are Wicked Tuna, Creek Ratz, Drunken Jacks, Wahoo's Fish House, Captain Dave's Dock Side and the infamous Dead Dog Saloon with its big porch, hammocks and horseshoe pit.

Seafood is legendary in these parts and local waters in the 'Seafood Capital of South Carolina' provide the main ingredients for local dishes such as Frogmore stew (which usually contains crab, crawfish and shrimp), shrimp gumbo and she-crab stew. Flounder, red

“Seafood is legendary in these parts and local waters in the 'Seafood Capital of South Carolina' provide the main ingredients for local dishes”

The harbour at Murrells Inlet



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drum, spotted sea trout, oysters, blue crab and clams come from the creeks and marshes, and moving offshore, mahi-mahi, tuna and wahoo end up as substantial meals on Marsh Walk restaurant tables.

On my final evening I have dinner at Wicked Tuna overlooking the Crazy Sister Marina at the southern-most end of the Marsh Walk, which boasts one of the most stunning views along the entire Grand Strand. Seated on the outside decking with a locally-brewed 'smoked hickory brown ale' and a delicious meal of 'marinated South Carolina grouper topped with garlic lemon cream and mashed potatoes,' I gaze out over the salt marsh in the sultry pink dusk. Here's to fabulous seafood and top-quality golf in Myrtle Beach...

OTHER ATTRACTION & ACTIVITIES

Whether you visit Myrtle Beach as a golfing group, a couple or a family, there's a plethora of things to do away from the fairways...

Head to the TicketReturn.com field (21st Ave. N., Myrtle Beach) for some good old fashioned American baseball. Grab some delicious boiled peanuts or a loaded hot dog, sit back and cheer on the local team - the Myrtle Beach Pelicans.



Wicked Tuna is one of several excellent places to eat on the Marsh Walk at Murrells Inlet.

The team's season begins in April and wraps up in September.

For great views of Myrtle Beach and beyond, take a scenic helicopter ride or soar into the sky on the east coast's only 200-foot SkyWheel.

Wander paths abloom with azalea and honeysuckle beneath ancient oaks draped with Spanish moss at Brookgreen Gardens, named as one of the Top 10 Public Gardens in the US by

TripAdvisors reviewers. Check out the largest collection of American sculpture in the country or board a pontoon boat for a guided tour of the marshes, home to alligator and waterfowl.

Visit the main beach in town, which is wide, white and dotted with umbrellas and spend an afternoon reading, enjoying a cold beer and floating in the warm Gulf Stream waters.

Take the kids to one of the three different waterparks in Myrtle Beach, which are specifically designed for family fun with a focus on the kids with splash pools, waterfalls, and a myriad of slides.

Book an offshore charter fishing trip and fish for species such as Tuna, Wahoo, Mahi-Mahi, Sailfish and Marlin. Other forms of fishing are also available from pier to fresh water and inland fishing.

Enjoy some Myrtle Beach nightlife - from nightclubs and sports bars to discos and bars with a more laid-back local flavour.

Experience the full spectrum of Myrtle Beach shows and local venues, including live theatre, dinner shows, variety shows, concert halls and movie theatres. At The Grand Strand, you can see Calvin Gilmore's music and comedy variety show, The Carolina Opry, which has won



Hollywood Wax Museum – Myrtle Beach.



every top South Carolina tourism award, or visit the House of Blues at Barefoot Landing for blues, jazz, gospel and guest rock artists.

Try one of the multitude of outdoor water activities on offer including surfing, kayaking, parasailing, scuba-diving and jet skiing. Check out the amazing array of sea life at Ripley's Aquarium; Broadway's MagiQuest; the Children's

Museum of South Carolina, Hollywood Wax Museum and the upside down museum, WonderWorks.

Have a game of mini-golf, in the "Mini-Golf Capital of America" with a dinosaur, jungle or pirate themed course on just about every block.

Visit the PGA Tour superstore (1400 29th Avenue North, Myrtle Beach) to check out the latest golf gear.

Where To Play

Dunes Golf & Beach Club:

www.thedunesclub.net

Heritage Club:

www.heritageclubmyrtlebeach.com

True Blue:

www.fishclub.com

Caledonia Golf & Fish Club:

www.fishclub.com

Where To Stay

Myrtle Beach complements its golf offerings with a diverse range of premier accommodation options that are available over the entire Grand Strand – near the chosen courses, set inland or in full view of the wide beaches. Additionally, accommodation choices are plentiful for those on a budget.

Luxury

Inlet Sports Lodge:

www.inletsportslodge.com

Marina Inn at Grande Dunes:

www.marinainnatgrandedunes.com

Mid-Price

Island Vista:

www.islandvista.com

Anderson Ocean Club:

www.oceanaresorts.com/anderson

Economy

Beach Cove:

www.beachcove.com

Caravelle Resort:

www.thecaravelle.com

Climate

One of the greatest assets of the Myrtle Beach area, the weather offers mild winters and bearable summer temperatures. With an average high of 55° / 13° in the coldest month of January, and an average high of 88° / 31° in the hottest months of July and August, it is rarely too cold, or too hot to enjoy everything Myrtle Beach offers.

Myrtle Beach Golf Holiday

Is a non-profit trade association comprised of 79 championship golf courses and 99 golf package providers in the Myrtle Beach, South Carolina area. The originator of the "Stay and Play Package", they provide non-biased information about accommodation and golf courses to assist golfers when planning a Myrtle Beach golf vacation. They also host several events and tournaments annually to help foster the growth of the game including the World Amateur Handicap Championship – the world's largest single-site amateur golf tournament.

www.myrtlebeachgolfholiday.com

For more Information:

www.VisitMyrtleBeach.com