

Carolina On My Mind
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Listen to the strains of that old James Taylor song, “Carolina on my Mind,” and you’ll understand the charm of these sister states. Located along the central east coast of the United States, the two share more than just a border and a common name. They encompass expansive coastlines, diverse mountainous regions, business and industrial economic centers, all this while preserving their historical treasures. It’s easy to get to the Carolinas—just a day’s drive from New York, Florida and Washington, D.C. And depending upon your destination, you could fly into one of six international airports. Moderate climates also make them an ideal spot for tourists, especially those who love to golf. Whether its Pinehurst or Myrtle Beach, the Carolinas are synonymous with great golf in the United States. Few places in the world allow you the opportunity to experience the challenges of so many different golf courses designed by all the greats, including Jack Nicklaus, Pete Dye, Donald Ross, Tom Fazio, Robert Trent Jones, Rees Jones, Hale Irwin, Arnold Palmer, Fred Couples, Ellis Maples, Greg Norman and so many others. The best part, there are nearly 800 courses, both public and semi- private in North and South Carolina. Golf is played nearly year around in the Carolinas, with only the mountainous extremes of both states closing in winter.

Sign up for a tee time in the Carolinas, and your round will be among the 15-million played each year. Undoubtedly, the most famous golfing area in North Carolina is the Sandhills. There are the 40-plus golf courses located in and around Pinehurst, Southern Pines and Aberdeen. Here, the sandy soil and pine-scented air offer golfers an experience that overwhelms

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their senses. These courses are consistently ranked among the best courses in North Carolina and the United States. They are all distinct. Some offer Scottish links layout, while others wind their way through tall pine trees, rivers, lakes and rolling hills. No trip to North Carolina would be complete without at least visiting the site linked to the beginnings of golf in America, Pinehurst Resort and Country Club located in the Village of Pinehurst. This 144-hole complex is home to the famous Pinehurst No. 2, the site of the 1999 U.S. Open Championship. While it's a jewel not to miss, it is among the most expensive golf resorts in North Carolina. Expect to pay between \$78-\$225/round in season. Packages and reduced rates are available during non-peak times, especially in the winter.

In nearby Southern Pines, Pine Needles Lodge & Golf Club and Mid Pines Inn and Golf Club beckon. Pine Needles hosted the 1996 and 2001 U.S. Women's Open Championships. Peggy Kirk Bell, a charter member of the LPGA and her family, own and operate these Donald Ross designed courses. Don't miss the golf memorabilia at Pine Needles, where you'll see priceless pictures of Ma Bell and her golf contemporaries in the early days of women's professional golf. Fees are \$60-\$100. Packages and reduced rates available midweek, summer and winter.

If you want to improve your golf game while on vacation, choose one of many golf schools in the area. Woodlake Country Club in Vass offers year around Nike Golf Schools. Pine Needles offers many *Golfaris*, a trademarked name for a week-long golf safari. Other courses offer private lessons from their many teaching professionals.

Don't have a caddie? Don't worry. If you play a round at Talamore Golf Club near the Village of Pinehurst, a llama will haul your clubs around the course for you. But choose your own clubs, as the llamas haven't mastered the art of club selection. For non-golfers, shopping

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abounds at quaint stores in the Village of Pinehurst. And just an hour drive north you'll find museums, universities, shopping, state parks and sporting events in the Triangle region which includes, Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill. The North Carolina Zoo is also within an hour's drive.

Great golf isn't limited to the Sandhills. Scenic and unique courses are found from the Great Smoky Mountains and Appalachian Trail to the Outer Banks. Golf holes run uphill, downhill, and along the sandy beaches and rocky terrain. The Grove Park Inn Resort Golf Club, located in Asheville, offers a traditional Donald Ross venue with sloping fairways and winding streams at a historic hotel. Greens fees range from \$50-100. Packages are available. Non-golfers shouldn't miss the Biltmore Estate, a 250- room chateau that's the largest private residence in America. The Blue Ridge Parkway is also a must, especially in fall when the trees are ablaze with color.

Within the last ten years, daily-fee and resort courses have also sprouted up from Charlotte up the "Piedmont Crescent" formed by Interstate 85 to the state capital, Raleigh. Among the best is the Research Triangle region's only Four-Star, Four-Diamond hotel, the Washington Duke Inn & Golf Club. Located at Duke University in Durham, it's Robert Trent Jones' handiwork. Rates are \$35-\$70 with reduced rates available off-season.

Golf along the Carolina Coast offers intoxicating and breathtaking views, while challenging your abilities. On North Carolina's Outer Banks, golfers will be impressed with Nags Head Golf Links in Nags Head and The Currituck Club in Corolla. They're both considered among the best courses in North Carolina. Greens fees range from \$30-\$115 with packages available. Reduced rates offered for resort guests and during certain times of the year. Even if you're not swinging a club, you'll find plenty to do. Whether you sun on the gorgeous

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beaches, visit the site where the Wright Brothers first took flight or tour ancient, yet working lighthouses, you'll fall in love with the Outer Banks.

Farther south, you'll find a quieter area known as the Crystal Coast, which includes Morehead City, New Bern and Emerald Isle; and the Cape Fear Coast, made up of the Wilmington and Wrightsville Beach areas. Both regions offer ideal golf and oceanfront accommodations. Greens fees range from \$30-\$100.

The Brunswick Islands area ties into what is known as The Grand Strand. It's a golfer's paradise along South Carolina's Myrtle Beach area. More than 100 courses stretch across a 60-mile region situated between a sandy, white coastline and a mossy, tree-lined Intercoastal Waterway. Annually 750,000 golfers play more than 3.1 million rounds on the Grand Strand.

Myrtle Beach National, one of the most recognized, features three unforgettable Arnold Palmer courses, South Creek, West and King's North. The signature 3rd hole, Par 3 at King's North is memorable; its island green and sandtraps form the state's outline. Caledonia Golf and Fish Club, located at Pawley's Island, SC, offers an antebellum-style clubhouse and bridges connecting holes as the Waccamaw River winds through the course.

The Legends Club includes three courses, Heathland Course, Moorland and Parkland. Each one presents a unique set of challenges, such as blind drives straight over woods. The new Tom Fazio and Lanny Wadkins designed Tournament Players Club is among the dozens of courses on the Grand Strand to host major PGA and LPGA tournaments. This area also hosts the PGA Senior Tour Championship, the Ingersoll-Rand Senior Tour Championship, and the DuPont World Amateur Handicap Championship.

Keep your eyes open for alligators while on the Grand Strand, though. Many golfers share stories of gators sunning themselves along the marshlands and swamps at a few courses.

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Greens fees on the Grand Strand range from \$20-\$180, but there are plenty of packages that allow play at several courses for one rate.

The South Carolina Lowcountry courses, with their white ocean dunes, overhanging Spanish moss, and beautiful marshlands are also considered among the best in the U.S. There are more than 20 championship layouts on Hilton Head Island. Sea Pines Plantation features three courses, the Ocean Course, the Sea Marsh Course and the crown jewel of the Lowcountry, Harbour Town, the host of the MCI Classic/Heritage of Golf. Greens fees along the Lowcountry range from \$25-\$225. Package deals and reduced rates offered during the off-season.

Explore the historical riches of Charleston and be sure to check out the “birthplace of golf”, the site of America’s first golf course and golf club, South Carolina Golf Club was founded in 1786.

Enjoy the heritage of the Pee Dee Indian tribe, visit the Darlington International Speedway, and while you’re there, play a round at the Country Club of South Carolina. Patience and skills are necessary here; it’s billed as the most difficult in the Southeast.

Golf is a year-round passion in the Carolinas, but the busiest times for most courses are in the Spring and Fall. Winters are very mild, so golf is always an option. Summers are extremely hot and humid in the Carolinas. Lather on the sunscreen, wear a hat, drink lots of fluids, and you’ll enjoy some of the best courses in the United States, often without any wait at all.

ESSENTIALS

When to play: year round, but summers very hot and humid.

Greens fees: \$25-\$225

Handicap required? Not usually.

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Activities for non-golfers: Beaches, mountains, historical sites/tours, Raleigh, NC's capital, Charlotte, Historic Charleston, museums, a 250-room chateau, and the NC Zoo.