



You don't have to go to Augusta National to walk over the famous Ben Hogan stone bridge — it has been replicated at the World Tour Golf Links.

With exceptional course designs, Myrtle Beach is a great golf destination

A fairway to spend a vacation

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IT was apparent we were at a golf destination when my son, Carey, and I passed a PGA Superstore and a huge discount outlet specializing only in golf shoes as we drove to our Island Vista Resort hotel while on another father-son golf vacation.

We soon found we were in good company, as we met a number of Canadian and American golfers from the northern states teeing it up ahead of their various home-course opening seasons.

As much as Myrtle Beach is a family destination, its many golf courses make it a desirable destination for golfers from around the world. The majority of designs have been crafted by some of the best-known and respected architects in the industry, which practically ensures followers of particular name-brand layouts will sooner or later find their way to the Myrtle Beach region.

Chris King, spokesman for PlayGolfMyrtleBeach.com, says golf is an integral part of the Greater Myrtle Beach community.

"Whether it's the waiter at the restaurant, a co-worker or a person walking down the street, people here embrace the game," King said. Golf is a key driver of the area's economy — not just because of the number of courses but because of their quality. "We have almost 90 courses, with some of the best public golf courses for any destination in America."

If you go

MYRTLE Beach has some of the biggest, boldest, not-so-small mini golf options. Jurassic Golf, Jungle Safari, Dragon's Lair and Captain Hook's Adventure Golf are just some of the options.

The Angus Steakhouse on South Kings Highway is a uniquely designed restaurant with good steaks and ribs, and ample helpings of sides.

In addition to Broadway on the Beach, a smaller but more upscale shopping option is Market Common, built on a nearby former airport. We had an excellent meal there, at the Travinia Italian Kitchen & Wine Bar.

For more information, go to playmyrtlebeach.com or visitmyrtlebeach.com.

There are four courses to choose from at the Barefoot Resort. We played the one designed by North Carolina native and professional golfer Davis Love III. It's easy to fall in love with this course, which features wide fairways and big greens, and also incorporates the ruins of an old plantation home on two of its holes, adding to its beauty.

Players should not be fooled by the course's openness or spacious greens. It is still a long and difficult course — and like many Myrtle Beach courses,

it's been rated highly by most U.S. golf magazines.

Nearby Barefoot Landing is a large waterfront development with dozens of restaurants, shops and activity options for both children and adults. Under-scoring the area's golf popularity, the Greg Norman Australian Grill — with annual sales of US\$8 million — is one of the busiest in the complex. It was an excellent place to relax on the patio, which overlooks the yachts and condos on the other side of the waterway.

The mere mention of course designer Pete Dye will get golf aficionados considering plans to visit almost any destination. At Prestwick Country Club, Dye — who also designed one of the courses at the Barefoot Resort — worked with his son to create a public golf course that has the look and feel of a private club.

The course's use of waste bunkering and visual deception will force golfers to think. At 7,000 yards, it is a course designed for long-ball hitters. But with six sets of tees, Carey and I both enjoyed playing it. I shot from the forward tees, while Carey tested his distance skills from different tee boxes from hole to hole.

Any frustrations from bad shots on the course were eased by spending the evening at Broadway on the Beach, the huge shopping, dining and entertainment complex in Myrtle Beach.

It includes the Carolina Comedy Club, whose talented performers can erase many more tensions than the

simple stresses of a few errant golf shots.

Robert Trent Jones is another name synonymous with exceptional golf designs. He designed the Dunes course in Myrtle Beach, which is known for a hole that has made it famous worldwide. The sharp, doglegged par-5 13th hole has been appropriately named Waterloo. It is recognized as one of the greatest golf holes in the world, where many of the best have experienced their own personal Waterloo.

If your ball does not actually find water, you will still want to avoid the gallery of alligator spectators often found sunning themselves along the dune's edge.

Just a few kilometres north of Myrtle Beach, in Cherry Grove, is the Tidewater Golf Club and Plantation. It's commonly referred to as the Pebble Beach of the East.

Perched atop river bluffs along the Intracoastal Waterway and offering scenic views of the Atlantic Ocean, Tidewater combines the natural elements of maritime forests and pristine salt marshes to create a picture that belongs on a postcard.

Designed by architect Ken Tomlinson, the layout is challenging, but the ever-evolving views will make for an enjoyable outing, regardless of the quality of your game.

Perhaps the most fascinating course we played was the World Tour Golf Links.

It features 18 different holes inspired

by some of the most iconic courses in the world. You don't have to go to Augusta National to walk over a stone bridge like the famous one you may have watched the world's best golfers cross, year after year. Tackle Scotland's St. Andrews in Myrtle Beach, along with many other widely renowned signature holes replicated at this course.

While it's a course that may have multiple personalities, it is worth playing — even if just for the photo opportunities alone.

Myrtle Beach hosts a golf event for amateur golfers that I would love to take in sometime in the future. According to King, the World Amateur Handicap Championship is the largest single-site golf tournament in the world. More than 3,000 golfers, from more than 25 countries and most of the American states, show up every August for a 72-hole net-stroke event played simultaneously on 60 of Myrtle Beach's best courses.

Players are divided by age, gender and handicap each day — with the largest golf social event taking place every evening in the Myrtle Beach Convention Centre.

According to King, between 25 and 30 per cent of the golfers come back every year.

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