With more than 100 golf courses, hundreds of lodging options and rates that seem to change 20 times a year, planning a golf trip to Myrtle Beach area can seem like a daunting task. But it doesn’t have to be. Armed with the information in this article you will be able to plan your golfing trip of a lifetime. You’ll learn everything you need to know to help you decide when to go, where to play, stay and eat and how to get the best deals. So whether you are planning a trip with 20 golf buddies or just want to play some golf as part of a family vacation this is source for everything you need to know.

What is the Grand Strand? The Grand Strand is the region along the Atlantic coast stretching approximately eighty miles from Georgetown, South Carolina to Bald Head Island, North Carolina, with Myrtle Bach at its center. It also includes a couple East West branches along Highway 501 and Highway 9. See Appendix 1 for a map of the area.

Why Myrtle Beach? Myrtle Beach, which has been dubbed the “Golf Capital of the World”, offers perhaps the greatest variety of courses and prices of any golf destination. In some circles Myrtle Beach has a reputation for low quality bargain basement tracks. That view is inaccurate and undeserved. The quality and quantity of courses in MB at each price point is unmatched by any other golf destination, and within each class of course, the greens fees are more reasonably priced on the Grand Strand than almost everywhere else. If you are seeking a luxurious golf and spa vacation, golf and gaming or golf and theme parks, the Grand Strand is probably not where you will want to go. However, if you want to play golf, golf and more golf on a range of courses as good as you will find anywhere and a good bang for the buck, then this is the place to go. The Grand Strand is also a great destination for a summer family beach vacation with golf on the side.

When to go? The 100 or so golf courses on the Grand Strand remain open for play year round. At least one offers free play on Christmas day. However, there is a wide difference in weather and course conditions that will be found from season to season. See Appendix 2 for a listing of average high and low temperatures for each month. Understanding green fees is not an easy task, as most Myrtle Beach golf courses change rates more than ten times during the year as there are several peak periods, several shoulder periods and several off-periods. This link will give you an idea about rates for the MB courses at the various seasons. http://www.golfdesk.com/individual\_course\_rates.cfm

 Spring: The prime golf season in Myrtle Beach is in the spring from early March to June. During this period both course conditions and weather reach their peak. Average highs are in the seventies and the humidity is not too bad. It’s excellent golf weather, especially for visitors coming out of their northern winter golf hibernation. A great time for a trip to Myrtle Beach is a few weeks before the courses in your home area open for the season. Of course prices are also at their peak during this period. It is imperative to book your tee times in advance when planning a spring trip. Although not necessary, some groups start their planning a year in advance. Determining which courses to play is part of the fun.

 Winter: Myrtle Beach winters are generally mild from a Northerner’s perspective and bargain-hunting golfers do visit the Strand from December to February. However, it can be hit or miss as to whether you will want to go out on the course on any particular day. Snow is a very rare occurrence, but frost delays and chilly days are not uncommon. It is not like Florida here. Because of the low morning temperatures and short days you may not be able to get in 36 holes on a winter day. However, the courses are not crowded and rates are at their lowest. It is a good time for the bargain hunters to play some of those high end courses that may be too expensive at other times of the year. Winter is not a great time to book a set trip weeks or months in advance. However, unlike other times of the year it is likely you can get out on almost any course by making last minute reservations, so if you are flexible you can tailor your plans to the weather.

 Summer: Summers in Myrtle Beach are hot and sticky. Golf during July and August is often a side-line to a beach trip rather than a full blown golf trip. The Grand Strand is after all, a beach resort community. Green fees during the summer are low (although beachfront lodging rates are not) and most courses are not too crowded especially around mid-day. The best times to play are very early in the morning (try to be one of the first groups out so you can zip around the course) or late afternoon.

 Fall: The period from Labor Day to Thanksgiving is the second most popular time (after the spring) for a MB golf trip. The beach crowds are gone, the heat has subsided and the rates are reasonable.

How to Plan:

 A. Determine (1) when you want to go, (2) how much you want to spend (which may influence #1), and (3) who is going (which can also influence #1 due to availability of the members of the traveling party.) Most “buddy trips” are four or eight players, but groups of 16, 20 and higher are not uncommon. If it’s your first trip I’d suggest limiting it to eight players. Groups of two or three players are fine and easy to plan. Five is a difficult number to accommodate as you will not be allowed to play as a five- some and if you split into a twosome and a threesome, the twosome is likely to be paired with two strangers, which may or may not affect the ambiance of your trip. Planning a trip as a single will be discussed separately below.

Determine the length of your trip, how many rounds you want to play and what other activities you may want to include (influenced by your budget and your stamina.)

Determine which courses to play (which is the most fun part of planning)

Determine (i) how you will travel (drive or fly), and (ii) where you will stay (closely related to the decision as to where you will play.)

Should we have a group leader? Absolutely! You need someone to be the final arbiter of the group decisions (including who will be part of the group), the accountant, the communicator and the central point of contact among the group. Too many chefs will spoil the trip. It’s helpful for the leader to know most of the people on the trip. The group leader should be a boy scout: trustworthy, loyal, friendly, courteous, cheerful and thrifty (although he or she probably need not be “brave, clean or reverent“). Being able to lay down the law when necessary is also a good trait to have. The group leader will have to do a lot of the work but that is part of the fun. If the group is large enough, some packagers give an additional discount which can either be given to the leader or shared among the group. The leader needs to make sure that everyone has paid their respective share by the time it is required to confirm reservations and should be hesitant to advance or loan money to or on behalf of the group members. That can be a good way to ruin a relationship.

What is a “packager” and should you use one? A packager is a travel agent/trip planner who packages rounds of golf and lodging. The decision to use one or do everything yourself depends on several factors. The first is how much work you want to do and how much do you want to have someone else do for you. The second is which packager you use. There are several good independent packagers (See Appendix 3) who specialize in booking golf trips to the Grand Strand. They know all of the ins and outs of the courses and the lodging options and can help you get the tee times that work best for you and probably save you a few bucks too. However, beware of other packagers who try to steer you to courses or accommodations that make them the most money. Unless you know which courses you want to play I generally suggest staying away from the packagers who are part of a particular lodging facility or a particular golf facility or course management company unless you are fairly certain that you are interested in staying at their property and/or playing their courses. They have an inherent conflict of interest to encourage you to stay or play at the facilities that they are affiliated with. Unless you really know exactly what you want I would limit my choices to a reputable independent packager. You should have an idea of which courses you want to play and know the rack rate for those courses during the time of your trip before contacting a packager so that when you receive a price quote you can see how much you are saving.

(See <http://www.golfdesk.com/individual_course_rates.cfm> .)

However, if you know that you want to play courses operated a specific company, by all means contact that company directly as they may have the best package deal for their courses and related lodging, sometimes including a free round if you play their courses. For example, Myrtle Beach National Company <http://www.mbn.com/> operates a dozen or so courses as does Burroughs & Chapin Co. <http://www.myrtlebeachgolftrips.com/>

If you can’t decide between a selection of courses using the information provided later in this article or on the web sites listed in Appendix 5, a good packager will be able to help you set a final line up of courses. It is a good idea to get two quotes. However, whether you get one quote or more, make certain that the quote clearly states that it includes cart fees and all green fees and that there are no additional taxes or surcharges. Some of the less scrupulous packagers (and many of the advertisements that you see in magazines and on the web) will provide a price quote that does not include cart fees (which are almost universally required in Myrtle Beach) and/or surcharges (add-ons to pre-set packages charged to play better courses). You need this information in order to really know the cost of the trip and to be able to compare quotes “apples to apples.”

Deciding which courses to play. As already mentioned there are 100 golf courses to choose from over a distance that will take more than two hours from one end of the Strand to the other. So, how does one decide which ones to play? The major factors to consider are (i) price, (ii) location, (iii) style, (iv) difficulty, and (v) “quality” (which is a subjective, yet important, factor that includes criteria such as beauty, conditioning, variety of holes and shot values.) Section 2 reviews each course and includes details that you won’t find in any other single source, such as number of forced carries, number of water hazards, number of marsh view holes and water view holes to give you a better feel for the style, beauty and difficulty of each course. Each course is given an overall quality rating, either “Eagle”, “Birdie”, “Par” or “Bogey.” The courses are also rated for cost from $ (indicating a course that is in the lowest 20% price wise) to $$$$$ designated the most expensive courses, with each dollar sign added indicting the next most expensive 20%. Appendix 4 is a chart showing rack rate green fees (including carts). This will be helpful in determining which courses are relative bargains, because, although there is a general correlation between the quality rating and cost, it is not a perfect correlation and some courses are priced lower than would be expected from their quality rating (and some over-priced). Therefore, for example if you find two courses that are each in the $$$ price category and one is rated a “Birdie” and the other is rated a “Par”, you would be wise to choose the one that is rated a “Birdie.”

 Those visitors who have played golf in places like Monterey, Palm Springs, Kohler, Las Vegas, Scottsdale and other world class golf destinations will be pleasantly surprised by the value and quality of the best Myrtle Beach courses. The green fees of the most expensive courses in Myrtle Beach top out at $200 during peak season as compared to green fees ranging from $250 to $500 during peak times at those other locales. Players who are used to those other top of the line destinations will likely want to play the best that the Beach has to offer, which is pretty darn good seeing that ten Grand Strand courses have been ranked in the top 100 public courses in the US by Golf Magazine and Golf Digest.

 While some groups like to play only the top rated courses, others are looking to play all “bargain” courses. Many other groups play courses having a variety of price points sometimes playing a bargain course to start off the trip, then playing several middle range courses and then finish up with one or two high end lay-outs as a memorable finale to their trip. What to choose depends primarily on your budget and your tastes. If your trip is primarily to enjoy the camaraderie of your companions and you are not avid golf travelers or “collectors” of famous golf courses, playing the expensive “big-name” courses may not be very important to you. On the other hand if you are used to playing the best of the best, your course selection criteria will be different. Whichever price category you choose, the courses in Myrtle Beach will, with few exceptions, compare favorably to courses in other areas in the same price range. The courses here have to be good in order to compete with their ninety-nine neighbors.

 In narrowing down your course choices, you must be cognizant of the distance to be traveled form your accommodations to the course and from course to course if you intend to play 36 holes on a particular day. With so many courses to choose from you will be able to find plenty of courses that meet your requirements in close proximity to one another and to your lodging. You should do your best to eliminate from consideration any courses that require long car rides unless you are really dying to play a particular course. In this article we have segmented the Grand Strand in to seven geographic territories ranging from the far south end (the Pawley’s Island area), to the far north end (the area from Shallotte to Bald Head Island.) The eight territories are identified as follows:

FS - (far south)

S - (South)

501 - (Highway 501)

MBC - (Central Myrtle Beach)

NMB - (North Myrtle Beach)

9 – (Highway 9)

N – (North)

FN – (Far north)

You might want to travel from one territory to an adjoining one in a given day and perhaps a territory that is two away. However, there is no need to travel further.

Course Styles - Parkland, Marshland, faux links, unique

Territory personalities

Difficulty

**Replay Rates on the day vs. booking a second round in advance:**