



The layout at The Pointe Golf Club complements the region's surrounding natural environment.



Summer Wind

Excellent courses, stunning scenery and close proximity to the beach – with the accompanying sea breeze – make Coastal Carolina an enticing golf getaway destination

by AARON PAITICH

When summer officially arrives, families will have a chance to take a trip and spend some quality time with each other.

Along the broad expanse of North Carolina coast, the Outer Banks, Wilmington and Sunset Beach regions provide plenty of popular hangouts for seashore enthusiasts, warm-weather lovers and, let's not forget, die-hard golf enthusiasts.

Regardless of your exact destination, visiting golfers will no doubt get a chance to encounter the area's signature challenge – the summer wind.

OUTER BANKS

"The real difficulty of our [courses] comes when the wind blows," says Cory Schneider, PGA professional and head instructor at both The Carolina Club and the nearby Pointe Golf Club. "It tends to stay fairly windy, so

[the prevailing breeze] provides one of the courses' best defenses."

The Carolina Club (www.thecarolinaclub.com, 252-453-3588) in the Outer Banks is certainly no slouch. This par-72, 7,000-plus yard setup is well groomed and armed with challenges, all highlighted with its signature seventh hole, which features a par-3 island green that measures 166 yards from the championship tees.

"A lot of the time people are thinking about that hole before they even get to it," Schneider says. "It's pretty demanding – and you don't see too many island greens for the most part. It really is a fun hole."

The Carolina Club also has five par 5s, all with different character that lengthen the course. The club features L93 bentgrass greens and five sets of tees that dictate the overall difficulty and experience for each golfer.

If you like The Carolina Club, then it's worth checking out its sister course in Powell's Point, The Pointe Golf Club (www.thepointegolfclub.com, 252-491-8388).



High shot values are prevalent throughout one's round at The Carolina Club, including at the island green par-3 seventh hole.

The layout is a popular choice for visitors because it's closer to the beach. While more skilled players may prefer The Carolina Club, The Pointe offers similar course conditions with easier playability.

With few forced carries, minimal rough and A1 bentgrass putting surfaces, the layout makes for a stern, yet forgiving, test of golf. The toughest hole on the course is the 460-yard, par-5 eighth, a severe dogleg to the right.

The Currituck Club (www.clubcorp.com/Clubs/The-Currituck-Club, 252-455-9518) in Corolla is an experience in itself. In addition to the decadent resort, sandy beaches, fine

ABOVE: THE CAROLINA CLUB; THE POINTE GOLF CLUB

restaurants and a unique trolley system, there is also some golf to be played – a perfect scenario for families looking for variety.

Lush vegetation and shoreline views adorn this Rees Jones-designed course, which spans 6,885 yards on its par-72 layout. Named one of best courses to play in North Carolina by *Golf Digest*, locals know that to score low at Currituck, you have to keep the ball low, especially if the wind is up.

Located back on Powell's Point, **Kilmarlic Golf Club** (www.kilmarlicgolfclub.com, 252-491-4220) covers 605 acres of both forest and wetlands in classic Outer Banks style. While the Tom Steele-designed course occasionally welcomes notable local events, its tournament conditions are maintained all season long. Bentgrass greens and bermudagrass fairways cover this gem, and water spans 11 of the 18 holes.

"It's set up to be played at whatever level you're at and whatever your capabilities are," says Guy Thompson, Kilmarlic's head PGA professional. "The course is set up to be friendly. It's really one of the better tests of golf in the area."

The par-3 17th is Kilmarlic's signature hole. It plays 165 yards from the back markers and provides a stunning view of lush trees framing a green protected by water.

SUNSET BEACH

Like variety and allusions to ferocious felines?

Pack up your clubs and head to **The Big Cats** at Ocean Ridge Plantation

(www.big-cats.com, 910-287-1800) in Ocean Isle, which features four picturesque golf courses. Many of the plantation's golf holes capture everything that is beautiful, unique and challenging about the Sunset Beach area.

Tiger's Eye, an upscale daily-fee track, is covered with dense hardwood forest and boulders. Precise shots are required throughout the course, meaning golfers need to take a thoughtful approach in order to score low.

As the newest member of the plantation family, **Leopard's Chase** has been tabbed among the "Top 10 Best New Public Courses to Play in America" by *GOLF Magazine*.

Lion's Paw, designed by Willard Byrd, offers a more hilly and open layout, while still capturing the region's mystique of water and wildlife. Sugar-sand bunkers and mini-verde greens help keep up with the other sister courses in the areas of quality and playability. **Panther's Run** aims to test golfers but not overwhelm them. Wide fairways and soft landing spots complement a course adapted to the natural lay of the land.

If 18 holes is simply not enough, head to **Sea Trail Golf Resort** (www.seatrail.com, 866-368-6642) in Sunset Beach for three markedly different golf experiences. Sea Trail is a full-service resort located between Calabash and Shallotte, and with Sunset Beach right out the back door, it's a two-minute drive from the property to the ocean. There is even a full-service PGA learning center on site.

Named after their respective designers, the

Rees Jones, Willard Byrd and Dan Maples courses present varying challenges with scenery that rivals their excellent layouts. The Rees Jones course is liberally outfitted with lakes and trees, but allows some give-and-take thanks to its generous fairways. Water is in play on 11 of the 18 holes.

On the other hand, the Willard Byrd course requires pinpoint accuracy off the tee with trees and lakes always looming to snatch errant shots. The putting surfaces have recently been redone and the elevation changes will make golfers earn every putt.

The Dan Maples 18 is modeled after Southern-style courses filled with ancient Oak trees and Carolina pines. Five of its holes corral the Calabash Creek.

WILMINGTON

Located just 20 minutes from the beach, **Magnolia Greens Golf Plantation** (www.magnolia-greens.com, 910-383-0999) in Leland offers 27 holes of championship golf. Magnolia Greens, a daily-fee course, recently earned a four and a half star rating from *Golf Digest* and has hosted PGA Tour qualifying rounds.

Designed by Tom Jackson, Magnolia Greens offers three vintage nine-hole courses with five different sets of tees. The Camellia

LEFT: Kilmarlic Golf Club provides a fair test of golf that nearly every caliber of golfer can enjoy.

RIGHT: At Sea Trail Golf Resort, players are offered three unique tests. The Rees Jones course places a premium on accuracy.

LEFT: AKILMARLIC GOLF CLUB; RIGHT: SEA TRAIL GOLF RESORT





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“The lure of competition – I think that’s why we play,” says Sypniewski, who played on various mini-tours in Florida and California for several years before taking a job in Alexandria. He works for the financial advisory branch of Deloitte, the world’s second-largest personal financial services agency.

“Anybody can play golf ... but I think the reason the best players are great is because they enjoy the competition.”

Sypniewski says work commitments have limited the time to hone his game. In fact, he’s only played a few rounds all year so far, and has been out on the course a couple of times with his wife Jamie, whom he married last July.

“Maybe Jamie being out there will increase my volume of play,” Sypniewski says. “If I qualify, this will be like the first real golf tournament I’ve played in quite some time. I obviously have no expectations of doing well this year, but hopefully a few years down the road if I get to play a little more I might be able to get back in the thick of things again.”

“My experience is that I think the difference between the top amateurs and the best professionals is minimal. But you have to play a lot. I just hope I don’t embarrass myself when I’m out there.”

WINNING FEELING RESONATES

How good can the game be after returning from the professional ranks to amateur golf? Absolutely wonderful, Scott Shingler says.

Since regaining his amateur status in September 2007, Shingler has been the top dog in the state, being named the VSGA’s golfer of the year in 2009 and 2011. Shingler’s title in last year’s VSGA Amateur – combined with his 2010 triumph in the VSGA Mid-Amateur – enabled him to become only the fourth player in VSGA history to hold both titles in the same rotation.

The 40-year-old Haymarket resident is winning everywhere these days. In addition to his golf success, he and his wife, Arshia, have three young children: daughter Aava, who turns 6 this May, and sons Luke (4) and Blake (18 months).

Shingler bested then 18-year-old Ji Soo Park of Centreville, 3 and 2, to win his first VSGA Amateur Championship triumph last summer at The Virginian in Bristol.

“It’s better for me to be here than out on the road with these young kids,” Shingler says. After graduating from George Mason University in 1996, he hit the Florida mini-tours in the off-season from his assistant professional’s post at Robert Trent Jones Golf Club in Lake Manassas.

“Plus, I really enjoy winning. It’s a charge taking these kids down.” ♦

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Golfers need a sound all-around game to score well at The Mackay Course at Thistle Golf Club.

Nine contains plenty of trees and a slew of doglegs, and its par-5 finishing hole stretches nearly 600 yards. The Magnolia Nine is a more open layout early on before winding its way into the woods. The latest addition, the Azalea Nine, added in 2000, turns a completely different page in the Magnolia Greens experience.

The **Rivers Edge Golf Club** (www.river18.com, 910-755-3434), is a vacation in itself. Located in Shallote between Myrtle Beach and Wilmington, this beauty combines elevation changes, bentgrass greens, lakes, rivers, wetlands and more into one mesmerizing display. The fact that it was designed by Arnold Palmer just adds to its first-class ambience.

Trouble is strewn at nearly every turn at Rivers Edge. With sand, marsh and water hazards, golfers are required to play each shot with precision. Six of the holes rest high upon bluffs, opening up views to miles of surrounding scenery. The *Charlotte Observer* has ranked Rivers Edge as one of the five best courses in the state.

For golfers that navigate around water well, check out **Thistle Golf Club** (www.thistlegolf.com, 910-575-8700), located in nearby Calabash. To keep you on your toes, 25 of the 27 holes are either bordered or bisected by water. Course designer Tim Cate allows you to pair together any two nine-hole courses, named the Cameron, Mackay and Stewart.

One of the most memorable holes at Thistle sits on the Stewart nine, which plays to a par 35 with a trio of par 3s. At the 177-yard, par-3 ninth hole, golfers face a carry over water to an elevated green protected by pot bunkers and even more water to the right. It makes for a perilous shot on the best of days, and if the area’s well-known winds are blowing, it will test anyone’s game.

But then again, when golfing the Carolina coast, that’s all part of the experience. ♦

Author Aaron Paitich is from Minneapolis, Minn., and a frequent sportswriter for the Minneapolis Star Tribune.

THISTLE GOLF CLUB AND ESTATES