

ENCORE ATLANTA

TRAIL OF CHEERS

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THE 20-PLUS-COURSE GEORGIA GOLF TRAIL TURNS HEADS WITH ITS QUIRKY CHALLENGES, VARIED TERRAINS AND FANCY AMENITIES.

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FOR ONE WEEK every April, Georgia is the center of the golf universe. Every golfer and golf fan focuses on the Masters in Augusta, home of expensive admission tickets, green champions' jackets, brilliant azaleas, fabled pimento cheese sandwiches and the hushed, reverential voices of CBS announcers.

And, naturally, there's the course itself, so exclusive that 99.99 percent of golfers will never play it.

For the rest of the hackers, duffers and weekend warriors out there, Georgia has some 400 courses not named Augusta National. The Georgia Golf Trail highlights 22 of the best, from Brasstown Valley Resort & Spa (the highest course in the northeast corner of the state), to the links course at George T. Bagby State Park (near the Alabama-Georgia line). The Trail provides a vast range of terrains, challenges, prices and amenities.



The Trail is the brainchild of Doug Hollandsworth, the lifelong Georgian and golfer who created it to bring awareness to Georgia golf and the state's real estate, attractions and other economic opportunities.



Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, about an hour southwest of Atlanta, has two courses — one for pros and one for the not-yet-a-pros. Photo: Georgia Golf Trail

“It’s not just about the 18 holes,” Hollandsworth says. “Someone in New York calls Delta and gets their tickets and gets here. They go to Avis, and eat at Longhorn and spend the night at the Westin. It’s about economic impact.”

It’s also about competition with neighboring states for recreation dollars. Myrtle Beach, S.C., aggressively promotes golf vacation packages, as do many Florida communities. But the Southern king of the concept has been the Robert Trent Jones Trail in Alabama. Named after a legendary golf course architect (no relation to the fabled Georgia golfer Bobby Jones), it consists of 11 courses.



The King and Prince Beach & Golf Resort on St. Simons Island, at sunset. Photo: Georgia Golf Trail

“Other Southeastern states were helping promote golf,” Hollandsworth says. “Georgia is losing millions of dollars from golf groups that want to go there instead of coming to our state. Robert Trent Jones was growing like crazy. But who the heck wants to go play golf in Alabama, when we have so much more to offer the traveler and golfer here in Georgia?”

So in 2013, Hollandsworth, whose background is in marketing, publishing and sports radio, started Georgia Golf & Travel LLC. He teamed with the Georgia Departments of Economic Development and Natural Resources, and put the Georgia Golf Trail on the map.

It started with 15 courses (now 23, give or take). “We’re going for quality, not quantity,” he says. And diversity. Major tickets on the Trail include the prestigious Reynolds Plantation (Reynolds Lake Oconee) and Sea Island. But the trail also lists some excellent state park courses with reasonable greens fees. “Georgia has some great golf, from the mountains to Atlanta, to the lake, to the coast,” Hollandsworth says.



Brazell's Creek, an 18-hole course in the Gordonia-Alatamaha State Park near Reidsville, is about three hours southeast of Atlanta on the way to Savannah. Photo: Georgia Golf Trail
Next for the Trail, he hopes, are courses in Columbus and Augusta.

The Trail also promotes other recreational activities associated with the courses, so that non-golfing family members have plenty to do while their golfer is out swinging, likely being reminded of Bobby Jones' quote: "Golf is the only game I know of that actually becomes harder the longer you play it."

More details on some of the courses and their amenities, listed alphabetically. Remember, this is just a sampling:

- **Brasstown Valley Resort & Spa.** Five sets of tees that wind through wildlife preserves, ponds and streams. Rated by Golf Digest and Leading Golf Courses of America as one of the top Georgia courses to play. Plus horse stables, trail riding and massages, facials and other body treatments in the spa. In Young Harris and the Blue Ridge Mountains, about 2 hours, 20 minutes north of Atlanta. Details [HERE](#) or at 706.379.9900.



Highland Walk i in Royston is two hours northeast of Atlanta. The 18-hole course is at Victoria Bryant State Park. Photo: Georgia Golf Trail

- **Callaway Gardens.** Two courses — one for pros and one that's less challenging. Plus kayaking, canoeing, zip-lining and a butterfly center. In Pine Mountain, an hour southwest of Atlanta. Details [HERE](#) or at 800.852.3810.
- **Chateau Elan.** A total of 63 holes, some with recently renovated greens. Plus winery tours and tastings, and day and overnight spas. In Braselton, about an hour northeast of Atlanta. Details [HERE](#) or at 678.425.0900.
- **The Club at Savannah Harbor Westin:** The 18-hole course is the former home of the PGA Liberty Mutual Insurance Legends of Golf Champions event (2003-13). Avail yourself of Savannah, one of the South's great tourist spots and home to top restaurants, nightlife, history and walking tours. About 3.5 hours southeast of Atlanta. Details [HERE](#) or at 912.201.2000.



The Lakes Golf Course at Laura S. Walker State Park near Waycross is an 18-hole, par 72 course with three lakes not far from the Okefenokee Swamp. Photo: Georgia Golf Trail.

- **Lake Blackshear Resort & Golf Club.** Georgia Veterans Memorial Golf Course earned a four-star rating from Golf Digest. Includes a Georgia veterans military museum, train rides and a marina. In Cordele, about 2 hours, 10 minutes south of Atlanta. Details [HERE](#) or at 229.276.2377.
- **Little Ocmulgee State Park and Lodge:** The 18-hole Wallace Adams Course is surrounded by loblolly pines, willows and magnolias. Plus swimming in the lake and a children's splash pad. Near Helena and McRae, about 2.5 hours southeast of Atlanta. Details [HERE](#) or at 229.868.7474.
- **Stone Mountain Park:** A total of 36 holes that date to 1969. Plus cable car rides to the mountaintop, a theme park, hiking and fishing. In Stone Mountain, 36 minutes northeast of downtown Atlanta. Details [HERE](#) or at 770.465.3278.

Georgia's climate makes golf possible year-round in much of the state, although that's not the same as being able to play 365 days a year. A driving tour of all 23 courses could take a couple of months and more than one credit card, but it's certainly doable. Hollandsworth knows only one golfer lucky enough to have completed the Trail. His name: Doug Hollandsworth.

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A BROADER LOOK AT THE TRAIL

You'll find Georgia Golf Trail courses north, south and east of Atlanta; none are located to the west. Depending on what part of the metro area you call home, these courses are as close as a 36-minute drive (Stone Mountain) and as far away as a five-hour drive (Georgia coast). Please note: The list changes slightly year to year. This is the most updated information available. Let's follow the points on a compass:

NORTH, NORTHEAST

- Brasstown Valley Resort & Spa in Young Harris
- Chateau Elan in Braselton
- Highland Walk in Royston
- Lanier Islands Legacy Golf Club in Buford
- Stone Mountain Golf Club

SOUTH, SOUTHEAST

- Lake Blackshear Resort & Golf Club in Cordele
- Meadow Links in Fort Gaines
- Brazell's Creek in Reidsville
- Cuscowilla on Lake Oconee in Eatonton
- Little Ocmulgee State Park and Lodge, near Helena/McRae
- The Creek & The Lakes, both in Waycross
- The Club at Savannah Harbor Westin

SOUTHEAST, ON THE COAST

- Jekyll Island Georgia on Jekyll Island
- Sea Island Golf on Sea Island
- Sea Palms Resort & Conference Center on St. Simons Island
- The King and Prince Beach & Golf Resort, also on St. Simons Island

SOUTHWEST

- Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain

EAST

- Arrowhead Pointe in Elberton
- Harbor Club on Lake Oconee in Greensboro
- Reynolds Lake Oconee, also in Greensboro
- Stone Creek Golf at Hard Labor Creek State Park in Social Circle