

Brainerd Lakes, Mn



Nobody is planning on changing Minnesota's license plate slogan from the 'Land of 10,000 Lakes' to the 'Land of 10,000 Links.' However golf is a vital part of the sporting culture in this Upper Midwestern state, home to some 450 courses.

With approximately 4.5 million residents, Minnesota has more golfers per capita than any other state in the Union, and is the only state to have held all thirteen of the different national championships sanctioned by the USGA. (The U.S Open, Women's Open and Senior Open, the U.S Amateur, Women's Amateur, Senior Amateur, Senior Women's Amateur, the Junior Amateur, Girls Junior, and several others.)

The Ryder Cup has never been held in Minnesota, but that will change this year as summer gives way to autumn. Hazeltine National in the Minneapolis suburb of Chaska will host the 41st iteration of these much-anticipated international matches, as the United States attempts to turn the tide. (The Europeans have won five of the last six Cups, and seven of the last nine.)

For those traveling to Minnesota to play golf, the Brainerd Lakes area of the state offers several compelling venues and lots of good lodging. Grab a National Rental Car at the Minneapolis Airport and head north.

In about two-and-a-half hour (150 miles) you'll be smack dab in the middle of one of the Midwest's golf hotbeds.

Twenty five years ago the area was best known as a getaway for fishing, recreational boating and water sports, and home to the bigger-than-life statues of the mythical Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox. Legend has it that Bunyan's giant footsteps created the area's myriad lakes. In 1990 the landscape began a subtle shift towards golf, with the opening of [The Pines at Grand View Lodge](#). These 18 holes, which expanded to 27 some five years later, were the region's inaugural foray into the world of the upscale destination course. The Pines at Grandview Lodge begat a host of other dazzlers, including Arnold Palmer's tribute to his father, Deacon, with a must-play known as [Deacon's Lodge](#). The Classic at [Madden's on Gull Lake](#) is another top-tier venue, which features several other courses of varying length and difficulty, 63 holes in total. Same can be said for the 45-hole complex at [Cragun's Resort](#). All four facilities are exceptional, none more so than Palmer's effort.



[Deacon's Lodge](#)

Like the king in his prime, Deacon's Lodge is muscular, bold and dramatic. With wide, sweeping fairways, many tumbling downhill from elevated tees, there's plenty of room and reason to swat drivers all day.



Cragun's

Cragun's Resort offers Dutch Legacy as its headliner. This Audubon International certified sanctuary is one of only two dozen public courses nationwide garnering a five-star rating from Golf Digest. This Robert Trent Jones Jr. creation offers multiple tee boxes, a number of forced carries and varied approach options on a pristine piece of property. Jones Jr. also created Bobby's Legacy, with several split fairways and a rhythmic mixture of longer and shorter holes. They also offer a unique Reversible 9 par-3 course, ideal for families, kids and novices, which changes direction daily, offering holes from 85 to 225 yards in length.



The Classic

The Classic at Madden's on Gull Lake was designed by longtime course superintendent Scott Hoffmann, who consulted with the late New England based architect Geoffrey Cornish. The first three holes of this walker-friendly knockout skirt the pristine waters of Bass Lake, and then things really get pretty with bridges, towering Minnesota conifers, and beautiful bunkering. In addition to the championship course, there is Pine Beach East, circa 1926, stretching all of 6,100 yards. Holes 14 through 16 memorably consist of two reachable par 5s and a driveable par 4. Pine Beach West is even more petite, just a

shade over 5,000 yards in length, and rounding out the offerings is what's aptly known as Madden's Social Nine, eight par-3s with a par-4, perfect for walking-and-talking while swinging a few clubs with family and friends.



The Pines

Finally, The Pines at Grandview Lodge, the course that begat the Brainerd Golf Boom, remains as popular as ever. The Woods, The Lakes and The Marsh are separate nine-hole ramblings that can be combined into an 18-hole round, or all 27, if so inclined. The greens are among the best in the area, and depending on the chosen routing, golfers encounter gorgeous stonework, sharp doglegs, deep forests and wonderful lake views.

Dining options go well beyond area staples such as walleye, wild rice soup, and Lutefisk, which is a local delicacy and acquired taste, a white fish cured with lye. Patrons can drive or boat to [Ernie's on Gull Lake](#), a lively and family-friendly eatery established nearly a century ago in 1917. Grilled Norwegian salmon and braised pork shanks are among customer's favorites, as is their famed lobster bisque. [The Classic Grill at Madden's](#) offers serene golf course views, and a rich variety of entrees such as Chicken Lobster Oscar, Korean Beef Short Ribs and the Risotto of the Day. Finally, [the Barn](#) is a diner as simple as its name. They feature filling breakfasts, homemade pies, and the little-known-outside-the-Midwest 'Maid-Rite' sandwich, (otherwise

known as a 'loose meat' sandwich) which is a ground beef sandwich not made into a patty. Sounds odd, tastes great!