

Golden Isles, GA



There are a dozen top-notch golf destinations throughout the Southeast, but the Golden Isles of coastal Georgia, located just north of the Florida state line, is among the most distinguished, not to mention the most accessible. Grab a National Rental Car from either the Jacksonville or Savannah airport. In either case, you'll be just an hour-and-change from a destination that exudes class and gentility, not to mention magnificent scenery and a deep sense of history. Some of golf's most storied names have left their mark here over more than three quarters of a century. These include original Sea Island Golf Club course designer Walter Travis, who in the early days of the last century won the U.S. Amateur three times and the British Amateur as well. Bobby Jones once held the course record there and Sam Snead bettered Jones' mark some thirty years later. There was LPGA pioneer Louise Suggs, who more than sixty years ago won the Sea Island Ladies Open, then went on to amass fifty five professional wins — including a pair of U.S. Opens. There's also local boy Davis Love III, more on him a bit later.

Any discussion of Golden Isles golf begins with the [Sea Island Golf Club](#). There are few club entrances more dramatic and inviting than the drive down the stately Avenue of the Oaks. The heart rate and anticipation factor of any avid player will rise as they make their way down the tree-lined corridor and view the sparkling guest lodge and

golf complex with its colossal American flag whipping in the ever-present ocean breeze.



Image via [Sea Island Golf](#)

The club features a trio of excellent options. First and foremost is the Seaside Course, a 1999 Tom Fazio reconfiguration of the original separate nines designed by Charles Colt, Hugh Alison and Joe Lee. Seaside is at the southern tip of St. Simons Island, and is dotted with tidal creeks, dunes and salt marshes. It is located on the site of the old Retreat Plantation, with tabby ruins and an old slave cemetery clearly visible. The tees are slightly elevated, offering excellent views of the Intracoastal Waterway and St. Simons Sound. The wind whips and howls on the exposed property. Players should be prudent with their choice of tee box, lest the scorecard ruined and the golf ball compartment emptied if one bites off more than they can chew, length-wise. Length isn't a problem for the PGA Tour players who descend for the RSM Classic, and compete on Seaside and the neighboring Plantation Course.



Image via [Sea Island Golf](#)

Speaking of the latter, “U.S. Open Doctor” Rees Jones, son of famed architect Robert Trent Jones, reshaped the work of Walter Travis and Dick Wilson into the Plantation Course in 1998. He refers to the renovation as ‘parkland by the sea,’ and there are few courses on the southern Atlantic coast as inviting as this. Super popular with guests, and lacking some of the ferocity of Seaside, Plantation offers expansive fairways, lush natural scenery, and beautiful vistas of flowering plants and hardwoods in addition to some long range ocean views.



Image via [Sea Island Golf](#)

Rounding out the trio is the Retreat Course, executed by local product Davis Love III and his brother Mark. They reinterpreted the original Joe Lee design from the 1970s. With more than twenty PGA Tour wins, including the PGA Championship, Davis Love III is one of the more accomplished Tour pros of the modern era. His design career is on a

similar trajectory, and Retreat has green complexes with plenty of slope and undulation, many of which are fortified by challenging bunkering.

Other golf options abound, as there are more than a dozen courses on Jekyll Island, St. Simons Island and Sea Island. [The Hampton Club](#) on the northern reaches of Saint Simons is worth a visit, as is [Heritage Oaks](#), in the nearby city of Brunswick.

Post-golf, much of the action is found on Mallory Avenue on St. Simons Island, where a variety of live music venues and restaurants vie for the vacationers who haven't expended all their energy on the course or in the ocean. There are ninety-plus eateries, so no shortage of options. [Southern Soul Barbecue](#) speaks for itself, [Barbara Jean's](#) is renowned for crab cakes, and [Tramici](#) scores points for old-school Italian with a lively atmosphere.