

## Hammock Beach, FL



Florida has more than twelve hundred courses, more than any other state in the nation. Traveling golf lovers think primarily of the east coast, (Doral, PGA Village or TPC Sawgrass) west coast (World Woods in Brooksville, Innisbrook in Tampa, all the way south towards Fort Myers) or greater Orlando when they plan trips. However there is great golf to be found in an area that few consider: The panhandle. Not surprising, considering it stretches some 200 miles in length, from Jacksonville to the Alabama border, and varies in width from 50 to 100 miles.



Southwood Golf Club

Tallahassee is known in equal parts for its lyrical name, as the state capital, and home of football powerhouse Florida State University. But golf-wise it offers a fine test of the game called **SouthWood**, once lauded as the place to play in Florida's capital city by GOLF Magazine. This large-scale 3,200 acre development features a lovely Fred Couples-Gene Bates design. There's room to move about in this stretch of north Florida, a stark contrast to the shoulder-to-shoulder dynamic that proliferates further south.

If there's a single touchstone of their signature golf course, stretching almost 7,200 yards from the championship markers, it is these magnificent live oak trees, festooned with Spanish moss swaying in an ever-present breeze.

Bear in mind that this is atypical Florida golf. The terrain isn't tabletop flat and riddled with condos. Nor are there lagoons and out-of-bounds stakes sprinkled in every direction. This is north Florida, with dense stands of hardwoods, notable elevation changes, and fairways that roll and undulate.

The course makes liberal use of the rambling, 175 acre plot, with big tees, big greens and big fairways. There are five sets of tees, and at the opposite end of the back-of-the-box black markers are the "wee links" for juniors and abject beginners, just 2,700 yards. But the two middle tee boxes, the ones most men will play from are garnet and

gold, not so coincidentally the school colors of Florida State University, perhaps twenty minutes away.



Camp Creek Golf Club

About 150 miles further west near Panama City is another little-known beauty, the Tom Fazio-designed [Camp Creek Golf Club](#). This is considered one of the finest courses in the state. No small honor, taking into account the sheer volume of courses in Florida. Camp Creek appears to be a wondrously wild and untamed property. But in fact was created from a nearly flat thousand acre site by Fazio's design team and a fleet of bulldozers. One million cubic yards of earth were moved for this project, which translates in to the length, width and height of a football field. But the golf course is fully integrated into the natural surroundings, and the playing features appear as though they've been in place forever. "I just kept looking across the road to Deer Lake State Park," explains Fazio's design associate Rick Horger. "I attempted to make our shapes look like their contours."



Shark's Tooth Golf Club

One other venue of note, also in the Panama City area: Situated among the live oaks and loblolly pines along the shores of historic Lake Powell, [Shark's Tooth](#) is a hard-to-access imaginatively designed challenge from Greg Norman.

Shark's Tooth is as much nature preserve as golf course, and enjoys Signature Status awarded by the Audubon Society for its commitment to environmental excellence, an honor shared with only a few other courses in Florida. Norman's design relies heavily upon the natural lie of the terrain, sand dunes and ridges, not just to preserve the natural environment, but to add drama and fairway definition.

The course is private but accessible to guests of the utterly charming [WaterColor Inn](#) in nearby Seagrove Beach. This sixty-room Inn is the just reward for weary golfers seeking ultimate comfort and chic under the same roof. This boutique hotel, overlooking the Gulf of Mexico, is a rare amalgamation of whimsy and chic, spare and elaborate.

Service is ultra-attentive, but never fawning, as is sometimes the case at bigger, "brand-name" luxury hotels. The onsite seafood restaurant, known as Fish Out of Water, shouldn't be missed. The meals are spectacular. Much like the golf at Camp Creek and Shark's Tooth, just minutes down the road.