

## Mississippi's Gulf Coast



It's safe to say that twenty years ago not one in a thousand people had ever heard of Tunica, Mississippi. Unless you were a riverboat captain or a native of nearby Memphis, Tennessee, there was no reason you would have.

Before legalized gaming was introduced in the early '90s, Tunica County was the single poorest county in the United States. The town itself made Mayberry look like Monte Carlo, so slow and sleepy was the pace. The featureless landscape, bordered by the broad expanse of the Mississippi River to the west, and the city of Memphis some twenty miles to the north, was little more than a sea of cotton fields, and flatter than a Scrabble board. But times have changed.

Now Tunica welcomes more than ten million visitors a year. It's the largest casino resort between Atlantic City and Las Vegas, and while it's lacking the history of the former and the glitz of the latter, it definitely has some allure of its own. Besides a mild climate, a down-home southern charm and close proximity to the fun and funky city of Memphis, the casinos that have sprung from the landscape insure a non-stop slate of gaming, entertainment and dining options. Where liberally-spending vacationers go, golf is sure to follow.



Image via [Tunica Travel](#)

**Tunica National** is the most estimable of the area's courses. Designed by ten-time PGA Tour winner Mark McCumber, who is one of very few players-turned-course-designers that also happens to be an accredited member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects. His wind-whipped Mississippi masterpiece is a sturdy test of the game. The rolling terrain is rife with strategically-placed water hazards and bunkers, which are balanced with generous landing areas. Big, fast, undulating greens await golfers after they negotiate the trouble tee-to-green. Fortunately, a 360 degree circular range allows all players the comprehensive warm-up necessary to negotiate one of northern Mississippi's staunchest golf challenges.



Image via [Tunica Travel](#)

**River Bend Links** was born of an unusual alliance of three casinos, normally fierce competitors, who saw the need for alternative entertainment for their guests and the public. Sam's Town, Hollywood and Harrah's Casino joined forces to build this user-friendly facility, slightly less ferocious in its playing demands than its area siblings. Architect Clyde Johnston describes his creation as "a field of dunes." It's as good a description as any, because the 18 holes are comfortably nestled in a bend of the Mississippi River. The 6,900 yard track offers a range of sand and grass bunkers, mounds, and treeless, wind-swept landscapes to facilitate a traditional feel. Located in the adjacent town of Robinsonville, and further removed from the burgeoning population center of Tunica itself, wildlife still inhabits the area. Golfers may well encounter deer, fox, or wild turkey as they seek out their birdies.



Image via [Tunica Travel](#)

This area of the country isn't famous for 'spa cuisine.' So any visitor hankering for fried pickles, catfish, hush puppies, country fried steak, peach cobbler, sweet tea and the like should check out the **Hollywood Café**, which is colorful, eclectic and will afford plenty of change from a \$20 bill. It's also been immortalized in the enduringly haunting Marc Cohn ballad 'Walking in Memphis.' (The exact lyric: "Now Muriel plays piano every Friday at the Hollywood.")



Image via [Tunica Travel](#)

The same country gestalt is found at the **Blue & White Restaurant**, where breakfast is served anytime. Popular items for a midday meal also include fried green tomatoes, fried green beans, chicken and dumplings, frog's legs and pork chops. (Vegetarians can survive in these parts, but it's slim pickings.)

Any worthwhile casino destination has a dozen shows, a hundred restaurants and a thousand hotel rooms, minimum. But Tunica is distinguished in a way that Vegas, the Bahamas and Atlantic City are not. The reason comes down to three words: The Mighty Mississippi. Visitors would do well to tear themselves away from both the buffet and the baccarat tables and head down to **Tunica Riverpark & Museum**.



Image via [Tunica Travel](#)

In fact, by complementing the RiverPark tour with a quick cruise on the “Big Muddy” itself on the Tunica Queen, a visitor can obtain a working education as to why the Mississippi River has been such a vital conduit in our nation’s history. The interactive nature of the museum displays, the dynamic, state-of-the-art video monitors, and the wall-sized illustrations all combine to provide a “you are there” atmosphere that will appeal to both kids and adults. Besides, once you board the Queen, enjoying a spicy Bloody Mary or ice-cold beer, listening to the live banjo music as you cruise the river, the fun really begins.