

Florida Golf: Snowbird Retreat

I must admit I am now a "snowbird".

To define, a snowbird is anyone who leaves the ice, snow, and cold of the north to spend some time during the winter in Florida (or, I suspect southern Arizona, California, or Nevada).

In most areas in Florida golf courses are plentiful.

Some are in very good condition and others may not be in the best of shape, but, when you just want to get out and practice or swing the clubs, they can be fun to play.

Many are unacceptably expensive for the average golfer with family responsibilities, or for seniors who have dwindling incomes, but there are courses where reasonable prices can be found if you are willing to do a little research and play in the afternoon, especially during the week.

A schedule that could work for many snowbirds is some sightseeing or fishing in the morning and then play golf in the afternoon.

I will not provide a research project on Florida golf, as there already are considerable advertisements and other available information on golfing in Florida.

I will mention a few courses along the east coast of Florida (north to south) that I have found to be somewhat reasonable in price and also a good challenge and fun to play.

Jacksonville / St. Augustine area

If you can spend any length of time in the St. Augustine area you should visit the World Golf Hall of Fame, located just west of I-95 exit 323.



World Golf Hall of Fame



18-Hole Greens Putting Course

I was impressed!

In addition to the history, information, and memorabilia presented at the Hall of Fame, the admission includes your try at one hole at St. Andrews via a golf simulator, admission to a movie at the onsite Imax Theater, and one round of play at an 18 green putting course.

If you need to test your ego, for \$5 you can take a couple of shots to a real island green that imitates a par 3 at the TPC Sawgrass.

There is one golf course onsite adjacent to the Hall of Fame.

The Slammer & Squire golf course is a top of the line course that provides a professional level golf experience. Another snowbird who played the course told me that; "The fairways are like fine carpet. They are nicer than most of the greens that he plays on in his home state".



Slammer & Squire Golf Course



Section of the Practice Range

For \$20 at the Slammer & Squire Golf Course you can use the practice range for the entire day. There is also an excellent putting green and a chipping and sand trap practice green.

A short drive away in another section of the World Golf Village is the King and The Bear. This is also a very beautiful high-end golf course.

Although these two courses are out of my price range, I can appreciate their condition, challenge, and beauty. (NOTE: Rates are a little lower in the summer.)

There are a number of golf courses in the immediate area that are also very nice and quite challenging, yet can be played at a reasonable price, especially on weekday afternoons.

These include; The Golf Club at South Hampton; Cimarrone Golf and Country Club; St. Johns Golf and Country Club; Royal St. Augustine Golf and Country Club; St. Johns County Municipal Golf Course; Magnolia Point Golf and Country Club; The Golf Club at Sanctuary Cove (in Waverly, Georgia, north of Jacksonville).

The St. Johns County Municipal Course is one exit south of the World Golf Village. It receives a significant volume of play and may appear to be overcrowded, but I am told that play moves along without much delay.



St. John's County Municipal Course

The Golf Club at South Hampton, St. Johns Golf and Country Club, and the Cimerrone Golf and Country Club course are just west of I-95 at exit 329 (one exit north of World Golf Village).

The South Hampton course is highly rated and a very attractive course.

The St. Johns Country Club is also highly rated and is a beautiful course.

Both courses have reasonable pricing, especially in the afternoon.

*Clubhouse at the
South Hampton Country Club*



The Cimerrone Golf and Country Club, which is directly across the street from the entrance to the drive to the South Hampton course, is also a beautiful and challenging course. Like most of these courses, it is located in a real estate development. When you approach the entrance gate for the Cimerrone you need to tell the security guard that you are going to the golf course.



Cimerrone Golf and Country Club

I played the Cimerrone and found the staff to be extremely helpful and the course to be challenging and in very good condition. Best of all, although it was one of the most reasonably priced courses to play, it was not crowded. We played at 2 PM and our group of two felt that we had the course to ourselves.

Magnolia Point Golf and Country Club is located just off of Rte 17 in the small town of Green Cove Springs.

It is also in a gated community.

This course has rolling, almost hilly grounds and lots of trees, much like northern courses.

Afternoon weekday pricing is also quite reasonable.



Magnolia Point

The Royal St. Augustine Golf and Country Club is located on route 16 about ½ way between I-95 (exit 318) and US 1.

It has been a couple of years since I played this course, but I found it to be in excellent condition with very good but challenging greens, and plenty of water and hazards.

It is noted as a target course. Be sure to bring your best game (and a few extra golf balls).

Rates are very reasonable.



Royal St. Augustine

A little north

A relatively new course that I first visited when it was being excavated, and now have had a chance to view after it has been completed, is The Golf Club at Sanctuary Cove. This is a Fred Couples / Davis Love III designed course that is located just east of I-95 (exit 26), south of Brunswick, Georgia (about 45 miles north of Jacksonville, FL).

I did not have time to play on the afternoon that I was able to visit the course this year, but I did get a chance to take a quick tour. The course appears to be very challenging and quite attractive. It is also reasonably priced, has excellent facilities, and is not overcrowded. I will make it a point to play this course the next time that I am in the area.



The Golf Club at Sanctuary Cove

What to do? What to do?

For those family members who might not live on a diet of golf, the Jacksonville / St. Augustine area has many activities for family members to enjoy. I will only mention a few.

If you elect to go to the Golf Course at Sanctuary Cove, you will be near Jekyll Island and St. Simons Island, Georgia. Be sure to have either lunch or dinner at Barbara Jeans' original restaurant, at St. Simons Island (She-Crab Soup, Crab Cakes, etc.).

In the Jacksonville / St. Augustine area, the beaches are excellent, the historic areas are worth the visit, and museums are plentiful. Shopping is available at both unique shops and large outlet malls.

Check out the beach and look for shells on the beach just north of the Vilano / St. Augustine Inlet.

In addition, fishing for freshwater and/or saltwater species is available via the St. Johns River and various lakes, or the ocean and inter-coastal waterway.



St. Augustine Beach

Titusville area

Just west of I-95, on route 50, **The Great Outdoors** is a community of homes and upscale recreational vehicle sites that is filled with nature and beauty.

It is also home to a very nice and well-conditioned golf course that is open to the public. Tell the security guard at the gate that you are going in to play golf.

After 2PM the price drops to a rate that northern seniors are accustomed.

There is also a very nice putting green and a unique driving range, where you hit balls into a pond.



Don't be surprised if an alligator is resting on the shoreline of a water hazard, or deer or even a wild hog comes wandering across the fairway.

Don't reach in for your ball!



The space center and other attractions are only a short distance away.



Fort Pierce area

Indian Hills Municipal golf course is located just east of highway 1 in Fort Pierce. It is a fairly open golf course with some rolling ground and bunkers and water hazards. Greens are in good condition. University and college competition at this course is common in late winter. The afternoon rate is in the \$40 range.



Indian Hills Public Golf Course

For beach goers and fishermen, good fishing is available along the Indian River and via the outlet at Fort Pierce. You can watch the Manatees swim along the warm water discharge near the Fort Pierce municipal park. The beaches to the north of Fort Pierce and at Vero Beach and Hutchinson Island are great.



Surf fishing (for Pompano and others) and Para-surfing can be enjoyed in the Ft. Pierce area

Homestead

Skipping the glamorous and also congested metro areas, and moving down to the south, there are golf courses in the Homestead area south of Miami and north of the Florida Keys. Two that you may find interesting are Redland Golf Club and Keys Gate Golf Course. Both have reasonable afternoon rates.

Sightseeing, fishing, and adventure activities in this area include Biscayne Bay National Park and Everglades National Park.

A drive to Flamingo, FL takes you through an area of the Everglades National Park where there are sightseeing, birding, and if you dare, canoeing, kayaking, and hiking opportunities.



Marathon and Key West area

Let's be honest, people do not go to The Keys for the primary purpose of playing golf. But if you cannot get golf out of your system and you really want to play, even The Keys offers some golf opportunities.

If you are a member of a country club, then you may be able to play the private Sombrero Golf Course in **Marathon**, Fl. Although the course is out of my price range for play, it is reported to be in very good condition and also quite challenging, with no room for error. You must keep the ball in the fairway. The reciprocal fee for guests from other country clubs is reported to be slightly over \$100.

Only a very short distance away is a unique par 3 golf course that is the best deal around. Key Colony Beach has a public course that receives a lot of play from mostly vacationing seniors and other snowbirds.



Key Colony Beach Golf Course (Par 3; 9-holes)

The course is a fun course that has small and very slow and bumpy greens, and is not in great condition, but provides a very good place to practice your short-iron and chipping and pitching shots (the longest hole is 132 yards). The people you meet here are lots of fun – typical average golfers and seniors from all over the US and Canada. The fee is \$9 for 9 holes and \$17 for 18 holes.

If you want some competition there is a 2-person scramble every Saturday at 1 PM. (Be at the clubhouse by 12:45 PM.) Your partner is selected via blind draw.

Other activities in the area

Fishing in Marathon is beyond great.

You can shore fish from the 7-mile Bridge for various snappers, cobia, amber jacks, grouper, tarpon, and sharks, or by walking the flats near Bahia Honda State Park for bonefish and other cruisers.

If you want to assure yourself of a great fishing experience, contact Captain Jeff at www.catch-em-all.com fishing charter.

Mutton Snapper



Swimming at Sombrero beach, diving or snorkeling at the famous Sombrero Reef, or kayaking the gulf side and the inshore ocean waters, provides many activities for non-golfing or non-fishing family members.

There are also hiking and biking trails and birding opportunities at nearby state parks.

Key West

Key West has the southern most point in the US, beaches, bars, restaurants, cruise ships, artists, a unique "living butterfly" museum, internationally famous fishing, Mallory Square entertainment and sunsets, and one golf course.

Mallory Square before sunset



Inhabitants of the Key West Butterfly Museum

The Key West Golf Club is a public, Rees Jones designed, golf course that is in very good condition and has excellent greens.

Land space throughout the keys is at an extreme premium, so it is not surprising that there must be a few compromises for a golf course in a location like Key West.

For example, the driving range is a minimal size netted area with only a few hitting mats. There is a landfill close to the course so the buzzards are often soaring high overhead, competing with the jets from the nearby Naval Air Station. Occasionally there is an unpleasant odor in the air.

On a very positive note, the clubhouse is very nice, the staff is extremely helpful and courteous, the two practice putting greens and the chipping area green are in excellent condition, and the course is challenging and fun to play.



Key West Club House



Key West Fairway

The Key West Golf Course has plenty of bunkers to keep you honest and a few strategically placed water hazards. The back 9 plays more difficult than the front 9.

The in-season rate is an unacceptable \$160, but there may be opportunities to play during the week at a lesser rate in the \$40 to \$60 range.

Summary

This brief review took us from the northeast Florida to the southern most location in the US.

There are many things to see and do (or to relax and not to do) along the entire route, including the metro areas around West Palm Beach, Ft. Lauderdale, and Miami Beach, that I did not include in this brief article. And although the occasional "cold" front might come through the area, the one thing you won't be doing is shoveling snow!



The sun is now setting on this winter visit to Florida, and on this brief look at a few golf courses and activities along the eastern Florida coast.

Thanks for reading this article. I hope you enjoyed it.

Let me know if this information was interesting and of value to you.

Hit 'em straight!

Phil Lawrence

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