

Chateau Elan, among the best golf experiences in Georgia

Inland Georgia

If Georgia's on your mind there's a wealth of golf in the state which saw North America's first gold rush. We look at the state in two parts, starting with its inland treasures, then taking a tour of its coastal gems



The surname had a rather familiar ring to it. Sarazen – anything to do with the legendary Gene, aka The Squire, winner of seven majors and inventor of the sand wedge, I wondered? Absolutely. Geoff is not only assistant golf pro at the Chateau Elan winery and resort, he is also the late, great man's grandson. And a pretty damned good chip off the old block, too, as he demonstrated during our round on the resort's Chateau Course.

The Sarazen connection goes deeper at Chateau Elan. Gene co-designed the Legends Course with fellow golf immortals Sam Snead and Kathy Whitworth, each picking six favourite holes from around the world. Guests staying at the resort's luxurious hotel or villas have limited access to this private course, whereas the 7,030-yard Chateau and marginally shorter Woodlands, both by Denis Griffiths, are open for all. Chateau is an enjoyable resort course edged by discreet, swanky housing. Wide fairways allow you to rip it off the tees, but grippy Bermuda rough and lurking

lakes and streams snaffle anything too wayward. Greens are fast and true. Woodlands' pretty, undulating tree-lined fairways demand precision. A walkable nine-hole executive course rounds off the 63 holes.

An hour's drive north-east of Atlanta, Chateau Elan is a 2,300-acre estate with 200 acres of vineyards first planted in 1981. Its grandiose winery is fashioned after the great French chateaux and offers free tours and tastings in addition to the resort's equestrian centre, spa, tennis and cycling. Eight restaurants include Paddy's, an Irish pub shipped lock, stock and barrel from Dublin. The atmosphere, Guinness, food and staff are as authentically Irish as you'll find anywhere across the pond.

Beautiful pine forest-edged Lake Oconee, an hour east of Atlanta, is Georgia's second largest lake. Its Creek Indian name means the Great Water. Today it stands for great golf, with half a dozen cracking courses and two of America's finest golf resorts.

Cuscowilla is a gated 700-acre resort and residential community with a Ben Crenshaw



“Geoff is not only assistant pro, he’s also Gene Sarazen’s grandson. And a pretty damned good chip off the old block, too, as he demonstrated on the course”

PHOTOS: PETER LELLEGARD

and Bill Coore course its centerpiece and accommodation in well-appointed lakeside cottages and villas. The course is highlighted by spectacular red-sand bunkers protecting crowned greens while the first two holes on the back nine demand brave shots over an inlet of the lake while anglers drift silently by on electric boats. You can walk the course, but must take a caddy. They are compulsory for all golfers between December and March. Forecaddies are the norm, with a cart. Deer and other wildlife are common and a panther has even been seen on the course.

A village centre on property includes a resort pool, children’s pool and kids club, tennis centre and gourmet restaurant.

Nearby Reynolds Plantation residential and golf retreat spans 10,000 acres around the lake with five public courses. The recently-acquired Port Armor by Bob Cupp adds to the original quartet, which are Plantation, also by Cupp, Jack Nicklaus-designed Great Waters, Tom Fazio’s 27-hole National and the Oconee course by Rees Jones. The Dave Pelz Scoring

Game School is also based there and a sixth course will be added by early 2007.

The luxury 251-room Ritz-Carlton Lodge, Reynolds Plantation, was named North American Golf resort of the Year for 2005 by global golf tourism industry body the International Association of Golf Tour Operators. It features a spa and other leisure activities including fishing, waterskiing and canoeing.

The 7,029-yard Oconee course is rated the most difficult of the courses, its par-4 18th

WHERE TO STAY

Chateau Elan

Contact: 00-1-678-425-0900
chateauelan.com

Cuscowilla on Lake Oconee

Contact: 00-1-706-484-0050
cuscowilla.com

The Ritz-Carlton Lodge, Reynolds Plantation

Contact: 00-1-706-467-0600
ritzcarltonlodge.com

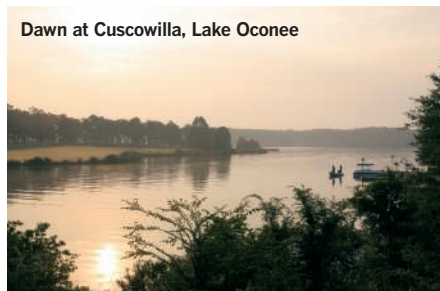
typifying the risk and reward temptations offered throughout. The hole’s back tee is a beauty, giving golfers the opportunity to go for broke over a lake inlet spanned by

an arched cart-path bridge. The 15th is a par-3 version, ending in a peninsula green while a rock-strewn brook snakes down the par-4 16th fairway. Caddies are required on the course, either as forecaddies with a cart or as walking caddies. They can also be booked on the other courses. Of the others, Great Waters is fractionally longer and combines a front nine through wooded corridors with a more open back nine skirting the lake.

Lake Oconee’s courses are playable all year, the Bermuda grass fairways going dormant in winter to make the tees and greens look like verdant islands in a sea of brown.

Georgia is, of course, famed for Augusta National and its annual Masters spectacle. You are more likely to win the lottery than play its hallowed turf, but public courses in and around

Dawn at Cuscowilla, Lake Oconee



WHERE TO PLAY

ATLANTA METRO

Stone Mountain Golf Club

Stonemont Course: 6,863 yards, par 70

Lakemont Course: 6,444 yards, par 71

\$28-\$62, plus \$8 fee to enter Stone Mountain Park

Contact: 00-1-770-879-9900

stonemountaingolf.com

Grand entrance and classic hits from both these rock stars

GEORGIA MOUNTAINS

Chateau Elan Golf Club

Chateau Course: 7,030 yards, par 71, \$40-\$85

Woodland Course: 6,735 yards, par 72, \$40-\$85

Legends Course: 6,935 yards, par 72, \$145. Resort guests can play at certain times of the day

Contact: 00-1-678-425-6050

chateaulan.com

Grand winery resort with premier-cru golf to savour

HISTORIC SOUTH

Cuscowilla

6,847 yards, par 70

\$110.50-\$150 includes cart, forecaddy or caddy fee

Contact: 00-1-706-484-0050

cuscowilla.com

Spectacular lakeside course with distinctive red-sand bunkers

Reynolds Plantation

Oconee Course: 7,029 yards, par 72, \$125-\$260, caddy required \$45 extra

Great Waters Course: 6,545 yards, par 72, \$105-\$195

Plantation Course: 6,698 yards, par 72, \$90-\$165

National Course: 3 nines, 6,015-7,066 yards, par 72

Contact: 00-1-707-467-0600

reynoldsplantation.com

Heavenly golfing retreat with divine collection of courses

SOUTHERN RIVERS

Callaway Gardens

Mountain View Course: 7,057 yards, par 72, \$60-\$100

Lake View Course: 6,031 yards, par 70, \$45-\$85

Contact: 00-1-706-663-2281

callawayonline.com

Golfers and garden lovers will adore this floral marvel



Distinctive red-sand bunkers at Cuscowilla



View to Stone Mountain

Several holes bring water into play on the Lakemont at Stone Mountain

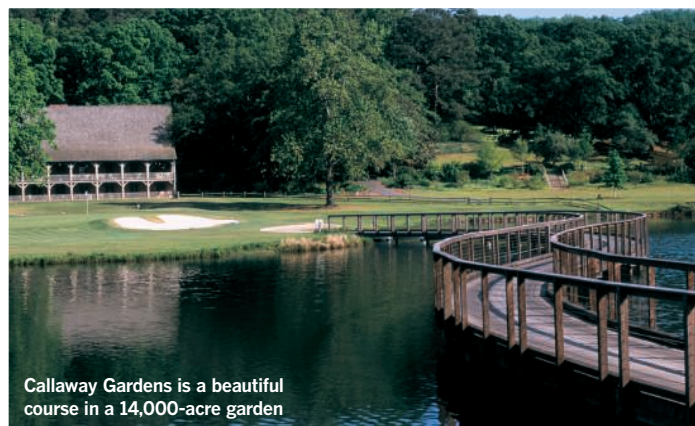
Augusta include The Club at Jones Creek by Rees Jones and Donald Ross design Forest Hills. Georgia's Golf Hall of Fame on the banks of the Savannah River features larger-than-life bronzes of golfing superheroes including Georgia's own Bobby Jones, who built the National, among 17 acres of botanical gardens.

Atlanta's historic East Lake Golf Club was Jones' home club. The Rees Jones-restored Donald Ross course hosts the annual PGA Tour Championship season finale and the clubhouse — open for limited visits to the public — is a shrine to Jones.

Of Metro Atlanta's 57 public courses, two — 27-hole Lake Spivey golf Club and River's Edge Golf Club — are just 15 minutes south of Atlanta's international airport. Also south of the city is the highly-rated Georgia National Golf Club.

Stone Mountain Golf Club has two courses next to the granite monolith and its huge Confederate Memorial carving of Robert E Lee, Jefferson Davis and Stonewall Jackson on

horseback. Lakemont has nine holes around Stone Mountain Lake with views of the mountain. Several play over water, including the opening, double-dogleg par 5. Stonemont, built in 1969, is the original 18-hole layout and Georgia's only Robert Trent Jones Sr course open to the public. After its 1999 resto- ➞



Callaway Gardens is a beautiful course in a 14,000-acre garden

CALLAWAY GARDENS

The Oconee is one of five public courses at Reynolds Plantation



PETER ELLEGARD

ration, he described its setting as “so magical that it truly seemed as though God, Himself, had created (it) with a golf course in mind.” The 1st is rated the state’s toughest opening hole.

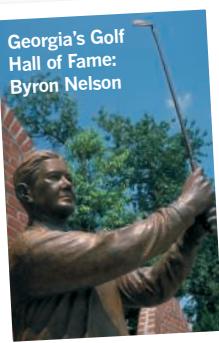
Callaway Gardens, in the southernmost foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, is a 14,000-acre garden, resort and preserve with two 18-hole courses. The Dick Wilson-designed Mountain View formerly hosted the PGA Tour’s Buick Challenge while the recently-renovated, par-70 Lake View is noted for its par-3 10th hole, with its island tee and serpentine bridge to the green in front of the original clubhouse.

Georgia’s state park golf system has eight courses offering great value and quality. Two are in Georgia’s mountains including the newest, Arrowhead Pointe at Richard B Russell. Opened in mid-2004, it sits on a peninsula jutting into a 26,500-acre lake with no lake-front houses. Rates maxing at \$42 at weekends including cart make it a bargain. The Creek at Hard Labor, an hour east of Atlanta, is similarly priced

Little Ocmulgee, a 6,625-yard state park course amid loblolly pines, magnolias and willows in South Georgia, is even cheaper at \$30 for weekdays and \$35 weekends, and the Georgia Vets Memorial Course and Meadow Links at George T Bagby, to the west, are both less than \$40 at weekends despite tipping the scales at over 7,000 yards each and having 130-plus slope ratings.

There’s a lot more to Georgia golf than Augusta National. It seems fair to say that we should all say Amen to that.

Georgia’s Golf Hall of Fame: Byron Nelson



GEORGIA GOLF HALL OF FAME

WHERE IS IT

Georgia is the largest state east of the Mississippi and one of the most diverse in the US. It has numerous rivers and lakes and its inland areas range from farm-covered plains to the forested Appalachian Mountains foothills. State capital Atlanta, in the north-west, is its international gateway.

KEY ATTRACTIONS

■ **Atlanta’s World of Coca Cola** celebrates the world’s favourite soft drink and has welcomed more than 12 million visitors since 1990. Other city attractions include the nearby Underground Atlanta mall, the Martin Luther King Jr National Historic Site and Centennial Olympic Park.

■ **Callaway Gardens**, in Pine Mountain, is a 14,000-acre horticultural wonderland which also features tennis, hiking, biking, fishing, water sports and the world’s largest man-made inland beach as well as golf.

■ **Georgia’s Golf Hall of Fame**, in Augusta, mixes bronze sculptures of some of golf’s masters with aquatic, butterfly, formal and xeriscape – water conservation – botanical gardens.

■ The clubhouse at Atlanta’s East Lake Golf Club has been restored to how it was in 1926 and includes a museum dedicated to its legendary son, **Bobby Jones**. Tours are available from 3pm-4pm on the third Sunday of each month by prior reservation, limited to 15 people. Contact: 00-1-404-373-5722.



Chateau Elan Legends clubhouse

Inland Georgia Facts



WORLD OF COCA COLA

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

■ **Stone Mountain Park**, one of Georgia’s top family attractions, is set on 3,300 acres around the giant rock. Attractions include a cable car ride to the 800ft summit, paddlewheel riverboat cruises, a scenic train and the world’s largest laser show.

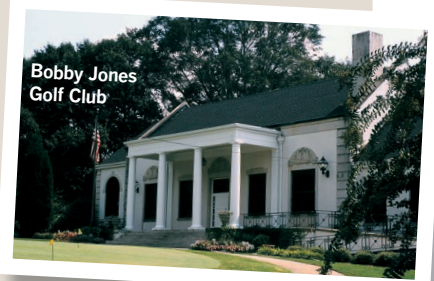
■ **Kennesaw Mountain Battlefield**, north of Atlanta, preserves a battle ground from the Civil War’s Atlanta Campaign. The two opposing armies had over 160,000 men and nearly 450 guns. The national park’s Junior Ranger Programme includes 17.3 miles of walking trails and activities. Artillery demonstrations take place during the summer.

■ **The Blue Ridge Scenic Railway** operates rail tours on a 120-year-old route through the mountains of Chattahoochee National Forest in north-west Georgia. The 26-mile route, from Blue Ridge, takes over three hours.

■ Atlanta’s new \$200 million, Noah’s Ark-shaped **Georgia Aquarium** is one of the world’s largest aquariums with 50,000 aquatic animals housed in tanks holding more than five million gallons of fresh and salt water.

INLAND GEORGIA FACTS

■ Georgia’s second oldest city, **Augusta**, was founded in 1736 as a colonial trading post. A towering chimney on Augusta Canal was once part



Bobby Jones Golf Club

of the vast Confederate Powderworks, while the King and Sibley textile mills built following the Civil War still operate today.

■ Augusta is known for its barbecues as well as its golf. Former president and Georgia native Jimmy Carter once had local favourite **Sconyers BBQ** specially flown to Washington DC.

■ Bobby Jones built the **Augusta National Golf Club** and hosted its first Invitational Tournament in 1934.

■ Georgia’s capitol building in Atlanta has a **gold dome**. The gold was mined from Dahlonega, Georgia, the site of the first gold rush in North America.