

# Coastal Georgia

You'll find a world of tradition and elegance as well as golden golf in the Golden Isles

**I**knocked on the heavy wooden door and a split second later it creaked open, a wrinkly, uniformed butler named Robert ushering me in with a warm Southern welcome. He led me to a grand, richly-furnished world of armchairs and high, heavily-beamed ceilings, giant TV screens, a snooker table and a lounge bar, from where a low murmur of conversation emanated from its dozen or so occupants, some of whom were dining off fine china.

I could have been in an exclusive gentleman's club. Except that this was merely the locker room at The Lodge at Sea Island, a 10,000-square-foot extravagance inside a lavish addition to one of America's greatest golf resorts. =>

PHOTO: PETER ELLEGARD

They called it  
Millionaires' Village:  
Jekyll Island



The Lodge is less than five years old but its private club ambience suggests it has been there forever, a notion helped by the fact that Robert and many colleagues have worked at Sea Island for 40 years or more. The rest of the clubhouse echoes the theme, with dark oak panelling and exposed timbers, stone floors and a trophy room full of reminders of the great golfers who have graced this elite resort in the 70 years since it opened.

A barrier island off Georgia's coast, half-way between Florida and Southern belle Savannah, Sea Island and its neighbours, St Simons Island, Little St Simons Island and Jekyll Island, are known collectively as The Golden Isles.

The name is said to refer to the coastal marsh grasses which shimmer and glint in the wind, although some say it was for the Spanish explorers who came in search of gold. It could equally well be a reference to the rich legacy of those who helped develop the islands as havens of leisure and golf.

Sea Island is famous for its Spanish-flavoured Cloister hotel, by celebrated architect Addison Mizner. For three days in mid-June 2004, this normally-tranquil island resort was the focal point of global attention when the world's most powerful and influential politicians gathered for the annual G8 summit. George W was following in his presidential father's footsteps, as Bush senior honeymooned at the Cloister with wife Barbara in 1945, returning in 1991 shortly after the first Gulf War.

The Lodge provides a luxurious home from home right on the doorstep of Sea Island's three 18-hole courses, with 40 rooms and suites costing up to \$1,000 a night immediately above the clubhouse. Outside each evening, a lone piper laments the passing of another day.

White-uniformed caddies and high service levels are an enduring tradition at Sea Island Golf Club. Once four separate nines, they have been transformed into three top 18-hole courses.

The par-70 Seaside Course began life in the 1920s as two separate nines, one of them the Seaside Nine described by the immortal Bobby Jones as "one of the best nine holes I've ever seen." The revised Tom Fazio layout is a masterpiece of manicured fairways and greens on a canvas of sand dunes, natural grasses, oaks and cedars framed by the salt marshes of St Simons Sound. Davis Love III says Fazio turned "18 holes that didn't match into 18 matchless holes."

The Plantation Course evolved from a blend



JEKYLL ISLAND AUTHORITY

Renovated Pine Lakes, now with family tee boxes

of the Plantation Nine, first laid out in 1927, and the Retreat Nine. Remodelled in 1998 by Rees Jones, it has a parkland layout through ancient live oaks, lakes and flower beds.

The Retreat Course is the work of hometown hero Love and is the longest of the trio at over 7,100 yards, yet is still eminently playable by the casual golfer.

Jekyll Island can claim an even more illustrious past. It was bought as a hunting retreat for \$125,000 in 1886 by some of America's wealthiest men, among them JP Morgan, Joseph Pulitzer, William Rockefeller and Cornelius Vanderbilt. They had a 60-room clubhouse built the following year and added waterfront "cottages" the size of mansions, taking their yachts down from New York to stay for a couple of months each winter. The clubhouse is now the Jekyll Island Club Hotel and the area around it, including the cottages, a National

Historic Landmark dubbed "Millionaires' Village".

Jekyll's first golf course was built in 1898, another two added in 1909. In 1926, leading course designer "Old Man" Walter Travis was commissioned by Rockefeller and his rich Jekyll Island Club buddies to create the best course money could buy.

The resulting nine-hole course, Great Dunes, is still there today and has been restored back to its original condition. Another three 18-hole courses have since been added, making Jekyll Island the largest public golf facility in Georgia with 63 holes.

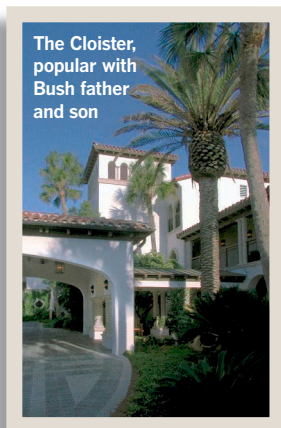
The first of the other three courses, the Dick Wilson-designed Oleander, was added in 1964. It was followed by Wilson's Pine Lakes in 1968 and Joe Lee's Indian Mound in 1975.



**"I could have been in an exclusive gentleman's club. Except that this was merely the locker room at one of America's greatest resorts"**

All three use the lakes, marshes and woodlands dripping with moss to create a natural feel in harmony with the surroundings. Premier course Pine Lakes underwent major renovation in 2002, including the addition of family tee boxes so children can play alongside their parents.

History is also much in evidence at St Simons Island's King and Prince Beach & Golf Resort, which originally opened in 1935 as a dance club. The beachfront resort owns the nearby Hampton Club course, on the site of a former 18th Century cotton and rice plantation. The course is one of the area's most beautiful, architect Joe Lee using a string of tiny islets to create a signature cluster of four stunning holes amid the golden marsh grasses accessed by elevated golf cart bridges.



The Cloister, popular with Bush father and son

SEA ISLAND



The Hampton Club: beauty amid the golden marshes

## WHERE TO PLAY

### Sea Island Golf Club

Seaside Course: 6,945 yards, par 70, \$210-\$240 includes cart and required forecaddy  
 Plantation Course: 7,058 yards, par 72, \$160-£190  
 Retreat Course: 7,106 yards, par 72, \$160-\$190

**Contact:** 00-1-912-638-3611  
 seasiland.com

*You'll certainly like to be beside this superlative Seaside and its siblings.*

### Jekyll Island Golf Club

Indian Mound Course: 6,469 yards, par 72  
 Oleander Course: 6,521 yards, par 72  
 Pine Lakes Course: 6,620 yards, par 72  
 \$40-\$57, walking allowed

**Contact:** 00-1-912-635-2368  
 jekyllisland.com

*Once-exclusive haunt of America's super-rich now open to all.*

### The Hampton Club

6,465 yards, par 72  
 \$59 includes cart  
**Contact:** 00-1-912-634-0255  
 hamptonclub.com

*Joe Lee conjures up some magical marshland holes on this former plantation.*

### The Club at Savannah Harbor

7,288 yards, par 72  
 \$75-\$85  
**Contact:** 00-1-912-201-2240  
 theclubatsavannahharbor.net

*Admire the Savannah views but keep your wits about you to avoid the wetlands.*

## WHERE TO STAY

### The Lodge at Sea Island

**Contact:** 00-1-912-638-3611  
 seasiland.com

### The King and Prince Beach & Golf Resort

**Contact:** 00-1-912-638-3631  
 kingandprince.com

### Westin Savannah Harbor Golf Resort & Spa

**Contact:** 00-1-912-201-2000  
 westinsavannah.com

The Lodge at Sea Island: an old-style Southern welcome



SEA ISLAND



The Hampton Club



SEA ISLAND



The Avenue of Oaks entrance to Sea Island GC

Sea Palms golf resort, also on St Simons Island, offers 27 holes plus tennis, while mainland town Brunswick has three 18-hole layouts.

Savannah has an even longer tradition of golf. The Savannah Golf Club is one of the oldest in America, going back to the 1790s when a course was constructed on a Revolutionary War battlefield site. Donald Ross redesigned the existing course, which originally opened in 1900 with nine holes, in 1917.

The historic city has a number of courses, including the Southbridge GC by Rees Jones, set among graceful Georgia pine and oak trees.

The Club at Savannah Harbor, part of a resort including a 400-room hotel and spa, has an 18-hole course by Robert Cupp and legendary "Slammin' Sam" Snead. The course hosts an annual event on the PGA Tour's Champions Tour and offers great views of historic downtown Savannah as it winds through the tidal wetlands between the Savannah and Black rivers.

Postscript: While washing my hands in The Lodge's locker room, a silver-haired giant of a man emerged from a shower with a towel round his waist and stood alongside me. In a Sandhurst accent he asked if I was "one of those medical chappies", referring to golfers there from a doctors convention. When I explained, he replied: "Well, I hope you don't write about it too glowingly. We can't have too many people knowing about it."

I could understand him wanting to keep this magnificent part of Georgia to himself.

## Coastal Georgia Facts

### WHERE IS IT

Georgia's coastline spans more than 100 miles from just north of Jacksonville, Florida, to Savannah. International gateway **Atlanta** is 250 miles from Savannah and 280 miles from Brunswick and its coastal islands. Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport and Jacksonville Airport are both served by the major US airlines and have connecting flights from the UK via a number of transatlantic gateways. Regional flights also operate from Atlanta to Brunswick.

### KEY ATTRACTIONS

- Savannah's **historic centre** is the largest urban historic district in the US. It covers 2.5 square miles and includes 21 green squares and 1,600 buildings rated historically or architecturally significant. Italianate mansion Mercer House, setting for best-selling book *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, is now open to visitors.
- **Jekyll Island's 200-acre National Historic Landmark District**, where Victorian-era millionaires spent their winters, features 33 19th and 20th century buildings including the original Jekyll Island Clubhouse.
- Historic sites on St Simons Island include Fort Frederica, built

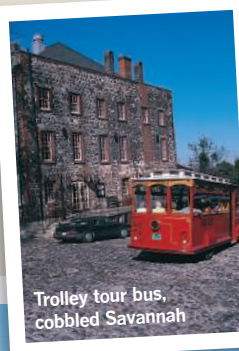
three years after the founding of Savannah, and **Bloody Marsh Battle Site**. An outnumbered force of British troops defeated a Spanish attack there in 1742, halting the Spanish invasion of Georgia.

■ The vast **Okefenokee Swamp**, one of America's oldest and most well-preserved freshwater areas, measures 38 by 25 miles. It provides a habitat for 234 species of reptiles including an estimated 9,000-15,000 alligators.

### FAMILY ACTIVITIES

■ Upmarket Sea island resort **The Cloister** was voted North America's favourite family-friendly resort by readers of *Travel + Leisure* magazine. Family activities include Jeep Train shelling trips, sandcastle building contests, Family Olympics, junior golf and tennis clinics, marsh boat trips and turtle walks.

PETER ELLEGARD



Trolley tour bus, cobbled Savannah

■ Military re-enactments take place regularly at Savannah's **Fort Pulaski** and **Old Fort Jackson**.

■ Georgia's largest and southernmost barrier island, **Cumberland Island**, is a protected national seashore and its marshes and dunes are home to sea turtles, wild turkeys, wild horses, armadillos and abundant sea birds. Reached by ferry, it has interpretive programmes and an activity booklet for kids.

■ **Steamboat City Theme Park** opens near Brunswick in spring 2006, themed around the heritage and culture of old Georgia. It will include a replica steamboat and period town, rides, animal attractions and live shows.

### COASTAL GEORGIA FACTS

- Live oaks felled and milled on St Simons Island were used to build famous warship the USS Constitution, otherwise known as "**Old Ironsides**", and in the construction of Brooklyn Bridge.
- The new **Sidney Lanier cable-stayed bridge** linking St Simons Island and Jekyll Island is Georgia's tallest, at 486ft. At the foot of the bridge a new park, Liberty Ship Park, is being added to remember WWII ships built in the area.

Seaside Course, Sea Island Golf Club, one of America's best resorts



PETER ELLEGARD

### GEORGIA FACTS GETTING THERE

Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson Airport is the world's busiest airport. Direct non-stop flights from the UK are operated by **Delta** ([deltaairlines.co.uk](http://deltaairlines.co.uk); 0800-414767) and **British Airways** ([ba.com](http://ba.com); 0870-850-9-850). There are also hundreds of daily flights to and from destinations throughout the US.

### GENERAL INFO

**Time difference:** GMT -5  
**Climate:** Georgia enjoys four seasons and has mild temperatures year-round because of its latitude and proximity to the warm Gulf of Mexico. Its coastal region is sub-tropical while its mountain areas are cooler. The year-round average temperature is 18°C and summers have an average high of 32°C.  
Information: [georgiaonmymind.org/uk](http://georgiaonmymind.org/uk); 01293-560848.  
**For information on holiday packages contact 3D Golf** 08701-200-300; [3dgolf.com](http://3dgolf.com)