

Mississippi officials are confident that areas like Biloxi will recover quickly

# Mississippi

Mississippi's hurricane-lashed coast will take time to rise again, but meanwhile there are many golf courses in the rest of the state ready to give visitors a real Dixie treat

**B**irthplace of the Blues and Elvis Presley, Mississippi has been hitting all the right notes for its burgeoning golf industry. That was until the arrival of an unwelcome and unruly visitor in late August of 2005. Hurricane Katrina pounded the Mississippi coast with a force so destructive it laid waste to the thriving Gulf Coast towns of Biloxi and Gulfport and many smaller communities. Apart from the tragic human toll, the storm smashed the lifeblood tourism industry along the coast, including its numerous casino resorts and golf courses.



Yet as the monumental task of cleaning up in the wake of Katrina got under way, the state's tourism bosses affirmed their determination to rebuild the devastated area and its facilities, helped by a US government federal aid package.

And while that could take many months, the message is that the rest of the state is very much open for business and ready to lay on a Deep South welcome like never before for visitors.

Despite its ferocity, the brunt of Katrina's effects was limited to the coastal strip.

Within three days of its landfall, Timberton Golf Club in Hattiesburg, 70 miles inland of Gulfport, had opened its driving range, with course owner Ron Hickman saying the 27-hole course had come through in good shape other than the loss of a few trees and would reopen 18 holes within a couple of weeks.

Of Mississippi's 150 golf courses, the majority are well away from the coast. The state measures nearly 350 miles from north to south and more than 160 miles across, spanning five distinct and diverse regions with the Mississippi River forming its western boundary.

It may not have the quantity of courses as other states but the quality, challenge and variety of its golf product has been attracting golfers in ever-growing numbers, to the point where it has been named America's fastest-growing new golfing destination in recent years.

For a "new" golfing destination it has quite a history in the game. The Gulf Coast began welcoming golfers nearly 100 years ago. The first nine holes of Gulfport's Great Southern Club, the oldest course in the state, were designed by the great Donald Ross and built in 1908 with oyster tee boxes and sand greens.

A century on and courses throughout Mississippi bear the hallmarks of some of the best modern-day designers in the business.

The state-wide Magnolia Golf Trail features 11 inland courses at which golfers can get up to 50% off green fees using the Magnolia Golf Trail Player's Card, costing \$49.95.

Timberton, designed by Mark McCumber and ranked in the state's top 10, is among courses on the trail. Hattiesburg's other courses include Canebrake Golf Club by Jerry Pate, which *Golf Digest* rates among Mississippi's top three courses and which has five sets of tees measuring from 5,129 yards to 7,003 yards.

In the Capital/River Region in the southwest, historic Mississippi River town Natchez has the golf trail's Beau Pre Country Club. The oldest settlement on the river, Natchez is rich in stately antebellum homes, many now converted into stylish B&B inns. There are three trail-member courses near capital Jackson – dogwood-lined Patrick Farms; Caroline, set around Lake Caroline; and Ron Garl's par-64 Whisper Lake. Non-trail courses in this region



Old Waverley: a nip of the Highlands with a slug of the Old South

include several other gems such as the heavily-wooded Quail Hollow course by Arthur Hill in Percy Quin State Park, near McComb. The Jack Nicklaus-designed Annandale Country Club in Jackson hosts the PGA Tour's Southern Farm Bureau Classic each autumn, but is private.

Casino town Tunica, in the north-west Delta Region, is just 30 minutes south of Memphis. Apart from its nine casinos it features three top courses including trail member River Bend Links, a Scottish links-style design with humps, bumps and pot bunkers. It is right by two of Tunica's casino resorts. Grand Casino's Cottonwoods Golf Club, by Hale Irwin, also offers a taste of Scotland, alongside America's largest casino complex with 3,000 slot ma-



Tunica National is a public facility designed by Mark McCumber

## WHERE TO PLAY

### THE HILLS REGION

**Mallard Point Golf Course**  
7,004 yards par 72  
\$35, walking allowed  
**Contact:** 00-1-662-487-2400  
mallardpointe.com

### THE DELTA REGION

**River Bend Links**  
6,906 yards, par 72  
\$40-\$60, includes cart  
**Contact:** 00-1-662-363-1005  
riverbendlinks.com

### THE CAPITAL/RIVER REGION

**Beau Pre' Country Club**  
6,935 yards, par 72  
\$50-\$60, includes cart  
**Contact:** 00-1-601-442-8181  
beauprecc.com

### THE PINES REGION

**Dancing Rabbit Golf Club**  
Azaleas Course: 7,128 yards, par 72  
Oaks Course: 7,076 yards, par 72  
\$54-\$96, includes cart  
**Contact:** 00-1-372-2248  
dancingrabbitgolf.com

### Old Waverly Golf Club

7,000 yards, par 72  
\$110-\$140, includes cart  
**Contact:** 00-1-662-494-6463  
oldwaverly.net

## WHERE TO STAY

**Pearl River Resort, Choctaw**  
**Contact:** 00-1-866-447-3275  
pearlriverresort.com

**Grand Casino, Tunica**  
**Contact:** 00-1-062-363-5825  
caesars.com/grandcasino/tunica

PETER ELLEGARD

Biloxi's historic lighthouse has thankfully survived Katrina's onslaught



**“Of Mississippi’s 150 golf courses, the majority are well away from the coast. The quality, challenge and variety have been attracting golfers in ever-growing numbers”**

chines and 100 gaming tables. The third course is the Mark McCumber-designed Tunica National, a new \$12 million public golf club featuring extensive practice and instruction facilities and tennis courts.

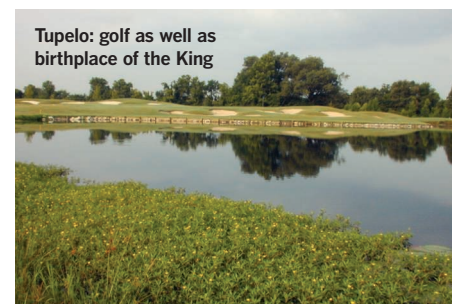
The Delta Region is where the cotton fields and juke joints gave birth to the Blues, and where exponents including Muddy Waters and BB King grew up and helped give the genre worldwide acclaim. You can trace the musical heritage along the Blues Highway, Route 61, and stop off at Clarksdale to take in the Delta Blues Museum.

The most-visited tourist stop in Mississippi’s north-eastern Hills Region is Tupelo, where Elvis was born. The King’s two-bedroom house and next-door chapel and museum are open for tours. Nearby courses include the Natchez Trace Golf Club, just off the scenic Natchez Trace Parkway, and Magnolia Trail course Big Oaks, which has generous fairways, large greens and some of the region’s best practice facilities. Another trail course, Bob Cupp’s Mallard Pointe, is a 7,000-plus yard challenge in John Kyle State Park with spectacular lake views, forced carries and narrow fairways. Autumn 2005 saw the opening of the latest state park track, the Hugh White State Park course in Grenada.

Five courses are in DeSoto County, four of them in the city of Olive Branch by the Tennessee border. Among them is trail course Wedgewood and The Links at Whispering Woods, part of a resort originally Holiday’s Inn’s worldwide training HQ.

Mississippi’s eastern Pines Region does not have any Magnolia Trail member courses, but there are three must-plays. Old Waverly in West Point is a Bob Cupp and Jerry Pate mix which blends a nip of the Highlands with a slug of the Old South and is rated the best in the state. It hosted the US Women’s Open in 1999.

Tom and Jerry combined for the region’s



Tupelo: golf as well as birthplace of the King



other two stunners at Pearl River Resort's Dancing Rabbit Golf Club on a Choctaw Indian reservation near Philadelphia. Not the cartoon cat and mouse, but Tom Fazio and Jerry Pate. Their Azaleas and Oaks courses both top 7,000 yards and with their waterfalls, meandering streams and contoured fairways are regarded as modern classics.

As for the two dozen or so Gulf Coast courses, among them Arnold Palmer's The Bridges at Casino Magic and Bear Landing by Jack Nicklaus, Mississippi Division of Tourism UK representative David Nicholson says they will reopen.

"There's no question the golf courses will be rebuilt and the area will be back, bigger and better than it was," he insists. "The rest of the South is open and functioning as normal and we need your business more than ever."



Dancing Rabbit: designed by Tom and Jerry, but definitely not slapstick

## Mississippi Facts

### GETTING THERE

Mississippi is sandwiched between Louisiana and Alabama, with Tennessee to the north, the Gulf of Mexico to the south and the Mississippi River forming its western boundary. It has several airports served by regional flights connecting to international gateways, including at capital Jackson, Tupelo, Greenville and Columbus. Tennessee's Memphis is just 37 miles from north-western casino and golf destination Tunica.

### GENERAL INFO

**Time difference:** GMT -6.  
**Climate:** Mississippi's geological diversity and size gives it a diverse climate, from temperate in the northern hills to tropical in the south. Golf is year-round and temperatures range from an average 6-11°C in winter to 28°C in July.  
**Information:** visitmississippi.org; 01462-440787.



Blues...

For information on holiday packages contact 3D Golf 08701-200-300; 3dgolf.com

### KEY ATTRACTIONS

- Music-lovers can pay homage to the King by visiting the two-room house in Tupelo where he was born, the memorial chapel and the **Elvis Presley Museum**. Other Elvis sites include the school where he won his first talent contest, the hardware store where he bought his first guitar and the fairgrounds he performed at early in his career.
  - **Natchez** is the oldest permanent settlement on the Mississippi River with over 500 antebellum structures built on the profits of King Cotton. Some are open for tours, and you can also visit the Natchez-Under-the-Hill steamboat landing district.
  - **The Natchez Trace Parkway** is a 444-mile scenic byway from Natchez to Memphis, first used by Native Americans thousands of years ago and later as a trade route during frontier times.
  - Take the **Delta Blues Trail** along Blues Highway, Route 61, to visit the Delta Blues Museum and Ground Zero Blues Club in Clarksdale and on to Indianola for the birthplace of BB King and 60-year-old juke joint Club Ebony.
- FAMILY ACTIVITIES**
- **Jackson Zoo** in the state capital also features a traditional carousel and a

Discovery Reef exhibit while divers hand-feed fish in the 20,000-gallon Mississippi Museum of Natural Science aquarium.

- Tupelo's non-Elvis attractions include the **Tupelo National Battlefield** which commemorates the last major engagement of the Civil War in Mississippi, the **Tupelo Auto Museum** with more than 100 classic cars, and the **Tupelo Buffalo Park**, where more than 250 buffalo roam nearly 200 acres.
- Leland celebrates the birth of Muppets creator Jim Henson with the **Birthplace of Kermit the Frog Museum**, featuring the green puppet and other memorabilia.
- Take a Mississippi **steamboat ride** on a stern-wheeler from Natchez and Tunica.

### MISSISSIPPI FACTS

- The Blues began in the



Elvis lives...

- cotton fields of the Mississippi Delta and is considered the only music original to the US.
- **The University of Mississippi Blues Archive** in Oxford, Mississippi, contains the world's largest collection.
- The world's first round-trip transoceanic flight was performed in 1928 by pilot **H T Merrill**, from luka, who flew to England and back in a plane loaded with ping pong balls.
- The teddy bear was created after President **Theodore**

- Roosevelt** when on a hunting trip to Onward in 1902 he refused to shoot an exhausted and helpless bear. A New York candy store owner put a stuffed toy bear in his window, calling it "Teddy's Bear", and it was so popular it led to the founding of the Ideal toy company in 1903.
- Mississippi produces more than 70% of the world's supply of farm-raised **catfish**. Each April, the World Catfish Festival is held in Belzoni, known as the "Catfish Capital of the World".
- **The Biedenharn Candy Company Museum**, Vicksburg, commemorates where Coca-Cola was first bottled in 1894.



River cruise

## GULF COAST

Due to Hurricane Katrina, the golf courses of Mississippi's Gulf Coast are temporarily closed. For further information, visit the Mississippi Office of Tourism website ([visitmississippi.org](http://visitmississippi.org)) or call 01462-440787.