

The Audubon Golf Trail

Post-Katrina Louisiana offers golfers plenty of fun

Louisiana bills itself as a sportsman's paradise. With approximately 175 golf clubs and courses in about 100 towns and cities across the state, it's certainly a slice of golfer's heaven, even in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Premier among the offerings are the exceptional courses of the Audubon Golf Trail, a system of world-class resorts and parks named for John James Audubon, who painted many of his famous bird studies in Louisiana. Play one round for an afternoon as a break from touring antebellum plantations or select several courses for a week of serious competition with a friendly foursome.

"Nine of the ten courses in the trail last fall are open and doing good business thanks to the mild winter we had," said Eric Kaspar, administrator of the Audubon Golf Trail for the Louisiana Office of Tourism. "And we just added our eleventh course, at Idlewild, an hour west of New Orleans in the heart of southern Louisiana."

With courses in Alexandria, Baton Rouge, Hammond, Lake Charles, Many, Marksville, Monroe, New Orleans, and Shreveport, the Audubon Golf Trail attracts golfers who want to try their hand at courses designed by golfing greats such as Peter Dye, Hal Sutton, and Arnold Palmer. The newest member, the Atchafalaya Golf Course, offers 18 holes on a 7,533-yard public course designed by Robert von Hagge, known for his work at over 250 courses worldwide, including the links at Doral, LaCosta, and Tournament Players Club at the Woodlands.

Courses selected for the trail are second to none when it comes to playability, conditioning, amenities, and customer service. Put together a trip by combining stay-and-play packages, which are available at individual resorts. For example, at the Cypress Bend Resort on the Texas-Louisiana border, which also has a spa and conference facilities, winter packages start at \$75 per person, based on double occupancy, with unlimited golf for one day and overnight accommodations. At Tamahka Trails, in Marksville, weekday packages starting at \$123 per person include two rounds of golf, breakfast, cart rental, and driving-range balls.

Four-day golf itineraries suggested by the Louisiana Office of Tourism take you through the northern or southern arms of the trail. On the northern swing, you can visit Calvert Crossing, Olde Oaks, Cypress Bend, Gray Plantation, and Oak Wing while passing through the Creole Nature Trail All-American Road, where you might spot alligators and exotic birds. The southern route samples Carter Plantation, Tamahka Trails, and The Island in Plaquemine, with a stop at the Paragon Casino or a hydrofoil swamp tour en route.

Despite disruptions due to last fall's hurricanes, Louisiana's golf courses are in good condition for playing. Some courses lost perimeter trees, but those that closed following the hurricanes, such as Cypress Bend and Gray Plantation in Lake Charles, reopened quickly. Only Tournament Players Club of Louisiana remains closed temporarily.

"TPC of Louisiana lost a lot of trees and is still closed to repair fairways that were inundated with saltwater. It's slated to reopen in September," said Kaspar. "Audubon Park in New Orleans was closed for a month, during which it served as a staging ground for the National Guard. But it is open now, Thursday through Sunday, and in great shape."

Before planning your trip, contact the Louisiana Office of Tourism for information about vacation packages and current conditions at specific courses. Check out the Rebirth Rewards program, designed to attract tourists back to the state with discounts and special rates at hotels, museums, and other attractions.

For more information

Audubon Golf Trail
www.audubongolf.com
(866) AGT-IN-LA [248-4652]

Louisiana Office of Tourism
1051 N. Third Street
Baton Rouge, LA 70802
www.louisianatravel.com
(225) 342-7454

