

THE GOLF COAST

Charleston, Myrtle Beach and Hilton Head put South Carolina among world's top golf destinations

BY TOMMY BRASWELL || braswell@postandcourier.com

How many shots would it take Rory McIlroy to hit a golf ball the 187-mile length of South Carolina's coast? If the world's No. 1-ranked golfer were to use his average distance off the tee for every shot (305.9 yards), McIlroy could do it in about 1,076 swings.

On shot No. 41 McIlroy would find himself at world-renowned Harbour Town Golf Links on Hilton Head Island. On his 357th shot, he probably would pause and reflect on one of his crowning achievements, an 8-shot victory in the 2012 PGA Championship at Kiawah Island's Ocean Course. Stroke 966 would find McIlroy in Myrtle Beach at the famed Dunes Club.

Along the way, he would pass within a few shots left (the Atlantic Ocean being to his right) of 191 of South Carolina's approximately 368 public and private golf courses.

"I don't think there's a stronger package in terms of three distinct destinations in a four-hour stretch than coastal South Carolina," said Joe Passov, who writes a monthly travel column for Golf Magazine and oversees the publication's golf course rankings. "I'm a huge fan of coastal South Carolina. It's a pretty easy endorsement for me to give."

Golf Digest, in ranking the 10 Best Golf States based on top public courses per capita, says South Carolina is No. 2 behind Hawaii and is home to three of the golf world's most popular hubs, Myrtle Beach, Hilton Head and Kiawah Island.

Please see **GOLF**, Page C5

Charleston: Birthplace of American golf

BY TOMMY BRASWELL
braswell@postandcourier.com

No one would argue that Kiawah Island, Seabrook Island and Wild Dunes aren't world-class golf resorts. But is Charleston itself a golf destination?

The popular golf resorts are a 45-minute drive from downtown Charleston, but there are plenty of top quality golf courses sprinkled throughout the area.

Unlike Myrtle Beach to the north and Hilton Head to the south, golf isn't the reason most visitors head to Charleston. History, food, architecture, beaches and cultural events are top reasons tourists list for visiting the Holy City.

But golf is very much in the fabric of Charleston, with the first golf clubs and balls shipped to America, specifically Charleston, in 1739. More recently, the 1991 Ryder Cup Matches and 2012 PGA Championship, both held at Kiawah Island's Ocean Course, made Charleston an international

Charleston NUMBER OF COURSES IN AREA:

35

MOST NOTABLE: The Ocean Course, Kiawah Island
FUN FACT: Golf came to Charleston before the United States was a country. According to a document in the National Archives of Scotland, golf clubs were shipped in 1739 from Scotland to Charleston businessman William Wallace. In 1743, 432 balls and 96 clubs were shipped to another Charleston businessman, David Deas. Golf was first played in peninsular Charleston at Harleston Green.

destination for golf.

"Charleston is a very multi-dimensional destination and is a wonderful destination with great golf. For us to present ourselves as a pure golf destination would be unfair to the visitor and to the destination," explained Gary Edwards of Coastal South Carolina USA, an organization that markets tourism internationally for Charleston, Myrtle Beach and Hilton Head.

Passov said Charleston vexes him.

"It's home to some great golf, clearly. It's home to trophy golf in the form of Kiawah, starting with the Ocean Course. But Kiawah's other golf offerings would be all-stars anywhere else," Passov said. "Wild Dunes, the Links Course, maybe not as acclaimed as it once was due to the development and due to the beach erosion, but it's still a very good place to play. And there are some under-the-radar bargain courses in the area that the rest of the country doesn't know about.

"But the reason Charleston vexes me is because of the non-golf attractions. Sometimes it's hard to think about a pure golf vacation in Charleston. It's so much fun spending time in Charleston with the culture, the arts, with the restaurants, with the history, with the views down by The Battery. I almost tell people to split your vacation into two separate sections. When you go to Charleston, do a top-quality resort, and then go spend a couple of days in the city and immerse yourself in

one of the nation's best cities."

Bradley Klein, the author of several golf architecture books and a senior writer for Golf-week magazine, praises not only the resorts, but also the 36-hole Daniel Island Club.

"The charm of downtown Charleston is a major factor. I love it, everybody I know loves going there. It's a very sophisticated small city with very easy access to golf and quality shopping. That's great," Klein said.

Much of the marketing of Charleston as a golf destination began 20 years ago when the Charleston Golf Course Owners Association and the Convention and Visitors Bureau started Charleston Golf Inc., said Terry Sedalik, executive director of the Charleston Golf Course Owners Association. The two organizations pooled money and petitioned for matching grants. Out of that grew Charleston Golf Guide (charlestongolfguide.com), a one-stop location for tee times, hotels and package deals.