

Masters week four-day golf itinerary

So after years of watching on TV and hoping, you've finally moved to the front of the waiting list for tickets to golf's rite of spring, the Masters.

First of all, congratulations; the experience of walking the fabled grounds of Augusta National, seeing azaleas and dogwoods and rolling, perfectly-groomed fairways – not to mention the world's best golfers – is worth the wait. Enjoy.

Now then: what about the rest of your week? It's a time-honored tradition for Masters-goers to spend half a day watching the PGA Tour guys, then hand off the coveted badges to friends and head out to play a quick 18 holes – or vice versa. So where are you going?

Augusta has a number of courses that make themselves available that week – with attendant prices that will dwarf what you paid for the Masters tickets. May we suggest an alternative?

[Just across the Savannah River](#), anywhere from 20 to 70 minutes away, South Carolina courses are waiting to welcome you. In some cases, private clubs only open their doors this one week a year to outside play. And the prices might surprise you – in a good way.

Assuming you're in the Augusta area Thursday-Sunday, here's a four-course lineup, with alternatives, featuring a variety of challenges and costs. Your friends back home will be asking about your trip afterward; don't disappoint them, or yourself.

Day 1: Thursday (Round One at the Masters)

[Palmetto Golf Club, Aiken](#)

Around the time Dr. Alister Mckenzie was building Augusta National some 80 years ago, his crews also converted the sand greens to grass at [Palmetto Golf Club](#). Begun in 1892, Palmetto is the nation's second-oldest club at the same location, behind only the Chicago Golf Club.

Since then, the venerable course has undergone a number of updates, the most recent in 2005. Inside the renovated original clubhouse, host professional Tom Moore will show you his collection of memorabilia. You easily could spend a day looking at vintage photos of Ben Hogan, Sam Snead and Bobby Jones, plus letters, clubs and balls. But the course is the real draw.

Short by modern standards, it's the toughest 6,713 yards (back tees) you'll ever play, with elevated, undulating greens, wicked bunkers and rolling terrain. Palmetto allows public play for nine days during Masters Week (April 3-11 this year), with greens fees, cart, range balls and lunch for \$175.

If you can't get on Palmetto, [Aiken Golf Club](#), built in 1912, is a history-rich alternative. A public course year-round, owner/pro Jim McNair's tiny gem also is close to downtown and has an old-style Pinehurst feel. Like Palmetto, it's short by modern standards (6,039 yards) but deceptively demanding.

There's history everywhere, from its original clubhouse to photos of 1950s LPGA stars Patty Berg and Babe Zaharias; the club was the first in America to have women's tees. And the cost – \$75 Sunday-Saturday; after 3 p.m., \$50 (\$40 if you walk), and on Masters Sunday, \$40 all day – is a steal. Just ask Sports Illustrated writer Michael Bamberger, who walked 18 holes after one Masters and raved about the experience.

Augusta National is 20 minutes away when you're done, but the city of [Aiken](#) has other attractions, too. Stop for a post-round beer or lunch at [Aiken Brewing Company](#) or [West Side Bowery](#). Evening dining at [The Willcox Hotel](#) is recommended. For non-golfers, [Hitchcock Woods](#), a 2,000-acre in-city preserve, and [Hopeland Gardens](#), next door to Palmetto, offer peaceful, natural retreats.

[Palmetto Golf Club](#)

275 Berrie Road SW, Aiken, 29801
(803) 649-2951

[Aiken Golf Club](#)

555 Highland Park Ave., Aiken, 29801-3703
(803) 649-6029

Day 2: Friday (Round Two)

[The River Club, North Augusta](#)

Don't want to venture too far away from Augusta National today? Not to worry. Right across the Savannah River in North Augusta, the River Club is close enough that several of its holes have views of the river – not to mention plenty of water on the course itself.

Originally planned as a private club when it opened 13 years ago, the design by Jim Fazio (brother of Augusta National consultant Tom Fazio) is now open to the public year-round. For Masters' Week, playing will set you back \$250 – comparable to Augusta courses – for all fees and cart, plus breakfast and lunch. Tee times (off front and back nines, morning and afternoon) remain available online or by phone.

Longtime head professional Chris Verdery describes River Club as having “more of a coastal feel, with water, wetlands and marsh, plus dramatic bunkering and bent-grass greens.” Five sets of tees, the longest measuring 6,951 (par-71), give a variety choices for all levels of players. The course also has three luxury golf cottages on site, though all are taken for this year's tournament.

After your round, and if you're still hungry, Verdery recommends a bite to eat at Manuel's Bread Café (www.manuelsbreadcafe.com), an “upscale deli” featuring sandwiches, soups and desserts, located in the Hammond's Ferry shopping area. Non-golfing spouses can tour the North Augusta Arts & Heritage Center (www.artsandheritagecenter.com) in the city's municipal building on Georgia Avenue.

[The River Club](#)

307 Riverside Boulevard, North Augusta, SC 29841-4199
(803) 202-0110

Day 3: Saturday (Round Three)

[Savannah Lakes Village](#)

[Hickory Knob State Park Golf Course](#)

Because Masters' leaders go off late on the weekend, this is the perfect morning to venture further afield. Just 40 minutes up Highway 28 (starting at Augusta's Riverwatch Parkway) is [McCormick](#), which has – for a small town – a surprising selection of places to play and eat.

Savannah Lakes Village, a 5,000-home development, has two 18-hole designs by Virginia-based architect Tom Clark which, the rest of the year, are members-only weekdays but offer weekend public play. Tara, a 7,002-yard, par-72 track, is an “old school” country club with tight, tree-lined fairways, TifEagle ultra dwarf greens and a double green for Nos. 9 and 18. Monticello, 7,032 yards from the back tees and par-72, is more of a links-style layout with water on 10 of 18 holes, rolling hills and bent-grass greens.

Both courses offer five sets of tees and dramatic elevation changes. Playing either course is \$100, which includes fees, range balls and lunch.

A stone's throw from Savannah Lakes is Hickory Knob State Park Golf Course, one of [South Carolina's](#)

[two state park courses](#) and the lone resort state park, with accommodations, lodge and onsite restaurant. A quick 18 holes with cart will cost you \$42 during the Masters, but get coupons for the regular \$35 rate at www.hickoryknobresort.com.

For that price, you get a 6,560-yard Tom Jackson design with lake views, large elevation changes, excellent conditions and slick, undulating greens, plus driving range and two practice greens. Accommodations during Masters' week are limited; call (800) 491-1764.

For post-round lunch, both Savannah Lakes courses have grill rooms; evening dining is at Tara. Hickory Knob's restaurant serves meals from 7 a.m.-10 a.m., 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m.-9 p.m.; sandwiches and snacks are available in the pro shop.

McCormick has [Fannie Kate's](#), a bed-and-breakfast (check for accommodations) serving lunch and dinner, plus a downstairs club. For beers and pizza or a full Italian meal, try nearby [Little Italy](#).

[Savannah Lakes Village](#)

5812 U.S. 378 West, McCormick
(800) 332-0013

[Hickory Knob State Park](#)

1591 Resort Drive, McCormick
(866) 369-9331

Day 4: Sunday (Final round)

[The Patriot Golf Club at Grand Harbor](#)

[The Links at Stoney Point](#)

[The Golf Club at Star Fort](#)

Final-round leaders at Augusta National traditionally tee off around 3 p.m. That's more than enough time for the hour-plus journey to the Greenwood/Ninety Six area and one of the best deals of Masters' week.

The Patriot at Grand Harbour, a Davis Love III design within site of [Lake Greenwood near Ninety Six](#), is a real bargain: \$78 for greens fees and cart to play a course that would fit right in at Hilton Head, Kiawah or any other resort area. Towering elevation changes and traditional Donald Ross-style elevated greens make this course a delight. The par-5 18th, which finishes atop an enormous mound surrounded by facsimile Revolutionary War-period "ruins," is worth the trip alone.

Head professional Tommy Thomas advises customers to call with credit cards ready; the club requires 24 hours notice for cancellation. Reservations also can be made on the website.

About 15 minutes away in Greenwood is The Links at Stoney Point, a Tom Jackson design that recently underwent a \$4 million makeover. Not long at 6,718 yards (par 72), Stoney Point likewise makes use of the area's hilly, dramatic terrain, and features two holes on Lake Greenwood plus mini-Verde greens that are undulating and frighteningly quick.

Cost for greens fee and cart is \$65. Fittingly for Masters Week, the course has planted 4,000 azaleas as backdrop.

Finally, Ninety Six has one of the great "bang for your buck" deals: The Golf Club at Star Fort. Named for a nearby Revolutionary War battle site, with rugged terrain and interesting holes throughout, the course has hosted a number of S.C. Golf Association events. Masters Week rates are the normal weekend rate of \$40 (cart and greens fees).

If you're not rushing back to Augusta National for the finish, Greenwood offers a fun sports bar in the

[Sports Break](#), lunch at [Howard's on Main](#), [Caravan's](#) or [Dixie Drive-in](#), or maybe dinner at Fin and Filet, Montague's (both steak and seafood) or Pasquale's (For info go to www.visitgreenwoodsc.com).

Who knows? By Sunday afternoon, you might prefer a cold drink, a good meal – and the final round on CBS-TV. And if you don't find time to play all these courses ... well, at the Masters, there's always next year.

[The Patriot Golf Club at Grand Harbor](#)

101 Grand Harbor Blvd., Ninety Six, S.C. 29666
(864) 543-2000

[The Links at Stoney Point](#)

709 Swing About, Greenwood, S.C. 29649-8633
(864) 942-0900

[The Golf Club at Star Fort](#)

2816 Golf Course Road, Ninety Six, S.C. 29666
(864) 543-2757