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Youth on Course

How a program providing \$5 rounds could transform the game of golf



Bluffton gives travelers a true taste of Lowcountry golf

As the area grows and gains national exposure, time your visit to enjoy great golf and authentic eats **BY DON JOZWIAK**



The Jack Nicklaus-designed May River course at Palmetto Bluff makes for a memorable round in Bluffton, while there are tasty eats on tap at the Music to Your Mouth festival (above left) and Cahill's Market (right).

The southeastern tip of South Carolina is home to Bluffton, one of the fastest-growing cities in the state. For golfers from elsewhere in the Carolinas, the area offers plenty of solid golf—16 Carolinas Golf Association courses are located in Bluffton and neighboring Okatie—and fun activities off the course. And being a short drive from popular destinations such as Hilton Head Island, Parris Island and Savannah, Georgia, the Bluffton area serves as a convenient base for a multi-day golf road trip.

While nearby Sea Pines on Hilton Head is well-known for hosting the PGA Tour's RBC Heritage event, the Bluffton area is about to take a turn in the spotlight. Belfair is set to host the 2019 PGA Professional Championship, the premier national event for club professionals, which is televised live on Golf Channel. The 2019 event is set for Belfair's North and South Courses from April 28–May 1, marking the first time the championship is being played in the spring.

Belfair, like nearby Berkeley Hall and Colleton River, is a private club, but there are plenty of great public-access golf opportunities for golfers who discover the Bluffton area through Golf Channel next spring.

When an international audience tunes in to watch the PGA Professional Championship, they'll see the authentic Lowcountry topography that the Bluffton area typifies. That means semi-coastal land criss-crossed by intra-coastal waterways between the Atlantic Ocean and the Colleton River, with scenic islands, rivers and beaches scattered across the landscape.

That lends itself to interesting and challenging golf at places like Palmetto Bluff, which features May River—a Jack Nicklaus Signature design that winds along its namesake. The towering live oaks lining the fairways have been there for centuries, but the golf course is modern and fun for all skill levels. There's plenty beyond golf to experience, too, as Palmetto Bluff offers several other staples of the area, such as fishing,

hiking, tennis, equestrian and shooting opportunities, and the Montage Palmetto Bluff has a variety of accommodation options that offer timeless charm with modern amenities.

Not far from Palmetto Bluff are two of the area's must-play public courses. Hilton Head National Golf Club is just a mile from the bridge to the island, but makes it worthwhile to stay on the mainland. The front nine was designed by Bobby Weed, while the back nine is part of the original Gary Player design that was part of the 27-hole routing Hilton Head National had when it opened in 1989. The dual-designer blend makes for an interesting 18 in a quiet setting.

Just up the road is Old South Golf Links, which has six holes along McKay's Creek and some of the best views in the area. Holes weave in and out of oaks to open land, then along tidal marsh, creating a constantly shifting strategic challenge. Like Hilton Head National, Old South offers island-worthy views and golf, but at mainland prices.

Before or after golf, get a taste of true Lowcountry cuisine with a stop at Cahill's Market. Bluffton native John Cahill cooks and runs the "Chicken Kitchen" with his siblings. The menu changes from day to day, but southern fried chicken is a mainstay at Cahill's along with spike soup, shrimp creole, okra, field peas, collards, macaroni and cheese, squash casserole and the famous pear cobbler dessert.

If you're planning a fall trip to Bluffton, time it for the 12th annual Music to Your Mouth festival. The four-day event combines food and music to benefit Second Helpings, a non-profit organization dedicated to eliminating hunger in the Lowcountry. Tickets go on sale July 2 for Whole Hog Festival pass, or individual sessions—including the Bourbon & Bacon Grace Cruise and the Rock the Dock pairing of tailgate snacks and refreshing cocktails. Sounds like a perfect way to get a true taste of Bluffton. ■