



RTJ GOLF TRAIL IS CALLING YOUR NAME

You'll find fabulous,
affordable and
diverse opportunities
a short drive away



SHORT COURSE #8 AT RTJ SILVER LAKES



It is not a surprise that each year thousands of Georgia golfers take advantage of Alabama's **Robert Trent Jones** Golf Trail. It's been that way since the inception of the trail and the trend shows no sign of changing.

The RTJ Golf Trail has destinations in every corner of the state — from Mobile in the southwest to Muscle Shoals in the northwest, from Dothan in the southeast and Huntsville in the northeast. The RTJ Golf Trail is present in Alabama's big cities, like Birmingham and Montgomery, and the smaller hamlets like Greenville and Opelika.

There are 11 destinations and 26 courses on the RTJ Golf Trail, a total of 468 holes — all of them calling your name to the first tee. And most are an easy drive from all parts of Georgia.

The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail features great options and caters to people all over the country, not just Georgia and those throughout the Southeast. The courses draw countless buddy trips and church groups and civic gatherings — and plenty of family foursomes. There's no wonder the *New York Times* once called the RTJ Golf Trail, "some of the best public golf on earth."

Not only are the RTJ courses outstanding — they were all designed by Hall of Fame architect Robert Trent Jones Sr. — but they are budget-friendly, kept in superb condition all year and fun to play.

Many of the RTJ Trail destinations have multiple courses. You can stay in one place and not worry about making a long drive to a different course.

Here's a look at each of the destinations along the golf's version of Route 66.

ROSS BRIDGE, HOOVER

The course reopened to great reviews after being closed for a one-year renovation process that saw the installation of Ultra Dwarf bermuda greens. A number of holes and bunkers were redone and some cart paths were moved closer to the greens to shorten the walks. Some of the bunkers were made smaller and others were raised and made shallower and easier to play.

One of the most dramatic changes came at No. 10, where the green was dropped and moved to give players a chance to run it up to one side of the green. The green was also dropped on the par-3 14th and a rock wall was built around the green, adding to the reputation of the par-3 holes on the course.

No. 18, the signature hole, now offers a split fairway off the tee. The shorter route brings water into play, but grading has eliminated much of the slope toward the water. The back tees play 620 yards but even the 511-yard white tees are a handful.

It's easy to do a stay-and-play at Ross Bridge by staying at the Renaissance Ross Bridge Golf Resort and Spa. It's just one more reason why Ross Bridge was named as one of the top golf resorts in North America by *Golf Digest*.

CAPITOL HILL, PRATTVILLE

One of the most popular destinations is Capitol Hill in Prattville, a suburb of Montgomery, the state capitol. There are three unique courses to be found at Capitol Hill, which makes it a very popular destination. *Golf World* readers once voted it the No. 2 public golf facility in the country.

When it comes to golf, you can tell Jones means business on the first tee of The Legislator. It's a long par 5 with visually confusing bunkers. Just aim toward the middle of the fairway and you'll be okay. Then get ready for an enjoyable 18-hole journey that includes six holes through and around a cypress swamp. You may even encounter one of the course's unusual racoon squirrels or a whitetail deer.

The Senator is the most unique of the three courses in Prattville. It is a Scottish links-style layout that incorporates mounds — some of them 20–40 feet high — throughout its routing. There is plenty of trouble, too, with 160-plus pot bunkers out there waiting to catch an errant shot. And the greens offer loads of challenging undulation. It's a beautiful place, but it definitely has teeth.

The Judge is the toughest of the three courses at RTJ Capitol Hill. You know the round is going to be special from the instant you set foot on the first tee, which rests 200 feet above the fairway and offers a panoramic view of the Alabama River. It is considered by most to be the signature hole for the entire Robert Trent Jones Trail. It is truly one of the most breathtaking opening holes in the region.

There are 14 holes where water comes into play. The hazards are obvious, but so are the views. Keep your smartphone handy. This is going to be a scenic round. The par 5s on the Judge are brutish and long. The 10th hole measures 711 yards from the tips — although that's not recommended unless you have a PGA TOUR card — and the other three par 5s tip the scales at 550-plus yards, even from the middle tees.

CAMBRIAN RIDGE, GREENVILLE

This 36-hole facility may be the hidden gem of the RTJ Trail. The original 27 holes — the Loblolly, Sherling and Canyon nines — were renovated in 2016, many of them to open views of Sherling Lake and add to the beauty of the experience. The greens were all redesigned with new grass that made them much speedier. There's also a par-3 course that will appeal to newer players and kids.

The Canyon nine is carved from former hunting grounds where deer blinds remained nailed to the trees and is made for target golf. The Loblolly nine features rolling fairways, massive bunkers and plenty of water-fronted greens — along with sort of tall pine trees you'd expect from the name. The Sherling nine starts at the highest point in the county and drops to play along Sherling Lake before finishing with a dramatic bunker-free uphill finishing hole that finishes with a three-level green that is 192 feet deep and is shared with the closer on the Canyon Course.

GRAND NATIONAL, AUBURN/OPELIKA

There are three courses available at Grand National, a stop that has become perhaps the most notable on the RTJ Golf Trail. The Lake Course was ranked No. 2 by *Golfweek* in 2021 for the best course in Alabama and the Links Course came in at No. 9. It helps explain why *Golf World* readers voted Grand National as the No. 1 public golf facility in the United States.

Grand National has an impressive list of events it has hosted: the NCAA Men's and Women's National Championships, the PGA TOUR, the Korn Ferry Tour, the LPGA Tour, the Symetra tour. The 2000 NCAA championship was one of the most dramatic in history, with Oklahoma State (led by **Charles Howell III**) beating Georgia Tech (led by **Matt Kuchar**) in a playoff after the teams had tied.

The centerpiece is Lake Saugahatchee, which borders 32 of the 54 holes. The lake and surrounding areas were famously referred to by Jones as the single greatest natural site for golf he had ever seen.

The Links Course, which has hosted most of the facility's signature events, has perhaps the best finishing hole on the RTJ Golf Trail. The drive on this long par 4 requires players to carry a corner of the lake and hit their approach shots over water to a shallow green. Water. Bunkers. Hazards. Negotiate them and you might still end up with a 100-footer for birdie.

The Lake Course has 12 holes on the water and features perhaps the best assortment of par 3s on the Trail. The featured hole is the 15th, a 230-yarder that plays to an island green. Oh, and you might get an occasional breeze there, too.

The Short Course is a par-3 course which features water on half the holes. Don't overlook this course because it's a par-3 layout. Good players will be tested — it's 3,189 yards from the back tees — while the course is still a handful from shorter range.

HAMPTON COVE/HUNTSVILLE

There are 54 quite diverse holes available at Hampton Cove.

The Highlands Course plays over rolling hills and is framed by long grasses that wave in the wind. It is notable for an old mule barn that's next to the fifth hole and for the scenic stretch of finishing holes.

The adjoining River Course is completely different. Built on former soybean fields on the Flint River, it is the only Robert Trent Jones course in the world that does not have one single bunker. The layout includes some grand oak trees and water comes into play on 16 holes. It's considered a shot maker's course.

The Short Course is a par-3 layout that features 11 holes with water in play. The course is a wide open, links-style course that newcomers will love and lower handicap players will find challenging.

HIGHLAND OAKS, DOTHAN

Tucked away in the state's southeast corner, Highland Oaks features three nine-hole layouts — each with its own unique identity — and a nine-hole par-3 course.

The Highlands nine brings several lakes into play, including the par-3 sixth hole that features a peninsula green.

Marshwood is best known for its 701-yard par-5 sixth — although it's not recommended that you play from the tips — and its ninth hole, a par-4 that plays 422 yards, may be the best on the property.

The Magnolia is set apart by the presence of its namesake trees, as well as a 1,000-foot wooden bridge that spans the marsh. A split-level fairway on the par-4 fifth hole will make you think before you hit.

The Short Course can be enjoyed by players of all skill levels and features three holes with water.

LAKEWOOD CLUB, POINT CLEAR

There are 36 holes that await visitors at the Lakewood Club at the Grand Hotel Golf Resort and Spa, one of the state's grand old destinations. The original 18 holes were built in 1947 by the legendary **Perry Maxwell** and later expanded to 36 holes. The Lakewood Club has hosted the U.S. Senior Women's Amateur three times — 1974, 1986 and 2021.

The Dogwood Course was renovated in 2018 and the Azalea Course was renovated in 2019. The upgrades added TifEagle Ultradwarf greens that make them playable throughout the year. There's always a reason to visit, regardless of the season.

SHERLING #9, CANYON #9 AT RTJ CAMBRIAN RIDGE



LAKE #15 AT RTJ GRAND NATIONAL





HIGHLANDS #6 AT RTJ HIGHLAND OAKS



VALLEY #18 AT RTJ OXMOOR VALLEY

MAGNOLIA GROVE, MOBILE

Recent renovations have made Magnolia Grove more user friendly, but visitors must still navigate their way through pines and hardwoods and around creeks, marshes and lakes.

Crossings is the signature course and has hosted LPGA Tour events. Recent renovations added additional water features, including waste areas on the 16th hole that are made of crushed oyster shells. The abundance of trees requires accuracy off the tee and an intelligent approach around the course.

The Falls Course is the only par-71 course on the Trail. It is known for its large contoured greens and massive cloverleaf bunkers. The par-5 10th hole is the signature hole and features water from the lake cascading in front of the green.

The Short Course also got a makeover with several newly-designed putting surfaces. It was named the best par-3 course in the country by *Golf Digest*.

OXMOOR VALLEY, BIRMINGHAM

Built on former mining land owned by U.S. Steel, Oxmoor Valley has 54 holes that feature elevation changes, creeks and forests as it traverses the peaks and valleys of the Appalachian foothills.

The Ridge Course may be the most photogenic, with its numerous elevation changes. As a tribute to the area's mining past, the green on the par-5 third hole is buttressed by a shelf of exposed shale.

The Valley Course was completely renovated in 2021 with new tees, bunkers and greens. The notorious 18th hole was among several holes to be redesigned.

Oxmoor also features the Back Yard, which opened in 2022, and offers a collection of fun, interesting holes that features accessible but challenging hole locations. The nine-hole par-3 course is where you gather for fun, friendship and cocktails. You can enjoy a drink while sitting around the fire pit in rocking chairs that overlook the first tee and the second and ninth greens.

The Back Yard is meant to be played in about an hour by a foursome. There are no water hazards and just a handful of bunkers, making it enjoyable for the most novice golfers. But the better player will be challenged for its interesting and confounding green designs.

SILVER LAKES, ANNISTON

Perhaps Silver Lakes has the most appropriately named courses on the RTJ Golf Trail — the Backbreaker, the Heartbreaker and the Mindbreaker — to go along with its Short Course. Set within the



SCHOOLMASTER #18 AT RTJ THE SHOALS

foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, with Lee's Lake providing the watery pleasure, Silver Lakes is a stunner.

The Backbreaker features wide fairways, demanding greens and fabulous views. The Heartbreaker is best known for its three finishing holes that show off the elevation changes and dramatic lake views. The Mindbreaker is a shorter layout set among woods, water and wetlands. Even the par-3 Short Course is a test as you work around Lee's Lake.

THE SHOALS, FLORENCE/MUSCLE SHOALS

The distance challenge on the RTJ Golf Trail began when the Fighting Joe Course opened at The Shoals. It measured in at 8,092 yards — the first course to break 8,000 yards — and features wide fairways that are bordered by dune-like mounds and tall grasses, and large bentgrass greens. There's nothing tricky about Fighting Joe. You just have to go out and get it.

The 18th hole is one of the most unique finishers on the Trail. The par 3 is cut out of a hill and punishes any shot that comes up short or bails out to the right. At least the lovely view of the Tennessee River on the tee box can serve as a tonic.

The Schoolmaster is a more traditional course. It's wooded, rolling and spectacular. Keep your smartphone handy to grab a picture of the waterfall that guards the front of the second green. The 18th hole is a wonderful risk-reward hole that's ideal for deciding a bet between two friends as they come to the end of a great round.

For more information on the RTJ Golf Trail, visit RTJGolf.com. 