

Drive the RTJ Golf Trail
Road Trip #18

Alabama's Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail is a collection of 468 holes at 11 sites, stretches from Muscle Shoals to Mobile and to every corner of the state.

Go for a Drive on the RTJ Golf Trail

(INTRODUCTION)

In Alabama, you can go for a drive on the RTJ Golf Trail, but these driving skills don't require a steering wheel. Celebrating 20 years of great public golf in 2012, the entire Trail has received renovations at every course within the past five years. While the courses keep getting better, the Trail's commitment to service and amazing value (most greens fees are between \$45 and \$64) will always stay the same. For more information on the entire Trail, please visit the **RTJ website** [<http://www.rtjgolf.com/>].

Day 1 Golf – Oxmoor Valley – Birmingham

Pull Quote

Come see why *Golf Digest* called Alabama “one of the top 50 golf destinations in the world.”

Oxmoor Valley (100 SunBelt Parkway, Birmingham; 205-942-1177), a favorite on the RTJ Trail and a great place to start a road trip, is one of the many reasons *Golf Digest* called Alabama one of the top 50 golf destinations in the world. This 54-hole facility was built on former mining land owned by U.S. Steel. Sculpted from peaks and valleys of the Appalachians, the courses offer scenic forests, numerous creeks and challenging elevation changes. The Ridge course, with its rollercoaster fairways and heavy tree cover, is incredibly photogenic. As a reminder of the site's former use, the green at the par-5 third hole is buttressed by a shelf of exposed shale rock.

The Valley course is dotted with picturesque lakes and beautiful rolling fairways, and stretches two miles downrange along a slender valley. The 18th hole, a 441-yard par-4, nicknamed “The Assassin,” rises to a dramatic finish at the clubhouse just above the green.

Check out the Short course at Oxmoor, a delightful collection of 18 pure one-shotters that offer severe elevation changes with almost every hole played downhill. It was listed by *Golf Digest's* “Places to Play” as one of the nation's great value public courses.

Where to Stay

Nestled into the gently rolling hills of Birmingham, the Renaissance Birmingham Ross Bridge Golf Resort & Spa [<http://www.rtjgolf.com/resorts/rossbridge/>] (4000 Grand Ave., Birmingham; 205-916-7677) is less than a mile from Oxmoor Valley. Named one

of *Travel +Leisure's* “Top 500 Hotels in the World,” this four-diamond property has 259 guest rooms, with balconies overlooking the fourth longest golf course in the world, which is also part of the RTJ Golf Trail. In fact, it will be the final course played on this road trip.

Don't Miss: The Bagpipers at Sunset

In keeping with the Scottish theme of Renaissance Birmingham Ross Bridge Golf Resort & Spa, a traditional bagpiper wanders the golf course and grounds every evening at sunset playing a multitude of songs and calling golfers back to the clubhouse at the end of the day. Enjoy drinks or dinner on the terrace overlooking the gristmill and waterfall while the bagpiper serenades guests. Sometimes, the bagpiper even makes it to the lobby and the clubhouse where guests can request their favorites.

For an extra mile of excitement, Ross Bridge is the host hotel for the Porsche Sport Driving School held at **Barber Motorsports Park** [<http://www.barbermotorsports.com/indy/index.php>] (6040 Barber Motorsports Pkwy., Birmingham; 205-699-7275), where they literally put you behind the wheel of a Porsche to experience the track firsthand. The **Spa at Ross Bridge** offers the perfect refuge for relaxation at the end of the day.

Where to Eat

You don't have to venture too far for incredible cuisine. **Brock's** restaurant downstairs at Ross Bridge provides an incredible atmosphere and Mediterranean-inspired dishes that promise to please every palate.

For something a little more adventurous, take a short drive to Five Points South, otherwise known as foodie central and the reason why Birmingham has so much local flavor. For a meal with Tuscan flair, head to **Bottega** [<http://bottegestaurant.com/>] (2240 Highland Ave. S., Birmingham; 205-939-1000) where award-winning Chef Frank Stitt creates different menus nightly, or stop by another one of his refined restaurants, **Highlands Bar and Grill** [<http://www.highlandsbarandgrill.com/>] (2011 11th Ave. S., Birmingham; 205-939-1400) for delicious cuisine made from only the freshest local ingredients. Visit **Hot and Hot Fish Club** [<http://www.hotandhotfishclub.com/>] (2180 11th Court S., Birmingham, 205-933-5474) for not only the incredible food but also to experience the culinary brilliance of Chef Chris Hastings, recent "Iron Chef America" champion.

Day 2 Golf – Capitol Hill – Prattville

To be fully prepared for the day, stop by the breakfast buffet at Brock's before heading down I-65 to Prattville. Even though it's only a short one-hour drive to the course from Birmingham, it wouldn't be a proper trip without stopping in Clanton at either **Durbin Farms Market** [<http://www.durbinfarms.com/>] (205-755-1672) or **Peach Park** (205-

755-2065) at Exit 205 off I-65 to pick up some of their famous peaches (or peach ice cream).

Arrive at **Capitol Hill** [<http://www.rtgolf.com/capitolhill/>] in Prattville (2600 Constitution Ave., Prattville; 334-285-1114) to find three 18-hole championship courses, all of which offer unique challenges and dramatic landscapes. The Judge course, named by *Golf* magazine as one of the 10 public courses in America worthy of hosting the U.S. Open, begins with an intimidating first tee 200 feet above the fairway overlooking the Alabama River and Montgomery skyline.

With 14 holes adjoining the water and a stunning bulkhead green, the Judge is described as simply magnificent and was even ranked in the top 50 courses by the *Zagat* Survey of America's Top Golf Courses.

The Senator course, a Scottish-links style course with beautifully manicured bent grass greens, welcomes the world's best golfers at the **Navistar LPGA Classic** each fall. This course holds more than 160 pothole bunkers and mounds up to 40 feet in height, but it does not have a single tree. The secluded setting on this course will make you and your group feel as though you are the only foursome on the course. The Legislator, a more traditional course, plays in and out of pine trees and along the bluff. The natural landscape is impressive as the course leads back up the bluff to finish at the spectacular clubhouse. Stop in for a relaxing lunch or a quick snack before heading into Montgomery for the afternoon.

Where To Stay

Conveniently located at the course, the **Montgomery Marriott Prattville Hotel & Conference Center at Capitol Hill** [<http://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/mgmmm-montgomery-marriott-prattville-hotel-and-conf-ctr-at-capitol-hill/>] (2500 Legends Cir., Prattville; 334-290-1235) provides the perfect lodge atmosphere for a relaxing stay. The hotel's 95 guest rooms were renovated in 2009 and include flat-screen televisions and high-speed Internet access. Two eight-room luxury villas have living areas and are ideal for golf groups traveling together.

For something a little more adventurous, spend a luxurious evening at the **Renaissance Montgomery Hotel & Spa at the Convention Center** [<http://www.rtgolf.com/resorts/montgomery/>] (201 Tallapoosa St., Montgomery; 334-481-5000), only a short distance from Prattville in downtown Montgomery. Renaissance Montgomery opened in 2008 bringing to the downtown area a great cultural and culinary hub. The hotel features 345 luxurious guest rooms and suites, several restaurants and bars and a European-style spa. Located near the Alabama River and across the street from popular **Alley Station**, Renaissance Montgomery is quickly becoming the city's social hot spot. The Montgomery Performing Arts Centre, an 1,800-seat theater connected to the hotel, hosts a variety of national and international acts from concerts to Broadway musicals to stand-up comedy and more.

Where To Eat

Before dinner, stop by **The Exchange**

[<http://www.houserestaurantmontgomery.com/restaurant/hotels/hotel-information/travel/mgmbr-renaissance-montgomery-hotel-and-spa-at-the-convention-center/bar-lounge.aspx>] (334-481-5165) for drinks and atmosphere. The Exchange is right off of the lobby at the Renaissance, making it an extremely convenient option. Depending on the weather, enjoy the fire pits on the patio while listening to live music, scheduled nightly. If you're looking to stay in the hotel for dinner as well, visit **The House** [<http://www.houserestaurantmontgomery.com/restaurant/hotels/hotel-information/travel/mgmbr-renaissance-montgomery-hotel-and-spa-at-the-convention-center/restaurant-home.aspx>] restaurant (334-481-5166) featuring an array of local cuisine with perfected Southern flavor.

For something a little different, venture across the street to one of the Alley Station restaurants. Sa Za [<http://www.sazapizza.com/>] (130 Commerce St., Montgomery; 334-495-7292) boasts "real Italian food" with a modern twist, while **Dreamland Bar-B-Que's** [<http://www.dreamlandbbq.com/>] (101 Tallapoosa St., Montgomery; 334-273-RIBS) reputation for the best barbecue in the South speaks for itself. Finish the evening at the **Alley Bar** [<http://www.alleybarmontgomery.com/main.html>] (166 Commerce St., Montgomery; 334-387-3333), a bar and lounge worth visiting for the frozen shot room alone, not to mention the delicious drinks and live entertainment.

Day 3 Golf – Ross Bridge – Birmingham

After a visit to Montgomery, it's time to head back toward Birmingham. The ultimate golf trip would not be complete without playing the crown jewel of the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail, **Ross Bridge** [<http://www.rtgolf.com/resorts/rossbridge/>] (4000 Grand Ave., Birmingham; 205-916-7677). The youngest of all the RTJ sites, Ross Bridge is beautifully carved into the rolling terrain of Shannon Valley. As mentioned previously, Ross Bridge is the fourth longest golf course in the world, making it a challenge for even the most seasoned golfers. It does offer multiple tees so that golfers of all levels can enjoy the course.

Meandering through indigenous landscape and around the Ross Bridge Resort, notice that the course is symbolic of an old parkland-style course with 10 holes played along the banks of two significant lakes connected by a spectacular waterfall dropping 80 feet between the ninth and 18th greens.

A gristmill on the waterfall reflects the history of the old mining site. Considerable elevation changes combine with water or other natural obstructions to get your attention. Large putting surfaces provide many tempting pin locations that will test golfers' approach shots.

The picturesque finishing hole leads back toward the resort, where lunch awaits at The Clubhouse. Don't leave without trying the fried pickles or the onion rings, and for the main course make sure to try the famous Ross Bridge burger with a side of homemade sweet potato fries.

To ensure the proper finish to the perfect trip, stop by the **Spa at Ross Bridge** for 9,000 square feet of relaxation. Enjoy a signature massage to soothe the muscles or simply spend time in the spa's sauna, steam room and whirlpool before heading home.

To share questions or comments about this road trip, please email Bill.Lang@pchresorts.com [Bill.Lang@pchresorts.com].