



THE Myrtle Beach Diet

Just joking—no need to restrain yourselves. Get your fill of roller coasters, turtle spottings and fresh shrimp right off the pier

BY STEPHANIE HUNT

With its old-fashioned salty appeal, South Carolina's Myrtle Beach beckons to the kid in everyone. If the seaside Ferris wheel doesn't get your memories spinning, whiffs of Coppertone and fried shrimp surely will. At the heart of the 60-mile-long Grand Strand, Myrtle Beach remains one of the country's most popular family vacation spots. It's got all the classic ingredients: sun, sand and surf, plus attractions like a 10-story-tall waterslide, salt marshes you can kayak through and more than 100 golf courses. Myrtle Beach proper is a mix of high-rise hotels and family resorts—many with their own water parks. A handful of surviving motels from the 1940s serve as reminders that families have been coming here for generations. Here's why.



Kayaking off the Grand Strand. Below: Ripley's Aquarium has a shark tunnel and tankfuls of tropical fish.



● WHOLE LOTTA RIDES

One cobra roll, six inversions and a zero G roll, with Jimmy Page's guitar licks crunching through 64 speakers. No, this isn't a raucous sushi joint; it's the Led Zeppelin roller coaster at the Hard Rock Park. Opened this spring, the \$400 million amusement park has a midway, a motorcycle stunt show and an all-ages coaster. One attraction even lets spectators blast riders with water cannons. *843-236-7625; hardrockpark.com; \$50*

● GO FISH

Huge sharks and loggerhead turtles swim overhead at Ripley's Aquarium, which, believe it or not, offers a terrific display of aquatic wonders. Check out the tropical kaleidoscope of Rainbow Rock and the otherworldly aura of Ray Bay (1110 Celebrity Circle; 843-916-0888; ripleysaquarium.com; \$4-\$19). For fish *au naturel*, try casting from one of Myrtle's eight piers, where you can rent rods and obtain permits. *southcarolinaparks.com*



Sunny delights: (from far left) A putt-putt game at the Hawaiian Rumble; family fun on the Grand Strand; the Live Oak Allee at Brookgreen Gardens.

● FORE FUN

The Myrtle Beach golf bonanza extends to putt-putters, who can tackle pirates, dinosaurs and plane crashes at 50 miniature golf courses. For tropical kitsch, try Jungle Lagoon (junglelagoon.com), while Molten Mountain offers outdoor and indoor (air-conditioned!) courses (moltenmountaingolf.com). But be sure to hit the classic, the Hawaiian Rumble, where exotic birds cheer you on. *prominigolf.com*

● ART ALFRESCO

Founded in 1931 as America's first public sculpture garden, Brookgreen Gardens stretches over 9,100 acres. Enchanted oaks and impeccably landscaped "rooms" showcase more than 1,200 works by 320 sculptors. Egrets, hawks and alligators make their home in the zoo, which has a new otter exhibit. 800-849-1931; *brookgreen.org*; \$5-\$12

● CATCH THE WAVE

Myrtle doesn't do "small," as evidenced by Myrtle Waves Water Park, with its 10-story-tall slide and 20 acres of wet and wild action. Spend the day getting waterlogged on a dozen attractions, from the lazy river to the wave pool. 843-913-9260; *myrtlewaves.com*; \$20-\$28, *soft drinks and parking included*

● THE NEW OLD

Broadway at the Beach is an old-time boardwalk with newfangled shops, restaurants and attractions, including the Build-a-Bear Workshop. Fuel up at Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville before heading to Pavilion Nostalgia Park, whose vintage rides—like a classic Herschell-Spillman Carousel—were salvaged from Myrtle Beach's beloved but shuttered Pavilion Amusement Park. 800-386-4662; *broadwayatthebeach.com*




● SHOWTIME

Mesmerizing acrobats, contortionists and plucky animals dazzle all ages at Le Grande Cirque at the Palace Theatre (palacetheatremyrtlebeach.com; \$10-\$45). The rowdier Dixie Stampede serves up a rollicking dinner theater show where the North and the South battle it out, with trick horses and racing ostriches. 800-433-4401; *dixiestampede.com*; *dinner and show for two, from \$87 (not including drinks, tax or tip)*

● SEE FOOD

For super-fresh shrimp and fish, make the 20-mile, state-line-crossing drive north to Calabash, NC. Try the Docks Seafood House, one of the oldest and most reliable fish shacks in this hush-puppy heaven. 9955 Nance St.; 910-579-6775; *meal for two \$55 (not including drinks, tax or tip)*

● PADDLE IT OUT

Kayak the creeks around Huntington Beach State Park to explore salt marshes, a maritime forest and an amazing array of shorebirds and wildlife (southcarolinaparks.com). Keep an eye out for porpoise, sea turtles and bald eagles near Drunken Jack Island, where Blackbeard may have stashed stolen treasure. The Black River Outdoors Center offers guides, kayaks and gear. *blackriveroutdoors.com* 

stay

RCI-affiliated resorts in Myrtle Beach include:



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For more information, visit RCI.com or call
Weeks: 800-338-7777
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NON-RCI-AFFILIATED HOTELS:

BREAKERS RESORT
2006 N. Ocean Blvd.; 800-952-4503; *breakers.com*; two-night doubles from \$387

CORAL BEACH RESORT
1105 S. Ocean Blvd.; 800-556-1754; *myrtlebeach-resorts.com*; three-night doubles from \$700

DUNES VILLAGE RESORT
5200 N. Ocean Blvd.; 877-828-2237; *dunesvillage.com*; two-night doubles from \$510

KINGSTON PLANTATION
9800 Queensway Blvd.; 800-876-0010; *kingstonplantation.com*; two-night doubles from \$209.

SEA CREST OCEANFRONT RESORT
803 S. Ocean Blvd.; 888-889-8113; *myrtlebeach-resorts.com*; two-night doubles from \$242